

LETTER TO LITTLE JONI
(My sister, my best friend, my soul mate)

As I approach my third quarter of life and fifty-six of these years as a Benedictine sister, I want to share some memories with you of my journey thus far and some of the significant details God chose to use in order to guide me to this Benedictine life. You may remember a good many of them, but some you were too small or too playful to recognize their significance in the bigger picture of your and my life.

Our home was a house for the church until we were at least 10 years old and our Guardian Angels Church was built. **Do you remember** how much fun it was waiting for Father to come for Mass? Sometimes he was late or he forgot the altar stone or the Mass wine, so back someone went to the parish church in the neighbouring village of Grandview to get these items. While we waited, people sat around and talked, visited while we ran around and had lots of fun with our friends!

So it was in our home that you were baptized, and two Benedictine sisters who were staying at our place to teach catechism, were present. **Do you remember** Sr. Hiltrude asking Father if he put salt on my tongue as required to do as part of the Baptism ritual?

Our home was a place where sisters and priests were always welcome. Since Mom had a brother a Redemptorist priest, Mom and Dad had great respect for priests and religious sisters and treated them as part of the family. **Do you remember** that picture we took with Uncle Paul holding you in his arms when you were only nine months old? He was still a seminarian and was home visiting. **Do you remember** Sr. Alfred holding you in your first birthday suit with only a little diaper, and the tub of water on the grass beside you in which you had just finished splashing? It was a hot and sunny July day - your first birthday. Many years later

as a postulant in Arborg, I was her piano accompanist for the pieces she was studying for her violin exam. **Do you remember that?** How much fun and happy she always was? **Do you remember** her dancing with daddy in our living room when four Benedictine sisters teaching catechism in Dauphin came to visit, and daddy wanted me to play a Ukrainian "kolomyka" for him? I did and they danced!!

The sisters were always fun-loving, happy, full of interesting stories and mischievous - some of them. **Do you remember** when we returned from Ethelbert and the sisters arrived earlier than expected that Sunday afternoon. (We never locked our home). We knew they were to arrive in mid-afternoon. It was a hot summer day and daddy wanted to treat his special friend, Sr. Callista to a refreshing bottle of beer. He got one out of the fridge, poured it into a glass and poured another for himself. **Do you remember** the look on his face when he took the first sip? Then he exclaimed with a laugh: "Oh, that Callista! She's up to her tricks again!" Sister had helped herself to a cool bottle of beer before we arrived home, filled the empty bottle with water, sealed it, placed it back into the fridge and prayed that **that** would be the one daddy would grab. And it was! A reverse miracle - beer into water, almost like Jesus changing water into wine! **Do you remember that?** I do, to this day!

God gifted us with the gifts of music and song and the sisters loved to sing. They encouraged me, taught me piano and organ during their summer catechism stints. And when I went to Arborg for Grade XI and heard the beautiful strains of Gregorian chant wafting through the convent hallways and reaching me at study hall, there was a divine spark ignited in my soul which never left me. But you **must remember** how you played by ear whatever tunes you heard as a little girl when we got the piano but had to wait for over a year before Miss Hamilton had a space available to teach you. I continued my piano lessons in Arborg and when I came back home for Grade XII, that divine musical spark and the

encouragement and invitations of the sisters drew me to become one of them.

It is primarily through music and liturgy that I have served during my 50+ years as a Benedictine - in Winnipeg, Calgary, Antigonish and the parishes of Cape Breton Island, N.S. - in schools, with church choirs - and it is through music and song that the Benedictine legacy of Ora - song, liturgy- and Labora - much of which continues to be music and liturgy - continue to draw me on a journey which will eventually lead me, **and you**, little Joni, my soul mate, to the heavenly chorus of all Benedictines who continue, with the Seraphim and Cherubim, to sing God's praises.

And it is this story, my little Joni, that you needed to hear as we continue our journey during this year dedicated to all Consecrated People on the occasion of the year of Consecrated life.