

Sister M. Alberta (Zimmer), CSC

(Mildred Louise Zimmer)

May 6, 1927 – November 27, 2020

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, with help from Florence Zimmer Kallin and many Holy Cross sisters and Saint Mary's staff. Sister Suzanne read them at the memorial Mass on December 4, 2020.

Mildred Louise Zimmer was born on May 6, 1927, in Danville, Illinois, to John and Theresa Zimmer. Early on in their marriage, her parents had suffered the loss of several babies during pregnancy, and the doctor told her mother that they would not be able to have children. So, as the story goes, her parents simply went on with life. The next thing you know, the Zimmers were blessed with six healthy children: Paul, Roger, Florence, Mildred, Barbara Ann and Daniel. As Sister Alberta wrote later, "So much for the good doctor who said there would not be any children!"

After graduating from St. Patrick's Elementary School in Danville, Illinois, Mildred went to the high school juniorate at the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Notre Dame, Indiana. She left after one year and transferred to Danville High School back home. Recently, the oldest daughter in the family, Florence, shared some stories about the Zimmers' home life. From her engaging descriptions, it is clear why Mildred would want to come home. Mr. Zimmer hung six swings in their grape arbor so that each child had a personal swing to enjoy. During summers, the family spent time

together at the drive-in movie theater and at the carnival at the fairgrounds. Family dinners included times when Mr. Zimmer would tease Mildred by calling her Millie. She did not like this teasing and would, as Florence said, “Clam up!”

The three sisters enjoyed playing together in their backyard, climbing trees and picking cherries and apples from the neighbor’s trees, which hung over into the Zimmer’s yard. The neighbor just said, “Fewer cherries for your mom.” Unfortunately, the apples were green and gave the children tummy aches! Mildred was responsible for watching over the youngest child, Danny, once he began school. Each day, they walked the mile and a half or two to and from the school. She also had part-time jobs while attending Danville High School, working as a waitress at S.S. Kresge and packing products at a candy company and a photo shop.

Mildred Zimmer entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross on July 31, 1945. Upon reception of the holy habit on February 2, 1946, she received the name Sister Mary Alberta, a fitting name for one so interested in science. Sister Alberta earned a Bachelor of Science and a master’s degree in physical sciences, both from the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana.

She taught students in third, fifth and sixth grades in elementary schools for six years. She then taught mathematics, chemistry and physics to students in secondary schools for 15 years. A master teacher, Sister Alberta believed that, “Since God is ultimate Truth, teaching the truths of Science will bring [students] closer to God.” Sister Alberta’s years as a teacher were full of the usual challenges. However, her sister Florence recounts one story from Sister Alberta’s classroom days that shows another side of the serious teacher: A high school

student came into class with a squirt gun and aimed it at Sister Alberta. She looked at him and said, “I dare you!” He took her dare. He sprayed her with all the water in the gun. She was a bit surprised that he did it, but she took it with good humor.

Sister Alberta left teaching to pursue training in computer science. She was eager to get in on the ground floor of this emerging technology. She successfully completed intensive IBM training during an internship at Holy Cross Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah. Sister M. Gerald (Hartney), general treasurer, secured Sister Alberta’s assignment to Holy Cross Shared Services, where she directed and managed data processing at the motherhouse from 1971 to 1996. She had a lifelong fascination with computers, remarking that she had begun with computers that filled a room and now there are small ones that are portable and used anywhere. She also said, “I still have so many things to learn”

After finishing at Saint Mary’s, Sister Alberta enjoyed a sabbatical year at Gonzaga University’s Credo Program of Religious Studies in Spokane, Washington. One of the fruits of that year was a commitment to walking as a means of strengthening her spiritual, mental and physical health. Many of us can recall seeing the figure of Sister Alberta out on her daily walk—sometimes around the entire campus, often down to the “gate” and back, and almost always in her later years a walk to Queen of Peace statue and a visit to the sisters in the cemetery. She was an example of persistence despite difficulty when her arthritis challenged, but never overcame her determination to enjoy nature outside.

Sister Alberta continued her ministry when she was missioned to Saint Catherine by the Sea convent in Ventura,

California, where she served in numerous ways. The time in California also gave her the opportunity to visit more often with her family who lived out west. When Sister Alberta returned to Saint Mary's she quickly found multiple ways to be of service. She was available each weekday afternoon to assist sisters who had financial concerns. She faithfully gathered and submitted the archives for her community. And, up until recently, she also was a steady operator of the camera in the Church of Our Lady of Loretto, broadcasting Masses and other prayer services via the closed-circuit television system to sisters unable to attend these services.

Sister Alberta was steady as a rock. She epitomized the saying: "What you see is what you get." She was always just herself: authentic, forthright, sincere and honest, sometimes painfully so. Sister Alberta had a listening heart, a clear mind, and a closed mouth. Anything spoken in confidence to her would never be heard anywhere else. Personally, I found her to be a trusted friend who allowed me to test out my ideas with her—and to set me straight when it was needed.

Sister Lydia Issah wrote, "During my interactions with Sister Alberta, I found her to be a sister with integrity. She was very honest, just, thoughtful and did not hesitate in sharing her insight and religious life experience with the younger generation. She was a genius sister, a good adviser, and a source of inspiration to many, especially the youth. She was very welcoming and dedicated."

Sister Alberta also had deep dedication to our sisters in the memory care communities. For years she faithfully visited the sisters in Saint Joseph and Little Flower communities

every Sunday afternoon. All the companions remarked on her quiet presence during her weekly visits. Along the way Sister Alberta also came to know the staff and was very supportive to them as well.

Sister Alberta was even more faithful to her Lord. Every morning she went to the Chapel of Loreto to make a holy hour. She made the trip from her fourth floor Rosary Convent room regardless of the effort it took as her arthritis became more debilitating. She was a familiar figure to all the staff in the first-floor hall of Saint Mary's Convent. In fact, you could set your clock by her. She served as a silent example of devoted commitment yet was always friendly and outgoing as she made her way to church.

As physical therapy staff member Jheri White reflected, Sister Alberta was resilient. When difficulties developed physically, she assessed the situation, took suggestions, and went to work on the problem. Just as her parents had "gone on with their lives," so too did Sister Alberta. This was a lesson she learned early and well since it was apparent this resiliency defined her overall approach to life.

Sister Alberta, with gratitude we say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have fought the fight; you have finished the course; you have kept the faith." You were a true daughter of Holy Cross. We thank you for your example, and we celebrate your union with God as you joyfully praise him forever! Amen! Alleluia!