

Vita of Sister Ruth Johnson



Sister Ruth tells much of her own life story in an autobiographical booklet that she wrote in the 1990's. In the Introduction she says, "I know that God has been actively involved in my life, my seemingly insignificant little life, and I am grateful...."

"Riga, Michigan, was my birthplace, and the event took place without any unusual occurrences on October 17, 1923," she writes. "I (Ruth Eileen Johnson) was the ninth child of the twelve children born to Roy and Emma (Miller) Johnson. My godmother, Hazel Cook, was a good friend of the family."

She continues, "Our family moved to the Bell farm near Sylvania, Ohio, when I was one and a half years old. There I lived happily enjoying the outdoor atmosphere of fresh air and sunshine along with my brothers and sisters. We spent time along the Ten-mile Creek, fishing as best we could, and scouting around in the woods, picking violets, butter-cups, jack-in-the-pulpits, Dutchman's breeches, trilliums, and goose berries to eat.

"While a great deal of my education came from institutions specializing in learning, a great deal of it also came from my family. Meet the Johnson tribe ...," she says, going on, "My mother, Emma Miller, and my Dad, Roy Johnson, fell in love, married, and so here we are. Of my brothers, Philip was the oldest and Lawrence was third oldest. All four of my other brothers, Mark, Bernard, Leon, and William, joined the defense forces in World War II. The girls in the family, interspersed with the boys, were Lois, Leona, Susan, Ruth (ME), Theresa Marie, and Mary Jo." Only Mary Jo survives.

During early grade school days at St. Joseph's School in Sylvania, Ruth "became an escort for the Sisters who would otherwise have to walk to school alone." The family moved and began attending St. Mary's School in Toledo, but Ruth's escort services continued when one of the sisters wanted to walk to the Motherhouse on Monroe Street.

While attending Central Catholic High School, she became very interested in reading, so she roller-skated weekly down Canton Avenue to the Public Library and shared candy with the kids playing in front of the library. She said, "Best of all the teachers at Central was Sister Mary Joseph. She was my inspiration for joining the Tiffin Sisters in my junior year."

When she was received into the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis on August 12, 1940, Ruth received a new name, Sister Mary Lawrence. Two years later she became a professed member.

Sister Lawrence attended St. Francis College in Joliet for two years, and after also attending summer schools at Mary Manse College in Toledo she received her bachelor's degree. Her master's degree in education came from Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

For 25 years Sister was missioned to teach. Those years took her to St. Mary in Edgerton, Holy Family in New Cleveland, St. Bernard in New Washington, Our Lady of Consolation

in Carey, St. Sebastian in Bismark, and the Catholic Schools Office of the Toledo Diocese. During those years in education she taught third through eighth grades and was a principal for seven years.

In 1975, Sister Ruth returned to what she had loved doing as a volunteer in high school, namely, work with the elderly. At St. Francis Home she became Activities Director, a position she held until 1985. Sister Ruth was extremely happy to use her musical talents, poetry sharing, singing, dance, and exercise for seniors. She loved entertaining and playing a clown.

And there was more. In subsequent years she was curator of the Museum, coordinator of the activities program for senior sisters; president of the Seneca County Church Women United; coordinator of Seneca County Migrant Ministry; volunteer in the infirmary; and now special praying member.

One of her most unforgettable experiences happened when she was making an annual retreat at Living Waters in Maggie Valley North Carolina. The nature retreat entitled "The Grandeur of God" provided an opportunity to see close up the beauty and magnificence of God's Mountains. Awe became a fearful experience, however, when she became lost in the mountains overnight.

More recently, Sister Ruth had been sleeping quite a lot and talking very little; yet certain things brought back her alertness. Sister Janet Hay tells how much Sister Ruth love to see relative during a 2015 reunion in Toledo. Sister Ruth thoroughly enjoyed having nieces and nephews come up one by one to talk with her. On another good day, Sister Ruth wrote out words of a song she loved to sing. She wrote in big letters: "I Love Mountain Music." And we recall how in the Convent Chapel for her 75th Jubilee Sister Ruth was handed the microphone to say her name during the renewal of vows. She responded with a big: "Hello!"

Sister Ruth ends her autobiography with an experience she had while she was dusting in the convent Oratory many years ago. Kneeling under the statue of Jesus Embracing Francis, Sister Ruth was hit on the head by a loose nail. She shared this reflection: " Maybe Jesus was trying to get his other hand free to embrace ME. She was welcomed home on August 1, 2017