

Reflection Project: Letter to your younger self
Catholic Health Association of Manitoba
Legacy of Care and Compassion Project

December 21, 2014

Dear Ruth,

While I am presently known as Roberta in the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, I was baptized Ruth. I want to begin my story as a young woman graduating from high school from St. Ursula's Academy in Bruno, Saskatchewan, where I seriously considered entering religious life and becoming an Ursuline Sister. While waiting for the date of entry, circumstances took me to Calgary to look for work. However when the time arrived, a health condition intervened so that I did not follow through on these plans and over the next six years I lived a life as a young adult enjoying a time of dating, dancing and earning a living. I even came to the point of considering marriage; however there was still that deep-felt desire and call to be of service to others through a life as a religious. A major decision was to be made so I again spent some time at a convent in Calgary but was soon convinced that it wasn't the place for me. Circumstances, however around that time provided me with an opportunity to leave Calgary for Toronto with a close girl friend who had family in that city.

As I was boarding the train, a very dear friend and mentor suggested that, when I arrived in Toronto, I look up a Sister of St. Joseph who was an aunt to two of her close friends and who also had a sister in the same order.

As if by fate, after leaving Union Station in Toronto, we travelled up Bay Street and one of the first places I saw was St. Joseph Convent where these Sisters lived. It immediately registered in my mind!

And perhaps again by fate, I found employment with a company which was situated one block from the Convent and which I passed each day on my way from Mass at a local church.

Finally, that inner voice and desire compelled me to make a visit and thus begins the rest of my life and journey as a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

I relate this part of the story to encourage anyone in like circumstances of decision-making to realize that God has a plan for you and will not let you down for as noted in Isaiah 43:1,2 – “I have called you by name: you are mine. When you pass through the water, I will be with you.”

And again in Isaiah 43:5 – “Fear not, for I am with you. “

My life in the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph afforded me the opportunity to go to University and to graduate with an Honors B.A. in Home Economics and to become a Registered Dietitian – a profession I practiced in two hospitals in Toronto. Subsequently and after further studies and discernment, I moved on to a career path of healthcare administration which eventually led me to St. Joseph’s Residence in Winnipeg which had formerly been a general hospital founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1923 to serve the population in North Winnipeg. In the late 1900’s the hospital was converted to a seniors’ residence. As time went on and as the residents became frail and more dependent, the building could no longer meet their needs so a decision had to be made - whether to close the facility or build a new one.

The Archdiocese of Winnipeg wanted a Catholic presence in North Winnipeg, so it was decided to build.

I was then missioned to Winnipeg to accomplish the task which proved to be very challenging as well as rewarding. The new residence which was built on Leila Ave. and opened in 1980 thereby provided the residents with a beautiful new home with private rooms which they had not experienced in the former facility. What a joy it was making this possible for them!

It was with some sadness but also gratitude that ownership was later transferred to the Benedictine Sisters and subsequently the facility became a member of the Catholic Health Care Association of Manitoba.

After a year's sabbatical, my journey in healthcare took me back to Toronto to assume the responsibility for a 610-bed long-term and rehabilitation centre, where I was president for over ten years before retiring in 1993 – thus ending a rewarding career of working with seniors during their various stages of diminishment. However it was the beginning of a life of volunteerism and service to seniors as a Eucharistic minister in long-term care facilities and in their homes.

If I leave a legacy, I believe it will be in what has been achieved in providing for those in need of long – term care and most particularly seniors and this through my involvement and leadership in provincial and national associations that advocate on behalf of those in need of such care.

It is evident that during one's life there are many twists and turns, but each new experience brings with it opportunities for new relationships, new learnings and unforeseen obstacles to overcome, but as I bring this to a close, I offer this reflection for those who are pondering a major change in their life. One so often dwells on those you are leaving or what you are giving up without considering what may be gained. Helpful for me, has been the story of the Biblical Ruth, my namesake in the Old Testament, who by leaving her homeland and remaining faithful to her own desires and to her mother-in-law Naomi found a whole new life and was richly blessed as mine certainly has been!

My older self,

Roberta

Sister Roberta Freeman, CSJ
Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto