



## **Sister Clara Ann Budenz, OP 1932-2018**

*Although their education did not extend beyond eighth grade, which included no psychology or parenting classes, our parents provided a loving home environment. Hospitality was one of their special gifts and our home was constantly filled with relatives and friends. Whatever the techniques they used, the six of us all ended up possessing a good self-image and a deep love for one another that exists to this day. We often say that if we were penniless, we would be rich.*

Such was the home life with which Dorothy Joanne Budenz and her five siblings – Henry Joseph, Louis William, Lawrence Francis, Jerome Quentin, and Mary Kathryn – were surrounded in their hometown of Terre Haute, Indiana.

Dorothy was the youngest of the six, born on October 25, 1932, to Clara Ann (Massing) Budenz and Henry Joseph Budenz Jr., who worked for the American Can Company. The family lived in Terre Haute until 1945, when Henry was transferred to Chicago.

For the Budenz family, life in Terre Haute in the 1930s and early 1940s was as typically “Americana” as could be, with a tight-knit neighborhood whose children played together, had lemonade stands, and put on theatrical productions in the Budenzes’ three-car garage. Dorothy loaded up her little red wagon with cucumbers to sell and also sold the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Much of life centered around St. Margaret Mary Parish, where the family attended church and where Dorothy was taught by the Sisters of Providence.

Things changed considerably with the outbreak of World War II. Mary Kathryn and the three oldest boys joined the service, while Jerome entered the minor seminary, leaving Dorothy as the only child at home. Gas rationing curtailed what had once been regular holiday and vacation visits to the paternal grandparents in Indianapolis, and the shortage of workers due to the war meant that Henry was working longer hours and even on Sundays.

In September 1945, Henry was transferred to Chicago, and Dorothy was enrolled in eighth grade at St. Symphorosa School, which was staffed by Benedictine Sisters. When it was time for high school, although Dorothy wanted to go to a public co-educational school, her parents insisted on continuing her Catholic education, and she was accepted into Lourdes High School, where she met the Sisters of St. Joseph from Wisconsin.

During her sophomore year there, 1947-48, her father was diagnosed with lung cancer, and died in May. The family had only recently moved into a new home when he was diagnosed, and his death meant facing the question of how to make house payments and still send Dorothy to a Catholic high school. She took a nurses’ aide job at Mercy Hospital and saved enough money for tuition and her other school expenses, at which point her oldest brother told her he would take care of the cost for her.

To this point in her schooling, Dorothy had had no experience with the Adrian Dominicans. But classmates who had come to Lourdes from Congregation-staffed schools spoke glowingly about them, and Dorothy found it extraordinary that at a party she attended, girls there who had been taught by Adrian Dominicans at St. Nicholas of Tolentine split the long-distance bill to call their fifth-grade teacher, Sister Jane Edward Schutz, in Buffalo, New York.

The boys she dated kept up their own connections with some of their former Adrian Dominican teachers. Many a Sunday found her and one of the boys taking the streetcar to the convents at St. Laurence, St. Columbanus, or St. Philip Neri to visit their former teachers.

The final pieces pushing Dorothy toward the Adrian Dominicans came when she joined a choir at St. Nicholas of Tolentine and began taking piano lessons from Sister Agnes Eugene Carteaux, and as a result got to know still more members of the Congregation.

But when Dorothy decided she wished to join the Adrian Dominican Sisters, her widowed mother was not especially in favor of the idea, as Dorothy was the only child still at home, and asked her to remain at home one more year. And so after graduation in June 1950, Dorothy took a job as a secretary for a printing company. When she sent in her application for admission to the Congregation later in the year, it went without her mother's signature. In her autobiography, Dorothy wrote of her mother as having mixed emotions: loneliness at the separation, but pride in having a daughter who was a religious.

She arrived in Adrian on February 2, 1951, and that August she received the habit and her mother's name as her religious name. After making profession in August 1952, she was sent to her first mission, St. Scholastica's in Detroit, where she spent the next three years teaching second, third, and fourth grades.

Subsequent assignments took Sister Clara Ann to St. Theresa's, Detroit (1955-56); St. Edward's, Detroit (1956-58); Holy Cross, Santa Cruz, California (1958-64); St. Francis de Sales, Las Vegas, Nevada (1964-67); St. Lawrence O'Toole, Oakland, California (1967-78), where she served as principal; and Our Lady of Grace, Castro Valley, California (1978-79), as principal.

At the time she learned she had been missioned to Santa Cruz, "my heart leapt with joy," she wrote in her autobiography. As it happened, her mother had just moved to California, still struggling with her daughter's vocation. Mother Gerald Barry, aware of the issue, deliberately assigned Sister Clara Ann to Santa Cruz so she could be closer to her mother.

Just a month later, her mother was diagnosed with cancer, making the time she and Sister Clara Ann could spend together a real blessing. When her mother died in 1960, it "was one of the most difficult times of my life," Sister Clara Ann wrote. "I always maintain she was my life's greatest model and spiritual director."

During her time in Santa Cruz, Sister Clara Ann finished her bachelor's degree in history from Siena Heights College (University). She went on to earn a master's in education from the University of San Francisco in 1966.

In 1979, Sister Clara Ann's ministry began to move in a different direction. She became regional director of Families for Prayer, a national parish-based program promoting family-based prayer time, for six years. Then, after returning to education for three years as principal at St. Mary's, Walnut Creek, California, she became a director of religious education, serving at Resurrection Church in Aptos, California, from 1989 to 1995 (during which time her title changed to pastoral associate) and at Sacred Heart Church, Fresno, California, from 1995 to 2000.

Sister Clara Ann spent the next eleven years with the Diocese of Fresno, first as director of ministries and then as the vicar for religious. Then, in May 2011, experiencing health issues which accelerated her plans to retire, she returned to Adrian to take up residence at the Dominican Life Center. She died there on February 4, 2018, at the age of eighty-five.

At the Vigil service on February 7, Sister Barbara Hehr, who had known Sister Clara Ann since their shared experience in the novitiate sixty-eight years earlier, remembered her as a listener. "I could always go to Clara and she was there," she said. She also recalled a Halloween when Sister Clara Ann, who loved parties, gave the much more reserved Sister Barbara a costume and insisted she wear it to that day's festivities. "We just enjoyed everything we did together," she said.

Two nephews, Mike and Patrick, also spoke at the service. Mike recalled meeting his aunt when he was 10 years old and the family traveled to Las Vegas where she was teaching, and thinking to himself, "My aunt has connections with the mob." He also remembered that she always had a bag of nickels in the trunk of her car, in case she came across any nickel slot machines.

Patrick also recalled his first encounter with his aunt: he was four or five years old and she came for his baptism, and he hid behind his mother because he was afraid of the stranger in "her nun outfit."

Sister Mary Keefe delivered the homily at the funeral Mass the next day, tying the Scripture readings Sister Clara Ann had selected (Wisdom 3: 1-6 and Matthew 25:31-46) with the way she had lived her life.

*I think her choices fit her spirit and her life perfectly. The first reading from the book of Wisdom tells us of those who have been found by God to be worthy, who are like gold tried in a furnace, and of the just being at peace. The part that I think best fits Clara Ann is the statement that the just "shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble." Clara Ann darted through life bringing light and joy to everyone she met.*

*Our Gospel is the story of the final judgment. Jesus tells his followers that he equates himself with those who are in need, those who are not able to take care of themselves, those who are the least. And who are "the least"? We, all people, are "the least." ... We are to welcome, visit, care for and love others in whatever ways we are given. We are to love and care for our planet that sustains us.*

*Clara Ann was a force of nature. She is a sparkling example of someone who lived for others. She gave parties whenever possible, She received gifts from friends and then turned around and gave the gifts to others. She was filled with joy, laughter, and fun. Like Clara Ann we are called by Jesus to give others what we have received. Let us look to Clara Ann as our shining example of generosity and love.*



*Left: Sister Clara Ann shakes the hand of President Lyndon B. Johnson at the Las Vegas Convention Center, 1964. Right: Msgr. Myron Cotta and Sister Clara Ann, Diocese of Fresno, California, 2001*



*Center: With her mother, Clara (Massing) Budenz*



*Left: Sister Clara Ann cuts the cake for her Silver Jubilee at St. Lawrence O'Toole in Oakland, California. Right: Dorothy Budenz (the future Sister Clara Ann), front and center, with the rest of her family, July 4, 1936*



*Members of the 2001 Golden Jubilee Class, August Reception, are, back row, from left, Sisters Elisa Joan Doherty, Dolores Slosar, Celine Marie Regan, Judith Ann Lieder, Anne Liam Lees, and Marie Wiedner; middle row, from left, Sisters Thérèse M. Haggerty, Julianne Wolny, Catherine Ahern, Agnes Peplinski, Jeannine Holway, Clara Ann Budenz, and Elizabeth Lynch; and front row, from left, Sisters Marian Edward Guethlein, Nancy Hanna, Dolores Marie Dolan, Mary Daria Herbella, and Rita Brunett.*