



**Sister Cathryn Deutsch, OP
1920 – 2015**

*When one learns to sing the Lord's song in a strange land,
nothing remains strange.*

Cathryn Jeanette Deutsch was born on January 25, 1920, in Virgil, Illinois, one of Chicago's farthest western suburbs. She was the second of four children born to Nicholas and Elizabeth (Beringer) Deutsch. In her autobiography, Sister Cathryn described herself as a blend of her German Catholic parents:

My mother was a hard-working, determined, large-hearted, self-made woman. My father, though not irresponsible, was a playful personality, effervescent, who was devoted to his family with an overflowing devotion for the rest of humanity. Eliz and Nick had an immensely large circle of relatives and friends.

At the onset of the Great Depression, the family moved to Aurora, Illinois, the birthplace of her mother. The family's meager resources, she said, "precariously went into Dad's opening an office for the distribution of coal."

On All Saints Day in 1928, her dad was killed in a train accident while driving to his office in the family's new car. In her autobiography, Sister Cathryn wrote:

At that penniless time, my mother's courage in facing survival with four children, ages 6,7,8,9, did not loom as clearly as the quick support of relatives. Two of my mother's younger sisters with a new brother-in-law came to share our home for two years to ease my mother's adjustment and to assist financially by room and board payments. Eventually Mom found work in a garment factory and after four years as a widow, she remarried.

With the financial help of her uncle, Father William Deutsch, chaplain at Mount St. Mary Academy, Cathryn was able to attend high school at the Mount. When she graduated in 1936 she received a one-year scholarship to St. Joseph College (now Siena Heights University). In her autobiography, Sister Cathryn described her decision to enter the Congregation. "I entered religious life neither through desire nor attraction but by an inward, inexplicable compulsion — the mystery of plan."

On February 4, 1937, Sister Cathryn entered the postulate and at reception in August received her religious name: Sister Mary Guillelma.

After first profession on August 24, 1938, Sister Cathryn was assigned to St Nicholas of Tolentine in Chicago, where she taught second grade for two years.

Her next mission was St. Mary School in Adrian for three years and then in the fall of 1943 she was assigned to teach at Visitation School in Detroit for one year. Sister Cathryn described what those first years were like.

That first year on mission in 1938 and those that followed began to shape my identity, which had less to do with religious life than with professionalism. Transferring to St. Mary's in Adrian and to Visitation in Detroit strengthened my self-image as a fine teacher wanting to be finer.

Summers during these first years of teaching were spent at Siena Heights College, where she received her bachelor's degree in business education in 1942.

In 1944 Cathryn was assigned to teach at St. Patrick High School in Miami Beach for the next eleven years. Of her twenty-two years in Florida, St. Patrick remained the most significant to her even though she felt unprepared to teach the diverse subjects to which she had been assigned. She wrote, "That I was unequipped to teach so many of my assigned diversified subjects didn't seem to matter [to the students]. They taught me that allowances for limitations are easily made when there is caring and fairness."

Summers during this period were spent on graduate studies. In 1953 she received her master's degree in business education from Catholic University in Washington, DC.

In 1955, Sister Cathryn was assigned to serve a six-year term as principal of Little Flower Elementary School in Hollywood, Florida, and this was followed by two years as assistant principal and teacher at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale. Her next assignment would be overseas.

Sister Cathryn was assigned to the Colegio Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic from 1963 to 1967. She taught the first year and then served as the school administrator for the next three years. She recalled this experience as being "*strangely conflictive*" and said:

My first conscious awareness of classism disquieted me. I believe these insights tugged at my commitment and urged me to do something. [The Congregation's] widened vision of justice was not premature.

During the remembrance service Sister Rose Ann Schlitt described Sister Cathryn's love during this period was both "tough and tender." She said:

Those of us in the Dominican Republic knew her in the tough times of her assignment as superior and principal at Colegio Santo Domingo during the turbulent middle 1960s as the country was transitioning from dictatorship to democracy. For the community it included the unfortunate "evacuation"

of our sisters on the Marine ship, followed by her subsequent return [to the Colegio] with Sr. Madeline Dervin to continue in mission. During those years Cathryn fostered community unity and inspired strength for mission in many ways.

Subsequently, in 1972 she was elected Vicaress of Adrian Dominican Latin American Mission [ADLAM]. She again responded with her “si”; a year she later identified it as the most difficult of her religious life. Indeed, Cathryn’s was a tough love and ever so tender.

In her autobiography, Sister Cathryn wrote about one of the tough issues she faced during her term as ADLAM Vicaress:

During this challenging period, congregational possession of the Colegio came into question. Such ownership, so appropriate at one time, seemed incongruent with the desired witness of the Adrians ministering in the D.R. Yet, letting go of the Island’s “Adrian Motherhouse” by gifting the Colegio to the Archdiocese, received almost as much condemnation as applause. Relinquishing security is uncommon valor even for those who have clarity of purpose.

After she served as the ADLAM Vicaress for two years, the 1974 General Chapter elected Cathryn to serve on the General Council from 1974 to 1978. Once freed of her administrative service, Sister Cathryn chose to minister for over six years in Nairobi, Kenya, with the Assumption Sisters in their formation program. She wrote:

My African days define for me the mutuality of ministry; in truth, though, I was far more the receiver than the giver. Those young, indigenous women took less than a day to capture my heart. I knew their God-centered lives, their creative means of survival. Their song and dance had something to say to me.

Sister Cathryn spent her final days of ministry, which she named “Winter Grace,” at Dominican Hospital, where she was secretary for Chaplain Services. She retired in 1999 and continued to live in the Santa Cruz area until the treatments she had been receiving for macular degeneration were no longer effective and she decided to return to Adrian in 2012. She wrote, “When I could no longer sew on a button nor run a vacuum cleaner, nor manage my checkbook, I knew I had to turn to assisted living.”

Sister Cathryn Deutsch died on June 5, 2015, at the age of ninety-five and in the seventy-seventh year of her religious life.

Sister Jo Gaugier, Chapter Prioress of Holy Rosary Chapter, opened the remembrance service by saying:

We are surrounded by things symbolic of Cathryn's life: her autobiography, treasures from her early days on the farm, the courage of her mother when her dad was killed in a fatal accident. Now Cathryn Deutsch is one of our foremothers who witness to us and encourage us on our journey.

In her homily, Sister Corinne Sanders, member of the General Council and friend, noted how Cathryn's life reflected the readings she chose.

The God who is LOVE makes all life and all love possible. We in turn are called to do the same with and for one another. We are called to be with God co-authors of this Love Story. Cathryn indeed wrote her own chapter in this book of LOVE, and she wrote it in her own way and in her own time.

She liked this story of the woman at the well who was bold, direct and did not hold back in her conversation with Jesus. Jesus may have been waiting at that well for more than a drink of water. Perhaps He was thirsty for a rich conversation. For Cathryn, relationship, marked by good conversation grounded in Love, was everything.

Our God, Cathryn's God, is a God who is desirous of these kinds of relationships. He waits for us with expectancy and will wait as long as it takes for the conversation to begin.

Any of us who knew Cathryn knew that she loved conversations but there was one exception: when playing cards there would be no conversation, only card playing.