

# In Touch with Prairie Living

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By Michael M. Miller

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GERMANS FROM RUSSIA  
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I want to share with you the marvelous life and story of Sister Joan Nuss, O.S.B. of Sacred Heart Monastery, Richardton, N.D.

Joan was born on November 22, 1917, the eighth of ten children of Frank and Catherine (Wanner) Nuss of Dickinson, N.D. Sister Joan was nine year's old when her father died in 1926. Later her mother married Stephen Frank and with this marriage she gained ten step-siblings. Sister Joan Nuss died on December 23, 2015 at the age of 98. She was the last to die of the combined family of 21 siblings.

In 1940, Sister Joan had entered the convent and began her monastic formation, making her first vows in 1942. On the occasion of her 60th jubilee in 2002, she said simply, "I wanted to serve God. I always wanted to be a Sister as a young girl and I am happy I am here." Three of her sisters became Franciscians at Rochester, Minn., but she was the lone Benedictine. Monastic life suited her and she always prayed vigorously for more vocations to our community.

Throughout the years in community she served in areas of domestic service, occupational therapy and nurse's aide at St. Vincent's Nursing Home in Bismarck and St. Luke's Hospital in Crosby, N.D., and was an expert crafter of so many things throughout all her years. Her favorite work was doing craft activities with the residents of St. Vincent's where she served for many years. She excelled in making rugs and all sorts of projects on the loom.

Sister Joan would go to any parish supper that served homemade chicken noodle soup so she could heartily enjoy several bowls full. No one enjoyed noodles – in very shape and form – as much as Sister Joan. Though she was short in stature she was tall in things

that mattered: deep prayer and serving others. She had a good sense of humor and a glorious laugh. She could tell some great "olden days" stories because so much of her life was spent working at St. Vincent's. She was well loved by the staff. She would have occasions of lucidity and right before her death was one of those as she said the "Our Father" with Sister Anna Rose.

Allan Burke, Editor, Emmons County Record, writes in his weekly column, *From the Heartland*, "A student of obituaries, I take note of those that stand out because of the life led by the person chronicled. That was the case last week end I ready the obituary of Sister Joan Nuss, O.S.B. (Order of Saint Benedict), 98, of the Sacred Heart Convent, Richardton, N.D. Sister Joan devoted her life in care for nursing home residents and hospital patients and was a noted crafter who wove beautiful rugs on loom."

"The part that moved me, however, was that she and her 10 siblings lost their father when they were very young. Their mother remarried a widower who had 10 children, and the couple raised the combined family during the hard times of the Great Depression. Sister Joan was the last of the 21 to die." Like several people, I've known from that generation. Sister Joan could have written a best-selling book."

February 1998, when Sister Joan was 81, she completed an oral history interview with Jocelyn Renner Tang, for the GRHC, at the Sacred Heart Monastery. Sister Joan shares that her parents immigrated to western North Dakota from the Catholic village of Muenchen, Beresan District, today near Odessa, Ukraine.

"Well, my mother was 19 when she came over accidentally. Her brother was suppose to come, but then he got

called into the service so he had to go to war. They told my mother to go on in Manual Wanner's name [her brother's name]. When they were on the ship, they thought it was a man. She said, "No, I'm a girl". "Why you got a man's name?" She said, "I can't help it." They badgered her a bit, but they told her to go by that name or else she wouldn't make it. She had a hard time on the ship."

"On the ship, there were going to put her in with the other guys. They had told her to be sure and go by that name and don't change it or else she would be sent back. But she made it across to America. Then when she came to Dickinson, Mr. Mischel went down to pick her up on that train and brought her home to my aunt's house, Rosella Mischel. Then he said speaking in German, "You visit for awhile and I'll go out and get a pail of coal and put it on the stove so it's warm in here."

The complete transcription of the interview is at [http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history\\_culture/oral/samples/sisternuss.html](http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/oral/samples/sisternuss.html).

If you would like more information on how to purchase these books or you would like to donate to the GRHC (family histories and photographs), contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, PO Box 6050, Dept. 2080, Fargo, ND 58108-6050. (Tel: 701-231-8416); Email: [Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu](mailto:Michael.Miller@ndsu.edu); website: [www.ndsu.edu/GRHC](http://www.ndsu.edu/GRHC).

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