Sister Patricia Dolan, OP
1934-2019

“Tonight, we gather to celebrate the life of a woman who was quiet, gentle, fun to be with, loved nature, and loved her family.”

So began the eulogy for Sister Patricia Dolan delivered by Sister Rosemary Asaro, Holy Rosary Chapter Assistant, at Sister Patricia’s wake service.

Sister Pat was born February 16, 1934, in Chicago to William and Catherine (Newton) Dolan. Both Bill and Catherine were natives of Buffalo, New York; Bill’s ancestors had arrived in the mid-1840s to work on the Erie Canal, while Catherine’s maternal grandmother had arrived alone from Scotland at the age of eighteen. Grandma Newton married and had five children before her husband died when Catherine was just ten years old. Catherine had to leave high school after her first year in order to help with the family finances through her job as a telephone operator. As for Bill, he was a Canisius College graduate who went on to a forty-four year career with the Federal Sign and Signal Company.

Catherine and Bill met at a dance and married in Buffalo in 1928. They moved to Chicago soon thereafter and settled in St. Laurence Parish before moving to St. Ailbe Parish around 1931. Four children came into the family: Margaret in 1929, Bill in 1932, Pat in 1934, and Maureen in 1937.

Sister Pat remembered her mother as a quiet but courageous woman who had struggled with rheumatoid arthritis since her early twenties and who was quick with a one-liner. “One rainy day around 1942 when the four of us (children) were engrossed in a board game, and probably arguing, my mother intervened,” Sister Pat said in her life story. “One of us asked, ‘Mom, weren’t we ever fun?’” She gave a one-line response: ‘You were a circus.’”

All four children attended St. Ailbe’s School and were educated by the Nashville Dominicans, and the three girls went on to Aquinas High School, which was operated by the Adrian Dominican Sisters. Sister Pat became one of seven young Aquinas women who entered after graduation in June 1951. Her sister Maureen followed her into the Congregation in 1956 but left in 1970.

Two months after becoming a postulant, Sister Pat was assigned to teach at St. Alphonsus School in Dearborn, Michigan. She started out with sixty-four third graders – it was “a rocky start,” she wrote – and then was given forty-two second graders.

She returned to Adrian that December to begin her canonical novitiate year, receiving the habit and her religious name, Sister Kevin Patrice, on December 27, 1951. Confessing in her autobiography that she was not a morning person, she wrote that early on in her novitiate she slept through most of the morning meditations and that even though she became “more focused” when Sister Patrick Jerome Mullins became novice mistress, she still napped through Father Jim Burke’s first Sunday homily on the three ages of the interior life to the point that she almost fell out of her stall in chapel.

After making first profession in December 1952, Sister Pat was sent to St. Jude’s School in Detroit and taught first graders there until the end of the 1954-55 school year, at which point she went to St. Peter’s School, Henderson, Nevada (1955-56) and then to Santa Maria del Popolo School, Mundelein, Illinois (1956-62). Following her graduation from Siena Heights College (University) in
1962 with a bachelor’s degree in mathematics, she was assigned to Regina Dominican High School, the Congregation’s school in Wilmette, Illinois. She remained there until 1967.

In February 1964, guessing (accurately, as it turned out) that she would need to teach earth science the next school year but knowing nothing about earth science, she applied for and received a National Science Foundation grant to study geology at Notre Dame over the summer. She went on to earn a master’s degree in earth science from Wesleyan University in Connecticut in 1970, followed later by a master’s degree in teaching mathematics from the University of Detroit (1973) and a Master of Library Science degree from Rosary College (now Dominican University), River Forest, Illinois (1991).

In August 1967, she went directly from a field geology course in Montana – during which, she wrote, her modified habit worn with jeans and a blue winter jacket “caused gaping by town residents” – to St. Ambrose High School in Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan, where she taught biology and physical science. During her time there she also became the parish representative to the Eastside Inter-faith Committee for Racial Justice.

Sister Pat was at St. Ambrose until 1970 and then went to Dominican High School, Detroit (1970-76) and Bishop O’Dowd High School, Oakland, California (1976-77), where she went to be near her sister Maureen, who had married and now lived nearby. At that point, Sister Pat decided she needed to do something other than teach, and she received a one-year National Science Foundation grant to Washington State University, where she took computer and math classes and taught Math 101 halftime.

She then went to work in August 1978 as assistant manager for a medical billing office in Santa Cruz, California, but for a number of reasons left after just a few months and in March 1979 became a secretary/manuscript typist for Kinnetic Laboratories, a family-owned oceanographic research company. It was interesting work and she enjoyed it, but she left in order to spend some time assisting her parents in Chicago because her mother was not in good health. When the 1979-80 school year began, she was at Notre Dame High School in Belmont, California, to teach math, but resigned soon thereafter for personal reasons.

In January 1980, she joined the Addison-Wesley Publishing Company in Menlo Park, California, as a textbook editor, and remained there until 1988 when she went to work for the Scott Foresman Company in Glenview, Illinois. During her time at Addison-Wesley, she suffered the loss of both her parents within just a couple of years; Bill died in April 1982 and Catherine in May 1984.

After eighteen months at Scott Foresman, she left the company and freelanced until going to Rosary College for her library science degree. With that in hand, she went to work at the Galvin Library of the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1991 and stayed until 1993, when she interviewed for a science reference librarian’s position at Illinois State University-Normal and was actually offered a different job that was a tenure-track position including being a science reference librarian.

In 1999, ready to retire, Sister Pat took a sabbatical and did volunteer work that included teaching English at the Aquinas Literacy Center in Chicago and assisting Sister Maureen Gallagher’s radio program Voices That Listen with office tasks.

Finally, as she began to experience issues with her memory, Sister Pat returned to Adrian in December 2010 to live at the Dominican Life Center. She died on July 8, 2019, aged eighty-five and in the sixty-seventh year of her religious profession.
Among those giving remembrances at her wake service was Sister Barbara Hehr, a member of her “crowd,” who told a number of humorous stories and recalled that Sister Pat would always come to their weekly prayer group decked out in her wide-brimmed hat adorned with big flowers. Sister Pat’s favorite song, Sister Barbara said, was “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” “She blossomed when we sang that song,” she said, and asked that the assembly sing it in Sister Pat’s honor.

Sister Joan Mehney, with whom Sister Pat taught at Regina Dominican, shared her own memories of the “shenanigans” that “the two Pats” – Pat Dolan and Pat Walsh – engaged in to keep the rest of the faculty in high spirits. “These spirits spilled over into the classrooms and students were inspired to see what our Dominican life was all about,” she said, going on to list the names of young Regina Dominican women who went on to enter the Congregation.

Also remembering Sister Pat that evening was her nephew Chris, who described his aunt as interested in people, devoted to family, usually with a smile on her face, and having “a feisty side.” Her sister Maureen talked about their closeness growing up, about Sister Pat’s love of travel and adventure, and remembered her as “a true and caring sister, aunt and friend.”

After listing some of the ways Sister Pat had been committed to serving others, Maureen concluded her remembrance by saying, “To me, this was the religious mission she gave herself: to befriend and help those in need. What a beautiful life!”

Sister Mary Catherine Nolan preached the homily for Sister Pat’s funeral Mass the next day. She remembered how, as young Sisters in Adrian for summer school, the two of them climbed out on the ledge about the back entrance to Madden Hall with a star map to find the constellations. “Pat loved God’s magnificent handiwork of creation,” Sister Mary Catherine said.

“… Pat, I do believe that having run the race and finished the course your reward is there for you in the wide loving arms of the Creator. You are now free to explore the entire universe of God’s creation and praise eternal beauty forever. We will remember your lovely smile and generous heart. Go in peace, faithful friend of God and our friend. Bear our love into paradise. May God’s holy angels lead you home to the wide waiting arms of the Lord. May Our Lady and all the saints be there to greet you.”
Center: The Dolan siblings are, from left, Margaret Zepeda, Maureen Silver, Bill Dolan, and Patricia Dolan. Right: Sister Patricia Dolan, then Sister Kevin Patrice, in a Regina Dominicana High School yearbook photo.

From left: Postulants on their Entrance Day are, from left, Sisters Angela Susalla, Mary Catherine Nolan, Marion Coppe, June Racicot, Helen Laier, Diana Marie Pellegrino, Patricia Dolan, and Mary Alice Naour. From left, Sisters Marilyn Foster, Patricia Dolan, and Marion Coppe, June 1991.
From left: Sister Patricia at the 2018 Summer Fun event at the Dominican Life Center. Regina Dominican High School science teachers are: front, from left, at microscopes, Sisters Mary Jane Hart and Kevin Patrice (Patricia) Dolan, and in back, from left, Sisters Roberta Marie Havey, Mary Liam Walsh, Stella Joseph (Kathleen) Sutherland, and Joan Edward (Joan) Mehney.

From left: From left, Sisters Mary Alan Stuart, Anne Russell, and Patricia Dolan. Sister Anne Russell, left, and Sister Patricia Dolan
Right: Members of the 2011 Diamond Jubilee Crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Nancy Fischer, Barbara Hehr, Patricia Walsh, Mary Louise Head, Joan Weitz, Helen Belsito, Anne Beauvais, and Celeste Mary Bourke; middle row, from left, Sisters Mary Alice Naour, Helen Laier, Thomas Leo Monahan, Patricia Dolan, Angela Susalla, June Racicot, Patricia Spangler, and Attracta Kelly (Prioress); and front row, from left, Sisters Marilyn Foster, Marion Coppe, Betty Lou Myers, Robert Irene Buchanan, Mary Alan Stuart, Mary Catherine Nolan, and Jane Robert Stuckel.