

# Sister Celeste Reinhart, SSND -60 Year Jubilee!



*"...those adventures  
have created a lifelong journey  
that began with one step:  
joining the School Sisters of Notre Dame."*

Seventeen-year-old Celeste Reinhart was struck by the maps of the world lining the hallway at Waterdown. She gazed at the beautiful colors and shapes of far-away lands, imagining the untold adventures they held. Thumbtacks had been pinned to the places where the School Sisters of Notre Dame lived and ministered. A wild thought filled her head: If the Sisters - *women like her!* - could go to those exotic places, so could she.

"I wanted to be one of those women, empowered to go there. I wanted to teach while my husband, who would be an engineer, would get water into the villages. I wanted to go to impoverished countries and develop them. I didn't get into fine details. I just thought, *I'm going to make a difference in the world.*"

Celeste's wanderlust had been sparked by her parents, who were always pointing to the family globe to show their children where the news of the world was taking place. Little did they know it would lead their first-born child to the convent.

Coming home from retreat, Celeste turned quiet. Her parents worried something was wrong with their "normally talkative" teen.

"I finally told Mom and Dad what I wanted to do. Mom said, 'Celeste, your dad and I have always said we won't interfere in what our kids do. But you will always be welcome to come home.' Wasn't that beautiful? Dad smiled while I talked, so I knew he was happy for me. But of course there was deep pain, too.

"I was the oldest of seven, and my siblings were very sad I was leaving. The whole family - the youngest was just 4 - got in the car to drive me from our farm in southwest Ontario to Waterdown. We had a picnic on the way. When we got there, we all went into the convent. The Sisters had a store. Everyone got a little stuffed animal and an apple pie. I had some money in my wallet, which I gave to my mother. I'm sure that was painful. It was so definitive."

Celeste felt a pang of grief as she watched her family leave, but it didn't last long.

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# Sister Celeste Reinhart, SSMD—Cont'd

It turned out her cohort included several girls from her high school.

"It was a nice surprise. I began having fun right away. The first night, one of the postulants played the piano and we had a sing-along. The postulant director was obviously happy, too."

The new postulants attended Grade 13 together, and after class, prayed and meditated and learned about their new life together.

"On weekends, a priest taught us about Vatican II and sports. We went on nature hikes. We also took 'Walking Lessons,' to learn how to walk in those long habits. It was important to walk like a lady, with no big steps. We learned to walk in a way that our big rosaries made no noise. That came in handy once we were teaching. The kids wouldn't hear us coming!"

Now in the convent, Celeste remembers realizing that a vow of celibacy was involved, and that marriage would be out of the question. Her dream of an engineer husband who would bring water to the villages would have to be transformed.

"It's the craziest thing, but it had never entered my mind that I wouldn't get married. That was okay. Being companioned by women was good. I let go of the idea of getting married."



## ONTARIO

Now a first-professed Sister, Celeste served several happy years teaching in Ontario.

"I started teaching Grade 1 and was delighted to see these kids learning to read. Later, I taught Grades 7 and 8. I had a few kids who had a hard time reading and would act out. I had them make a map out of clay to help them learn geography. They began to come around behaviorally, because they were using their hands and working together."



## BOLIVIA

When Sister Celeste went to Bolivia, she felt her old dream was being fulfilled. She soon realized that the dream - no matter how much she loved it - included a vast amount of work.

"We lived in a little hut with an outhouse, and cooked over a wood fire outside. We sometimes had to hike 45 minutes one way to get our water, although we usually could take a bus. Two gallons a day. We had to get to the stream early in the morning before the women started washing their clothes in it. We showered once a week at the parish house down the mountain. We were young and could do it."

The School Sisters were teaching teachers

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how to teach, a task that required an understanding of the culture that took time - and deep listening - to achieve.

"I discovered that those cultures that I had wanted to develop as a young girl already had cultures of their own. I learned how to stand back. I learned I was not the bank with the knowledge or know-how. I needed to enable the Bolivians because knowledge is power. They had their own knowledge, so I needed to help them recognize it. We were building democracy and advocacy at the grassroots level."

The wisdom of that time still informs Sister Celeste's interaction with others.

"Our own transformation leads to transforming others. We need to be cheerleaders, to get our hands dirty with those we serve.



### HOME AGAIN

Sister Celeste's new favorite ministry is back in Ontario at a nearby church where she and other volunteers are learning how to make bread. They make the dough on Friday, and leave it to rise overnight for the next group to bake on Saturday. It's sliced and made into sandwiches for those who are hungry.

"While it's rising the first time, we have faith sharing. Then we punch it down and leave it for the next group to bake. We are leaven

for each other as we feed the hungry. It's so sacramental.

"I've been praying daily for 60 years. Meditating. Reading spiritual books. Developing a personal relationship with Jesus. Reading scriptures. I've been noticing my heart spiritually is becoming more like a clear sky. Not as much clutter in there.

"When I look at the church, the spirit of freedom in religious life enables us to respond. I live in an apartment near 3 other School Sisters. We form a community together. We get together once a month for the whole weekend. It's a renewal time with prayer, meals, and sharing."

Sister Celeste laughs frequently as she reminisces. It's been a wonderful life, she says, companioned by other SSNDs through many rich adventures. Together, those adventures have created a lifelong journey that began with one step: joining the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

"My siblings thought I would leave the community once Mom and Dad were gone. They were wrong, obviously. I think they understand now."