

My Brother exclaimed : “Carmel??? Oh no!”



My Mother and Dad were born and grew up in the Appleton, Wisconsin area. Most of my relatives on both sides of the family live there. Before they got married Mother was a nurse's aid while Dad tried farming; but he lost two farms and so he went into the bakery business instead. When they got married, Mother quit her job. The first floor of the house was the bakery and the family lived on the second floor.

They had three children. My sister Lois, the oldest, was seven and my brother Joe was four when I was born. All three children had chores in the bakery before going to school as well as household chores which helped us to learn responsibility.

The family went to Mass every Sunday and all three children were taught by the Franciscans in Elementary School and by the Notre Dame Sisters in High School. Those were the days when they still wore the full habit. The Parish we belonged to was called Saint Therese Parish. The Sisters told us stories about the saints but Saint Therese was probably the one I most remembered. However, I still did not understand much about her life except that she was a cloistered nun who never left the monastery.

In learning about the lives of the Saints, some of them mentioned wanting to be a nun as early as seven years old. However, in my case, at the age of seven I wanted to be a “hobo”. It must have been from magazines or school books where I saw some beautiful pictures of the country. And oh, how I wanted to travel to go see those beautiful views! But I did not have any money to travel so, I thought, maybe... I could be a “hobo” who could ride on cars and trains for free.

That dream would change in Elementary School when the Franciscan Sisters showed us their community vocation video. Also, at around this time my brother Joe entered the Minor Seminary after his first year of High School. However, instead of wanting to be a nun I wanted to be a “Brother”!?!? We would visit him once a month and while my parents were talking to him my eyes would wander watching the people around the campus. The Seminary was run by the Salvatorians. I saw many priests, seminarians, and other families visiting with one another. Of all that was going on around me, my eyes would always be drawn to the Brothers who were working alone around the grounds of the campus. I told myself: “If I were a boy, I would like to be like those Brothers... working alone in silence...”

In High School, the students attended Mass everyday and once a month there was a Retreat day when the students had some opportunity to pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. From time to time the thought of becoming a Sister would enter my mind, especially during those Retreat days.

My father died at the age of 55 due to a heart condition. Mother continued the bakery business with the help of relatives who were employed there.

One day, Mother and I were alone in the kitchen washing dishes. A question just popped out of my mouth: "Mother, how would you feel if I entered the convent?" She looked at me with a big smile and said: "Oh, that would be one of the happiest days of my life!!!" And I answered very quickly: "NO! NO! I WILL NEVER GO..."

After I graduated from High School one of my cousins who was working at the paper mill got married and quit her job. She told her boss who also knew my family that I might be interested in taking her place. So, he came to the house to speak with me. I did accept the job. For three years I was doing secretarial work at the paper mill while at the same time helping at the family bakery. I became so overburdened with work that I decided to quit my job at the paper mill and just helped at the family bakery.

During those years, the thought of becoming a Sister would always come to mind, but I never really talked to anyone about it. I am the kind of person who does not want to be pushed... One day, as I was waiting in line to go to Confession, the Father Confessor saw me before he went to the Confessional. I must have been the fourth one in line. So, I went in and confessed my sins. After he gave me absolution he asked me: "Did you ever think of entering the convent?" And I very firmly said: "No, Father."

At that time I was twenty four and was really thinking about my vocation very seriously. The Holy Spirit must have been working through the Father Confessor to let me know that it was time to act on it. But I still did not listen and did not do anything about it.

The situation which really forced me to say something to my family was when my brother, who was now an ordained priest for the diocese of Green Bay, talked to me about the insurance for the bakery employees. The Government required businesses to provide insurance for their employees. Our bakery was just a small business and there were only fifteen employees including myself. Insurance companies would not accept less than fifteen employees for the group insurance. In order to get a reasonable price, my brother wanted me to be included there... He was Mother's advisor regarding business matters for the bakery. "I CAN'T," were the words that came out from my mouth. "I AM GOING TO ENTER THE CONVENT." He was a little bit shocked. And then he asked: "Which one?" "Like the Little Flower." I answered. And he said: "CARMEL??? OH, NOOOOOO..." Then, Mother entered the room. My brother said: "Mother, Betty has something to tell you." So, I said: "I want to go to the convent." With a big smile she said: "Do you remember what I told you some years ago? That would be one of the happiest days of my life!!! And remember too, Betty, you will have to OBEY..."

My brother advised me to write to two Carmels. One of those two had a waiting list. The other one was the Iron Mountain Carmel where I am now. My brother and Mother drove me to the Carmel for an interview. The Prioress, Subprioress and the Novice Mistress met us at the grate. After a few moments, Mother and Father Joe sensed that the Sisters would like to speak with me alone, so they stepped out. I was very nervous because I did not really know much about what I was getting into. The Sisters explained their life to me, the schedule and so forth. I listened... And then the Prioress asked me: "Do you have any questions?" I said: "NO... I THINK I KNOW IT ALL... (*gulp*, and another *gulp*...)". Towards the end of the meeting they told me they would mail a letter to let me know whether I could enter.

It was on a Saturday when I received the letter. My sister Lois, who was already married with two children was with me at the bakery. She insisted that I open the letter right away to see if I was accepted or not. But I wanted to be alone so I ran to the Church which was just across the street. I said a little prayer and opened it... The nuns gave me a choice of three dates when I could enter: one in May, one in June (Corpus Christi), or July 16th (Our Lady of Mount Carmel). I chose July 16th because that was the latest. It was still very difficult for me to leave my family. I was just so contented being with my family and working at the bakery that I did not want to leave my COMFORT ZONE. That was the main reason why it took me so long to say "Yes" to God's invitation.

I have been a Carmelite nun here for many years. The Sisters, both young and old, have become a real family to me.

My brother, Father Joe, passed away a few years ago. At times during prayer, I would recall him saying: "CARMEL?!?! Oh, noooo..." And now with much peace in my heart I could exclaim: "CARMEL?!?! OH, YESSSSS! THANKS BE TO GOD!!!"