Sister Patricia Janowicz, OP
1941-2017

“A woman of generosity and gratitude, a lover of children, cats, and life.”

That was how Sister Mary Jane Lubinski, OP, Adrian Crossroads Chapter Prioress, remembered Sister Patricia (almost always known as simply “Pat”) Janowicz at the Vigil Service held after Sister Pat’s death.

Sister Pat was born on May 27, 1941, in Wyandotte (Michigan) General Hospital, the only child of Sigmund and Frances (Lisek) Janowicz. All four of her grandparents were Polish, and she grew up surrounded by rich Polish traditions. Pat remembered in her autobiography that she called her grandparents either the “Wyandotte grandma and grandpa” (her mother’s parents) or the “Detroit grandma and grandpa” (her father’s parents) so as to distinguish which set she was going to visit.

When Sister Pat was very small, the family moved from an apartment to a small house in Dearborn, Michigan, and from there, in 1945, to a larger home on Detroit’s northwest side. Sigmund worked as a truck driver, hauling sand to make concrete, and as a little girl, Sister Pat, a self-described tomboy, played not with dolls but with toy trucks and sand.

Kindergarten was spent at Crary Elementary, and from there Sister Pat went on to St. Scholastica’s. By second grade, she was riding the city bus to school; her mother would walk her to the bus stop and then go to her job at a restaurant.

Her parents frequently drove the Sisters from St. Scholastica’s to Adrian, and it was on one of those occasions, while Sister Pat was in fifth grade, that one of the Sisters mentioned St. Joseph’s Academy. By the time she got to eighth grade, between the fact that the Sisters had a great influence on Sister Pat, and that she had a desire to meet new people and have new experiences in an entirely different environment, she asked her parents if she could go to the Academy.

“My next four years had (their) ups and downs; however, I would never exchange my education, cultural experiences or living experiences during those four years,” she wrote in her autobiography.

Sister Pat entered the Congregation in June 1959. As a postulant, she was assigned to work for Sister Ann Joachim, and as a novice, she worked at St. Clement Infirmary, where she prepared and delivered trays to Sisters.

“I was very fortunate to spend the entire year there. That year was busy but I feel I was blessed to have the opportunity to serve the Sisters,” she wrote, before relating an unforgettable story from a time she was clearing trays from the Sisters’ rooms:

I was on third floor and I checked to make sure the dumbwaiter was on third. I then proceeded to get a tray (mind you, they all had real dishes, silverware, glasses and tea pots). I put the tray on the shelf of the dumbwaiter and to my surprise the dumbwaiter had been moved to another floor. Please note that the wall of the dumbwaiter was the wall to the chapel. I was in big trouble because the tray coming down sounded like a bomb – totally interrupting the Sisters’ prayer. When I got to the kitchen Sister Francis
Catherine told me to see my novice mistress. … I sure could get myself in some predicaments.

Sister Mary Sigmund, as she was known at the time, completed her canonical novitiate in December 1960 and was sent to teach third grade at St. Mary’s School in Paw Paw, Michigan. It was an area with many dairies, wineries and asparagus farms, and Sister Pat recalled in her autobiography that in the spring the Sisters would receive crates of asparagus to rinse and freeze. “When I left I did not want to see any more asparagus,” she wrote.

She was in Paw Paw until June 1962 and then went on to teach at St. Joseph’s in Adrian; St. Joseph’s in Belding, Michigan; and St. Gabriel’s in Detroit, which was near enough to the Ford Motor Co. factory that grit settled on everything in the classroom. By 1968, she had earned her bachelor’s degree in social studies from Siena Heights College (University). Then, while she was working on her master’s degree in reading at Marygrove College, a Sister of St. Joseph approached her about working in the reading department of the Archdiocese of Detroit’s Child Appraisal Center. She served there from August 1971 to November 1977, when the center closed.

“This job showed me that all children, no matter what learning abilities they had, could still make contributions to society,” she wrote in her autobiography.

Over the next several years, she worked as a special education teacher in the Anchor Bay and Waterford school districts, both in Michigan; earned a master’s degree in working with the learning disabled and a specialist’s degree in special education administration/supervision, both from Eastern Michigan University; and was certified to work with both emotionally and mentally impaired students. When she was pink-slipped at Waterford because of low seniority, she decided to go to northern Michigan, where she could be near her family, and substitute teach.

But after doing that for one school year (1981-82), Sister Pat put her teaching and administrative skills to use by starting a special education learning center at St. Francis School in Petoskey, Michigan. She ran this program for four years before deciding to move to be closer again to her elderly mother and stepfather (her father having died in 1969).

From 1986 to 2002 she was a special education teacher at the East Jordan (Michigan) Middle School, and then she became a substitute teacher again for a number of area schools. Finally, in 2004, she made the decision to return to Adrian to serve in the transportation department, a job she held for the next ten years.

When she drove a Sister, whether to or from the airport, to a doctor’s appointment, on an errand, or to visit family, “her care extended to always having a bottle of water for you and entertaining with stories of family, friends, the state of Michigan, and cats,” said Sister Chris Matthews during the Vigil Service for Sister Pat.

Sister Chris also recalled a morning during a time she was having some lung trouble that she woke up and could hardly breathe. She decided to wait until the transportation department opened and called for someone to take her to the emergency room, whereupon Sister Pat appeared on the scene and took charge, calling 911 and going to the hospital herself, where she stayed with Sister Chris until she knew Sister Chris would be all right.

“I’m sure that all of you could get up here and tell of Pat’s care for you,” Sister Chris said. “And I want to thank you, Pat, because I know that I’m a better caregiver because of you.”

1 Sister Francis Catherine Chaloupka cooked for the sisters at St. Clement’s from 1950 to 1960.
While other Sisters had memories to share of Sister Pat too, so did several Co-workers who felt her loss deeply and wanted to share their own stories, which Sister Mary Jane related at the Vigil Service. One Co-worker, the mother of a daughter with disabilities, related how Sister Pat always asked about her daughter, wanting to know, “How’s OUR girl?” A Co-worker in the mailroom remembered Sister Pat’s “friendship, laughter and a listening ear. … She listened to your stories, made some funny comment and she always knew the right words for the moment. There was never a dull moment with Pat around.”

Sister Pat clearly saw her service as a driver as a ministry to the other Sisters. In one of her annals, she noted that the relationships she had built with the Sisters she drove and “the life-sharing events of their lives that they share with me when driving” were experiences that influenced her life. Even after retiring as a driver in 2014, she continued to serve in an area of need, working in the mailroom as long as her health permitted.

She died at the Dominican Life Center on October 16, 2017, at the age of seventy-six, and was laid to rest in the Congregation cemetery four days later. Said Sister Mary Sue Kennedy, homilist at the funeral Mass:

Pat was a large woman but her heart was even bigger. There was always a birthday card or Christmas card, a phone call to say that she cared, a willingness to drive someone to see a family member or just to the store, a willingness to help out in whatever way was needed. Pat also gave to us with her “hello,” “good morning,” “how are you?” or her beautiful smile – oftentimes when we needed it most.

… Pat lived life as an adventure and every day was a new part of the adventure called life. Pat has begun her next adventure, that of being with her God in eternal joy and peace. We rejoice with you, Pat, but we will miss you and you will remain in our hearts. You have taught us how to live without counting the cost. We are grateful for all you were and all that you have been.
From left: At a party at St. Gabriel’s, Detroit, September 1968. Sister Patricia with her mother. Sister Patricia celebrates her Silver Jubilee at Weber Center, Adrian, 1985

From left: Sister Patricia, as an eighth grader, crowns the statue of Mary, 1955, St. Scholastica, Detroit. Sister Patricia with her parents.
From left: Sister Patricia’s senior picture from St. Joseph Academy, Adrian, 1959. First Communion, St. Scholastica, Detroit, 1949.

Members of the 2009 Golden Jubilee June Crowd are back row, from left, Sisters Rosemarie Kieffer, Peter Anthony Schulte, Christa Marsik, Sean Eileen Allgeyer, Sarah Ann Sharkey, Jo Ann Jauquet, and Helen Wilson; middle row, from left, Sisters Mary Diane McMeekin, Susan Van Baalen, Beverly Bobola, Jean Keeley, Rosemary Zuccaro, and Joan Marie Weithman; and front row, from left, Sisters Joan Krajewski, Mary Emidio Singer, Mary Jean Clemenger, Patricia Janowicz, Delores DeBets, and Joan Christine Meerschaert, with Sister Donna Markham (Prioress).