

Interview with Sister Kathryn Mayer (KM) and Sister Margaret Vander Heyden (MV)

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Mankato, Minnesota

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BM: It's a pleasure to visit with two interviewees. We are in Mankato, Minnesota and this interview is taking place in the Good Council of Sisters of Notre Dame, and I have first with me, am going to go by age. Sister Margaret Vander Heyden where are you originally from?

MV: Originally from Faribault, Minnesota.

BM: The second interview is Sister Kathryn Mayer and you are also originally from Mankato, Minnesota. And well acquainted with Good Council for 18 years up here.

We are going to interview the two of them at one time; so we hope that you will be able to recognize them. Once in a while I am going to ask and identify the name, so that you can keep them straight. They have both been here at Good Council for how many years?

MV: Since 1932.

BM: Where did you get your training though?

MV: Shall I begin?

BM: Let's start with the basics like we do with everybody and then we will get into that. First of all Sister Margaret I would like your name that you were born with?

MV: Margaret Vander Heyden.

BM: Were you known as something else?

MV: When I was received into the (024) I have been named Sister Mary Zeraid. (sp)

BM: So some people might know you by that name.

MV: I went by that name (022)

BM: How many years were you there?

MV: Two years.

BM: What years?

MV: 1960-1962.

BM: And Sister Kathryn...

KM: I was Genevieve, short Gen all my life down here. I was born here and went to school here at the age of 17 right into high school and then I did some (027) and then my sister career began. This was in Saint

Mathews in St. Paul where I stayed for 15 years until I finished. Then I was sent to my old home town and I taught at the academy of Good Council for about 12-15 years. Then I went back to St. Paul again and became high school principal at the school. Then I came to Strasburg.

BM: You did.

KM: St. Anthony's which was a ritzy, outstanding high school.

BM: North Dakota.

KM: And a completely new faculty. It was astounding, but I really didn't know what I was getting into. I remember after we got off the train, and I think Father Remley (sp) was there to pick us up, and I saw a sign "Strasburg Home of 800 friendly people."

BM: So were you two together then two years?

KM: I was there two years also and got the thing going. Got the Presentation the first year, which is something. We were proud of it. All of us were experienced teachers even though we had nothing in the school building, except one lab table that could not be used. You got what you needed, the first few two years and we loved it. There were hard times but they were good times too. We had a grade school and that has been intensely (045). But we came back at the request of the people of Strasburg, I was told, so we were sent. We have a motto, "Notre Dame you are called a vocation, you are sent" and that was it. Indeed it was.

BM: Sister Margaret where did you enter the convent?

MV: I entered the convent here in Good Council in 1932 and then I was (052) for four years. Usually two years, but I was there four years as I had only one year of high school. I had finished my high school and a year of college and did my year of practice teaching during that four year period. Then I went to (055) a beautiful year and enjoyed that very much. After that I was sent out west to Spokane, Washington.

BM: That was a long way away.

MV: That was a long way. My first trail ride, my first time out of Minnesota. It was a very enjoyable trip to see the mountains. I just love the mountains.

BM: What did you do there?

MV: I taught at Saint Josephs School which was a poor area and Notre Dame had the school. I had the 5th and 6th grades. Just to give you an idea of the colleges he had there. My classroom was very small which had 24 double desks in it and I had 48 students that first year. I couldn't do any separating. That was my first year of teaching outside of my practice year and that was done in a new career.

But I didn't know what was going to happen and I was in my craft room just before 8 am. The bell rang which means to go over to Mass; so she had us all lined up two and two in (068) church. While I was getting mine lined up to go to church, and a woman and a young boy stopped and came into the room and the mother turned to me and said, "I would like to enroll my son in the 6th grade here." He's a naughty boy and I don't know what to do with him. This was in the presence of the boy. The last thing I heard some years ago that this boy ended up in the penitentiary. I tried to do my best to the many, that was in Spokane, Washington.

I spent four happy years there then I was transferred to Twela (sp) which is sixty miles north of Spokane. That was a lovely place and I really enjoyed it very much. It was right up in the valley surrounded by mountains. There was a high school and a boarding school for grade 2. There was just two years of high school and when the school closed they all went to public school.

From there I went to Colten (sp) and that was ninety miles southeast from Spokane, and I loved it there too. That was out in the farming area where we had nineteen acres of farmland. There were animals: cows, pigs and chickens and it was very delightful. In all I spent 23 years in Washington, then I came back to Strasburg. During the time before that, I was sent to get a library degree and received it in Portland, Oregon.

BM: That came in handy.

MV: Because we received accreditation. We had in our library in Strasburg. Every book was taken out because it was public school property except the religious books. Let me tell you this: At Christmas time the principal came and he said, "Sister I would like the 200" and I said sorry sir over my dead body. We just had our library complete. Every Saturday a group of us would work at books, and we got books from so many sources.

A dear mother who was another provincial.(sp) At this time Sister Bernardia (sp) said you may have permission to ask anybody anything, but don't steal anything. So we go to our folks first, our friends because we needed things. Whatever we needed we made a list and it worked out very well.

BM: So after 1962 where did you two go then?

MV: When I left I went to a school in Waterloo, Iowa. I didn't know the reason why, but a brand new school with 1600 students and they received their students from seven parochial schools, and I was to be the liaison (sp) with the Notre Dame. We had many Notre Dames and we were in one Notre Dame Convent there, so I was sent there to teach and to be the liaison with the blessed sacraments to students that was there.

BM: What state was that?

MV: That was Waterloo, Iowa. When I got there were 1600 students and I didn't know one, I had three English classes: religion, the year book, journalism, and the newspaper and counseling.

BM: How long were you there?

MV: I was there two years until I was called here, and then what awaited me here was the principal of the (115) of Good Council over there in that big building. They knew everything, I won't go into that too much but the second year a call came from Rome. Ackoven (sp) was suppose to send to the International House someone for public relations, so I was called. "Sister Kathryn you have the credentials. We don't want to take you from the school, but you have to move shortly. Do you want to stay here or do you want to go to Rome?"

My answer was, "I want to go to Rome." I was there for half a year and worked in public relations and then, now hold your breath" the pope Paul VI said that the American bishop wanted his newspaper in English. They had five or six other additions already. Because I was a journalist I was invited, an English major, I was invited to work in the Vatican and to found and edit with a wonderful Irish priest from

Ireland to edit the English edition of (129). We began it in 1968, and worked together beautifully. We began poorly with a joint office, but we worked through it. It just happened that our talents just blended. Father was a great preacher and was very skilled in learning, and I was a journalist by profession and it really worked out well.

BM: How long did you do this?

MV: Twenty years and just loved it. Then I was seven years too old. In the Vatican there is an age limit, so when you reach the age of 65 the men had to stop. Religious 70! I was 77 then. The secretary of state called one day and said, "I think Sister Katherina has reached the age level." Father (139) said, "I think they made a mistake in her birth certificate. It lasted two more years and then they had trouble in that they couldn't find another Notre dame to take my place. It was kind of unusual to find someone with languages and journalism, etc. It was time for me to come home.

BM: And that was what year?

MV: I was there from 1966 until 1986. I came home in 1986. Two years later I celebrated my 80th birthday. I still had a lot of leisure and energy didn't I?

BM: You did.

MV: Now I am going down—I'm going to be 89. The Lord was so good to me I just want to shout his praise.

BM: I can't believe this. We'll have to get another picture of you to prove this.

MV: I can give you one with the pope. I was there for two popes, Pope Paul and Pope John I and I still have respect for Pope John I. They were all wonderful.

BM: And you have a picture with John Paul I.

MV: The first thin he said was, 'I want to meet all my employees.' And he came to every office. He is a wonderful man and now he is failing, but he will live to the millennium and I hope so.

BM: Sister Margaret, after you were called back here and you had been to Strasburg then where did you go?

SM: Then I went to Saint Agnes High School in St. Paul. Even though I had gotten my library degree they already had a librarian at Saint Agnes; so I was asked to teach in the home Economic department and had four years of that. Then I had a home room and a religion class. The home room students were my religion class.

MV: Did I say something about the Strasburg connection with the (162). She has two sewing machines. I think her brother gave her one. What she did was making those lovely uniforms. They had white blouses and maroon skirts and westkits. They looked darling! I didn't know that they wore uniforms then. By that time they had a stove and she went into the cooking part besides teaching that. We all taught several subjects. I was the principal there and thought I'm going to make this a new school, another Saint Agnes. We talked about a name and I tried to make the people feel like they were pioneers in the school. Anyway I said, "How would you like the name of Saint Benedict School?" They liked that. Later on we had a very nice faculty for one thing and a good curriculum.

BM: So that is when you were first certified after that first year. Wonderful, sometimes that is not so easy to do. I am going to back up and I need to get your name and the date of your birth?

- SM:** I was born October 16, 1911 and baptized Margaret Mary.
- BM:** And your last name is Vander Heyden (SP) You were born in Fairbault.
- SM:** Fairbault, yes, at home the second child of the family, one brother who was older. I was the oldest girl.
- BM:** Any other siblings?
- SM:** Yes, there were nine of us in all. Six of us are still living. But my darling mother didn't stay with us very long and died in 1925. I had just had my fourteenth birthday and I tried to keep the family together as much as I could but it didn't work.
- BM:** It was your dad.
- SM:** Dad was still living and was a barber. Barbering in those days was practically nil as far as making money was concerned. It was during the depression so that crops that year were not good and had very little to live on. So we separated the following February.
- BM:** Where did the children go?
- SM:** The children all went to different relatives or friends. Some had hard times getting adjusted, but I was considered old enough to take care of my brother and I. He was fifteen and I was fourteen. I went from place to place as a hired girl and some places I earned \$2.50 a week which amounted to ten dollars a month. That wasn't very much to live on. I stayed in Fairbault for about six years. My aunt was housekeeper at the Assumption Parish in St. Paul. The girl she had helping her left; so she asked me to come there and work with her. I stayed there for four years.
- It was during that time I got acquainted with the Notre Dame Sisters. I did not know there was such an order and my dear sister Phidaelus (210) who was home service sisters but she had charge of the sacristy at the Assumption. There was so much work in that sacristy. Everyday were hundreds of vigil lights that had to be cleaned and changed with new candles. They were near the funeral parlor and all the funeral flowers were brought over here so I helped her sister Phidaelus (sp) with that.
- BM:** You know that's the hub of Saint Paul, so you can imagine the work.
- SM:** Then sister Phidaelus (sp) we would talk with each other and she never mentioned religious life to me. But I did accredit her for my vocation. She was such a dearest soul quiet, gentle, and I just loved her. We can a mission in April and one of the priests in that mission was speaking one evening in the 'Blessed Mother'. There was something in there but all of a sudden I felt a tap on my arm and I heard the voice, "You go to the convent." So I talked to sister Phidaelus (sp) she talked to the superior at the assumption and they contacted Mother Adrenia (sp). Mother Adrenia came to St. Paul and talked to me a few minutes and I said I would like to go. "Do you love children?" I said, "I love them" She said, then we will make you a teacher. I was almost twenty-one years old at the time, but I went to the convent.
- BM:** That's why you didn't have a high school education since you were working and providing.
- SM:** After mother died we stayed together until February and then my dad had an action and sold the little stuff we had. With some of that money he sent me to (236) Academy for one in Fairbault for one year. The tuition then was \$50 a year including everything. I spent one year there and then I went to St. Paul.
- BM:** What was the nationality of your family?

SM: My father came from Holland and my mother was German. Her dad, my grandfather, came from Germany. My grandma was born in Fairbault also, so my mother was pure German.

BM: And what was the name of your father?

SM: My father was George but really was Gerard. When he came to America at twelve years of age everybody called him "George" so he went by George.

BM: and your mother?

SM: My mother's name was Rosa Crimm.

BM: Where did your father come from?

THERE IS A SWITCH IN CHARACTERS

KM: My father came from Wilhelm (William) (250) on the Rhine and his last name was Mayer. It was Maier in the beginning as it was in an all German settlement. My brother was a druggist and sort of inherited the best drug store in Mankato because of the two proprietors it was Lambs Drug Store. In the summer my brother would work there and the two, a roommate, it was interesting because the Lambs went on vacation. The mother and father who owned the drug store were killed in a car accident. The children lived, but one was crippled for life and I don't know about the other one.

So here was the drug store. The two dads, my dad and Frank's roommate helped them and the two young men took over Lambs Drug Store. They kept the place for two years. Then they couldn't do it anymore. He worried about prescriptions because he specialized in prescriptions. Frank took over and it became The Mayer Drugs.

BM: So you have one brother and five sisters.

KM: We had a beautiful family. My mother had a little joke and this is it: "It have six daughters and each one has a brother."

BM: What was your mother's maiden name?

KM: She was Kathryn Millias and came from Koblenz, north Germany. My dad came from (279) on the Rhine.

BM: How did they meet?

KM: They met here in Mankato. My mother came by herself and my mother had a brother living here.

BM: Who influenced you?

KM: I was influenced by my family who were religious and they had a good family. I was the second youngest we had a good middle class family. So we didn't have any troubles and trials, but I was influenced by the Notre Dame Sisters. I came from Peter and Paul that had eighth grades there all Notre Dame nuns. They were strict but we learned and then the Jesuwins (sp) from the time we were in the second grade would come every week to give us instruction. Then when I came to Good Council I had the same wonderful nuns and I just loved every one of them.

BM: I forgot to ask you when you were born?

KM: October 10, 1999

BM: You were born here in Mankato.

KM: I am the sixth in line and the seventh was my sister who came after and she died three years ago so I am alone. Her husband was a wonderful man and wrote to me every two weeks. He was a Kernal (sp) in the Army. She was married in Frankfort. She was in college two years and then my mother wasn't too well so she said, "I'm coming home" and I'll be around Mankato then I will be with her. My mother died the next year. In the meantime she was working around Mankato and was very intelligent.

My dad died from loneliness and died the next year. Then she said, "I'm joining the Wax." The Lord pointed this out to her I am sure, she joined the Wax and being the type of girl she was she just went up the ranks. I learned all the ranks from her. She was in Eisenhower's headquarters and she was there for the signing of World War II; that is where she met Archie.

BM: What was her married name?

KM: It was Gauthier a very common name in the south, and he was from the Louisiana area.

BM: A word for French.

KM: He was a fine man. He missed my sister so much and wrote to me every two weeks and would send me pecans and the kind of candy that I liked. He died suddenly about a month ago. So all the sisters and brothers have passed away and all had happy lives.

BM: Well that's good.

KM: We were blessed.

BM: Deciding of the religious life at the young age did you realize what you were leaving behind?

KM: When I graduated from here I had a four year scholarship so I was getting ready. My brother was still at Crate (sp) University and my dad said, "You worked hard and we'll get you through." But my mother said, "I hope you won't get a job and you will be gone and we won't see you for so long."

So I went to Mass every day and I attributed my vocation to my home and going to mass. One day I came out of Mass and here was the Superior of the Convent. We had twenty-four nuns there. She said, "Did you every think of being a nun?" That's all I am thinking of lately—just like that. She said, "I am going back to the sisters and we are going to start a Novena (348) and we are going to pray." You choose what's right and so that happened. I went through three days of H E L L!! Temptations and struggle.

I wanted that peace, I waited for her the next day and I said, Well now you can stop the novena, because I am going to enter the convent. The next Sunday my mother and I walked up the steps and came to see the mother in the dorm. Mother knew my mother when they started talking. I wondered where I came in? So the dorm mother asked me what I wanted. I said, "I would like to be a sister." Well she said, "You can't have those nice clothing anymore." Then I said, "That doesn't matter." Well, I know your mother, your father and your family we welcome you.

BM: Isn't that great! But you had three days that were very difficult.

BM: I have a question for you. How did you blend in at Strasburg with the German-Russian population there.

- KM:** I didn't have any difficulty. The students were very friendly and I really enjoyed my time with them.
- BM:** The students went to their own church. A lot of them went to Saint Bensville. (Sp)
- KM:** I looked through the 1976 books, because when we split—Catholic verses/public school. The Welk's were in there too. We even had a concert with Lawrence and one of his singers, Joe Phenev (sp) along.
- BM:** You covered so much that I think I will have to go back to when you entered the convent. Did you communicate with you family and friends after you done that?
- KM:** I loved it so much and I knew everybody.
- BM:** So you were at home and that was very difficult. Sister (402) did you communicate with your siblings?
- KM:** We were allowed to write one letter a month and I asked Sister (405) do you know my father, brothers, and sisters who live in different locations and I said, "Could I write more often to them?" She allowed me to write two letters a month; so I wrote one to my father and one to, change thoughts, to my brothers and sisters. Some of them were very small. The baby was only sixteen months old when mother died so we didn't know too much about her. She was taken by my aunt and uncle.
- BM:** Did you keep communication lines open to them though when you were in the convent?
- KM:** Then we were permitted to have visitors once a month. Some of them came once a month so we kept communications open as much as we could.
- BM:** So you got to know the children as they grew up?
- KM:** I felt so at home there. My sister was a junior in high school at the academy. And I knew all the academy girls. They were always cheering when we met the bus, but we had rules we had to follow.
- BM:** Was there some things you were encouraged to do and some you were not encouraged to do?
- KM:** The only think Sister (430) said, "I think you are getting a little clicky." Because all those that went to the academy there were eight from our graduating class that entered. Eventually we became a little "clicky" so we stopped it. I just loved it there. We had our first year of college there. We had a choir, food and put on two plays. I got all the costumes from my friends. I had contact with them. My birthday was coming and I got a telephone call on Sunday. Sister (443) all my girlfriends are down there then I took off. I didn't hear her say fifteen minutes. We sat there for two and a half hours at a good party all afternoon. When I came back she just looked at me and said, "Fifteen minutes!"
- BM:** Did you get in trouble for that?
- KM:** No, she was very understanding and she knew we liked it in the convent. She was just wonderful.
- BM:** Was there anything else you could think of?
- KM:** Well, I didn't know of any of the candidates and knew nothing about Good Council. That was my first trip up there when I had a letter from Sister (459) to welcome me in, telling me what the entrance fee was. I had no money, so the sisters at the Assumption got a suitcase and a trunk for me. I remember they paid \$2.95 for the suitcase and \$6.95 for the trunk. I had that trunk all those years until I came here to retire now. Anyway they gave me the things I needed. I can say that she was special.

BM: You have a fantastic memory.

KM: There were times when we didn't have any money in our pockets either. I tried to do as much as I could while I was working at the Assumption. I started out there with \$20 a month and later on a got a \$5 raise, but I continued to give my little sisters the things they needed.

BM: I want to go back to Strasburg, North Dakota. During the two years you were teaching there. Did you interact with the community a great deal? Did you get to know the parents, their homes?

KM: I remember the first home school meeting. I wanted to make it a little thin (482) so we invited them to come and they came. We had a nice assembly sitting there. I talked with them and told them how glad we were to meet them and that Father had fixed up the school very nicely, and they were welcome any time to come and see us. Well, the listened. They were so nice when we sat around having coffee, but they didn't talk much. We got along well and what is she going to do there. We worked together and that's just my nature. The people were so good to us. They would bring us packages of meat, sausage, break, rolls. They were really good to us. When we had to raise money like for a fair she made the best hamburgers I ever ate. I got the kids together before, we've got to get some pies and I'll tell you how to do it. We are going to Bismarck and go to the jewelry store first and tell them that we are having a big fair, and have you got something that we could sell or use for a raffle? They were amazed and I would tell them where to go next. We came back with so much stuff. The next day a boy came to me, a Rath boy, I remember he's (512) sister. I brought you a pig for the fair. What will I do with the pig? We'll keep it until the fair and then we'll raffle it.

BM: That's wonderful

KM: The ladies used to come into the home economics department and tell us about the different things the people of Strasburg liked; the kinds of food and then I tried to include those as we set up this fair. One of the ladies came to me early on the day we had the fair and she said you want to get a lot of people coming over. It was a very successful fair.

BM: It must have been quite an experience—

END OF TAPE