

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER LOIS JOHNSTON

July 27, 1929–April 9, 2021



Lois Regina Johnston, the fifth of six children of Howard Johnston and Julia O’Connell, was born in Sheraden on July 27, 1929. Her older sisters and brothers, Alice, Viola, Howard and Ralph, preceded her in death. Her youngest sister, Kathleen (Kay), is with us in spirit. Some of her family are here to join us in the celebration of Lois’ life. Lois attended Holy Innocents and Langley High Schools. She entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill on September 8, 1948.

As a young sister, she was sent to Pittsburgh Hospital to study nursing. After graduation in 1955, she became the evening supervisor at Providence Hospital in Beaver Falls.

She was open to appeal. The next year, she studied anesthesia at Mercy Hospital and in 1957 became a certified nurse anesthetist. Our sister anesthetists were frequently awakened during the night to give anesthetics to surgical patients and to women as they delivered their babies. They reported to the operating room ready for the 8 a.m. case.

Like most of our sister nurses, Sister Lois made the rounds, serving at Providence and Pittsburgh Hospitals, McGuire Memorial, a long-term care facility in Beaver Falls, Roselia Foundling, and Assumption Hall. While at Roselia, she completed her BSN degree at Duquesne University.

She was ready to respond. Sister Lois’ practice was diverse; she was an anesthetist, an obstetrical supervisor, a director of nursing at Roselia and Assumption Hall, a private duty nurse who cared for patients and members of

her family in the hospital and at home, and a supervisor of an adult daycare center at John Kane in Scott Township. She also taught licensed practical nurses at Schenley High and Connelley Trade Schools. Near the end of her career, she worked for 7 years as a pharmacy technician at several pharmacies in Greensburg. Then, she became the telephone operator and receptionist at DePaul Center, Assumption Hall, and Caritas Christi. She was the welcoming face and the cordial voice on the phone. At 83, she officially retired.

An article in the January 23, 2005, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* highlighting Roselia praised Sister Lois' work there during the early sixties. Sister Lois told the reporter that she received letters from the girls after they went home. One said that the sisters accepted the young women as they were and did not judge them. Another young woman wrote a book on exercise and dedicated it to Sister Lois, saying that she had taught her humility. She was willing to serve.

When I reviewed her file, I found letters that she had written to our general superiors. She described living a regular schedule at Resurrection convent after 20 years of evening and night shifts and on-call responsibilities. Other letters reflected the uncertainties of private duty nursing. She never knew whether her case would last two days or two months and how much money she could earn to help support the community.

I met Sister Lois, then Sister Bonaventure, shortly after I went to Pittsburgh Hospital to study nursing. She was a young red head, warm, gentle, funny, and so welcoming. She seemed to know that the three new sister "probies" were scared to death. We teased about going to Howard Johnston's restaurant for a banquet. I felt bad when she was transferred.

We reconnected when I moved back to Pittsburgh. She had developed a serious and rare blood disease that added to the uncertainty in her life. She did not complain. I was glad the Kay lived close by and how much they enjoyed having lunch together.

When she fell and was admitted to UPMC Mercy, I called Father Albie, one of the chaplains, and asked him to look in on her. They would call with a report several times a day. One afternoon, she called to say good-by. She told me that she was going to die and that God was coming to take her home. She was so happy and she was glad that God had given her a little time to get ready. Today, Archabbot Bartel explained why she was so happy. “She knew that God was a nurse.”

Some theologians say that Heaven is not about eternal rest. It is a place of eternal activity, knowing and loving God. You are ready Lois. You were always open to appeal, ready to respond and willing to serve. You have worked very hard and been an example to each of us. Enjoy eternal life.

Funeral Liturgy Reflection

Sister Rosemary Donley

April 14, 2021