

HERstory

This feature highlights the lives of our sisters, mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers in whose footsteps we follow. River Valley Woman feels that what our senior women in the river valley have to say is vitally important and that we have much to learn from them.

This month, Sister Mary Ann Osborne of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mankato tells HERstory. Visit her web site www.sistermaryannosborne.com

Where were you born and grow up?

I was born at St Joseph's Hospital in Mankato and grew up on a farm in St Peter.

What about that do you remember most fondly?

In my childhood, I often climbed up and sat in our weeping willow tree in our yard. I admired the branches against the blue sky and tried to imagine things that I could make out of them. I loved to ride bike up and down the road and often went exploring in our grove of trees.

Tell us a bit about your family and growing up.

There were seven children in my family—five girls and two boys. I am the sixth child. My parents always taught us to respect all things and appreciate beauty. My mom loved to grow and arrange fresh flowers for our home. My dad taught me to love nature and all its gifts. We would often go to the woods to have a family outing of picking flowers, hunting mushrooms and having a wiener roast. We were exposed to beauty around us and respect for all people played an important part in our upbringing.

Education?

My first bachelor of arts degree was from Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, Wis., in education. I taught grade school for 13 years. I then returned in 1997 to Metropolitan State University in Minneapolis, Minn., to receive another bachelor of arts in art. As part of that degree I went to Stuttgart, Germany, to study sculpture for six months.

How did you get into wood carving and how have you been able to blend your life as a School Sister of Notre Dame with your art?

My first attempt at taking a one-week class in woodcarving was in 1984. It raised many foreign words



to my vocabulary and many new techniques. The next summer I took a two-week course and then I was hooked. I found that I could not separate who I am and what I believe from doing this art form. Being a School Sister of Notre Dame has opened up many opportunities for me and influenced how I view things. I found that through my artwork God works through me to touch others. I have learned that what touches me, I must express. I just need to listen and follow my heart. It requires spending time listening and knowing that it is not about me, but rather something that God is doing through me to speak to others.

You created a piece for this year's 150th anniversary of SSND in Mankato. What do you want people to get out of seeing it?

I wanted a bold statement describing how the SSND community was invited by the town people in 1865 to come to educate in Mankato. I tried to correlate the 150 Psalms that we have prayed in our office prayers over the past 150 years here in Mankato, putting a particular emphasis on Psalm 150. I chose a powerful quote from Psalm 150, "Let everything that has breath praise God." By our very being we sing our praise to God. We express our praise through organ, trumpet, strings, tambourine and dance, which I highlighted in the carving. We gratefully remember those who have gone before us and those who continue to hear the call to spread the gospel. God is present in so many details, particularly the details we ignore. The subtle use of color connects with the flow of the wood.

If your life had gone differently, what do you think you'd be doing right now?

I spent a month working at Genesis Farm in New Jersey before I ever started wood carving. It was rooted in a spirituality that revered Earth as a primary revelation of the Divine. For me it connected air, water, land, nature and the health of our communities. I think I would be working to promote and achieve this well-being for all. So, basically the same thing as I am doing now, trying to open up new ways of seeing.

What is your greatest adventure in life?

My greatest adventure in life came while I was in Stuttgart, Germany, studying. I did not know German at the time so that provided its own adventure. While there I got a rail pass and traveled all around Europe for a month. I visited art museums and wrote papers on different art pieces for credit toward my art degree. On my way traveling to Madrid the train separated and I got an unexpected ride through western France. As a result it provided over a daylong detour riding the train with many interesting encounters. My travels led me to fully experience how we are all one people under the same stars.

If you could go anywhere, where would it be?

I would travel to Norway. I have always wanted to see Norway since I was little and learned about it in school. I planned on going there when I was studying in Europe but instead my teacher wanted me to go to Greece. In the process I quite literally discovered it was all "Greek to me" trying to get around alone.

I managed to see many wonderful art pieces with the help of people that I met along the way.

What other hobbies or activities do you enjoy? How do they complement who you are?

I enjoy listening to music, watching movies and enjoying time in nature. Many of the pieces I create are a reflection on things in nature. Sometimes the words of songs inspire a piece to be carved or some scene from a movie really touches me and I know that I need to make something in response.

When people first meet you, who do you hope they see?



I hope others see me as someone who walks humbly with God. Also as a person who is enjoying life and grateful for the gifts that I have been given. I would like them to find me approachable and seeking justice for others.

Looking forward, what is in store for you?

For the past year I have been working toward having an exhibition at the Basilica in Minneapolis titled "With Passion." It contains several new wood carvings that are paired with quotes of Pope Francis and Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger, foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The quotes are used to describe my carvings. The exhibit at their gallery runs Sept. 12 through Oct. 25, 2015. RVW

Bend of the River Carving

The route and blue color represents the Minnesota River. At the bend of the river where Mankato is, the SSND Symbol, made out of wire, identifies all SSND's in the International Community.

The four women on the top part of the carving represent Sr. Ambrosia, Sr. Johanna of the Cross, Sr. Rebeccah and Candidate Mary Helling who travelled from Milwaukee, WI in 1865. The man gazing out into the future toward the bottom part of the carving is to represent the original calling for SSND's by Leo Lamm in 1864 and later Father Sommereisen in 1865.

The leaves represent how education provided new life and growth. The lines from Psalm 150 represent the past 150 years of praising God with dancing, pipe organ, trumpet, stringed instruments, and tambourine.

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