

Remembering Sister Patricia (Marie Ruth) Hewitt
Feb. 25, 1929 – Feb. 19, 2013



“I’ve always decided [things] on the spur of the moment. They were always sudden decisions and sometimes kind of surprising decisions...that turned out pretty well...and I learned new things all the time.”

This quote from Pat’s oral history sums up her approach to life and ministry.

Pat was born on Feb. 25, 1929, in Detroit, Mich., to Robert Frederick Hewitt and Edna Marie Leyes. She was the youngest of three children. Robert and Carolyn were her older siblings. Pat’s grandmother and grandfather lived upstairs from her family and she recalls this fond memory. “When I was a little girl, my mother banged on the ceiling with a broom handle; that was the signal to my grandmother that I would come up and have tea with her every afternoon. So she’d be doing something like baking and telling me all about England (that’s where Pat’s father was born) while I was having my ‘sugar water’ tea.”

Pat went to St. Theresa Grade School and High School in Detroit. While in grade school a Dominican Sister and a Dole pineapple advertisement stimulated Pat’s artistic bent. She says, “I had a teacher...who was interested in giving art lessons, so she made some squares to show us how to enlarge from a magazine picture...I enlarged from a picture of a Dole pineapple. It had a palm tree on it, and I did it in beautiful chalk color. I gave it to my mother who framed it and thought for sure I was going to be an artist.”

In high school Pat took courses in charcoal and in figure drawing at Cass Tech She later became an art major at Marygrove where she met the IHMs and graduated from there in 1951.

Pat's oral history includes some interesting spur-of-the-moment stories. Out of the blue one night she and a friend decided to go to Europe. The trip would cost about half of Pat's salary, which was \$2,900 dollars a year. She ate a steady diet of peanut butter and wore parachute dresses to save money. She says, "There was a lot of nylon parachute material left over from the War, so they made it into all kinds of prints. You could buy a wash-and-wear dress made from nylon parachutes."

This trip to Europe sparked an unexpected change in Pat's life. To prepare for it, she and her sister Carolyn took a photography class at Fordson High School. Pat discovered she really loved photography and she had remarkable talent as a photographer.

After seeing the pictures of her European trip, her principal put Pat on an audio-visual committee the next year for the Allen Park school system. At the end of her first year she became the director of the Allen Park school system's audio-visual program.

Of this experience, Pat says, "I think I was about the first woman to go through media instruction for Wayne County, and at that time there were only two women in charge of media programs in Michigan."

In 1961 Pat saw a notice up for a principalship and made another spur-of-the-moment decision to apply for it. She came in second. What the superintendent said to her the next day, however, changed her life forever. After complimenting her on how well she had done, he said, "I'll tell you right now I'll never have a woman administrator on my staff."

Pat knew she had to make some changes. Should she go to the Peace Corps? A bigger school system? Or stay where she was? She describes another spur-of-the-moment decision. "One Saturday morning I was having a cup of coffee and reading the paper. All of a sudden I thought, 'Why don't I do the whole works and see about going to the convent?' It was a call that quick. It really was a call because I had been having a good time traveling around the world, had my own horse, had gone to a Jack and Jill dude ranch, and had a nice Chevy convertible. I was living the life of Reilly. So 'the call' was quite a shock. When I told my

family, everyone was shocked. [After all] I was 32 years old.” Pat entered the congregation in 1961.

Pat was only in Monroe a week when she had her first art class with the Novices. It was quite an experience! She said, “The first day all the Novices trooped into my class. I brought the records down from the Postulate and put them on the phonograph. I told the Novices, ‘this is an art class and you have to relax, enjoy the music and talk with each other. It will help you with your art work.’ Meanwhile the Novices were rolling their eyes at one another about talking in class.

“The music drifted up to Sister Alphonsine’s door, and she came flying down [sputtering] ‘What’s going on here?’ It was kind of startling.” (Pat thought after that experience the Novices had permission to talk in art class.)

From 1963 (her second year Novitiate) to 1994 Pat had a variety of positions, such as teacher, educational consultant, director of media services, principal, director of religious education in various schools and parishes throughout Michigan.

When Pat developed the media section on the ground floor of Marygrove Library in the ’70s, she met Sister Louise Daly, who became her good friend, housemate and traveling companion. At that time Pat also became the liaison between the college and the Photographic Guild of Detroit. She learned the fine art of nature photography through this connection.

Louise shared Pat’s love of nature and often they would go to some woodland park so that Pat could photograph wildflowers. Louise’s task was to pick out the good ones. When she found one, she’d say, “This is a beautiful one.” As soon as Pat got all stretched out on her belly and ready to photograph it, Louise would chime in with, “Here’s a better one.”

Pat’s connection with Rockwood began in 1986 when she had to find a place to live for Nicholas, her 90-pound dog, and herself. (For some reason the saying love me, love my dog, just didn’t cut it at other convents.) She heard that St. Mary’s Convent in Rockwood would be empty after the Dominicans moved out. She asked the pastor if she could move in, and he was delighted to have her and Nicholas.

By chance Pat read in the paper about an upcoming meeting of the Rockwood Historical Society. She went and eventually became a member.

In 1994 Pat retired from formal education. She confesses in her oral history that, “I was getting up there in years and I was a little tired of going off to work while Louise drank her coffee and read the Free Press. (Louise had moved in with Pat after she had retired from Marygrove.)

After she retired, Pat’s ministry became more service-oriented to the community of Rockwood. She became more involved with the Rockwood Historical Society and eventually became its president in 1999.

The Society wanted to build a museum, so Pat decided to become a grant writer to help defray the cost. She also believed that writing grants, like being a member of the Responsible Investment Committee, was a way to serve the community and promote justice and peace. In approximately two years, she received about \$86,000 in grant money to help build the Rockwood Area Historical Museum. (Not bad for someone who had never written a grant before!)

What else did this multi-talented retiree with eclectic interests do in her “spare” time besides write grants? She wrote her family genealogy, the history of St. Mary Rockwood Church and the Rockwood City Newsletter.

At age 75, on a whim, Pat, who didn’t know anything about politics, ran for a seat on the Rockwood City Council and won. When her term ended, Pat decided to retire to the Motherhouse. A serious fall at Rockwood City Hall in 2007 quickened her decision. Pat lived either in the Motherhouse or the Health Care Center from 2007 to 2013.

During this time Louise and Pat’s sister, Carolyn, visited her practically every Sunday.

Pat, your adventurous spirit, courageous risk-taking, community service, and creative hope touched, inspired, and improved countless lives.

A few days ago, not on a whim or on the spur of the moment, you took the ultimate leap of faith into the arms of your loving God. The adventure of life you so delighted in here is really only just beginning for you now. ENJOY!

Sister Mary Ellen Loren, IHM

March 30, 2011