

**July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016 – Sister Rachel Lindenmaier speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sister of St. Francis, Oldenburg.**

Abbreviations

SRL: Sister Rachel Lindenmaier

MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon in Oldenburg, Indiana, on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016. I have the pleasure of being with Sister Rachel Lindenmaier. Thank you, Sister. Would you like to introduce yourself?

SRL: Yes, I'm Sister Rachel Lindenmaier, a twin to Sister Evelyn Lindenmaier, who's my big sister that I admire so much, by five minutes. But I, she got a little crowded in there so I got it told her go on move out so I can have a little more space and she did that. But she's the most patient wonderful human being you could ever be with. And when I was eight years old was when I formed my mind to being a nun. And I used to play being a nun, or even being a priest, by saying, pretending to say Mass. When I was a kid at home and then when I got to be older, noontime I'll go back, so that thought kind of stayed with me for several years. And as I was a young child growing up we carried papers and we worked for a truck farmer, and we did domestic works for senior citizens because we enjoyed doing for others.

Because my mother one time sent us back to a neighbor because she paid us fifty cents back in those days, big money, shoveling snow, and she says we don't do things for money. So that stayed with me all my life. As well as she said, girls your dad and I would rather if you didn't smoke, so we never did because we loved our parents. We had a beautiful home, we had a loving home, out of forty-five years being with my parents, I never heard an argument. They were very good they both went through some hardships, Dad lost his wife after two months of marriage, and my mom's fiancé got killed by a train. So and they met about four years later. And my father when he is there playing cards with the group, he told them today he would take him home, he told his buddy that was with him, he said you to take her mother the little fat, I want the skinny one. Because he knew at that time that's who he was going to marry.

And we, I have two older brothers, one living he's eighty-four now, and another one that passed away at sixty-seven. He married and had five children, and my eldest brother he never did say I do, he'd never married. And then my mother and dad lived to be eighty-two, Dad eighty-two, Mom ninety-five. And they all died of heart attack so I guess he loved them so much he took them quickly. On that line, but they were my father started an ice cream business up in Indianapolis called the Blue Ribbon Ice Cream on 918 North Senate, which is no longer there because of course my father's not living it and they sold the bit business, those who bought it didn't seem to know keep it going for some reason, so it disbanded.

And something else took this place, like an empty lot. I went to Marian College when I entered the convent, I took my college education in the young years of my formation. And we attended there, and of course I meantime before that I went to St. John's High School in Indianapolis. I live on the south side of Indianapolis, exactly St. Roch's parish which many of you may know something about, and a lovely parish. It's no longer truck farming anymore. Its houses and apartments. And it all disappeared, quickly.

Anyway when I was eight years old that's when I decided to be a nun, and when I was a senior in high school I decided to go to the prom. I went to the prom with a young gentleman, and he was older than I, and I had a good time except he didn't know how to dance and I didn't know how to dance. He stepped on my foot and I stepped on his, but there was just something inside me that said this isn't for me. And you'll know when that happens, if something tells you it's not for you then try another life that you think you might enjoy. And so I decided that I would become a nun. Meantime, I worked one year out of high school at Ellis Trucking Company, up there in Indianapolis, which I'm grateful I did.

But I have been now out going on my sixty-second year in the convent, and I loved every inch of it. But the most satisfactory work I got to do was they sent, you didn't ask, they send you now you get to choose, was in the inner city. I spent about twenty-five years in the inner city. I worked with the many denominations and I worked with Saint Rita's Indianapolis, and All Saints Indianapolis, but most of my prayer was in the West End of Cincinnati and Over-the-Rhine.

Now during that time I had a very enjoyable, exciting life. I was [unintelligible] once — but other than that, I enjoyed myself. And I chose the Franciscan because they were so joyful and cheerful. They always seemed to have a good time, and enjoy each other and so respectful to each other So that's one reason why I chose the life, but meantime God also gave me another surprise. He decided to call my twin sister, too. And so that made me very happy, but for thirty years after we left the novitiate, we were both separated into different areas. And now we that we are eighty years old, I didn't want to tell you that but I am, I and I—we finally get to enjoy our life together. And never never when you get older and you retire, never stop doing something. Take up a hobby, if you had don't have one. If you have one, carry it through. My sister and I took up the hobby of workshop, we like to work with wood and craft, so we have been doing that and then we put that stuff in our gift shop, which we have done for been open now for about several years, on that. So that's part of my exciting life. I cannot think of anything else that you think you know, but I'll tell you now. If you feel you want a good life, good food, good luck, come join.

MEL: Thank you, Sister.

SRL: You're welcome.

MEL: May I, are you feeling well that I could ask you a few questions, oh good. And you can relax back there because you, it carries your voice. No, not at all, but thank you,

Sister. So I'll continue this, okay? Um Sister, I was wondering if you could talk about you decided to be a Franciscan and you came you were eighteen years old when you decided—

SRL: I was nineteen when I entered.

MEL: When, do you, I was wondering if you could reflect on the feelings you had, you know, a young woman—

SRL: Well, I knew that when I worked at Ellis Trucking company, it was something I didn't want. Meantime my sister worked at [unintelligible] where they didn't hire relatives. But I did not realize that she was thinking about the convent either, and so I know I can remember this this lady, she wasn't Catholic but she was a good woman. And when I told them I'm leaving she said, you're not going to the convent, are you? I said, yes I am. And she said, behind those walls? I said, you don't know what goes on behind those walls, it's good stuff. So I mean I had a very enjoyable, my first year—. But when I decided to make the move to do this, I decided to send a letter and ask for some more information about the Sisters even though I used to have an aunt in that community. And instead of them sending me information, they sent me entrance papers and I've been here ever since.

You know my my twin evidently, after we made final vows there's only time that we talk about our shared our vocation because we did not want to influence each other. Because we each had to decide for own life, and that's a—one time I said to her I said, I'm not going. She said, I know why. I said why, but she said, you want the car to yourself. I said, right. I love cars and to this day I do. So if you know a pretty nice bright red convertible, that's just fallen by the wayside, drop it off. I'd love to have it, and now that those years, my happiest years of teaching were in the inner city. They're such lovable kids, but you got to help the poor. If they were hungry, you help feed him. If they didn't have any clothes, you made—I remember one time fixing the Christmas tree pole, they had the branches they—they had the branches and this little girl was three years old, had never had a Christmas tree in their home, because they could not afford it. And so the mother asked my sister and I if we think we can do something with it. Always, say oh yeah, we went out got a clothes, closet [unintelligible] and we put the holes in it, the branches in. But meantime we brought all the ornaments and lights, and I'll never forget the little joy that's on that girl's face, and jumping up and down. And today I have heard from her and she is now writing from the council in Cincinnati, Ohio.

So I've had I've had a quite a few experiences, especially in the inner city. I mean, we even watched them, help with a drug raid. Because that would be a student that I taught, who was a snitcher, but I knew that he wasn't very far because he, just couldn't do it. But we invited him in, so they could survey better in our house, because we didn't realize at that time we were surrounded by police. A friend that came to visit told us that, so we went out talk to him. And they said they couldn't see too well, we said come on inside, you can see better. So they did. And nothing was happening so they left.

All about ten minutes later, when they thought all the police were gone, this guy comes outside into the hands of the policeman, but prior to that there were certain shots that went off, and I thought, well we live in a trailer, it may go through the house, but it didn't. One of our Sisters was so excited she jumped over a recliner, she was pretty good jumper, on that.

MEL: Sister, so this was a convent that was in Cincinnati?

SRL: Yeah, that was our convent.

MEL: And it was a trailer, could you—

SRL: It was a trailer that was put on the back playground, because our pastor we worked for, had given away our convent to Marge Schott, who at that time was owner of the Cincinnati Reds. Oh and by the way, I have taught some of the ballplayers kids, and even had cookouts at their, at some of their homes or with their wives. So and David Justice, who was a very popular ballplayer back then, my sister taught him in the first grade, and she taught him how to play baseball, but she didn't expect him to break his arm. I'll never forget that, I said you're a good teacher, And that that's all I can think of at this time. I'm enjoying my old age, aches and pains. Because you can't get away from them, so don't try to run from because they was going to be there whether you like them or not. Like my mother says, mommy doesn't last forever.

MEL: Thank you, Sister. Sister, do you mind reflecting on how your prayer life has changed over your life?

SRL: Oh, before then we would say family rosary every night. And, and when my brothers went to the Korean War, we had more prayers and more prayers and more prayers and we, said O Lord, send them home, send them home. So we can shorten these prayers, but that's where my prayer life I was taught by my parents. And nourished and encouraged in the religious life. We did a lot of reflecting, meditation, and sometimes sleeping, too. And daily Mass, which is very important in our lives, because a Eucharist nourishes your soul so you can, it helps you to develop a prayer life.

MEL: Thank you. Oh, thank you, Sister. Is there um, would you mind reflecting on the idea of community of women religious, of women living together and working together?

SRL: Yes, community is means that you share a lot together. But community to this day is different than it was back when I entered. When I first entered, you were assigned a place to go and was so many Sisters because I remember the first time they told me I'm going someplace and I asked who was there, and they gave me all the names I said well I can't go there I don't know anybody. Wasn't long I learned who they were they were nicest people. But, no we had a wonderful novice mistress we met with her monthly, and she helped us with our prayer life, and from there we kept going and then we got a spiritual director that continues to help with us. And I learned a lot from the example of the older Sisters, they they are so prayerful that they really touch your life, in many ways. Some of them are so hard to walk, but they still get there, they still come.

Because for some reason I feel like where I am living in the health care, I go there to Chapel it seems like a over a block to get there. So I use with my little Hoveround, I go in circles, make them dizzy. They're fun things to work with.

MEL: Thank you, Sister. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or remember? Or if you'd like to talk about teaching or anything.

SRL: I remember well we, my sister and I gave some workshops at St. Xavier University, and up in Dayton University, on reading because so many of them, their attitude was afro-american children could not learn and that's not true, they're very smart.

And so this Sister who wrote the book Professor Funny, she invited us up to give some workshops to show them, and we gave the first grade students a book they never read before. And they they could comprehend it as well as read it right off, it was a third grade level. And that's the same time the pastor said the test was too hard, they won't pass it. So I said to the students, somebody said you can't pass this test. So why don't we prove them wrong? All of them did but one. Out of seventy-two first graders. So I felt I felt like I accomplished what I wanted to accomplish, not only that but help make them a better person, I hope. Anyway, you all make, we all make mistakes at certain times and but that doesn't mean you don't pick yourself up and keep on going, to try to do better. Because as old no matter how old you are, as the priest said at Mass today, we are clay being formed, and with that you need water to keep it going. And he still forms, and he won't stop for you until you get up to heaven.

MEL: Beautiful, thank you, Sister. Thank you.

SRL: You're welcome.

## **Part II**

MEL: Part two, with Sister Rachel. Thank you, Sister.

SRL: One thing I wanted to tell you when my parents went to a mission at our parish church, the priest asked them how many of you are praying for vocation from someone in your family, that they answer it. Well my mom and dad took that serious, they prayed and they prayed and they prayed. And Mom said to us once, I knew that one may be one but she said, I didn't think they take two because we come from a religious family my father has about twenty-three relatives that are our priests and we have about five nuns that are our relatives. And now, we're the youngest set so we're praying for another set of twins. So they can take and tell them, which one are you? That's what we had shirts made, I'm Rachel and the other one's I'm Evelyn. So we know who's who. I said if before we get Alzheimer's you better put a band on us because we won't know. And they'll forget who we are we won't, we couldn't help them out.

MEL: Thank you, Sister.

### Part III

MEL: Part three, with Sister Rachel. And you can sit back if you like.

SRL: My my mind is a little on the scatterbrain side. Always said spray me with ritalin and I'd be okay. But I had taught school thirty-five years, twenty-five of it was in the inner city that I loved. Some in Indianapolis, and some in Cincinnati. The other thing is when I decided that I was wearing out after thirty-five years of teaching, that I could no longer be effective or patient with the children like I should be, I decided to leave teaching but at that time you had a search for your own job they didn't assign your like they used to. So I thought now what am I going to do? Meantime, I already had some people that I cleaned for, elderly people, so they could stay in their homes.

And so I did that until I went to play classmate, and I went down to apply for a job. But we realized we're in the wrong place because they want to know if we could drive a backhoe and I said, but the paper said secretary, what's that got to do with a backhoe? And she said looked at my paper and said your math is wrong, I said you're alphabetizing wrong so she did all the math and I did all the alphabetizing. But meantime we went on and carried on with my domestic work until I went to the Fifth Third Bank in the research department. I also helped as security and we had a lot of kiting, which means that they jump from one bank to the other, so if they they make you think you could they got the account in there--So I'd also saw one taken out by handcuffs because she violated the rules of what we were instructed that she used other people she was in the credit-card department and she used their credit card to buy her things except one day she failed and gave the wrong address, so they got her and they took her out with handcuffs. And they told us that that would happen if I if any of the workers would give out anybody's bank account or anything of that nature, you are subject to prosecution.

From the Fifth Third Bank, my mother at that time was getting to be elderly she lived to be ninety-five, said she might need some help. And so I left the bank to go home to help her, when she said no I think I'll get along okay, so. She never walked with a cane, she was as limber as a little fly, and meantime I went then to work at St. Anthony Messenger, in the tele-ministry room. I called people to ask, know if they would be interested in buying a Catholic magazine published by the Franciscan Friars. And I did that for several years until they came to me and asked me if I would then be secretary to their vocation office. And so I took that on for a couple years, until the Motherhouse asked me to come home and be the housekeeper's supervisor.

From there I retired at the age of seventy-five, but I helped out wherever I can. Since I've had a stroke on February 1st 2015, which I'm grateful I'm as good as I am. But

walking and sometimes getting something straight it's a little more difficult for me, but you accept that and you talk it over with God. But I told him he's got talk it over with me first before he sends him. He doesn't listen, he keeps on sending, but you keep on accepting. You say, oh, you forgot again, didn't you. And go from there. And I always tell him that my mother had hold us to questions she said to give to him when she went to heaven, that he did wrong, created a woman. She was going to let him know that.

MEL: Could you explain that, Sister?

SRL: Yeah, well one thing she felt he put her eye teeth in wrong. The other part is, you never should have made a woman suffer every month. And I forgot what the third one was, but she had them all ready to go, but she did tell us she's going to heaven. But she said I may have a stop-off a while, repent for some things I didn't get taken care of. But she said I know I'm going to heaven. And I believe she did. I don't know if I told you I have had five nieces and nephews and two of them passed away one was twenty-nine, and the other one was thirty-nine, I think it was. And now I got one nephew left and two nieces. And they do not live in this vicinity, but I still I don't haven't seen him for a while but I keep them in my prayers. And I'd like for you to do that for me too. If we keep each other in prayer, that's love, that's what he wants us to do. To love.

MEL: Thank you, Sister.

SRL: You're welcome.

MEL: Do you mind talking, I'm still, interested in you working in the world as as a Franciscan. As a teacher, and in a bank, and how one does that.

SRL: Well, in the early days that I remember being asked by a friend, do we dress alike? And I said, all of us do, because at that time we wore a habit and we wore that for over ten years before they went into the changes. And then we wore what they called a modified habit, from a modified habit to regular clothes because that's what Rome was asking many of the Sisters do because some of the garbs that was worn by Sisters were blinding to them for seeing in traffic and things of that nature. And we've had some Sister's scapular get caught in a bus door and they didn't realize that they were drug. So it was time that changes were coming about so we needed to change, too. The hardest thing was to change because I loved what we were doing and how we were doing it and what we wore. But it's no different now than if and that people still know you and sister and I still have people coming up and asking us to pray for them, or if we can help them. And at especially at the bank when I worked there, their language wasn't too good. Some of them cussed like a Turk. And they say oh, pardon me, Sister. Oh, I said we all forget once in a while, but it kept going on and on. I finally said to them, I don't think you have to talk like that. So they did slow down, one guy said to us this lady he said, Oh Marilyn, get with it. You know, everybody has sex before they get married. I said, oh no. God's law hasn't changed on that one, yet. So I feel that when I left teaching that I was still serving the church because I was questioned how am I serving the church when I went to the bank, because they said the church are the people, not the building. When

you think back Jesus Christ did not have a building, so and we may come to that someday too, you never know what the future is going to bring for us. And if you ever get a chance and want to see something beautiful, come to Oldenburg.

MEL: Thank you, Sister.

## **Part IV**

MEL: Sister Rachel, part four.

SRL: Part four because she's brainless. Ah, I wanted to say that this community that we joined we didn't join it for this reason, but the co-founder of the community is my sister and I's great-great-uncle, Father Francis Joseph Rudolph. Because Mother Theresa came well he asked her to come over a group coming in from Austria.

Well, three of them went back and Mother Theresa kept on, but when she got here there were three girls waiting for her to join. And we started out with an orphanage, taking in children that had no parents. And he did not want her to wear the garb but they wore the garb then, of the olden days. That's how the habit really got kind of formed in that line.

And that, and that was early days women always kept their heads covered. Men didn't, but the women had to. That was the law, not the law of the church but it was the law of the country. I think, I've thought of everything else and if I forgot anything, my sister'll tell you.

## **Part VI**

MEL: Part six, Sister Rachel.

SRL: Uh, there's one thing I wanted to say is, when I taught at Connersville I was there for about five years, one of our Sisters out washing windows, and a girl came along and said, oh I'm going to the convent to but I'm not going to do that kind of work. And and she's, oh that's wonderful where you going? She said, I don't know my mother hasn't decided yet. Well, you decide for yourself, not your parents. And consequently the sister turned to her and said, she says I'm going to be a teacher. And the sister turned and said, huh, I am a teacher. She went, oh. Showing that we all took care of her and cleaning our convent, but every person that lived there had their certain responsibilities.

And we came together every evening and after school for our office and then our night prayer, we also got them together and one day a month we have recollection, which means it's your day, private prayer spiritually or if you want to do on that particular day.



And they it still we still have what we call it today as a day of prayer, instead of recollection we call a day of prayer. And once a month we have the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, because we do have an adoration Chapel. However we had to stop the evening times, because we had too many Sisters that were too more elderly than the young ones. The young was shot working in the pasture to help support us, because about forty percent of what they made came home to the mother house to support the retired Sisters because at that time we were not receiving anything from Social Security, because it was against the law because we were religious. They wouldn't give it to us, and so and when I first started it was I don't see how they did it, I only made three hundred dollars a year. And in 1970 the biggest-selling that at that time that I made was one thousand dollars a year. And you supported three Sisters off that salary. And but you did it, because you didn't we didn't get a budget, we didn't have any money of our own. And so uh, when we needed something what we called the Superiors of the house, they took care of that. They paid your bills and all. And what was the other thing I was talking about?

MEL: You were talking about what you think the best about the convent was leaving the walls.

SRL: Oh, yeah. When we at one time when the church was changing and they come around and decided they wanted the convents. And so that meant we had to find a new place to live. And that's when we went into the apartment living, although you never went alone, you always went with other Sisters.

I think that was when we were really able to minister and touch lives. Because I remember one that lived next to me I taught her child but he, she had a very abusive husband, and she said if I hear any rumpus please call the police right away, because that means he's trying to harm us. And so, and we had another one who said, oh I'm Catholic but i don't practice anymore and we said, do you still believe in God? He says, yeah. We said, you pray? He said, yes. I said, you'll come back. And off I never, he moved the way so I didn't get to find out whether he did or not but I'm sure he will, return.

So we ministered more in the taking communion to those shut-ins that couldn't get out, or who were cancer patients. We worked, we lived as one that we did the grass cutting, the trimming kept her garden, did some repairs and things for her. And we helped out any way we could in any other neighborhoods. I remember going from door to door to collect money for cancers, the Cancer Society, on there. So we nuns do this to basic some of the work, only in a different way then maybe that you do.

MEL: Thank you, Sister.