

Sister Rose Ellen Mlodzik, OP
Born to earthly life: March 26, 1913
Religious profession: August 4, 1931
Entered eternal life: September 25, 2016



I will make music to the Lord!
Psalm 108

Gertrude Mlodzik was born to Anna Cybart and Andrew Mlodzik of Princeton, Wisconsin, on March 26, 1913, the fifth of the couple's eventual ten children. She was baptized at Saint John the Baptist Parish in nearby Montello.

Gertrude began her schooling in the local public school; but when she was in sixth grade, she transferred to Saint John's to prepare for her solemn communion and confirmation. That school was staffed by Racine Dominicans, and during the noon hour, when other children went home for lunch, Gertrude helped Sister Damian Van den Wildenberg clean the church. She liked the sisters and what she saw of the life they lived, and soon decided that she wanted to be one of them.

After graduating from eighth grade, fourteen-year-old Gertrude headed for Racine, becoming a candidate on September 3, 1927. The following year, still a candidate, this small-town teenager was sent to teach sixty-eight third-graders at Nativity Elementary School in Detroit. Back at the motherhouse the next summer, on August 4, 1929, she received the Dominican habit and the name Sister M. Rose Ellen of the Holy Cross. She was sixteen.

She was still a novice when, starting in February of 1931, she walked the



1934



The Mlodzik family in 1938
(The eldest son is absent.)

few blocks to Saint Mary's each weekday to teach. A few weeks of intensive preparation the following summer preceded her first profession of vows on August 4.

When Gertrude was five, the family had welcomed a new baby who was named Genevieve. She eventually followed her big sister to Racine, entering the postulate just a few weeks after Sister Rose Ellen's profession, and beginning her novitiate that August as Sister Marie Gertrude of the Love of Jesus.

That autumn found Sister Rose Ellen assigned to Saint Luke's in Plain, Wisconsin, where for the next four years she enjoyed a setting not unlike her childhood home. But in 1935 she was back in Racine, this time at Saint Rose School. After just a year there, she returned to Nativity for a year. During the summer of 1937, on August 5, she celebrated her final profession, and then moved across Michigan to Holy Trinity in Fowler.



Already painting clowns in the 1960s



The reading specialist at work

In the fall of 1938, she was transferred to Saint Mary's in Janesville, Wisconsin, where she ministered for four years. Assignments followed at Saint Joseph's in Racine (1942 to 1944); Saints Peter and Paul in Green Bay (1944 to 1948); Saint Norbert's in Roxbury (1948 to 1949); and Assumption Grotto in Detroit (1949 to 1952).

Meanwhile, she had been pursuing her college studies during the summers, and in 1952 was awarded her baccalaureate degree in English from the community's own Dominican College. In succeeding summers she would take classes in library science, earning a second baccalaureate degree in that field from the College of Saint Catherine in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in 1960.

From 1952 until 1955, Rose Ellen taught at Holy Trinity in Fowler, Michigan, and from 1955 until 1964 at Saint Clement's High School in Center Line. (During part of that period, Sister Marie Gertrude was stationed only a few miles away at Nativity in Detroit.) Then, from 1964 until 1973, she served at Saint Catherine's High School, with her sister just across the street at the motherhouse as councilor for the first six of those years.

A year of service as librarian at Dominican College, newly renamed the College of Racine, followed, and then another year at Saint Catherine's. In 1975 she co-founded the Saint John Reading Center in Racine



1966

and taught remedial and speed reading there. She then served as librarian at Saint Joseph's School in Racine until her retirement on January 1, 1983. But already the year before, she had begun what would be a seven-year commitment to Siena Center's Adult Learning Program. She had always enjoyed students of all ages, but remained especially fond of primary-grade children.

From 1989 until 1992, she served as assistant librarian at Siena Center. Sister Marie Gertrude was by that time retired; so the two were able to spend good time with each other until Marie Gertrude's death on March 29, 1992.



Making music with Sisters Marie Louise Chateau, Avita DeGroot, and Bernice Flaherty, about 1995



Tutoring at Siena Center

cereal, carrots, marshmallows, chunks of fruit, and pine cones stuffed with peanut butter and birdseed for her feathered friends.

While still at Saint Joseph's, in 1978, Rose Ellen had taken an interest in the sisters' graves in Racine's Calvary Cemetery. Noticing that the names and dates on many of the early markers had

As she herself moved into retirement, Rose Ellen found many things to fill her days, including a long-standing hobby of painting, working complex jigsaw puzzles, and playing cheerful tunes on a portable keyboard at the north end of the corridor leading from the sisters' residence to the dining room. She was a lover of nature — particularly of birds. In winter she would create grapevine-and-evergreen garlands decorated with ribbons of cranberries, popcorn, cookies,



One of Rose Ellen's more complex jigsaw puzzles

been all but obliterated with time, she compiled a chart of all of the graves for the community archives and for display in the history room.



One hundred years old — 2013

After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in August of 2005, Rose Ellen took up correspondence with Sister Aquinas of the Sisters of the Holy Family there, sending more than thirty “care packages” to her and her displaced community. Over the next years, the two developed a deep friendship which endured until Sister Aquinas’ death after several years.

In April of 2013, shortly after her hundredth birthday, Rose Ellen moved to Lakeshore Manor. There, though her health was deteriorating, her presence

continued to delight those around her. She made a point of learning the names of staff and volunteers, and the names of their family members, often asking how they were. She was even appointed official “greeter” for new residents on her floor. “She would wheel her chair over to anyone in the dining room who needed help,” said Stacey, an aide at Lakeshore. “She never left the dining room till that person finished eating. She was more than a resident; she was family.”

An avid Packer fan, she enjoyed watching the games and participated in Siena Center’s Packer pool right up to the end of her life. One could almost hear her familiar laugh when, moments after telling Sister Bee Schellinger to go home that Sunday



morning, she quietly embraced eternal rest and then that afternoon won both halves of the pool! It was September 25, 2016. At the age of one hundred three, she had been professed for eighty-five years, the oldest member of the community at the time.

Sister Rose Ellen was survived by her brother Don and his wife Corrine of Sun City, Arizona, as well as nieces and nephews and a grandnephew and grandniece. Her parents had preceded her into eternity, as well as brothers Edward, Ray, Phil, and Victor, and sisters Eleanore Kanke, Martha Sterk, Marcella Nielson, and Sister Marie Gertrude.

Her funeral liturgy was celebrated at Siena Center on Wednesday, September 28, with Father Byron Haaland presiding. Sister Joyce Ballweg preached the homily. "Sister Rose Ellen," she said, "cheerfully gave it all she had! As a musician, teacher, librarian, and as friend, she enriched so many lives.... Perhaps that is why there was a beautiful rainbow in the western sky this morning."

Her body was interred in the community plot in Holy Cross Cemetery in Caledonia.



One of Rose Ellen's oil paintings