

July 29th, 2015 – Sister Barbara Piller speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of St. Francis, in Oldenburg, Indiana.

Abbreviations

SBP: Sister Barbara Piller

MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: This is July 29th, 2015 and I am Mary Ellen Lennon. I am in Oldenburg, Indiana at the convent of the Sisters of St. Francis. I have the pleasure of being with Sister Barbara Piller. Sister Barbara, would you like to introduce yourself and tell me about your beginnings?

SBP: Okay. I am as of yesterday, seventy-five, and I had a great birthday and it did help me to do some reflection about my childhood and my rich childhood, actually. I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio and you can do the math I was born in 1940, on July 28th. And so, yesterday I had some time to actually reflect on my childhood and I enjoy reflecting on my childhood, I grew up in a family of my father, my mother, my grandmother, and my uncle. Plus two sisters and two brothers. And so we had a household of nine people, and I feel that my my early childhood was really enriched by having that extended family. My grandmother lived until I was eight years old. She was in a wheelchair because she had had a stroke. And she was probably my first real religious education teacher. As a preschooler, we were each we each had our time with her. There were too many of us to be in her room at the same time, that would be too much for her, and we each had her our time with her and so as a preschooler I was, my time seemed to be in the late afternoon. And she taught me first of all she taught me about a loving God, and in the '40s and '50s that wasn't always what we were given. And she also taught me German songs she, we are German heritage, Swiss-German heritage. And she taught me German songs about God, I couldn't sing any for you right now, but uh, but they were fun. And so she spent quality time with us. I don't know that any of us ever felt as if we were not loved which is really a gift. I realized that now, as looking back it's a big it was a gift then, and as I look at my nieces and nephews and my great nieces and nephews, it's a gift that is being carried on through my siblings and through their children.

We had fun as kids, I was, I had a brother on both sides of me, both one who was four years younger than me and one who was four years older. And when I was about four and my little brother was born, I was not real happy because he came along and he came along the week before Christmas, and my mother and he were both pretty fell, and so that Christmas was a little strange but I didn't understand of course what was going on. My mother then had, was taken up when the baby came home, they were both they both had to be upstairs in the bedroom and I was not because my mother had whooping cough or something and I don't really remember what that was. But anyway we weren't allowed to see her for about a week, and I acted out that week but my dad

always rescued me. By fixing my sister's doll that I had taken apart, and so you would think that I wasn't wanting for attention but obviously I was. So that's one of my one of my favorite childhood memories.

Another one is we had our own soft drink company, and bottled our own it was a lemon-lime drink called "cheer up". We had an orange drink called "smile". We bottled "squirt", a grapefruit drink which still exists. We bottled Dad's root beer, and we had some of our own brand. And so Sunday mornings we were always taken down to the shop and we could play between the trucks and have races and things like that. And also in that stretch of time another favorite memory is taking a walk with my dad down near the shop and being on his shoulders and just how much how delightful that was, to be that close to my father. Not that he didn't hug us but that was a little for some reason that stands out in my mind. Also at the age of four I'm told that I my dad had a wedding reception put me on top of the table and I twirled baton for everybody. So you also have to know that I had these two older sisters and an older brother and Daddy when we turned to six, Daddy would stick a clarinet in our mouth and say play. So my older sister did that, my next sister did it, my brother did it. And I came along at the age of six and said, I don't want to play the clarinet. So I must have been a pretty strong-willed child. So Danny said, well you have to take piano until you can decide what instruments you want. And I said, well I want a twirl baton. And he said, oh no, you're not gonna be able to twirl baton the rest of your life. So I took me a while to choose my instrument. In our house growing up Daddy what, never had a music lesson in his life, but he loved music and he and my uncle who lived with us loved to sing together and their other brother they would they were great in doing harmonies and like barbershop and things like that. Daddy also had a set of drums, an accordion, a trumpet, a bugle, a clarinet, seemed like there was one other instrument. So they were, music was just a part of our lives, it was a given. It was more important in our household than being on any athletic team. Consequently, I could never catch a ball or anything like that. But you know, I to this day I am still able to use my music.

My first connection, well let me go back a little bit. Living with my uncle was like living with Santa Claus. He had this built-in family he did not have to discipline us, he was the fun person in the household that he would take us for rides and tell us to close our eyes and we'd end up, and he'd say he was going to close his eyes too and we'd end up facing a cornfield, and of course he hadn't closed his eyes but he made us believe that he had us plant a match in the ground. And the next day it would be a stick about four feet tall. Had us, he he was just full of fun and jokes and on Thanksgiving morning he would be the one to ask us to sit down and write our letters to Santa Claus. And it was like living with Santa Claus all of our growing up years.

When I started school, grade school, it was my first experience with a Sister. And I had the Sisters of St. Francis from here in Oldenburg as at St. Clare school in College Hill in Cincinnati. And Sister Mary Austin was, she had all of us in the first grade and my older sister is eight years older than I. So she had for twelve years she had a Pillar that she taught in the first grade. And so, I loved her but I do remember coming home from school one day and asking my mother, was Sister Mary Austin a man or a lady?

Because I saw her shoes and they looked like men's shoes. She she pulled out a handkerchief and it looked just like my dad and my uncle's handkerchiefs and I didn't see any hair. So I'd be trying to look up her veil to see like many children I think in those days. We tried to figure out, so my mother said, of course she's oh she's a woman, okay.

So that helped me to trust her a little bit. The first day of school I was desperately afraid because I did not have the opportunity to go to kindergarten. And I was told that my oldest sister Fran who was in the eighth grade at the time, she's my second sister, she she was in the seventh grade. She would be there when school was out to meet me in the hallway. Well, it was recess but I didn't know that it was recess, I thought school was over. I had had enough, so we went out and we were going to to the restroom and my sister wasn't there. So I just sobbed and sobbed and sobbed until they had to go down and get my sister out of class and help let her console me. So I was pretty attached to my siblings which wasn't a bad thing, not at all. And my two older sisters I thought of my oldest sister as my little mother and my sister Fran as my best friend. And she's been my first sibling to die, so that that's much later in my story. My, because I didn't want to play the clarinet I started piano lessons from Marian Gallagher who is now Sister Mary Gloria and is one of our community members, and I eventually had her again in high school. Very instrumental in my religious vocation.

The other piece that was instrumental in my religious vocation was my grandmother and hearing my catechism questions. In those days we had a catechism, it was pretty cut and dry and so my mother signed my grandmother as my catechism teacher at home. So my, I could go into my grandmother's room to have my catechism questions heard. My grandmother would ask me the question and I'd recite the answer. And it was with those answers after I gave the book answer that my grandmother would help me understand about this God. So once again this idea of a loving God and a compassionate, merciful God, forgiving God was just reinforced and reinforced throughout, up until the third grade when my grandmother died. Well and my mother continued that, but she truly was the root of my vocation.

MEL: I can so picture you and your grandmother together in the room. Do you, do you remember how your grandmother sounded or smelled or how she spoke to you?

SBP: I remember how she spoke to me, I remember her voice. I remember, I don't remember a scent in that room. But I do remember how she looked, and she was a buxom woman and she had of course white hair and it was usually, in a what they called not a bun but it would—my mother would roll it up for her on one of those things that they used to, I think they used to call them like a rat. But it was a tubular thing that mother would roll her hair up in that. This was my dad's mother by the way, and my mother was always for me was always looked upon as a saint because she took care of Grandma. It wasn't her mother, she rarely got to see her, we rarely saw her side of the family. But, so yeah, I picture Grandma with her glasses, even one of her little blue robes that she wore, and a little blue cape. I remember pictures of her, she loved to travel before she had this stroke, and my sister Fran was very much like her in that way.

My grandmother was a businesswoman, she and her husband before he died had owned a saloon, but it was also a boarding house for men. And when he died early he was only fifty-six when he died. I never knew him that his picture hung over the bed in my grandmother's bedroom. And when he died she decided that that was not a very good profession for her to be in because of being a widow. Even though her three sons were in their twenties by that time. But, so that's when she bought the soft drink company. Moved her energies to that and became the president of this company, we never, she was never referred to as that. And her sons took over the business when she could no longer do it, and when she became ill when she had the stroke. And she too was I don't remember this but my older sister does that she too was very much of a music lover and was one of the reasons why we were so involved in music. My uncle who lived with us of the three boys he was the youngest and he was the only one that really got formal music lessons, but only for a very short period of time.

So yes, I my grandmother is because it was kind of a central figure in our home, and I think we were all pretty quiet individuals because because of respect for Grandma. And I think we were one of the first people on our block to get a TV because of Grandma. And so yeah, our lives, her birthday was on Christmas Eve, so Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were very very special in our home. And the cousins, the other son and his family would always be with us. So yeah I think our early lives, my early life, really revolved around her. My brother Paul was four when she died, I was eight and and he was four. And this is another crazy memory I have, but I remember when the doctor had to come and then the priest came and my brother was taking a nap, and I remember my mother saying to my father how are we going to explain this to Paul? And Paul's really going to be-Paul's my younger brother-and Paul's really gonna be upset. I remember saying to myself, well what about me? But it wasn't about me, but it was at that moment because I also wanted to be recognized as having loved this woman. And so that was, I think all of us I think that was our first death that we had, the whole household felt. It just kind of changed the way we did things, not immediately, but as time went on. So, but it was still a musical household, it was still a household of laughter and love but that central figure was missing from it. And so.

Somewhere in my preteen years we had a lovely yard, we really did. And on Saturdays we would all work in the yard, it was kind of a given. The shop, the soft drink company they worked on Saturday mornings because my dad served a lot of the churches in the Cincinnati area, and especially in the summertime they would deliver the pop for the festivals and the parish picnics and so on. And sometimes he'd bring a pickup truck home and we'd be allowed to ride in the bed of the pickup truck. Now, that's not legal, but in those days it was. Again it was a great time to be alive. So then, where was I going with that, oh in the afternoon then they were always free and so we'd work in the yard and except my uncle who would often just skip out and go to a movie, and my sister Fran who would be magically asleep on the couch in the living room, and I would be the one, Barbara go in and wake up your sister get her out here. So you know, it was a good, it was a good time and enjoyable. We loved being outside, my mother always made sure that we were outside.

Another loving memory of my childhood was in the summertime mother would put a blanket, we had a beautiful oak, maple tree right outside our kitchen window. And she put the blanket under that and tell us the three youngest of us, you know she'd say, just lay here and take a little bit of a nap or just watch clouds. And so we were encouraged to use our imagination. My older brother would build Coney Islands, we had our radio station, we had a TV station. We in those days, I would and we we played house a lot and we played we had some friends that lived behind us and I would sometimes be the priest. And in our play which was interesting, not that I've ever seen a female priest, not ever, but somehow I was gonna be the priest sometimes maybe it's that I was pretty much of wanting to be in control, I don't know. So and but we we had fun, we really did and we played mother always encouraged us to play in the evening until it was twilight, or dusk and we had to come in. We kind of had, we came home from school and school time and we did our homework or we'd always have carrots or celery sticks out for us, not cookies. We did the homework and then our reward was that we would be able to play until Daddy came home, Daddy and Uncle. Or and then again after supper after we did the dishes.

Sitting around our table was also an enjoyable thing, after Daddy and Uncle would leave the table they'd go in to read the paper on the dining room table. But the rest of us would practice rhythms, tapping on the table. My sister, who was my older sister who was our first music teacher all of us, she started us on our instruments she would get us doing different rhythms against each other and so until we would drive my mother crazy. And then and then she too would say, okay you have to stop. My dad, because I had not chosen an instrument that you could play in a band or Orchestra, he loved bands, he would take me to all of us he took us to parades, we had a lot of community parades in those days, well we still do in these towns around here, too. And he'd ask me did I see the instrument that I wanted. No, did not. In the meantime my brother Paul, my youngest brother, turned five and he says to Daddy, he was going to jump the gun on this clarinet thing, he said, I want to play the trombone, at age five. So, he was a little bitty guy, and my sister Rita started him on the trombone. And my dad because the trombone has a long slide, okay Paul's arms were very short, Daddy had me sit next to Paul when he practiced and pull up the slide. I was nine. That was humiliating, you know, he didn't do it to humiliate me but he wanted me to be there to experience this instrument, you know. Maybe I'd like it too. But it was a little humbling for me. So Daddy took, I don't know if the girls were in this orchestra, but he took me to an orchestra concert, and in I don't even remember where was anyway—the flutes were featured and spotlight was on the flute and I thought it's a beautiful instrument, looks like a baton. So at the age of ten my sister started to teach me flute and I still play flute. I'm still playing for our Masses here on Sundays, and that has been also a gift, and through the years. My two brothers as we were growing up, once Paul started on the trombone, he was a natural and he was a great he is still is a great jazz musician. When we were Paul and my brother Linus, who he called brother, the two of them were able to be down in our basement and just spontaneously play, and just jam. And I'd sit at the top of the steps and I think when will I ever be able to do that, just make music, okay. And it wasn't until later on as a Sister that I was encouraged to use my flute to pray, and I began to be able to just respond to whatever readings I was hearing or the homily of that day. And

so now at Presentation of the Gifts I sometimes I play flute and it's not anything that anybody recognizes because it is responding in some way to the words or to the word that we've just heard. So and that's kind of jumping ahead in my story but but to just see how music has continued to be a significant part of our lives, in my life and actually the four of us that are living are still using music in some way.

MEL: I'm thinking of this little girl you said, was it nine, who is finding a way to pray that's all her own.

SBP: Right, right. That did not happen. The night that praying—well I found ways to pray with the flute but I didn't know I was praying then, okay. The other thing I started to do, we had a pond in our side yard and we had a bench in front of the lovely little tree, Japanese maple, and I would find myself there on Sunday afternoons just enjoying the quiet and being in the stillness. And I didn't realize that I was praying then, but I knew that it was giving me comfort. And if I was in a strange frame of mind, after I did that I could come in and I could be, get into whatever it was that the family was getting into or whatever. So I began to pray, I want to say without words, early in my life but I didn't know it, and then. So there was always a love for God and a love for people and I wanted, I knew that I wanted to serve people. That was throughout high school, and I had Sister Mary Gloria who I spoke of earlier. I had her as my, she was at OLA when when I went to school there, I went to high school at Our Lady of Angels in Cincinnati. As did my two older sisters, and I had Sister Mary Gloria for piano and then Sister Carolyn [unintelligible] I had for flute and Sister Carolyn who has since died. But they were very instrumental as was a Sister Clarice who was my English teacher. And she of all things had me doing some public speaking and I was like, I would have never believed that I could do that, and scared to death, a nervous wreck but I was doing it. She was one of the first ones I think who said in my going into my senior year, she said, I didn't have time in my schedule if I wanted to keep up the music I didn't have time for typing in either my junior year and in in my senior year I going in, she said to me, oh you're going to be a teacher you won't need typing. Yeah right. I believed her. Well that proved to be wrong, the teacher part yes, but the needing typing that was a bad lead there.

But anyway, in my senior year I was in, I don't think anybody really said, do you want to enter the convent. They hinted at it. But in the summer before my senior year I met this really neat guy and he was, my sister got married that summer, my oldest sister Rita, and he was my brother-in-law's cousin. So we had we had fun at the wedding reception you know, and we had a date, we were at you don't know these places but Moonlight Gardens in Cincinnati was a wonderful place to go dancing, and to go on a date. So this is the beginning of our senior year. Now we're dancing and he says you know, he said, I'm thinking about being a priest and I said, well that's interesting I said, I've been toying with the idea of going to the convent. And he said, well let's just see how this year plays out. So we dated a lot during that year and he was just fun, he was just a fun guy, my uncle called him Jerry Lewis because that's how funny he was. And so when we went on our senior retreat I think his was first he said, I'm taking your picture with me and I said, okay then I would do the same when I was on my senior retreat. Our retreats then

we're like one day, I think. And he was being taught by the Marianists in Cincinnati at Purcell High School. And so somewhere in there he made the decision that he was going to enter the Marianist. And I was still not sure. In the meantime I heard my mother saying to my neighbor, oh I think Barb's gonna enter the convent. I said, oh okay that's what my mother thinks.

So I'm not really sure when I made, I take that back. My sister Fran and I went to what's Holy Thursday evening and we have we had Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament Adoration after the Holy Thursday service. I don't, not sure was in the evening in those days but it was afternoon and evening. And so we took our hour of adoration, and it was during that hour that I thought yes, I am supposed to go to the convent and never thought of any other community but the Sisters of Saint Francis. They were all I knew, I had them in grade school, I had them in high school.

So I entered in September of that year, I was very very very homesick and I was also becoming ill. And losing a lot of weight, and was having some other issues. And Sister Estelle who was our novice mistress, she was getting very concerned about me. And that was, I entered on September 8th, and then we found out that I needed to have some surgery in December. And Sister Estelle said we're going to give you some choices, she said. You could have your surgery, recuperate in Cincinnati at Our Lady of Angels at the convent there. Come back, when you're ready. Or you could recuperate at home and come back in February. In those days we had girls who were at the academy who were in their senior year and they would enter the convent in the middle of their senior year in February, okay. So I had this surgery, I opted to go home. The other thing Sister Estelle said to me was, you're very homesick and I think that has something to do with your illness. So, but I did have to have surgery, so I went into Good Sam Hospital. In those days we did not tell our classmates where we were, what we were doing et cetera, so. I really appreciated Sister Estelle giving me options, she really treated me like an adult and did not say well, you know I really think you have this vocation, you should be coming back, it was not that way at all.

And so I had the surgery on December 8th, and I'm not sure how long I was in the hospital but then I was this by this time my brother Linus was in the seminary, okay. And he was he came home, I don't know what the date was, but for Christmas break and I was not sure that I wanted to go back in February. Well, Mother left the house, everybody else was gone but my brother and myself. He should have done better but I think I was stubborn and so we decided we're gonna move some of the furniture in the living room. This was on Christmas Eve morning. Well Christmas Eve night we were gonna gather at my sixth Christmas Eve had always been special to us because of my grandmother. So Christmas this was the first year my sister was married, so we were going to gather at her house to celebrate Christmas Eve, and my dad gets the idea we should all wear our wedding clothes over to, because they've just gotten married in August, okay. And so we all dress up in our wedding outfits, my sister Fran and I in our formals and Daddy in his suit, and uncle and the boys and their good clothes. And we go over to celebrate Christmas Eve. Well, I started getting really sick and and I was hemorrhaging, and so they took me home and the doctor said, put me in a tub of hot

water and that didn't work. And so my brother-in-law and my dad took me to the hospital and I do not remember anything about Christmas Day that year. Unless, except one of the Sisters of our community, Sister Yvonne who was a nurse, she was in nurses training, she came in to visit me and the person who had been the principal at Our Lady of Angels, they came in on Christmas morning and they gave me a little wooden carving of baby Jesus in a Half-moon, you know, crescent moon. I don't remember anything else from Christmas Day until New Year's Day. I don't remember anything of that week. And I know that my family was probably there every day.

But until New Year's Day when Daddy, they wanted to do a spinal tap and Daddy said no. And so I then went home. There was no way that I was ready to come back in February, physically or emotionally. And so I'm really toyed with the idea of, lay communities were coming into existence at the time, and so I had this book that I was studying other religious communities. I still knew that I wanted to do service so I did eventually slow again, again it was in front of the Blessed Sacrament that I was convinced that I needed to come back. And so I reentered September of the fall of 1959, and so.

But interestingly my vocation continued to be, I continued to question my vocation until I was probably thirty-nine years old so that was a twenty year period where I was struggling with, did I really belong here, didn't I belong here et cetera. Many difficult times in there but yet very beautiful times and very enriching times. And through the course of my fifty-six years in community I have been a music teacher, private lessons. I have been a classroom music teacher and that was as my life progressed in both high school and grade school. Then I began teaching religion classes to junior high kids. I loved teenagers, I loved the junior high age bracket and so I taught religion to junior high in a school in Indianapolis that was very large and so I had three seventh grade classes and three eighth grade classes and then taught some music in between. Classroom music. And some years were great, some years were not, but then I realized it's somewhere in the '60s Catholic schools, the future of Catholic schools believe it or not was being questioned. And I thought I do not want to be a private music teacher in a public school. I just knew that, and so that's when I retrained, I've got my master's degree in religious education.

So I've jumped ahead here to my religious life, okay. My call to religious life continued to be nurtured but it also continued to be questioned, especially in my twenties and when I was making, getting ready to make final vows. The situation I was in was not the healthiest as far as the women I was living with, the Superior that I had at the time. And I knew that if I ever had the opportunity to run a school I felt that she was running the school through fear, not through love. And so I remember saying to myself if I ever had that opportunity I thought that was never gonna happen. It did, but I would try to love, run the school through love and compassion. And I had had that witnessed to me by one of our Sisters who still living Sister Irene, you know.

So when I had the opportunity to switch over to classroom music and religious education I really appreciated it and that was at a school in Indianapolis, Little Flower on

the east side. I had taught for seven years there, and it was the longest I had stayed in any one place. Previous to that it had been like two and three years where I was, which was pretty typical in those days. And then in that seventh year I was getting more involved in youth and started to some religious education on the side, for the teenagers and Sundays kids. And the principal at the time and I had devised a plan where I would be part-time teaching and then in the rest of the time I would be able to go to some of the high schools, especially the non-Catholic high schools and meet with the Catholic students. Well, that summer the principal was diagnosed with pneumonia first, it turned out that he had cancer, lung cancer. And so I became principal by default, and a temporary temporary principal for three years. Not trained at all, but I had a great woman who is very fond of Marian University also, and she was my Assistant Principal and she had a great grasp of curriculum which I did not have, and but I had a good grasp of human beings. And I had also previous to this had also toyed with the idea of going into counseling but I wasn't ready to go quite into that direction. So here I was, Principal, and having to deal with children and their issues and parents and their issues and the prevalence of divorce was in families was just beginning, and so I did things as administrator that school to create a family atmosphere. Had organized games on the playground, had affirmation days where we, where a particular class would be affirmed for all of them, the good things they had done for one another. When kids got in trouble with what they said to one another, they had to say the same thing to myself if I heard it again. And they were like, oh okay.

So they started to treat you, treat each other with a little more respect and they were very good years those years in administration. Actually, those ten years at that Little Flower in Indianapolis were really years that I discovered gifts in myself that I didn't know I had. And I was really scared of like board of education meetings because I had none, I did not have a lot of work with adults, but I found out that adults are pretty much like little kids grown up. With some exceptions. So it was like, oh this is interesting and moms could be just just caddy about their kids as the the kids were about each other. So it was fun, and but I had wonderful people to live with, we had a great community life at Little Flower, and changed in size while I was there. I think we were twelve when I started there and we were probably down to seven when, there were six maybe when I left there. Those were also difficult times emotionally because we were the community in general of those in the early late '60s early '70s when renewal was beginning and a lot of women were leaving religious life. And so best friends were leaving community and to witness the signing of one of my best friends and for her to sign her papers to leave. Then that was very that was very difficult and yet continued to, I continue to ask the question then, why do I stay. And well, I really loved what I was doing and I loved people and I loved God and I thought, you know this is a pretty enriching life. And I was having fun. So we had, I also felt though that I wanted to begin people who are beginning to work in parishes and branch out from schools I thought, I think I'd really like to be in parish work. So that didn't materialize until between the school when I left Little Flower I knew that I had to, it was time, it was ten years and I needed to force them into hiring a qualified principal, because you know I had skills and gifts but I really wasn't I didn't have a license, I you know. This, doing this, out of my gut, in my heart not necessarily my head.

MEL: But running a school through love—

SBP: But running a school through love, and I was convinced that I was doing that. And even more convinced that a day that the school had a the farewell party for me and each class sang, did a parody on a song and they used songs from Hello Dolly, they used songs from Music Man, they used songs from Sound of Music. Super Jesus Christ Superstar, each class did a different song and sang. It was it was a very touching day, and I kept those things for ages until I think I still might have a few of those in a scrapbook. I had a previous to that I yet enjoyed teaching in a high school, but this this was kind of a really growing up time for me, and I think I was let's see ages I went there I was probably twenty-nine when I went to Little Flower and thirty-nine when I left there. And they that was a very enriching time, spiritually.

Spiritually, we were because of Vatican II we were learning how to talk to one another because we had silent, more silent time before this. We were learning how to pray together and that's when I picked up my flute again, and began to pray I could not spontaneously pray in words for some reason when we try to pray spontaneously together. And that's when one of my good friends who's now one of the Carmelites that lives across the street, she said, why don't you pray with your flute. And so I was able to pick up my flute again and pray my flute. There were a couple of years in novitiate where they took my flute away from me, those were really trying years. Why is a good question and to this day I don't know the answer, but we had strange rules in the beginning of my life and religious life. You know we weren't allowed to go home, we weren't supposed to have our pictures taken with holding babies. There were strange rules, we weren't supposed to eat with adults, with our parents when they came to visit. So all of that has changed now but in the early days of my religious we weren't supposed to go back home, anyway it yes. Another memory just popped into my head, you'd almost feel guilty if you drove past your home. I was taught in Cincinnati for only three years of my religious life, but in those three years I was only twenty minutes away from my parents' home. And my brother Paul and my sister Fran still lived at home, so it was like, okay that was hard. My sister Fran when she got married, I was twenty minutes away but I couldn't go to the wedding, but she spent, I will never forget this, she and the whole wedding party came up to Our Lady, I was teaching at Our Lady of Angels at the time, they spent the whole afternoon with me. Yes, very touching and those pictures are very precious to me.

MEL: Sounds challenging.

SBP: It was challenging and you know when you look back over things like that that was only with the grace of God that you remained. Truly. When I left Little Flower in Indianapolis I knew it was time to go but I didn't know what I wanted to do next. And the community said, why don't you do some kind of, they said three week renewal. So I went up someplace in New York and I had never experienced this amount of trust before, but my trust in God, I was sitting on a picnic table, I was sitting on the table looking at these mountains and I really felt God saying to me, something is going to be

given to you, just trust, okay. That was the year before my last year at Little Flower. Okay here it is May of my last year at Little Flower and I still don't know what I'm going to be doing, so it's kind of planning with one of the leadership team that I would take some time to do some courses in counseling. Well, I get a phone call from Sister Norma Rocklage who was on the leadership team at the time. And she said, Barb I've had a dream about you and I have this dream about starting a house of personal growth, because we were in the early '70s then, and we Sisters were leaving their ministries as teachers and going into other things. Some of them did not even know how to make their own decisions and so she said we need a house where Sisters can come and just be, have some personal growth time and have the therapist and having a person like you leading the house and just helping them to nurture them from from whatever challenge they had been through that they were not handling well. Just some fullness of life, and I said, can I do I have time to think about this and she said, well yeah about forty-eight hours, might have even been twenty-four hours, but it sounded as if it was something that I just really wanted to do and it was going to be not just for our Sisters but for four communities in Indiana who had mother-houses in Indiana. And it was called Shalom community, they already had a name for it, they already had a board of directors, Norma was on the board. And taken aback there were some people there was a Sister on the leadership team of these four communities who were kind of nurturing this dream.

So I said yes and it turned out that the house that they were getting was up at St. Pius the tenth on the north side of Indianapolis, northeast side. And I spent a year with a Sister from Huntington, not sure, Victory Noll Sisters. We were going to co-direct this house and so we really only had six months. So I took the time to go from houses that were already existing like this, there were houses of affirmation, they called them. There were some in Minnesota, there were some in Wisconsin. So I took the time to visit these houses and design our own program. And meeting with these other people and through the course of these six months other board members were added so we had a psychologist on the board, we had a lawyer on the board, and we had the four sisters from the religious the leadership from the these four communities. We started out, we had one Sister from Victory Noll who for some reason, we thought we were going to be ready to open in January, I said, we're not ready. I said this is like you know, it would be we we would be doing injustice but the Sister wanted to come anyway. So she came and it was a little bit of a challenge. The Sister that I was supposed to be working with decided that she it wasn't right for her but she was going to go to classes at IU, at IUPUI in Indianapolis. So those two lived in the house with me while I'm still trying to design this program. And then the Ferdinand Benedictines from, they sent a Sister who thought she might want to be the co-director and we were ready to open in September and I'd loved, she was great, and I actually I loved this Betty who was a student at IUPUI too, she was delightful. And meantime we had a dog, and because we thought the dog would be good therapy. And her name was Muffin and she played a big part in the design of this program.

So, we opened in September and we had one month. We had we opened in August, August 15th. We had five Sisters who were going to go through the program to a

[unintelligible] from my community. Two Ferdinand Benedictines and one from Victory Noll. And we had so we had nine bedrooms in this house but we figured we needed two bedrooms for guests because we wanted this to be as natural a living situation as possible. And some of these houses the Sisters like that I had visited, the Sisters did not cook, they did not clean, they did not make their beds. I thought, this is not good because they have to go back into, we want them to be going back into community living healthy.

So part of the program that we designed was that they took care of their bedroom, we took cook turns, they were to have a part-time ministry of at least ten hours a week which wasn't that all much. The pastor at St. Pius the tenth at the time said, if a Sister gives her volunteer time to us you can take that time off of your rent and our rent was already dirt cheap, trust me it was dirt cheap. So he was being, he did not have a good reputation as a kind person but he was being extremely kind to us and so, plus he loved the dog. So we the Sister then that I was to work with, we started August 15th by September 8th she realized that this was not for her, she went back down to Ferdinand. So then I was alone until our community one of the Sisters in our community who was working at Ritter High School, she Sister Jane, she I was continued working at Ritter part-time and then she was a part-time at Shalom.

Those were very enriching years for me because I remember saying to Sister Norma when she called to ask I said, Norma I feel like I'm falling apart you know, when she asked me to lead this program. I said, and she said, that's just what we want, we want somebody who has been struggling with life and who yes, what's the call, with who they are, relationships, and she knew that I had that's another whole story. The relationship was the person who had joined the Marianists, he was in Dayton and so we had we had begun to visit with each other once a month and we're getting very close and so he was part of my own discernment back at Little Flower. But Norma knew all about that because I was very open with her. And she said that's what we're looking for, we're looking for somebody who's lived life and you know you understand emotions and so on. So consequently because each of the Sisters had a therapist we had group therapy also in the house, the group therapists came to the house. And then I would meet Jane and I would meet with the group therapists after a session and we had all kinds of programs that we had brought into the house including what was it called, to know what colors were best for you to wear, because many of these sisters were still coming out of habit and beginning to wear her lay clothes. They had never interviewed for a job so we were doing, you know, testing to see what you're best suited for if you're not teaching. How to apply for a job, all kinds of really great personal growth things which I was benefiting from too, because I'd be at all these programs. And we also did a week of orientation to Indianapolis because many of these people didn't so we got to go to the Children's Museum, the Eiteljorg, you know various places, the zoo. Each year we let the Sisters choose, it was it was a very growth-full time.

And then the Sisters could go back to their communities at Christmas time and we stayed open until the middle of June. We'd have two months, June to August, that we could regroup. I did that for five years. Wonderful years, difficult years, challenging

years, scary at times depending on what the Sister's issue was, and how depressed she might get. Working with Sisters with diabetic that were not used to the mood swings, how to adjust their diets. We even had to put the dog on a diet because everybody would feed the dog a treat, we hadn't put up the list to say when you give the dog something you check it, so. We, the dog, we had a different group each year they could return for a second year but no longer than that. If they had a second year their time of part-time work went up to twenty hours so that they were gradually getting back into community and identifying their own issues and the work that they needed to do on themselves. We had more success stories than we didn't have which was a gift. Some of our Sisters, two of our sisters that were there, three, are still running around this house here at the motherhouse and doing very well. So it's, it continues to be a gift to me, to see how their lives improved because of this program.

So that was a period of time and in the meantime I started doing volunteer work at the parish and loved it and the parish loved me, so I was involved in music back, to doing performing I played organ out the Sunday evening liturgy. And at the children's liturgy I would lead the singing and so I got back into using my music but also getting involved in some of the parish work and, oh my.

MEL: Sister, no, may stop it, I, let me stop.