



Sister Mary Ellen Sprouffske. CSJ

Sister Mary Lawrence

August 10, 1928 – February 22, 2023

I began life on August 10, 1928, in Inglewood, CA, the second child and first girl of Frank Lawrence Sprouffske and Mary Kathryn Keelin Sprouffske. The family consisted of my mother and Dad and Michael Francis (Mickey) who was born a year and a half before.

I was baptized Mary Ellen at St. Columkille's Church. Sister Ann Louise Perret CSJ was my godmother. This was just 4 weeks before she entered.

I was 2 ½ when Pauline Larrine was born. I missed my mother very much when she went to the maternity home. I had heard she had gone and would bring home a baby. I figured she was working there and this baby was her pay. When we went to visit her, she was in bed and I knew it was from the hard work. Dad took Mickey and me to the big window to see the babies. He asked us to choose which one we wanted. The one I chose was asleep. Mickey chose one that was crying. Dad sided with him, which even at 2 ½ I felt wasn't too fair. Every time Pauline cried I blamed Mickey. This incident of "baby Choice" set my education of life back quite a bit.

Across the street from our house in Inglewood were empty fields of Los Angeles. I thought Los Angeles was nothing. One little friend down the street, a bit older than my 3 years, once asked my mother if she could take me to L.A. to play. She held my hands as we walked across the "border" and joined the neighborhood kids for WAR – a game played by pulling out the clods of dirt and long grasses and hurling them over to the "other side". (So. Calif. Snowball fights).

I was Irish and raised Irish. St. Patrick's Day was a Holy Day of Obligation. My 14 cousins on my Dad's side were all in the state of Washington. Therefore I played with my Irish cousins on my mother's side who lived in Southern California.

During the 2 years I remember living in Inglewood, I felt safe and cared for. I remember the 1933, 6.3 earthquake, hearing all of our dishes crash to the floor, the jigsaw puzzles Mickey and I were working on bouncing up and down on the floor and breaking apart. Mother had Pauline in her arms. My dad took Mickey and me under the doorjamb, held our hands and talked to us gently to alleviate our fears. (Even today, in an earthquake, I think of my dad's hands and calm voice.) We went outside and joined all the other frightened people on the block. I wondered if they had a hand to hold to calm them.

When I was 5, we moved to Nativity Parish where I attended elementary school. For grades 1 and 2, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston taught me. In the 3rd grade they were recalled and the Sisters of Loretto replaced them. I loved school and all my teachers.

When I made my First Communion and I got a clear white prayer boo, my Irish grandmother said to me, "Remember this day is the most important day of your life". A week later I took my First Communion book, gave it to my Dad and told

him I needed a new one because I had read the whole thing. He looked at me, laughed, and said, "You have to read your prayers, over and over". My Dad taught me how to pray that Sunday.

There was always music in our house with dad playing the standard guitar, Mickey playing the Hawaiian guitar and I playing the ukulele. We often played in theatres and veteran's homes.

Robert Francis (Bob) was born when I was in the 5th grade. We all picked out his name in a family meeting. Now our family was complete.

I entered Catholic Girls High School and was interested in the different religious orders. There were many possibilities for me but I was not interested in any of them except the C.S.J.'s, but I knew I didn't have a vocation.

I was a teenager on the home front during World War II. During this time we had Japanese neighbors. Mariko and Easter who were children when they were taken to an internment camp. It was a very sad day when they brought over their games and books to say good-bye.

When we graduated as a secretary with a good report, we were given a choice of interviewing for 3 positions. I chose a position but was there only a few months before the war ended. I remember all the chimes from the churches; the whistles blowing and there were smiles on everyone's face.

Being a secretary was a fine position but something was tugging at me. In my mind, I was thinking of becoming a nun. It wasn't a good fit yet. I prayed for a vocation every night.

One day at work, I was typing a letter dictated by my boss and when I returned the carriage on the old Underwood typewriter, I knew. It hit me hard. I was to become a Sister of St. Joseph in September. There was not a lot of time to set up an interview and prepare for entry.

My brother Mickey was discharged from the Navy in July. He had made up his mind to become a Carmelite while on a landing craft in the Philippines. He would go to the Carmelite Novitiate in Middletown, NY and begin his training in mid-Sept. We entered the same day, September 15, 1946.

I was received into the congregation on March 19, 1947 and given the name Sister Mary Lawrence after my parent's names.

After making temporary vows on March 19, 1949, I was assigned to teach Grade 3 at ST. Thomas the Apostle, San Francisco. This was the beginning of my teaching career, elementary, secondary, administration and later adult education. In high school I taught history, religion and art. My oldest student was 99 yrs. of age.

I spent many happy years in Senior Citizen ministry, LA Province Archives and in my last ministry on the Board of Director, DRPO (Desert Refuge for Peace Officers) in Joshua Tree, California. I worked with Fr. Mike McCullough who attended to the needs of the police officers and later the Marines at 29 Palms. Both groups often suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

I took many workshops in Spiritual Direction and spent many years in retreat work in the personal development office. I enjoyed making quilts and when it was time to celebrate our 150th anniversary of the C.S.J.'s, I planned the Sesquicentennial Quilt that's in the dining room at Carondelet Center. My interest in the archives and the history of the sisters led Sr. Pat Callahan and myself to make an exact replica of the 1836 cabin that was in Carondelet, Missouri.

During my free time, I made quilts and went camping with friends usually along the ocean. My love of adventure began in childhood when my brother and I bicycled every Saturday throughout downtown Los Angeles. Years later, as a CSJ, I watched for articles that piqued curiosity, and then set out and took a tour of Los Angeles. The physical challenges were worth the enjoyment and mental stimulation I got. I also enjoy reading and going for rides in the country.

After I had a stroke, I retired to Holy Family Community in December 2011 and found everything I was looking for. I found love and companionship from the sisters as well as from the nurses and staff who attended to my every need.

(death)

And now, dear Sisters, I say goodbye. I have loved being a sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet. I have tried to be faithful to my vocation and I have loved every minute. It was hard some days but I always felt it was worth it. Now we are entering a new phase with God's love. Do not be afraid for God is with us.

~ Written by Sister Mary Ellen Sprouffske, CSJ