



Sister Patricia Spangler, OP 1934-2018

In all the history of St. Nicholas of Tolentine School in Chicago, there have likely not been many instances of a three-and-a-half-year-old attending kindergarten. But when little Patricia Spangler proved herself so determined to follow her older siblings to school that her brother Jim was late to class because he was the one taking her back home, putting her into kindergarten was the solution devised by the principal, Sister Leone Therese Morrin. That way, Sister Leone Therese reasoned, Jim would have no excuse for missing class every time his baby sister decided to tag along. This did not mean, however, that Pat was officially in school a year early; the next year, she was enrolled in kindergarten along with the other children her age.

Sister Pat was born on December 31, 1934, to Robert and Anna (Rezac) Spangler. She was the sixth child and the third girl born into the family – following Marianne, Bob, Bill, Jim, and Betty Jo – and the first of the Spangler children to be born in Chicago; the family had previously lived in Kansas and Oklahoma. The youngest, Thomas, whom the family called “Timmy” because his godfather nicknamed him “Tiny Tim,” was born just before Sister Pat’s third birthday.

Thomas’ fourth birthday, December 7, 1941, coincided with the day Pearl Harbor was attacked and the U.S. was plunged into World War II. Bob was already in the Navy as part of the V-12 Program, through which men took college classes in order to become officers, and was at the University of Notre Dame. Marianne, who had been working as a secretary and stenographer in downtown Chicago, quit her job and joined the WAVES, where she became a secretary for an admiral at the Great Lakes Naval Base. Bill left school and joined the Navy as well, eventually serving in the South Pacific aboard the (second) aircraft carrier *USS Yorktown*.

Sister Pat wrote in her autobiography that the family residence, on West 64th Street, became a “home away from home” for fellow sailors Bill and Bob brought home while on leave. “Sometimes it looked like we had our very own ‘64th Street Naval Base,’” she wrote.

While her older siblings were serving their country, Pat was working her way through “St. Nick’s,” as the school was called. At first, school was hard for her, but as it turned out, there was a very good reason for that.

As a very small child, she had come down with a severe case of scarlet fever which left her deaf in her right ear. She was in fourth grade before she actually realized that she was different from other people. “I did not know that other people could hear with both ears,” she wrote in her autobiography. “My parents thought I just wasn’t paying attention when they had to repeat something to me. In fact I thought everyone heard out of one ear. One day while walking home from school with a classmate, I moved to her right side so I could hear her speaking to me. I asked if her right ear was the one she heard with.”

The next morning she asked her teacher if she could move closer to the front of the classroom, instead of being near the back since the children were seated in alphabetical order. “Looking back, I realized that was the first time I acted as my own advocate. No one had suggested that to me,” she wrote. “My grades really got better after that.”

Sister Pat finished her elementary school years at “St. Nick’s” and went on to the Academy of Our Lady High School, which was staffed by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In her junior year, the idea of religious life was something she began seriously considering, and after talking it over with a priest she decided she wanted to become an Adrian Dominican like her grade-school teachers.

On June 24, 1951, the seventeen-year-old boarded a train in Chicago with Sister Mary Ida Nash and three other postulants whom Sister Ida was bringing to Adrian herself. The four traveled to Jackson, Michigan, and then arrived by car in Adrian.

Sister Pat was received as a novice that December and was given the religious name Sister Anne Robert, after her parents. For the next twenty years, she taught at several schools in Michigan, Illinois, and Arizona. First came St. Edward’s (1953-54), and Holy Name (1954-60), both in Detroit. In the summer of 1960, she completed her bachelor’s degree work at Siena Heights College (University), and that August she was assigned to help open a brand-new school, St. Gregory’s in Newberry, Michigan. Due to a variety of circumstances, however, she and her compatriots found themselves being recalled to Adrian just four months later and she was sent to St. Rita’s in Chicago, where she spent five and a half years.

Then came an assignment to St. Celestine’s in Elmwood Park, Illinois, for the 1966-67 school year, but in January 1967 she was sent to fill in for an ill sister teaching sophomore algebra at Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette, Illinois, for the rest of the school year. Leaving her small community of sisters at Celestine’s for a convent of forty-four at Regina Dominican was a real change, and she was happy when in August 1967 she was sent back to St. Celestine’s. There, in addition to teaching, she was asked to be the school’s director of religious education, heading up a program which was innovative for its time.

In 1969 she was appointed principal at Queen of Angels School in Chicago, and spent three years there before resigning because her doctor had suggested she move to a drier, warmer climate. That ended up being Scottsdale, Arizona, where she taught fifth and sixth grade at St. Daniel the Prophet School for two years.

Being in that part of the country opened the door in 1974 to a whole new ministerial experience, one which would shape the rest of her working life. Three priests ministering to the very poor in an area near Albuquerque, New Mexico, wanted help in their work, and she and another Sister were invited to that ministry.

“Living among the people in one of the tiny villages was quite an experience. I treasure the memories of my service there. ... When I left there I was a changed person,” she wrote in her autobiography.

She left New Mexico for Tempe, Arizona, in 1978, where she spent nine months as the pastoral minister at Resurrection Church before returning to Adrian for two years to serve at Maria Health Care Center as a driver and then as a pastoral minister.

The year 1981 found her back out West, this time in Phoenix, to work as a spiritual director at the Mt. Claret Cursillo Center. Over the next fifteen years, she ministered there (1981-82) and then in a number of other locations all connected in some way to pastoral work: St. Barbara Church in Santa Ana, California (1982-87); the Serra Retreat Center in Malibu, California (1988-90); the Santa Maria de la Paz Community in Santa Fe, New Mexico (1990-92); Morehead State University in Morehead, Kentucky (1992-95) as a campus minister; and finally the Church of the Nativity in Leawood, Kansas (1995-96).

It was during this time that she discovered she had a flair for photography. As reported in a story for the June 2000 issue of *In Between*, during her time in Malibu she was driving along the coast to an early morning meeting when the sunrise sparkling on the waters of Santa Monica Bay caught her attention and she pulled over and snapped a few pictures. When the photos turned out so well that friends began asking for reprints, she started thinking about pursuing her newfound talent.

While in campus ministry at Morehead State, she took classes in art and photography and won three awards in a campus photography contest. Once she returned to Adrian to live, she continued her picture-taking, with some of the photos made into notecards to be sold at the Weber Shop and others shown at the Lenawee Council for the Arts. One of her photos – of Sister Ann Marie Snyder seated by the tabernacle in St. Catherine Chapel – was used on the cover of the worship aid for her own funeral.

Her final mission in life was to serve as a volunteer literacy tutor, and over time she worked at three of the Congregation's literacy centers: the Aquinas Literacy Center in Chicago (2004 and 2005-2010), DePorres P.L.A.C.E. in West Palm Beach, Florida (2005), and the Adrian Rea Literacy Center at the Motherhouse (2010-13).

Sister Pat died at the Dominican Life Center on July 29, 2018, aged eighty-three. She was remembered at her wake by Sister Nadine Sheehan, Vicareess of the Adrian Dominican Vicariate, as a woman of faith, eager to serve, who brought joy to others – including by dressing up as a clown and parading through the halls for Halloween, and giving Christmas gifts to the Sisters residing at Maria – and as an artist and educator.

“In her writings, Pat expressed her love of all her family, her love of the sisters with whom she lived, the many co-workers with whom she shared ministry and the many children, parents and adults who became part of her life,” Sister Nadine said. “Although she had ups and down in her life, as we all do, she depended on her God to help her through.”

Those last words were echoed the next day by Sister Maria Goretti Brown, who preached the funeral homily.

Grace and mercy were with Pat and God's care was with her. Pat loved the Gospels and spent a lot of time with them in her prayer. She depended on the Holy Spirit and it was the Holy Spirit that brought her through the MANY losses and deaths she went through. She walked with God as long as she could.

To paraphrase the reading from Wisdom today: But now the soul of Pat is in the hand of God and no torment shall touch her. She seems, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and her passing away was thought an affliction, and her going forth from us, utter destruction. But she is in peace because grace and mercy are with God's holy ones, and God's care is with the elect. Rest in peace, Pat. Amen.



Far right: Sister Patricia, right, and her friends draw water from the oldest well in Manzano, New Mexico, 1977.



Left photo: From left, Sisters Joan Mary, Patricia Spangler, Jean Keeley, Grace Dougherty, and Mary Rita McSweeney. Right photo: Sister Patricia and friend in Morehead, Kentucky.



Left photo: Sister Patricia takes notes during a Chapter Assembly. Right photo: Sisters Patricia (left) and Eileen Meyers at a Congregational gathering, Transformations '89.



Members of the 2001 Golden Jubilee class are: front row, from left, Sisters Betty Lou Myers, Robert Irene Buchanan, Marilyn Foster, Marion Coppe, June Racicot, Veronica Gonthier, and Patricia Spangler; middle row, from left, Sisters Mary Alan Stuart, Jane Robert Stuckel, Helen Mantovani, Thomas Leo Monahan, Helen Laier, Patricia Dolan, Diana Marie Pellegrino, Angela Susalla, Mary Catherine Nolan, and Barbara Ann Hehr; and back row, from left, Sisters Anne Beauvais, Joan Weitz, Nancy Fischer, Mary Alice Naour, Helen Belsito, Mary Louise Head, Patricia Eileen Consier, Patricia J. Walsh, and Celeste Mary Bourke.