

October 26th, 2015 – Sister Patty Campbell speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of St. Francis, in Oldenburg, Indiana.

Abbreviations

MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

SPC: Sister Patty Campbell

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon in Oldenburg, Indiana at the convent of the Sisters of St. Francis. It is October twenty-sixth, 2015 and I am so happy to be here the sister Patty Campbell. Sister thank you. Would you like to introduce yourself?

SPC: Well I for fifty years in the convent was Sister Suzanne, but then the government asked us to go back to our birth names and so I went back to being sister Patty Campbell, and so that's why I go by now. But I'm from a family of fifteen children, my Mom and Pop were told after the seventh one that that she would die if she had another child and so with the child, well they decided she he just said that the doctor said that because he thought seven was enough. So Mom and Pop continued to have eight of us and she didn't die till she was eighty-two. So one of the things I did is write a poem about my mom and my pop so if you want to hear it this is it.

*It's many a time I've used the phrase
that ever brightens each new day,
that changes clouds of to glowing Sun,
and roams through dreams when day is done.
The dearest of all sounds 'ere heard,
My mother.
But dear these words may seem to be,
there's something dear still to me,
her very heart, her joy, her pain,
her sufferings, though not in vain.
Her smiles and tears, her voice, and eyes,
her loving hands, her tired sighs,
I love, I love my mother.
The years have come and still they go,
in quick succession she grows old.
No, young in spirit always she, who
now another birthday sees.
May heaven show her happy days,
this one, this one, my mother.*

And I sent that to her on that birthday, so she was very thrilled with it so—but then Mom was the extrovert, and never spanked us, never was cruel to us, but very determined that we obey and that we do what it was part of what the family was called to be. My pop was an introvert, I at least that's how I see him now. Quiet and, but there for us. I was born on his birthday and their wedding anniversary. And the day before

Christmas, and Mom's birthday is in April which is nine months before—December and so I tell my brother and sisters I was a love child. And of course they'd say as if we weren't you know, but in a family that big you had to have things to, you know, push yourself up a little bit. So this is to Pop, that's what we called him.

*St. Joseph was a silent man, I see him in my pop.
As man who moved with God's intent,
to move ahead, don't stop.
What must be done is worth doing right,
no words needed, follow God's light.
When Pop would speak I listened well,
for the message beyond the words.
When Pop would smile, I smiled too,
and felt the joy within me swell.
My pop.
When Pop when—when sick, Pop cared,
And gave his best.
His heart was tender toward me,
I knew his love and trusted him
as lambs with Shepherds safe.
Born on his birthday, what a gift, my pop and me.
My pop.*

MEL: So Sister, would you like to describe the process of writing poetry? Did you do it all your life?

SPC: Um, the first poem I wrote was when I was a, in an English class at the Oldenburg Academy, and we were asked to write a poem. And so everybody that was our assignment to write a poem, so I wrote one. And this would have been in 1942, and after we turned them in you know, we just thought we did our homework you know. But sister came to me the next day and asked if she could have it printed in the, it was a teenage magazine and for Catholic girls and boys. And I said sure! Wow! Pride went way up, and it's called Reality. How many hours will there be thoughts, that dwell on him today. This was in December of '42—

*How many hours will there be thoughts
that dwell on him today? How many prayers
have been sent before to cheer him on
his way? How many gifts of gold he
brought, to him who lay, lies on on hay?
Can you tell me heavenly father, of his
joy this Christmas Day? People go to
church today, are hearts behind their
actions? They revel in a happy way, but
are there other dis—attractions? They say*

*would we have Christmas unless we all
have fun? But would there be a Christmas without God's little son?*

So that was in 1942, I would have been um, uh, a junior then, I guess. So, that's what got me started writing poetry. And that's one of the gifts I have I guess, I call it a gift—but we came from a artistic family. Mom didn't know that, she'd say all you kids doing all this— And I said Mom, I was a teenager by then I said Mom, you make our clothes, you fix our meals, you're there, I said. You are an artist. It's just that as mother you got to use your art differently than we do. Well I learned that when I taught because I didn't have much time to do stuff like that. But—I said we do have, you do have that gift. Well, if you say so. You know. But she played piano without ever having a lesson, and we sang all the time. And one time with this when we were adults, the girl who had been the neighbor to us and I were visiting and she said did your family realize how much you were entertaining the whole neighborhood when you sang? Because in the summer the windows would be open and somebody'd start a song and the whole house would take it up and we'd sing and we'd—harmonize, and we never were learned taught to harmonize and just did it, it's a normal thing we, we knew to do. And most of us were in the choir at church at times you know so, I still love to sing. We sing crazy songs, see we didn't have in the 30s and we didn't have a lot of toys and stuff like that because of that yeah, crisis you know, that there was no money available for stuff like that. So we would make up our fun. And there would like, there was a song—can I sing on this? There was a song, would be a song we learned like uh,

I want a girl just like the girl that married dear old Dad.

Well we changed the words to:

*I want a beer just like the
beer the pickled our old dad
it was the beer and the only beer the daddy ever had.
good old fashioned there were with lots of foam,
it took six men to carry daddy home,
I want a beer just like the beer that
pickled my old man.*

And we we'd do that with lots of songs, we changed the words and make them funny, you know, and—so, that was another thing we did as a family. I mean I'm not alone in this, you know, and these gifts that we've been given. I loved to draw, paint. My brother Charlie the youngest one, Mom said as soon as he could hold a pencil he would be sketching. And he died two years ago now, but his artwork throughout Kentucky and our homes you know it's just he did stained-glass windows that you wouldn't believe. If you wanted a stained-glass window in front of your front door on the glass you'd give him an idea and he'd do it. He did them in churches, he did you know. So it ran from Birdie the oldest you know, that we all had those gifts. It had to come from our mom and dad. And—so we were a singing family—artist, art family. We'd sit around the table and we couldn't afford to buy the the coloring books that had Shirley Temple in it. So we'd

draw her, and then we'd make clothes for her and then put them on her. They'd have little things you clip it on her you know and, that's how we entertained ourselves and around that big dining room table. And so you know if you think now we weren't all fifteen at one time that's you know obviously, but I'm the middle child I'm number eight. We had seven boys and eight girls. And one of them died as a baby, but I always include her because she is one of us. And now there are only six of us left, three girls and three boys, the rest are up in heaven. So that's my family.

MEL: Could you describe dinner in your house?

SPC: Dinner in the house was at a specific time if you weren't there, you forgot to get home by 6 o'clock at night, it was gone when you got home. And—well Mom cooked everything you know, everything. But anyway, so we were around the table and Pop was at the end and Mom at the other end and the youngest ones at the corners, and then there'd be four of us on each side or three whichever how many were home. And—my sister I was left handed and she was right handed so we'd feed each other with a fork with our elbows. But if you didn't like something, they'd say give it to Patty she'll eat anything. But we had a board underneath there like a little shelf under the table. And so they put their, what they didn't like, under there and the dog would find the tiny would he'd find it. And Pop and Mom knew we were doing that but anyway so, we ate in silence. We couldn't join the adult conversation until we had eaten everything and they and then when if you wanted to join in the talk you could. And—Pop was a fireman and he was there every other day. So well the days he was there at the table you know, we knew the, Mom fixed the plates, sent him down the road Pop got the first one, and then that was on that side and then and if you were on at the end of a place you you were to feed the baby or the child that was on the corner, and Pop would do the one over here and so forth. So and then went on Sunday we loved it when Sunday came because my aunt and—cousin, they were you know both maiden ladies I mean my aunt and her husband had died years ago. They'd come over for dinner at noon, and so that meant two more people at the table and so some of us were getting to eat out in the kitchen back. Which we love because we could do what we wanted to do out there. But I have to tell you this story, Mom made wonderful pies, and my brother John became a priest. So he was home for the meal and he was sitting on the side of the table at the end where Pop was here and he was there. And so Mom passed five pieces down you know and all of a sudden my dad was going—looking at him. Both pieces. He got up and went to the kitchen brought a ruler in and measured them and said to Mom, since when does a son get a bigger piece of pie than the father, and he sat down and laughed. You know, and the first time I made a pie, Mom was cutting it and passing it and she's oh my by the way Harry, this is Patty's first pie. And it was an apple pie. And so I was sitting there, looking at it, when he took his for his bite and he said oh this is good. So things like that went on in the family you know, this them there was humor but there was discipline, and so I always felt so comfortable with—

I had blood poisoning in my leg one time, my toe, and—it, the line was coming up. Now this was back in the 30s when I was in grade school. And—so the doctor come to the house then and they had to soak it in epsom salts, hot hot water epsom salts. And he

noticed that the line was coming up higher and he said if it goes past the knee it will go to the heart and kill her. Have your children pray that the things move that that the you know, they move out away from so—And Mom would do this a lot whenever said any was needed. Sent the rest the kids up to church to pray, the Patty one that her leg would open up to go around her leg rather than up past her knee. And sure enough it did. That next morning I—So the faith in our family has been so deep. It really has. My oldest sister became a nun in this community Sister Teresa Ann. My oldest brother was a priest, and then I became a nun in the you know, in 1943, and so there are three of us religious and Charlie the youngest, he joined the Passionist order. But he didn't it wasn't for him, so he now he was a married man, had five children and did his artwork and everything so.

MEL: staying was—

SPC: Well that was one of the things he did. On, in my room there's a piece of barn-wood with a face in it, which he called wisdom, and he gave it to me for one of my Jubilees. And so before you leave you'll have to look at that, I mean he loved him. They lived in Kentucky and he loved to paint old Kentucky homes you know, that we're sitting back and not being used. Or use barn-wood and paint, he'd paint Native American people on them and you know, just anything that came to his mind. And my sister-in-law, when he died gathered all his sketchbooks, he said he'd be in a meeting and be listening and everything but be sketching while they're at the meeting. He said it was just so much part of who he was. So—I remember carrying him up the steps when we went to father John's ordination. He was about three years old and I got to carry him, keep it, behave in church. So that's my family.

MEL: Sister, do you remember when you decided to become a Sister?

SPC: Okay, they sent us to the Academy because my oldest sister was teaching there, and suggested to Mom and Pop that so Marcy, me, Collette, and Sue, four girls in a row in the family. We're sent to the Academy. Marcy and Colette were not regular students and me and Sue were, what's the word, aspirants they called us. We were aspiring, which means you look at it, is this for me, is this what God wants.

MEL: Would you like some water, Sister?

SPC: No, I'm okay. So—I was home for a vacation and it was on Good Friday, not Good Friday, First Friday. And so I went to mass that morning so the other ones went home I said I'm gonna stay here and pray a little bit. So I went over to the Sacred Heart altar, knelt there, and said—am I supposed to be joining a convent? God I need to know your, your answer. And I just sat there with it all of a sudden I heard, I need you, so—I figured that's his answer and I so after my junior year I entered, and that year they, they knew I was gonna be entering. They had me take not not just third year Latin and third year math, but I also on weekends had a take fourth year Latin and fourth year math. I didn't know why, I thought they were trying to keep me out of mischief, so when I entered the

convent after my junior year, I got called into the office and she said well we have two things we need you to do yet, to get your diploma. A fourth of a credit in government and a fourth of a credit in health, because that was that one that said. So for health you'll make your bed right and you'll go walking with us on Thursdays. And for government you obey the rules. Well, so I did graduate with that class with my class, but of course we weren't allowed to go over for it but I am listed as a graduate because they pushed me to get all the credits I needed. I thought it was to keep me behaving. That could have been part of it.

MEL: Why couldn't you go, sister, for graduation?

SPC: Well we just weren't allowed to do stuff like that like, I didn't get to go to my – my college graduation. It was just—we had much more stricter rules at that time, than we have now. So you know it's just—I guess they didn't want us to get our heads all swollen up or something, you know. But my first time I got to be there was when I graduated from Xavier High School in history, and my mom was so excited she got to come from Dayton to be there for Mike because I hear does she my daughter at a graduation. After all those years. I'm not crying—my eyes water. But—so and Mom and Pop were very proud of us kid girls, we worked our way through pretty much you know, because they didn't have the money you know. They paid I think a hundred a year for each of us or something like that but they were very open to letting us come, and we worked. So a few years ago one of my jubilees, we were heading out to Arkansas, to visit my sister Sue out there, and when the four of us got together one time like we were just this the four of us we decided Mom and Pop sent us to the Academy boarding school for nine months out of the year because they had gone through five teenagers and they needed a break. That was our input on it anyway. So I had a good education and then I was sent out to teach and the first place I went was St. Aloysius in Ridgetown in Cincinnati, and I had fifty-four second graders. Now I'm all of seventeen years old, but when the print when the Sister came around he checked you know she was hired by the good the diocese to check Catholic schools, she said the first she sat in the back of the room and we went to lunch she said relax, you need to relax a little more but you're doing fine. Now she was the one that was our superior at the academy, Sister James Murray. You know, she had added me over there to take take when I think of all they had to be responsible for all of us girls nine months, but they did it. But anyway so, it went real well and one day we had a after school the parents could come and ask how their children were doing and so forth, you know. So I was sister Suzanne then, so the mother and her she had brought her little girl with her, we're leaving and the little girl said Mommy is Sister Susie related to Susie the ape at the zoo? Her mother almost fainted and I said oh no honey I'm not related to Susie the ape at the zoo. Her mother was so embarrassed but I think I said it's a little kid you know, so she was all right I should probably went home told her family about it but, but anyways things like that would happen you know, that but it made it worthwhile to teach I love teaching. I love going out on the playground with them, you know I'm playing with them and that when I got the bigger classes and one time I shouldn't even tell you this one, but we had these long habits on. Well when we scrub floors and stuff we'd pull up the skirt and and hook them in the back and then you you know they wouldn't get dirty. Well I'd do that on the

playground teach them how to play football or bring space-boats I didn't get in trouble, so but that's what the when you see and if I see any of them now they remember things like that. But so—

MEL: You taught for many years.

SPC: Oh, thirty about thirty-three years I taught. Started the second grade, moved up to the higher classes and in fact this one class were having their twentieth anniversary and invited their teachers back from right, I might have me back anyway. And of course we were not in habits anymore we were in lay clothes. So we, we went over to the building where they were going to have the reception, and finally this one Richard Caple said, ma'am we don't know who you are or why you're here. And I said see John Jonas over there? He said yeah. Ask him to come over here. And when he came over I stood up but my hands on my hips and said John Jonas will you sit down? And they said sister Suzanne! And then the stories rolled. So you know, and then he had the he told me that he had three teenagers now and they were driving him crazy and I clapped I said good, good. It's a sister I said what goes around comes around. But yeah, so I really enjoyed teaching. But then I would ask for a year of renewing myself spiritually, because the whole thing was concentrated all the time on teaching teaching teaching even in the summer you got to take classes in so forth. So, and they gave me the yes to just let they just wanted me to tell him how much it would cost them and where you'd be. I haven't thought of that. So my spiritual director was up in, in Fort Wayne, and he said well I'm the chaplain to these sisters here, and they have places you want me to ask them if you could up here? Well when I got up there I lived in a hermitage for nine months, and he was my spiritual director so I'd meet with him you know every month or so. So I never God get you where he wants you I tell you.

MEL: Sister, did you, could you explain this idea of spiritual retreat for a year? Could you explain that?

SPC: Well, I had time to concentrate on silence. I had time to journal. I had time to look at who I was, and what I was becoming what was God asking of me. So they gave me this little hermitage, they had six hermitages is on the property of twenty acres, the nuns did. And I was the first one actually to use one of them. But—and that's where I was and he was up there so you know I didn't have to travel with him, for him so and and I knew when it was over. I mean you know the nine months it's like being reborn spiritually. So I went back to the convent and that's when they, I got it I went back to Ridgetown that was about that class I had that I just told you about. I get a call one night, our community had just agreed to take a co-ed high school and it's—Scecina in Indianapolis. And we had just had girls high schools you know so I got this call from one of the head honchos and she asked if I would be willing to to transfer now that I had my degree in history to teach at Scecina High School. I said well I love what I'm doing here. She said well talk about it to your superior and call me back in a couple days when you think it's the right thing so that's how I got to high schools. But oh I asked her, I said can you tell me why you chose me? I said well because you had seven boys and you know how to control them. Because we had never had high school with boys in any

way I don't know who controlled who but they called me eagle eye, they gave me the name eagle eye and I said to ask one after school how come I wasn't supposed to know it but I heard it coming up the steps here comes eagle eye. I said why'd you name me that? Because we had nicknames for all the nuns at the Academy, they said well Sister you don't miss a thing. And that's true, that's one of my—sometimes I call it a gift sometimes it's not a gift at all I mean I wish I wouldn't see everything you know. But so that was and I enjoyed high school, six years there and then six years in Dayton at the high school there. And then it was after that my years at Dayton that, I asked if I could get involved more and parish work, I don't know if I asked it or if they asked me too, I don't remember that but—

So I, I got a job in Chillicothe, Ohio, and was there eight years I think, working as a co-pastor with the priests. And one of the things he told me when he was, when they had said yes to my being hired was now Sister, I don't want you to come back and keep asking me for permission. Do what has to be done. And one of my major things that I did was visit the home-bound, and the hospital. And—I was visiting the elderly, and this one woman she wasn't Catholic but she—her husband was. And I take him communion, and she'd be sitting there just looking so yearning. And I said and I knew she wasn't Catholic I said would you like to receive Jesus? You know this is Jesus, she shook her head yes, and I started giving her a communion. That's what he meant by that "do what has to be done". I heard confessions and in this hospital of people pouring they didn't know it but they were pouring out their you know because they knew they were dying. They'd called me in the middle of night can you come and baptize this baby? It's we're not sure it's gonna live but the parents want to baptize, so I go you know you did what you had to do.

MEL: I'm interested in how you felt doing this, giving communion, baptizing a baby—

SPC: Very normal. He was seeing me as a person who had the ability to accept what is in front of them, and it made me very much freer than I would have been under a priest who was very rigid with what I did but he wasn't, and so-you know it was it was an experience that I—and that's what he was talking about when he said that you know, "do what has to be done". And we did our CIA programs, we did the Emmaus retreats. We, we had two parishes in the town, and so in those things that we did together you know they we would have two parishes connected on them you know our CIA bringing people into the church you know in the same way with the Emmaus. So it was it was good that was my first experience and then from there I went to Oklahoma to the one of the Glen Mary missions, and I was there about six years I guess. It's a little—I had two parishes fifty miles apart one mission churches. And so I went while I was deciding where where I thought God was leading me all the scripture passages that I wrote were about the mountains, come to the mountains. Find me in the mountains, or however I would be reading it but, and I thought oh nothing but plains out there. But I went, so the first time I had to go over to the other fifty miles apart, what happens? I get out of the city, start up these hills and I'm in the Kiamichi mountains. So I thought, God, you know how to keep surprises don't you? So I felt like I was where he wanted me to be.

MEL: Sister, would you explain about this moment of discernment. So you're doing one job, and then is it a feeling that you're supposed to change jobs, or—is this obedience or that something different?

SPC: No, I was never told to. I felt that if I stayed too long, it wasn't fair to the people, they should bring a new energy, new you know. That was my concept of allowing the parish to move beyond where I had brought it. But before I leave I'd say now remember, don't compare them with me. They are gonna be who they are, you know, and accept them that way. Which was a good thing but I've been told a couple times by the people that it was good. So so then I was doing parish work, so when I left Oklahoma I came back to the Cincinnati I was staying with some of the sisters in Cincinnati. And just trying to determine what was next in my life. And so let's see what I do then. Oklahoma—I think that was that's that was about it, I think.

MEL: Sister, would you mind describing, maybe, some of your experiences living with other sisters? In all of your teaching did you live in convents or just the idea of living with other sisters and creating community?

SPC: Well I found it very helpful, and you have all different kind of personalities. Except one day I got told stop living on your, stop living on your sleeve. No that's not what she said. I'm very sentimental, and so when things like that happened, I'm wearing Oh, "stop wearing your heart on your sleeve". And I thought, gosh I'm sorry that's who I am. But I forgave her I mean, but she's just couldn't stand it, because she was more proper and you know and I wasn't I was this—love life. So that's—I got along I have a picture of me sitting at the dining room table and there were like fifteen of us there at least in this. St. Al's, and there's a half a gallon of ice cream in front of me and I'm pouring chocolate over it and eating it all around, because they kept thinking I, I'd just share it with them. So somebody I didn't know they were taking pictures but they took that picture of me. I said yep, she gave it to me because she knew I loved ice cream but I had done something for them in the house. House clean or whatever and—so that was my pay. It took me two days to eat that half a gallon.

MEL: Sister I know it's time for Mass, so maybe I'll stop it and then we can continue on another day if you wanted to?

SPC: Well, it's up to you. I don't know how much you need.

MEL: Okay, I'll shut it off right now. Sister, thank you very much.