



Remembering Sister Christa De Primo Aug. 14, 1920 - Jan. 7, 2009

Those who knew Sister Christa De Primo during the 67 years in which she has been a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary will describe her as a person who treasured her privacy. Though talented in many ways, she was not given to any display of her accomplishments. It is through her autobiography which, fortunately for us, she had written and filed, that we are able to gather together some reflections for this Remembering Service...and we are grateful to her.

It was in a small mining town in western Pennsylvania called Eleanora that Sister Christa was born on Aug. 14, 1920. Sister Christa describes her father, Samuel Thomas De Primo, as a quiet man and her mother, Anna Agnes (Juhasz) De Primo, as vivacious and chatty. They enjoyed a happy marriage for 49 years until her father's death in 1968.

At her baptism in the Roman Catholic Church, Christa was named Mildred. In 1924, her brother Bernard was born. This event was not happy news for four-year-old Mildred, it seems, as she is reported to have said that had her mother gone to church as she should have the baby would have been delivered elsewhere! As she matured, however, Mildred grew to appreciate Bernard's fine qualities.

When the mines were closing in Eleanora, the De Primo family moved to Detroit, as there was a promise of employment in the auto industry. Mildred's first three years of education were in public school. She then attended the Blessed Sacrament Elementary and Secondary Schools from which she graduated in June of 1937.

With the help of a scholarship and a related work program, Mildred was able to attend Marygrove College completing her bachelor degree in biology in June 1941. She surprised her family and friends at her entry into the postulate on July 2, 1941. Her mother, especially, experienced great sorrow at her leaving home and only gradually became reconciled. However, Christa recalls sharing with her postulant friend, Adreath Charbonneau (Sister Raphael), how much she felt at home at the Monroe Motherhouse.

Sister Christa was received into the novitiate in January 1942, made her first profession in 1944 and final profession in 1947. In the years following, her

studies at St. Louis University, at Fordham University in New York and at the University of Detroit further prepared her for the teaching of chemistry and biology at St. Mary Academy, Marygrove College, Marian High School and St. Mary of Redford.

In 1975, at the request of Sister Gratia McHale, administrator of what was then called our infirmary, Sister Christa agreed to prepare to become the pharmacist serving the health care needs of our retired and infirm sisters.

At the University of Michigan she earned a bachelor of science degree in Pharmacy in June 1978, and she then served as pharmacist in charge of our St. Mary Pharmacy until she retired from this position in 1999. During her years as pharmacist, Sister Christa gave a series of educational talks for the benefit of the Motherhouse residents. She addressed a variety of subjects related to health, disease states, drug therapy and treatments. These talks were appreciated by the sisters, and provided Christa the incentive to keep up with developments in the field.

Sister Christa's autobiography records faithfully a listing of the places in which she lived and ministered. She does not use this document to journal her inner thoughts or feelings. However, one delightful entry gives us an indication of how Christa met one of life's challenges while she was studying to become a pharmacist. She writes:

"Through the kindness of Monsignor Scherzer, then pastor of St. Mary of Redford Parish, I was able to live with his mother in her home in Ann Arbor as an overnight companion and cook for the evening meal. I still marvel at my temerity in agreeing to cook, as my experience in that direction was severely limited. I had lived chiefly in large houses where the most I was expected to do was help with an occasional week-end meal. By using cookbooks as my breakfast reading, I did manage to learn a little about cooking and dear Mrs. Scherzer learned patience."

We know that Sister Christa treasured a life-long devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament which began long ago in her years at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Detroit. For her page in the IHM Book of Life, she chose Psalm 139, which in simple and direct language expresses her recognition of God's closeness: "O Lord, you have searched me and known me...you search out my path...and are acquainted with all my ways...you hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me." With that knowledge and belief she could move forward into her life's journey with trust and confidence.

We remember her faithful presence at congregational meetings and her interest and concern for community issues and activities. Members of her mission unit who asked her to be their representative felt confident that Sister Christa would ask questions clearly and faithfully bring the group's issues

about matters that were being decided in community to the attention of Coordinating Council members when they were in session.

An incident from long ago novitiate days illustrates a creative side of Christa that saved the day for some novices, who in decorating for a feast day for Sister Mary Hubert had unfortunately and unintentionally caused a precious fern to be damaged. In response to a frantic request of the guilty novices, Christa composed "An Ode to a Broken Frond." Needless to say, Sister Mary Hubert accepted the apology and perhaps later on even shared this piece of poetry with her friends!

As the end of her life approached, Christa battled courageously with cancer. When she knew it was time, she moved into our Health Care Center, grateful for the loving care of her nurses, aides and the prayers of her friends. Hospice care offered relief from pain, but even more she continued to rely on the words of Psalm 139, "Your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast."

What a confident way to complete the journey of life on Planet Earth and to look forward to the promises of Life Eternal! Christa, may you rest now in the fullness of peace at the culmination of a life of gentle service and love. We, your sisters and friends, carry you in our hearts, our prayers and our memories.

Sister Marie Gatza
Jan. 12, 2009