



## **Sister Patricia DeMay, OP 1931-2019**

*I am coming to terms with the fact that time is fleeting, and I have tried to give values to the students I have worked with. The values that I hope I have instilled are a love and craving for learning, and an appreciation for books. If I have touched any people to want to do these, I have accomplished my bit in bettering the world.*

These words come near the end of the voluminous autobiography written by Sister Patricia DeMay in 2001 as she was ending her full-time ministry at the University of West Alabama in favor of adjunct status. "I have experienced many times, places, people," she also wrote in that paragraph. "I have taught from grades K-6 and college, have been school principal and school librarian. What more could I ask?"

Sister Patricia was born on May 5, 1931, in Jackson, Michigan, to Cuthbert and Myrtle (Bleicher) DeMay. Cuthbert was a physician in Jackson, while Myrtle had trained as a nurse and met her future husband during her training. The couple married on November 7, 1918, just a few days before the end of World War I, while Cuthbert was serving in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. After their wedding, they lived at Camp McClellan, Alabama, until Cuthbert's time in the service was up in February 1919.

In her autobiography, Patricia remembered her father as a man who enjoyed stamp collecting, photography, grilling outdoors, and traveling, while her mother was a fine cook and baker along with being talented in sewing and handicrafts.

Three children came into the DeMay family: John in 1919, Mary in 1921, and finally, ten years later, Patricia. Patricia wrote in her autobiography that her parents, with their unusual names, wanted their children to have "common" names, and she was named Patricia Ann and nicknamed Patsy. She hated "Patsy," she wrote, but the name stuck until she was halfway through high school, when she became "Pat."

With the Great Depression in full force during Pat's childhood, Cuthbert was often paid for his services in canned goods or, by his more rural patients, with a freshly killed chicken, so the family never went hungry. Fortunately too, his office was near the local train station and roundhouse, and many of his patients were railroad employees – the only people around who generally had ready cash.

The family lived on a short dead-end street in Jackson, called DeMay Court, which became a main site for play all year round. With little traffic, the children could roller-skate and play games such as hopscotch, and in the wintertime, the road's slight downhill pitch made it a perfect place for sledding.

One thing none of the children was allowed to have was a bike, because Cuthbert had seen too many children get into accidents riding them. "When I would visit my cousin in Lansing (Michigan), I learned to ride her bike but I never told my parents that I had done this," Sister Patricia wrote.

After public-school kindergarten, Sister Patricia was sent to St. John's Catholic School, which was staffed by Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters. Her first-grade teacher suggested to her parents that she should go into second grade in the middle of her first-grade year. It turned out not to be the right move, however, for she struggled with math and had social difficulties with being the youngest in her class for the rest of her schooling.

Sister Patricia spent her first two years of high school at St. John's as well, but then her parents thought that going away to school might benefit her. The choices were St. Mary's in Monroe, operated by the IHM Sisters, or St. Joseph Academy. She decided to take a look at St. Joseph and found she liked the atmosphere and the people there, and so the fall of 1945 found her in Adrian.

Being in Adrian also gave her a look at Adrian Dominican religious life. She had been drawn to becoming a Sister long before and had wanted to talk about it with the IHM Sisters who were her teachers, "but I was too scared to talk to them," she wrote. But now, at the Academy, she was surrounded all the time by postulants, novices, and Sisters, and knew she wanted to become one of them.

She finally worked up the nerve to speak to her parents about her desire. They agreed to it, as long as she finished high school first. When the possibility came up of her entering in February of her senior year and still continuing with her schooling, her parents gave their consent, and she entered the postulancy on February 6, 1948 – four days later than the rest of the postulants because while she was at home making her final preparations, she came down with the flu.

She was received into the novitiate – having requested the religious name Sister Mary Cuthbert after her father – on August 10, 1948, and made her first profession on August 11, 1949.

Her first teaching assignment was fourth grade at St. Lawrence School in Utica, Michigan. Because she had no idea how to write a lesson plan, two of the other Sisters helped her prepare her first day's lessons. On the opening day of school she walked into her class to find seventy students sitting there, and as if having so many students didn't complicate things enough, by lunchtime she had finished the entire day's lesson plan and didn't know what to do for the afternoon.

After a year there, Sister Patricia was changed to St. Celestine's in Elmwood Park, Illinois, where she taught third grade and was in charge of the music for the primary-grade play. "It was here that I learned so much about teaching," she wrote. "I learned much from the Sisters who were so generous in giving their time to help this poor little beginner get going."

She spent one year there as well, and then was sent to help open a new school, St. Clement's in Romeo, Michigan. "I remember starting classes with no blackboards, nor teacher's desk," Sister Patricia wrote. She used the experience of the workmen installing the blackboards during a school day as a teaching tool, talking with the class about how the work was being done right before their eyes.

Her assignment at St. Clement's lasted five years, during which time she worked during the summers on her bachelor's degree from Siena Heights College (University). In the summer of 1956, she received both her degree and a new teaching assignment, this one to Holy Family School in St. Petersburg, Florida. Subsequent assignments took her to Infant Jesus of Prague, Flossmoor, Illinois (1958-1959), Resurrection, Lansing, Michigan (1959-1965), St. Luke, Flint, Michigan, where she served as principal (1965-68), and St. Joseph's parish school in Adrian (1968-1969). Like St. Clement's, both Holy Family and Infant of Prague were brand-new schools when she went there.

She began her master's degree work in English at Barry College (University) while she was teaching in Florida, and finished it at Siena Heights in 1965. Because Siena Heights had no master's program in English, her degree was in education administration.

Besides working on her master's while at Resurrection, she was involved with helping set up a certification process for lay religious education teachers in the Lansing Diocese. "[I]t was the

beginning of my work extending beyond the classroom doors,” she wrote. “It was a super challenge and I liked that.”

Sister Pat had not been at St. Joseph’s long when the decision was made to merge the school with the other parish school in Adrian, St. Mary’s, and create Adrian Catholic Central. The arrangement only lasted for two years (1969-1971) until Catholic Central closed, at which point Sister Pat went back to Florida to teach at Queen of Martyrs School in Miami Shores plus teach evening classes at Barry.

For a number of reasons including her mother’s deteriorating health, she ended up returning to Michigan in 1972 for a job with the Hillsdale Public Schools. She taught at Carl Bailey School until 1977 and then was the district’s elementary-school library coordinator until 1979. Then, after a year’s sabbatical spent at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville to work on her Doctor of Education degree, she returned to Hillsdale as a librarian and junior-primary teacher. It was to be her last stop as an elementary teacher; now that she had her doctorate, she embarked on college teaching, first at Livingston University in Alabama (1980-1995) – during which time she spent a year battling breast cancer – and then at the University of West Alabama (1995-2003).

She retired at that point and continued to live in Livingston until 2013, when she returned to Adrian to reside at the Dominican Life Center. For the next six years, she kept busy with many creative endeavors, including knitting, crocheting, quilting, and card-making. Then, after suffering a stroke and being rushed to Toledo Hospital, she died there on April 6, 2019.

“Pat, you were our sister, aunt, crowd, and mission group member,” said Sister Joanne Peters, Co-Chapter Prioress of the Holy Rosary Chapter, at Sister Pat’s wake service the evening of April 10. “We will miss you, but we are grateful that after the struggle of your last days, you passed peacefully ‘into God,’ to quote you.”

Father Jim Hug, the Congregation’s chaplain, presided at the next day’s funeral Mass and preached the homily. Connecting the Gospel reading (Mark 9:33-37 with both Sister Pat’s life as a teacher of children and her creative side as a quilter, he concluded his homily with these words:

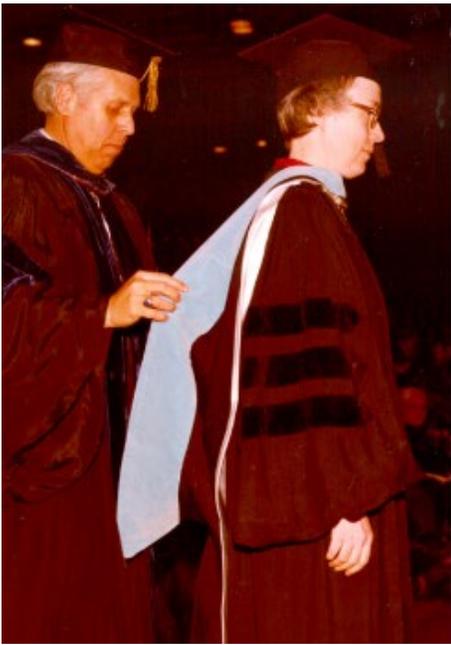
“This is all God wants of you: that you act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with your God and each other, and if you want to be great, compete to be the servant of everyone and care for the little ones. See what you can do in your life; take the bits and pieces, struggles and suffering, and make something, knit something, quilt something beautiful, warm, and life-giving in your life.”



*From left: Two years old, 1933. Young Patricia at a dance recital at St. John's School, Jackson, Michigan, 1940*



*Right: Father Edward J. DeKeyser turns over the first shovel of dirt in the groundbreaking for the new church at St. Lawrence, Utica, Michigan, January 25, 1950. Shown with him are: back row, from left, Sisters Jean Annette Rudolph (front), Evangeline Marie Loveridge, Frances Michael (Dorothy) LaMantia, Mary Cuthbert (Patricia) DeMay, Helen William Schanz, Rose Geralda Mullane, Father DeKeyser, Sister Robert Joseph Bailey, Father Elmer Nacy, and Sisters Richard James Carroll, Pierre Des Jardins, and Mary Wilhelmina Gasper.*



*Left: Sister Patricia celebrates Commencement for her doctorate in education at the University of Tennessee, December 12, 1980.*



*From left: Sister Patricia DeMay poses with the collection of books that she donated to the University of West Alabama. Sister Patricia with her father, her mother, and her sister Mary (far right) at St. Luke, Flint, Christmas 1965*



From left: Sister Patricia hooked this rug, 92" by 102" and 25 yarns per inch, for her front room. Sister Patricia sells her handiwork at the Dominican Life Center Christmas Bazaar, December 4, 2015.



Members of the 2008 Diamond Jubilee August Crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Patricia DeMay, Theresa Sinnamon, Angelica McGuire, Dorothy Worthy, Barbara J. Carroll, and Audrey Hull, and front row, from left, Sisters Ann Marie Meagher, Mary Declan Foss, Margaret Ann Reardon, Margaret Karam, Theresia Scheuer, and Ann Benedict Williams.