

My Dear Little Irene

You could not possibly have imagined such adventures and so much sorrow would be part of a little girl's life?

God destined that your birth into this world should take place in the afternoon of June 28, 1938 in Eastern Poland.

Your grandmother Elizabeth has often told you the story that you had some problems with breathing at birth so grandma bit one of your little fingers and you let out a loud "yelp" and your little blue body began to turn pink. Just a few moments of life and already a miracle!

By the time I was four 4, tensions and unrest began to surface among the various cultures in Eastern Europe. For safety, families had to gather together for the night so that the men could take turns to protect their families.

The overwhelming feelings of despair and uncertainty were clearly visible on the faces of family members when Germany declared war on Poland.

On day in May, 1943 everyone in the village was asked to prepare to leave their farms and homes and get into the boxcars that had arrived from Germany to our train station. We were only allowed to take some food and blankets.

I don't remember how long we travelled. At least 2 days and one night. When finally the train stopped we were told to disembark. A man with a horse and buggy picked us up and we were taken to a huge farm and fisheries estate 2 km. from the city of Dachau,

Mother and grandpa Martin were given the job of taking care of the barn animals- milking cows and caring for the horses. My dad was responsible for a number of fish ponds that were located on the estate. I was left in the house on my own.

Since this was war time, several times a day and more often at night the sirens would shrill to give a warning that the threat of air bombs attack was imminent. If I was outdoors alone, dad would rush over quickly to me and try to find a safe place for us to hide. I developed such fear of sirens that at night I would have nightmares.

The war began to escalate when the city of Munich which is about 25 km. from Dachau was totally demolished.

One day in spring I overheard my dad telling mom that the American army was moving closer to Dachau. By now I understood that the American army would be our salvation and somehow would bring this war to an end.

Daily I would run to the road to see if the American army was coming. One day my dream was realized. I saw army tanks in the distance and waited for them to pass by me so I could wave to them. Sure enough the first tank stopped and so did those behind. A soldier called me over.

When I came to the tank he lifted me up and sat me beside him. I could not understand what he said to me. However, he gave me something wrapped in shiny paper and motioned to me to unwrap it and to eat what was inside.

My! How sweet it was. What surprised me even more was that as I chewed on it, it did not get eaten up. I called it my "everlasting candy" and kept it hidden at night for days. I learned much later that my candy was gum.

One fine day the greatest happiness was that the war, the bombing and the sirens had come to an end.

Because there were so many people who were displaced by the war the UNRA (United Nations Relief Association) assisted in finding and placing thousands of people in barracks throughout different parts of Germany. Because there were people of various nationalities from Eastern Europe, the solution was to have each camp assigned to a different nationality.

Like so many displaced people, my parents took the opportunity to apply to emigrate to whatever country would accept us.

Canada was the first to respond to our request. My family had to undergo stringent physical health exams for 2 weeks. We also had to appear before a consulate body to answer questions. Finally we were accepted to emigrate to Canada and specifically assigned to work on Mr. Boiteau's sugar beet farm in Letellier, MB.

On May 2nd we boarded the Ship Samaria and in 10 days we landed in Montreal. After some days of acclimatizing to North America we boarded a CP train and headed for Letellier.

We soon experienced the generosity of the French Canadians who were most gracious to us.

At the age of 11, I began my first formal education in a small one room country school. Since all of the students were French, that is the first language I learned.

When our 2 year contract ended in Letellier, my family moved to Emerson because that was where jobs were available for my parents. I, of course had to learn to speak, read and write in English.

My family's final move was to Winnipeg where my parents bought their first home. I completed my education at Holy Ghost School and St. Mary's Academy.

In my heart I felt a strong invitation to join the Benedictine Sisters. I took the plunge into monastic life on August, 22, 1957 and have been a monastic for 55 years.

Most of my years of ministry were spent in teaching in Oyen, AB. Dog Creek, MB., in Seven Oaks School Division. I also had the privilege to specialize and teach blind and low vision student both in Winnipeg and Calgary.

One of the highlights of my life was my Dad teaching me to read using the one book we had at home, --a Bible. I developed a great love for the Book of Exodus. Perhaps the 40 years the

people of Israel journeyed in the desert parallels the journeys which my family and I had to take until we finally settled in Canada.

Now, Irene you have to admit that your life has been one BIG GLORIOUS ADVENTURE!!