

SISTER EVANGELINE ANDERSON by S. Jacquelyn Ernster

Welcome—family, friends, sisters, and MMC folks

In every institution there are those who have made a bigger than normal impact, Sr. Evangeline was one of those in the history of MMC and Sacred Heart Monastery. There is an axiom in philosophy that the total is greater than the sum of its parts. What I share tonight is only a part of who Sister Evangeline was, each of you will have other memories to share.

Prairie Spring

Willa Cather

Evening and the flat land,
Rich and somber and always silent;
The miles of fresh-plowed soil,
Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;
The growing wheat, the growing weeds,
The toiling horses, the tired men;
The long empty roads,
Sullen fires of sunset, fading,
The eternal, unresponsive sky.
Against all this, Youth,
Flaming like the wild roses,
Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,
Flashing like a star out of the twilight;
Youth with its unsupportable sweetness,
Its fierce necessity,
Its sharp desire,
Singing and singing

Out of the lips of silence

Out of the earthy dusk.

Sister Evangeline Anderson spent her youth in central South Dakota in a setting very resonant with the description given us by Willa Cather. She was the seventh child of William and Catherine Anderson, born in 1924. In her autobiography she writes:

In my youth, we lived on a farm, or rather on four different farms, until my sophomore year in high school, when we moved into Harrold. We were never in extreme or dire need, but there were many times when we were certainly schooled in poverty, as were many others during the depression, and many times my parents were unsure of food and fuel beyond a few days into the future.

She was a daughter of the prairie and of the depression which gave her distinctive characteristics she showed all her life, such as frugality, industriousness, and the ability to plan for the future.

Evangeline met the Benedictines at St. Mary's Hospital in Pierre where she worked post high school to earn money for college. Under their influence she entered the community in Yankton, in 1942. After final vows she earned her bachelor's degree at Mt St Scholastica in Atchison, KS. Shortly after she returned home, Mother Jerome told her "we are planning to send you to graduate school next year to take philosophy and you will probably stay to get your doctorate." Evangeline said it seemed like a "sentencing" at the time but in retrospect it became among the most precious words said to her because it opened new worlds and put her in contact with two people who had a tremendous influence on her life- - *Dr. Hart who taught me metaphysics and what it means to be a person; and Owen Fredrickson OSB who taught me so much about being a Benedictine.*

She returned to Yankton in 1953 and was assigned to Mount Marty College where she served in many roles over her career including the presidency from 1957 to 1974. These were formative years for the college and with Sister Evangeline at

the helm new ideas, new visions, new directions were embraced and inculcated. She led the first accreditation effort pulling together the curriculum, finances and services necessary. She established a governance structure that is still in place today and transitioned the college into a co-ed institution. She helped articulate the mission which held the heritage sacred and set a vision for the future. She built new buildings, Roncalli and Corbey, to enhance the campus and enable it to better serve its clientele. She led the college with a sense of quiet direction, intellectual insight, and regal presence. As a freshman, I lived in the dorm and will always remember her gliding down the halls after curfew to check on lights out. We knew we would not hear her coming but would see her if our lights were not out. She was supportive of the students and after the college became co-ed she became an avid sports fan, not missing many games until she could no longer, physically attend. The students knew she cared. She was clearly an intellectual and sometimes stern but she was also warm, supportive, and a good listener. Over the years she had many close friend-- students, sisters, and family members who treasured her support and love.

Evangeline was respected in many different settings. In 1977 she was given a sabbatical year which she took at Notre Dame University in the Religious Leader program. While there she met Fr. Phil Murnion who was heading the national Parish Project out of New York and he asked her to be administrative assistant for the project, so for the next four years she worked in that, living in New York and travelling from coast-to-coast. She commented that for someone who had lived all her life on the prairies of SD to be transplanted into the middle of Manhattan was an eye-opening experience.

In 1989, Kathryn Easley was elected prioress and she asked Evangeline to serve as assistant prioress. Evangeline said, *These years involved a lot of confidence sharing, a lot of planning, a lot of secretarial work. I recall the many hours that went into the planning and development of our long-range plan as we focused on "Monastic Women: Stewarding our Future".*

She also served on the Council of the Federation during that time and contributed her keen insight to the leadership of the Federation.

The fire of 1997 left an indelible mark on her years of leadership, she says, *I will never forget my taking roll call that night and learning for sure that two of us were missing, nor the trauma of bringing myself to call Sister Kathryn from a special family celebration to tell her our home was on fire.* She notes the blessing of the fire was the bondedness of the sisters during the exile to the Human Services Center, and the realization of how loved they are and what it means to receive as well as give.

The college was always grateful for the foundation she gave it and she in turn was always interested in its plans and future as it changed and grew. One of the highlights of her later years was the naming of the Scholastica Learning Center library after her made possible by an alum who admired and remembered her. Many others have done the same, most recently one of the labs in the new science center which is dedicated to her by the Donohoes.

Sister Evangeline was a giver, all of her life, she gave all she had, having been asked to do many things she never would have never dreamed of, each time she stepped up to the challenge and applied all the giftedness that was hers. She knew how to lead, and how to be a follower, she was academic but was not afraid to wash a window, help clean the vegetables and serve the infamous chicken dinner. She always had that broad vision that comes from growing up on the prairie where you can see for miles if you so choose, and she had the work ethic of a pioneer woman like her mother. If she was to leave us a message it would be to trust in God, step up to the plate, keep your eyes on the horizon, and continue living to the full the Benedictine way of life we professed. She will always be known as a pillar in this community, we will miss her presence but are happy with her in her glorious reward.