

Dear 'little' Mary,

I have been having a good time going through photo albums lately; there you are as a young postulant, and there in your white dress and veil ready to become a novice and here you are making your final profession. So many years have intervened and so many changes you could not have imagined. Just for starter, as a postulant you will wear a black dress and short veil and at final profession a tan coloured dress and have back-combed hair!

Religious life is not now what you envisioned. Let me tell you a few of the things you will experience. You will have a lot of fun as a postulant, playing pranks with the others, adjusting to and 'breaking' silence and praying the Divine Office. That prayer book is heavy and you will spend a few early mornings drowsy during meditation. You will meet your former classmates in school but will not be allowed to speak to them nor will you be allowed home visits for a long time. But you love the camaraderie, the chapel and take these restrictions in stride.

The sisters' in leadership will decide that you are meant to teach but that first year with 32 rambunctious teens will be a real testing ground! However, with time you will gain confidence and find you love your students; years later, some of them will keep in touch with you. Counseling and religious studies were more your interest than academics and you will end up with working with adults for many years. Their interest in the spiritual life will sustain and inspire you and take you to many different venues, like other churches and cities in Canada and the United States.

One of the biggest changes and challenges you (and your community) will see in your lifetime is the size and age of your community. Many sisters will leave and many will die but fewer will join. You will be discouraged by this and puzzled. But you will not be alone. And you will play your part in

Over the course of years, you will make mistakes; you will discover that to be a school of self-knowledge and humility. You are naturally someone who searches for your authentic self; in the process you will make choices that surprise some and trouble some. Some of those choices will be your best decisions. As one wise elder sister wrote to you, "be yourself and together we will travel on". You will always find God as your Centre and your sisters as support. You will go through sad times but will find deep joy as you remain faithful to your call and spiritual path.

Mom will be your greatest cheerleader, the one from whom you learned hospitality, the wisdom of the afternoon coffee break and so much more. Dad gifted you with some of his playfulness. You will stand on the shoulders of great women in your community. You will delight in the psalms, in singing and dance, in the mystery of the liturgical seasons.

I want you to be grateful for all the opportunities given to you to travel and study and to minister to people. Thank you for your willingness to try new things, to use what you were given in service to others, to work in community in many ways. While doing community work you will maintain contact with things outside religious life which will enrich you and the community. Keep up the spirit and believe in the good.

Love,
Your older self