Sister Kathreen Kosterman

This is a short account about Sister Kathreen and her family. Starting out as a young girl, until her life had been completed on August 15th, 1989, the Feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Mother.

It’s done in a very simplistic journalism, but is very poignant. She uses simple words, in an elementary fashion. I’ve not changed any of the words spelling or looked for more meaningful words. I think she says it all. See if you don’t agree.
Chapter I

My Life Before Entering The S.S.S.F., and after.

Our mother, Elizabeth, was a woman like no other lady I’ve ever met, loved, or enjoyed. Her hair were as black as the ink in a fountain pen. Her nose was a bit long, but well balanced on her chubby face. Her hands were as gentle and soft as cotton when she touched or cuddled one of her eight children. The clothes she wore were always simple, neat, and clean. Her blue eyes never ailed to sparkle when she played with us. Those gold and silver filled teeth of hers had to be replaced with a false set when she was thirty-some years of age. Our mother’s soft skin gradually wrinkled with the thousands of dishes, clothes, and floors she so energetically washed, scrubbed, and polished week after week, and year after year. She wore a size ten-and-a-half shoe which we daring children used to love to walk around in, even though they were tree times too large for any of us. Mother was so concerned about the safety and health of all of us, that the least little cut, scratch, or any minor injury would have been serious enough to visit the doctor’s office. But, thanks be to God, our dad (our dad) was usually at home when these minor things happened, and he always saved the day with his gentle patching up of the bruises, and a generous hug, and drying of “crocodile tears” as he called them.

CHAPTER TWO

Arthur William Kosterman, seven years older than our mother, was one in a million—a perfect gentleman and father who could, in our estimation, do anything and everything. He was Bookkeeper and General Manager of the Wecks Lumber Company for almost forty-five years, in spite of the fact that, before he was married on June 29, 1921, he had spent almost a year at Sacred Heart Sanitarium with a nervous breakdown. He suffered his first heart attach when I was seven or eight years old. I recall the evening very vividly, when, in the middle of the night, our Pastor, Father Anthony G. Wailer, was in our parents bedroom anointing dad. However, he recovered in a few days and was back at work. Dad always tried to please all of use, and often treated us during the hot summer days in Racine. He’d get all of us into our pajamas, pile us into our little Ford, and then get each of us an ice cream cone, which at that time was only five cents. He would take (then) a short drive out into the country where it was cooler, and then finally stop at the Drug Store on the way home, and buy another pint or quart of ice cream for our mother and himself. That was our evening prelude to bedtime in the Kosterman home at least once a week (or more in summer). On Sundays dad always made the noon meal, consisting of one of three Sunday menus at our house—Chicken in a huge pot of soup and vegetables, Pot Roast with potatoes and carrots and gravy, or a delicious Ham cooked in a large kettle of Split Pea Soup. Then, when everything was simmering on the stove, and all of us had returned from the 9:15 Mass, (Children’s Mass) which our Pastor and the Sisters insisted we must attend, Dad would read the comics to the youngest ones in the family. We loved the way he could exaggerate the verbal expressions of each character—Daddy Warbucks, Orphan Annie, Skeezix, Andy Gump, Maggie and Jiggs, and many others. However, before we could glance at, or read the rest of the paper, he’d spread it our on the dining room table, with a pair of scissors in his hand, and examined each page, often cutting out snapshots of half naked women, or anything which he thought would religiously tarnish our souls. We often complained that the paper was hard to read with several slices removed, but his only gentle reply was: “too bad, kids, but no son or daughter of mine needs to look at bathing beauties”.

On Sunday afternoons two events happened as regularly as a clock. Dad took the two or three youngest children to their beds for a short nap, and he also slept for about an hour until they awakened. However, for the next hour, he religiously listened to Father Charles E. Coughlin, and a few years later, Father
Manton, and Bishop Sheen. During that time, my job was to keep the young ones quiet in the kitchen with games, etc., or if the weather permitted, watch all of them in our back yard as they played. But as soon at the clock struck 3 or 4, Dad would head for the kitchen, and in a few minutes he had a huge bowl of salted and buttered popcorn, while I usually was at the other side of the stove making a double batch of fudge, or butterscotch. Most of the time both treats were ready at the same times. This weekly event lifted everyone’s spirits and put all of us in a good mood.

Holidays like Christmas, New Years Day, Easter, Decoration and Labor Day were visiting days either at our home or at one of the relatives. However, a number of these yearly occasions were days when we had the measles, chicken pos, whooping cough, or another of the childhood diseases. So, as a result, at several times of the year, we had a large sign on our front door, placed there by the Health Department Nurse, Miss Weiss. There were various ones, according to the progress of the disease. They were either the title of the disease, or QUARRANTINE, or—warning. We despised them, for they meant “Stay in the yard, and, sorry, no neighbor kids in the yard, and no company”.

Whenever our mother had a new addition to the family, we never suspected, or knew about it until the following morning, when our Dad would proudly announce that “Mom isn’t home”. She’s in the hospital with a new brother, (six in all), or a new sister (one besides me). “Your Aunt Rose will be here in a few minutes to stay for a week or two. Do whatever she tells you to do. Don’t cause any trouble for her, or I’ll take care of you when I come home from the office”. Aunt Rose Kosterman, our Dad’s, youngest sister, and unmarried, was very good to use, and as neat as a pin.

As I’ve already mentioned, our dad could do almost anything. Since he worked six days a week at the Wecks Lumber Company, there was one chore (besides making dinner on Sunday’s while mother was taking care of getting us to church for the 9”15 A.M. Children’s Mass) and that was to give one of us a haircut. By the time he had made the rounds of all eight of us, one a week, he had to start again from base one. Even the Sisters in school would notice the fine job he had done. They’d smile and say: “Somebody’s Dad was busy again yesterday. He’s a good barber”.

He could repair most of the things that went wrong at home, too—a broken chair leg, a clogged sink, the toilet, a flat tire, a broken tree limb, or just about anything. He was our idol.

When Dad paid the bills on Saturdays, he often brought a treat for us—for our Mom, a box of Fanny Farmer Candy, and for us, a Holloway Sucker, or chewing gun.

However, when the GREAT DEPRESSION arrived in Racine, the treats were less and less. But we still managed to have our Sunday popcorn and fudge.

Our eight room house on 1012 Yout Street, holding ten of us within its walls, needed a thorough cleaning every Saturday, and I usually did most of it from top to bottom. Mom was always busy taking care of the two or three youngest children, washing clothes, ironing, or baking bread, and kuchen or buns for Sunday. When I’d finally finish my rounds of cleaning, including washing the kitchen floor and the back steps, I’d start my afternoon with baking at least three cakes—white, chocolate, banana, and usually using up the egg yoks with the finale of a gold loaf cake. This may sound exaggerated to someone from a small family, but, believe it or not, I had to literally hide all but one cake after baking and frosting them, or all would have been consumed by 10:00 P.M. on Saturday night. We were a family who loved sweets. (No wonder I’m a diabetic).
I consider myself the most fortunate child in our family, for according to the events a few hours before I
was born, I had a slim chance of a natural birth. My mother entered St. Mary’s Hospital, on Holy
Saturday Evening, April, 1922. Our Dad spent the night in Saint Mary’s Chapell praying for a safe
delivery. He was still praying at 4 P.M. on Easter Sunday afternoon, when the doctor came to him and
said: “I can’t possibly save both you wire and baby. Which one would like me to save?” My dad said, “I
want you to save both mother and baby right now”. My mother used to tell me that I must have heard that
statement, for, a few minutes later I was born. But I had to have some special care, for I was jaundiced.
In fact, the doctor doubted if I would live, so I was taken to St. Joseph’s Church three days later, during
the worst blizzard of the year (1922), April 19, and baptized Virginia Elizabeth Kosterman. I did not gain
much weight (only 7 pounds at birth) until the middle of summer. When my parents took me to West
Bend to visit his cousins for a week. The four mail cousins were all teenagers and worked hard daily on
their 160 acre farm. Unbeknown to my mother, when one of the boys asked if he could take me to the
barn daily for awhile, she consented, little knowing what their purpose was for doing it. Each time they
took me, they milled some warm milk from one of their cows and fed it to me immediately. By the end of
the week I had gained a few pounds. My parents thought it was the result of that good country air. They
never found out the real reason until several years later when the young men told them what they did.
However, I was usually the first one in the family to catch colds and sore throats, so I had to have tonsil
surgery at the end of my first year in school in 1929. I spent the whole summer recuperating and drinking
eggnogs, for I had almost bled to death from a hemorrhage in the hospital. Then, one of the first days of
school in September when the weather was still warm, I went to school (only two blocks from home) with
no sweater or cap. In the meantime the weather became much cooler by noon. As we walked home for
dinner, I could scarcely breathe. I was put to bed. That afternoon the doctor was called to our home, and
I was told that I had contracted pneumonia. I then missed many weeks of school and returned after
Thanksgiving. For the rest of my eight years at St. John Nepomuk School, I caught almost every germ
that traveled from room to room in school, but never had to repeat a grade as a result. I graduated in
January, 1936, as a result of our school having started the A and B system of grades in the middle of my
first grade, when those of us who could read were promoted to Grade 2 B. The only disadvantage of this
was the fact that it was difficult to begin St. Catherine’s High School in January. So I was advised by my
eighth grade teacher, Sister Evasia, to remain at home for the second semester and help my mother who
was expecting her eighth baby. I became the “mother” for ten days during my mother’s stay in the
hospital. “After she returned home, Sister suggested that I return to the 8th grade room each afternoon for
an hour for Language and another class with the group. I did that until almost the end of the school year.

I began St. Catherine’s High School in September as a freshman with a full course of studies—Religion,
English, Biology, Latin, Algebra, and Band, learning to play the Baritone instrument, and later, the
French Horn. At that time the tuition (Depression Years) was sixty dollars per year. With our large
family and the depression in our midst, my father arranged for me to clean a classroom each day at St.
Catherine’s after school hours, in order to satisfy for may tuition. Guess whose room I was assigned to—it
was my Dominican Aunt, Sister Marina Schibilsky, my mother’s sister. All was fine during the first
year, but when someone told Sister that I was planning to enter Saint Joseph Convent at the end of my
sophomore year in 1938, Sister Marina began trying to find many, many reasons for me to enter St.
Catherine’s Convent instead of Saint Joseph’s. “Imagine—I could teach in my own city. (Our St. John
Nelpomuk School was the only School Sisters of St. Francis in Town). All the rest of the schools were
staffed by the Racine Dominicans. St. John’s had them for a while. Sister said, “The Franciscans have
missions so far away. They already have several thousand Sisters in their Order. We only have about six
hundred. Your mother and father need your help, etc., etc.” Poor Sister Marina. She tried so hard to
convince me, but to no avail. But I think she still loved my anyway, for on June 13, 1941, when I became
Sister M. Kathreen, she and Sister Margaret, my biology teacher, came to our Reception Ceremony. And
they were smiling with congratulations, hugs and kisses. Sister Manina died while I was teaching at St.
Nazianz, Wisconsin, in February, 1968. I was not able to attend her funeral at Sienna Center because of a wild blizzard and a very cold weather at the time. But Sister Evasia, my eighth grade teacher, who was again teaching in Racine at the time, accompanied my mother and dad to the funeral and took my place.

I have never regretted entering Saint Joseph Convent at the age of 16 years. And I have loved every minute of my life at an aspirant for two years, a candidate for one year, and novice for two years. The only rather frightening experience I have ever had was to be appointed to teach four grades in a classroom at St. Boniface, Germantown, besides being the organist and adult choir director, after having only two years of college. It it hadn’t been for my first Superior, Sister Evna Rund, who helped me much at the beginning, I could not have attempted the job. But her patience and motherly guidance helped me to learn very quickly how to keep four lively groups of children busy with appropriate work. One advantage of not having finished college before fulltime teaching was the fact that I was appointed to continue going to school for the next nine summers at the Convent. In spite of close quarters, a warm chapel without air conditioning, and hundreds of sisters all over the place, I loved every minute of it. In fact, I have never, NEVER been the least bit homesick for my family or home life, but I’ve often been very homesick for our dear and wonderful Saint Joseph Convent, where I spent many hours, months, and years learning to be a true and happy, and hopefully, holy School Sister of Saint Francis, in the greatest Religious Community in the world.

Thank you, Dear Mother Stanislaus, Double Dear Mother Cornona, Mother Clemens, Mother Amanda, Sister Frances Borgia, Sister Lauretta, Mother Sister Frances Cunningham, Sister Mary Garcia, Sister Petra Kraus, and Sister Rosenbach for your great leadership and encouragement as we all endeavor to grow in holiness and grace in following in the footsteps of the great St. Francis of Assisi.

P.S. My great teachers:
Grade 1  – Sister Agnesia
Grade 2  – Sister Daniel
Grade 3  – Sister Hortense
Grade 4  – Sister Idaberga
Grade 5  – Sister Idaberga
Grade 6A – Sister Idaberga
Grade 6B – Sister Evasia
Grade 7B – Sister Idaberga
Grade 8  -- Sister Evasia

Great Music Teachers: Sisters Diana and Sister Leonore Vogel in school music and church.

HERE ENDS MY LIFE STORY.
I have taught school in the following parishes:

1. 1943 – 1947: St. Boniface, Goldendale, WI. Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, and Organist and Music Teacher.
3. 1952 - 1953: St. Charles, Cassville, Grades 4, 5, 6, Adult and Children’s Choir.
4. 1953 - 1959: Our Lady of Help, Frankenstein, Missouri, Grades 5,6, later Grades 3, 4, 5, and Organist.
5. 1959 - 1968: St. Boniface, Waumandee, WI., Grades 3,4, later Grades 7, 8, and Organist.
7. 1969 – 1972: St. Joseph School, Hazel Green, WI., Grades 7, 8, Principal, and Organist.
12. 1980 – 1986: Racine, WI., St. John Nepomuk, Grades 7, 8, Religion, Reading (2 years) then Grade 5 (4 years).
14. 1990 Racine, WI., St. John Nepomuk, Reading Tutor for several grades, 14 Missions during 47 years of teaching.
15. 1967 – 1972: for five summers, I earned a Master’s Degree at St. Thomas College in St. Paul, Minnesota. Education with emphasis on elementary counseling.

END OF EDUCATION AND TEACHING.
ADDENDA

I have six younger brothers and one sister, all married with children, and a total of 29 nieces and nephews—and almost as many grand nieces and nephews.

My brother who is next to me in age is Doctor Richard Kosterman, an Optometrist, who has practiced in Antigo, WI for forty-seven years, lost his wife Frances, a few years ago, 1986. She had been severely crippled for many years with polio. They have eight children and several grand children in several states. Richard had been in the Pallotine Seminary for six years, entering after grade 8. He then returned home and entered the armed forces during the World War. He was sent to Optometry School in Chicago, when he earned his degree.

Since his family was raised and settled for life, Richard has decided to return to the seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, in August, 1989. Because of his age, Archbishop Whelan was the only Bishop who was willing to accept him. And because of his continuing taking of biblical and other courses throughout many years, he was told that he could be ordained in four years (1993). He left immediately after the feast of the Assumption of our Lady, following a family reunion.

Our brother, Robert, lost his wife a few years ago. She was ill for several years with cancer. In the summer of 1988, he remarried a beautifully elderly women who has twelve married children. Bob has three married children. They had a beautiful church wedding in Cedarville, Michigan, on July 2, 1998. Bob is a parish lector, Eucharistic Minister to all the ill, and an usher. Bob’s second wife one year ago.

Our brother, David, has four grown daughters, all married with children, except Kathy, who is a working maiden.

Our brother, Daniel, has three grown sons with children.

Our brother, LeRoy, has four grown children, two boys and two girls.

Our brother, Eugene, the youngest, has two grown daughters, one married and one single.

Our sister, Mary, in St. Paul, Minnesota, has five grown children in and around Saint Paul, Minnesota.

So our immediate family is spread around three states—Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

THE YEAR OF 1989

Here ends my story on Monday, August 17, the evening before the beautiful feast of Our Lady’s Assumption into heaven. May she bless and pray for all of us until we hopefully join her and her Divine Son JESUS in Heaven.

Our dear Mother Elizabeth Kosterman died on March 27 in 1982 at Woodstock Nursing Home in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Our dear Dad, Arthur William Kosterman, died on August 31 in 1970, at home in Racine. (Father Macek buried our Dad and Farther Kolanda buried our Mother).
Both Mother and Dad had beautiful funeral Masses at St. John Nepomuk Church in Racine, the city in which they had lived in throughout their lives. Dad was 79 years and Mother was 82 years.

After weeks before our dear Mother died, I found the following note which she had written on July 10, 1975 (five years after our Dad died).

P.S.: To my dear children—when I die, the yellow suspense card inside this envelope should be sent at once to the address on the blue lined envelope, so the Gregorian Masses will soon be offered for my soul. Stipend has been paid. Money Order dated, December 19, 1962, letter from Monsignor inside yellow envelope. The Third Order card should be given to our Pastor. I am a member of St. John Neopmuk Parish, Christian Mothers Confraternity and Altar Society, Third Order of Saint Francis, and the Apostolate of the Suffering. A notice should be sent to the following address, so I will be remembered in their prayers.

The Apostolate of Suffering
1501 South Layton Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53215

My dear children, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. I thank God for giving you all to me. Live good lives, stay close to God and His Blessed Mother, so we will all meet in Heaven. Remember your Daddy and me in your daily prayers. May Jesus bless all grownups and small ones.

All My Love,

Your Mother, July 1975
Mom lived alone from 1970 to 1980, when she was taken to Woodstock Nursing Home in Kenosha, the only home that had openings in Racine or Kenosha at that time.

Our dear Mother died on March 27, 1982 at Woodstock.

This short account of events in my life has been completed on August 15, 1989, the feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Mother.

Written by Sister Kathreen Kosterman, the first born of eight children.

All of us are still alive and well.

A woman who grew up in Racine, Sister Kathleen Kosterman, celebrated the 50th anniversary of her reception into the School Sisters of St. Francis earlier this month. The anniversary observance was at St. Joseph’s Convent in Milwaukee. School Sisters of St. Francis serve in the fields of education, health care and social service.