

*SISTER ROSE*

*OF THE PASSION*

*ROFFELSEN*



*BORN TO EARTHLY LIFE:  
AUGUST 26, 1920*

*BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE:  
FEBRUARY 21, 2012*

**Sister Rose Roffelsen**  
**Province of U.S.A. & Canada**  
**1920 – 2012**

Anna Rita Joan Roffelsen was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana on August 26, 1920. She was the daughter of William Lambert Roffelsen and Anna Petronilla Clausen both Dutch immigrants to the United States of America. Her father was a baker. Perhaps this is how Sister Rose got her sweet tooth! She loved pastries and those who knew her still chuckle when a box of chocolates is passed around, remembering her usual comment, “Three for the Trinity!”

The seventh of eight children, Anna was born into a family of strong faith. Though legally blind as a result of her mother’s illness during pregnancy, she was deeply grateful that her parents ignored the advice of doctors to abort her to save her mother’s life. When the time came to deliver, her mother received the Sacrament of the Sick. Both mother and child survived. Later, Sister Rose would often offer petitions for the Right to Life and a mother’s choice for life.

For her primary education, Anna was sent to St. Joseph School for the Blind in Indiana. She received her secondary education at St. Dominic Academy in New Jersey where she developed a great love for all things Dominican. For that reason, she asked for the name of Sister Rose of the Passion in honor of St. Rose of Lima, a Dominican Saint of the Americas. One of her greatest treasures was the fifteen-decade rosary the Dominican Sisters had given her that she prayed daily all her life. Anna’s formal education was completed in Indianapolis where she graduated from Marian College with a major in Social Work and a minor in Latin.

After college, she went to New York City where she worked for the Workmen’s Compensation Board for several years. During this time, she became associated with the Xavier Society for the Blind,

an organization she benefited from and supported all her life, both in the United States and Canada when she was transferred there in 1986. In New York, she met Fr. Jean Bauchet who helped her realize her dream of becoming a religious by introducing her to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny. At the time, the novitiate in the USA was just opening. The director of novices felt that accepting Anna in spite of her challenges of sight would bring blessings on the new novitiate.

A small incident during her first visit to Newport revealed the quality of this candidate's relationship with Jesus. As she fell down the three steps leading into the chapel she exclaimed laughingly, "I'm falling for the Lord!" This simple yet profound relationship with Jesus would only deepen throughout her life. Jesus was a person with whom she engaged in real conversation!

On October 3, 1953, Anna joined the postulants who had entered Mary Immaculate Queen Novitiate in June. It was not easy for her, a 33 year old who had lived a very independent life in the Big Apple (New York)! Her determination (sometimes stubbornness) helped her through as she struggled to bend her will to the Rule and Customs of religious life. That she managed to do so is reflected in the fact that she received the habit on March 19, 1954, was professed on August 22, 1956 and made Final Vows on August 15, 1962, all in Newport, Rhode Island.

After Profession, Sister Rose was assigned to Stella Maris, a residence for retired women in Newport. She helped with the housework while giving piano lessons and continuing to develop her own musical talent. Sister Rose was a natural entertainer. She regaled the elderly residents with her 'corny' jokes, her hearty laughter as genuine as herself and her sense of fun. She loved parties and had a repertoire of entertaining songs to sing whenever the community gathered to celebrate. She was gifted with a magnificent trained voice and she loved to sing even when the song was poking fun at her! We fondly remember her big grin whenever

she sang, "I'm a Rose from Indiana...I move at a snails slow pace..." written to the tune of Yankee Doodle during her postulancy by another postulant for a celebration in honor of the formation director. She also loved to dress up for Halloween, especially during those years when she ministered in nursing homes both in the USA and Canada.

From Stella Maris, Sister Rose was transferred to St. Joseph Convent, Newport where she gave private piano lessons at Cluny School and taught music and history part time. Her love of country shone through those history lessons! She also came weekly to the Novitiate to teach the postulants and novices hymns for Benediction.

After 25 years in Newport, the Lord led her to Hamilton, Ontario. The adjustment was not easy for a blind person with other physical problems, but she was soon navigating Hamilton with the help of DARTS, a transport service for the physically challenged.

In Hamilton, Sister Rose continued to share in household tasks, adding cooking to her repertoire of skills. The compassion learned from her own struggles to deal with the limitations of blindness was evident during the five years she visited the sick and the elderly at Village House in Newport, a ministry she continued with great success at Versa Care in Hamilton. Her love of singing and her talent to entertain were nurtured when she joined a Seniors Choir that sang in Nursing Homes and gave an annual concert. As she had in done in Newport where she had formed a special choir for funerals, she again joined the parish choir in Hamilton.

Aging often exacerbates the shadow side of ones personality. Sister Rose did not escape this humiliating experience. Her temper often flared as her frustration level rose with the diminishments of age. However, more often than not, the outbursts were followed by repentance.

In July 2003, Sister Rose, now 83 years old, was recalled to the States where she resided first at Landmark, an assisted living facility in Fall River, Massachusetts. Sisters from several religious communities resided here and Mass was available to them. Later, she was transferred to Saint Clare's Nursing Home in Newport. Even here, she found a way to praise God with the gift of her voice. During the last seven years of her life, she sang after communion during morning Mass at St Clare's until at Christmas 2011 she realized she could sing no longer.

At both Landmark and St. Clare's, prayer had become essentially her ministry. She served as contact person for our Associates and Affiliates. They loved the phone calls she made to wish them a happy birthday or anniversary and to assure them of the prayer of all the Sisters.

Finally, her loss of hearing and diminishing energy forced her to give up even this. As she revealed to one of the Sisters during a phone call to her, her passionate nature strongly resisted this kenosis and there were days when her frustration got the best of her but gradually, God granted her a measure of peace.

When Rosie (as she was affectionately called by the Sisters) stopped singing, we knew her big heart was already turned towards the place where she would never stop singing again. On February 21, 2012, a new song undoubtedly burst forth from her lips as she finally entered into the Presence of the God she had longed for, often chided, generously served and loved so well! At her funeral liturgy, the congregation sang in her stead those wonderful words summing up her spiritual journey. "Amazing Grace! I once was blind, but now I see!"