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CAPITULATION

I attended my second “Espiritu Seminar” (the name of the yearly summer camp) at Twin Lakes, Idaho, in the late summer of 1976.

Unlike the previous summer, when I was struggling with the shock of shaved heads and other serious punishments for breaking the rules, this time I found myself more at peace with what was going on. I derived satisfaction from spending time on my knees and participating in lengthy meditations, morning, noon, and night.

I was learning things from our Scripture readings. I made resolutions and asked God for the grace to be a more charitable and patient person. The readings put the gentle Christ before my mind’s eye, and the images were gradually making their way into my consciousness.

We prayed and meditated on the rosary daily. I learned that the proper way to say the rosary was to meditate on phases of Christ’s life while repeating the Hail Mary’s and Our Fathers. We were encouraged to keep our eyes closed during prayer to help avoid distractions. With practice I got better at visualizing a clear mental movie of Jesus and his preaching. These vivid images of his patience in suffering and teaching the apostles inspired me and filled me with gratitude for my faith.

But while my devotion to my Catholic faith was deepening, I was also being indoctrinated with Schuckardt’s ideology, which was always woven into the fabric of lectures and classes. At the time, I unquestionably accepted his leadership. As strongly as I believed in the Catholic Faith, I believed, just as strongly, in everything promoted by Schuckardt and his community.

The message Our Lady gave to the three little children at Fatima was discussed almost every day. It all sounded very familiar to me because Pedro and Louisa had talked about it at our cell meetings. Now, however, I was beginning to internalize the Fatima message.

Mary had asked the children, "Are you willing to offer yourselves to God for the salvation of souls?" When they replied, "Yes," she had added, "Then you shall have much to suffer. But, remember, my Immaculate Heart shall be your refuge, and this path will lead you to God."²² Those words resonated with what Nora and I had constantly talked about earlier that summer in private. We were convinced that God and the Blessed Mother were directly asking *us* to suffer for souls, for the Church and for the bishop's well being.

In the middle of almost every night, I held my own "holy hour" on my knees on the hard wood floor; and it was catching up with me during the day. I was also fasting and skipping meals as an offering for the salvation of souls.

I remember being very tired during the daily lectures, trying to hold my notebook and pen in such a way that, if I fell asleep, they would not fall to the floor. I didn't like sleeping in class, especially since I was really interested in the lectures and the Fatima message. I wanted to learn as much as possible at that second Espiritu Seminar.

It was at this time that I first heard the expression, "Holy Mother, the Church." The bishop used it frequently in his talks. I remember one occasion when he stressed that the Fatima Crusade seriously depended upon the loyalty of the youth in the community. "Will you be one of the faithful standing at the foot of the cross, while countless other young people spit in the face of their Holy Mother, risking eternal hellfire?" he asked, pounding on the podium.

At first I was confused by the term "Holy Mother" in reference to the Church and how "she" loved me. I was familiar with the term "Blessed Mother," which referred to Mary, but this was different. I had grown up playing word games with my family, and thinking about words and their meanings was something I liked to do. As I was pondering the meaning of Holy Mother, the Church, I had an *a-ha!* moment. It was simple. In addition to my own mother, I had another mother taking care of me. I had been chosen to be one of the Church's last faithful children, along with the bishop, priests and nuns, and the families of the Fatima Crusade. My mother, the Church, would give me all I needed to persevere as a loyal daughter.

My love for “Holy Mother the Church” would eventually point my life in a different direction but, by the end of summer camp, I was believing everything I heard and was having warm, fuzzy feelings about being part of the Fatima Crusade.

With my rebellious feelings now under control, I began my sophomore year by joining the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a religious club whose standards were even higher than the school's: scrupulously modest clothing, more prayers, and more good works. As “Handmaids of Our Lady,” we were expected to be shining examples for the other girls: Our Lady's helping hands on earth. For church, we wore sashes across our uniforms and blue, lace veils that identified us as handmaids.

All during that year, Nora and I would talk with each other secretly about our love of God and about our sacrifices, such as smiling at people we didn't like, eating food we didn't like, etc.

“I've got ashes in my sandwich!” Nora announced one day during Lent. She opened her sandwich to show me; it was covered with a layer of gray ash.

I was never that brave. I loved to eat, and the food at the school wasn't that good to begin with.

However, I did take Nora up on the challenge of wearing a rough rope around my waist under my clothes for Lent. I found the rope coiled up in my lunch sack one day, along with her handwritten, unsigned note: “I will stand at the foot of the Cross with Thee, O Jesus!” Writing notes was forbidden but an unsigned note was okay, I supposed. Nora and I had an unspoken competition going as to who could come up with the best quotations and the most creative places to leave them.

Deep down, I initially had misgivings about taking on these bigger sacrifices, and sometimes I felt overwhelmed by thinking about it all so intensely. It just didn't feel like me. I was the girl who had put on three pairs of pajama bottoms before getting a spanking as a child. I knew in my heart that I barely offered up the little things in my life. In addition, I would have died of embarrassment if anyone had found out I was doing all these penances.

Nora had a strong personality, and her influence over me was growing. By the year's end, we walked together in our sweltering school uniforms and flat shoes, with our hands folded straight up on

a twenty-six mile, non-stop penance walk with other Fatima Crusaders. We climbed a mountain in Montana in the intense heat of summer, not only for penance but also for the privilege of seeing the bishop ride his white horse to the top where he said mass for us. Sometimes, I wanted to get away from Nora, but I didn't want to hurt her feelings. I knew she was right about the bishop's specialness. Most of all, I was getting tired of keeping secrets.

Nevertheless, she inspired me with her acts of kindness to others and her willingness to suffer privately for poor sinners. I saw the happiness that sacrifice and service brought to her life. When she entered the convent, I saw the increasing joy that personal service to others gave her.

The same thing was beginning to happen to me. Though my faith may have been distorted in many ways, I, too, was beginning to experience the joy and satisfaction that self-sacrifice for the sake of others brings to one's soul.

For Thanksgiving, most of the boarding girls went home to their families, and Villa Maria closed for the holiday. Since my brother Patrick was living in the community, I decided to stay in Idaho with him. The nuns found a place with no young girls where Patrick could spend the holiday with me. The Burke sisters, who were about fifty and single, took me in. Perfect.

They cooked a fantastic meal, and Patrick and I welcomed every delicious bite. But I felt homesick that day. Back home, Thanksgiving was a big family event. My parents cooked the meal together and, after we had stuffed ourselves, we'd all run on the beach or head over to the church parking lot for a game of basketball. In this way, we worked off some of the dinner and made room for pumpkin pie.

After this holiday, Patrick would return to his more independent life as a high school graduate in the community. I would be returning to the Villa. Because of my new understanding of my faith, I was, of course, happy to be at the boarding home, but I felt sad that Patrick would not be in my life every day.

Love of my family and missing them, however, was not stronger than my love for the community and my faith. I delayed my Christmas flight home because of my preference to be with the bishop on Christmas. My parents were disappointed that I chose to wait until the day after Christmas to fly home to Imperial Beach.

"Don't you want to be with your father and me for Christmas?" my mother asked with some sadness. How could I explain it all over the phone?

"I want to be *here* for Christmas because the bishop is going to say Midnight mass and, afterwards, my friends are going to be in the live nativity scene. This will be followed by a reception for the bishop, and the nuns will be singing Handel's *Messiah*. It's going to be an amazing night."

"Okay," she said, her voice trailing off.

I wondered if she was crying, so I explained further. "I've never seen a real enactment of the first Christmas."

My mother tried to sound happy for me. "Oh, that does sound special. But if you delay your arrival, your visit will be shorter."

I realized I had to tell her the other reason I wanted to stay in Idaho for Christmas. I hadn't really explained to my parents my totally inexplicable conversion at the summer Espiritu Seminar, let alone the fact that I was preparing for an even greater religious commitment. After the Christmas mass, I would be making my total consecration to Mary, my "holy slavery," as St. Louis Marie describes it in *True Devotion to Mary*.

"You remember those books Pedro and Louisa always talked about cell meetings?"

"Yes" they said in unison, each from their own phone.

"Well, Patrick and I and my friend Nora, are going to give ourselves to Mary after the mass, just like in the books. If we don't do it on Christmas, we'll have to wait for the next time the bishop says mass."

It wasn't really true that Bishop Schuckardt was the only person who could witness this special commitment, but I didn't want to miss the opportunity to have such a holy man as the bishop witness my special event.

"Oh, okay," my mother said, but my dad was silent.

I planned to explain more about it when I got home.

I was so excited to see my parents at the airport as I came out of the ramp area. When they hugged me, tears ran down their faces. I felt a pang of conscience for making them wait to see me until after Christmas. But the bishop had become the most important person in my life.

Driving home from the airport, they asked me tons of questions. "So, who are your new friends?"

I described Nora and Marilee and a few other girls. They seemed pleased when I asked if I could invite some of the California boarder girls over to our house the following summer. I could tell they were happy that I was happy. When I told them about taking holy slavery and showed them the bishop's signature on the special document I had signed, they smiled.

It was strange entering my bedroom that first visit back. Things were just as I had left them the previous February. But *I* was different. My bedroom had been a special refuge, full of things that represented my developing self. And full of secrets, too, like the anguished poems I'd hidden under the carpet. (I had forgotten about these until I found them among my mother's things after her death.) Things were different, now.

I did not want to go anywhere during that brief visit home, because I felt I no longer had anything in common with my former San Diego friends. Besides, I would have to wear my new style of clothing if I went out. *What if I saw Cindy somewhere?* I thought. My desire to fit in with my old friends was gone, but my vanity and my desire to be respected remained with me.

"Will you at least come to the beach with me?" my dad asked. I agreed and borrowed one of my mother's mu-mu dresses.

"Is that what the nuns would want you to wear?" she asked.

"Up in Idaho, swimming is not allowed for girls...and neither is running or playing softball."

My dad snickered, "Oh, that's silly. But I suppose you have to follow the rules." It seemed strange to me that my parents, who had sent me there, were now being critical of some of the things I had learned at school. I found it difficult to explain to them the strong loyalty I felt toward my new beliefs.

I ran up and down the beach with my dad and our dog Teddy, reveling in this exuberant freedom which I had missed so much. The wind off the ocean blew against me, causing my curves to be revealed, but I kept going—running felt so good.

I worried later that I had been immodest on the beach. It was somewhat of a relief to know that in a week I would be flying back to Idaho, where there was no temptation to run or wear clothes that revealed my body.

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ARMING AGAINST THE ENEMY

Quite a few families were defecting from our church. As we later learned, some were getting local media attention, but the boarder girls were unaware of it because we weren't allowed to see newspapers or television or listen to the radio. We were told only what the superiors wanted us to know. When the Case family left, it was announced that they had "fallen away from Our Lady's Community." We were allowed no further contact with them.

Our boarding house had a small, fenced back yard and we were warned, "When you're in the back yard, watch out, because someone from the Case family might come around and try to talk to you over the fence." The Cases were talked about all the time: "You must not go near them. If they approach you, you must defend your faith."

One day when I was taking out the trash I saw Mrs. Case in the alley. She looked friendly and sounded normal when she said, "Hi." But my pounding heart reminded me that she had the power to destroy my faith. I loyally went back into the Villa and reported it. A group of us girls rushed to the upstairs dorm window to watch the poor lost soul. Miss Shroyer caught us spying on the woman and told us to pray for her instead.

We never took the busy streets to St. Joseph's Chapel but always stuck to the side streets. We walked two by two and had strict instructions to mortify our eyes. As we were returning from chapel in our usual formation one day, a woman rushed up to us and tried to grab Sr. Mary Francesca out of the line. I turned toward the source of the commotion and, before returning my eyes on to the ground in front of me, I caught a glimpse of Sr. Francesca shooing the woman away. It turned out to be her mother and, from then on, we were

warned to watch out for Sister's family, the Klotzes. They had once been members of the community but were now enemies and were causing trouble.

Later, Sister Mary Borgia wanted to make sure I hadn't been traumatized by the incident. "Are you all right after what happened on the street today?" she asked.

I said I was fine, but it *was* weird seeing a person's own mother make such a scene in public. I wanted to know what might have prompted her mother to do that but to ask would have been giving in to "sinful curiosity."

As we later learned from Kootenai County Court records, a religious sister in the TLRC was convicted of a battery charge for trying to protect Sister Francesca from her mother, a former church member, during the confrontation.²³

The same court placed the father of another one of our sisters on probation that year, for knocking one of the nuns to the ground while kidnapping his daughter from the convent. Police went to the family's home and released the kidnapped sister, but she never filed charges against her father.²⁴

That autumn, one of the "fraters" (those considering ordination in our congregation) was sentenced to five days in the Kootenai County Jail and two years of probation for excessively spanking a ten-year-old student.²⁵ I was only to learn of this later, as it was kept from us at the time.

One day while we were walking home down Foster Avenue, a truck drove slowly along with us. In my peripheral vision I could see huge poster boards attached to the sides of the truck with bold lettering on them. I concluded that it must be really important; otherwise why would the driver go to such lengths to get us to read it?

Our supervisor walked quickly up and down the line whispering not to look because an "enemy" was driving the truck. I struggled not to give in to my curiosity. My gut said, "Look at the sign! There are things you need to know." But, if I looked, the supervisor would call out my name and I'd be punished. We had been told that enemies would try to destroy our community. I assumed this was one of those attacks from the devil we had been cautioned about. Years later, I learned that the sign said: "Your bishop is on drugs" and something about sex abuse.²⁶ I wonder what I would have thought if I had looked at the sign that day.

As sophomores we were intensely drilled in how to defend our faith as we prepared for the sacrament of confirmation. Soon we would be Christ's soldiers and we needed to be able and ready to stand up for truth. While we were studying, the devil would be gathering all his forces preparing every possible attack, especially against young people.

When I happily announced that I had already been confirmed the year before, I was informed by Sister Fabiola that the validity of the ceremony would need to be investigated. I'd heard in class that most sacraments administered in the "modern church," after Vatican II, were invalid (not correctly performed). It had not dawned on me that this could apply to me. One of the bishop's right hand men, Fr. Alphonsus, looked into the details of my 1975 confirmation at St. Charles Church in San Diego. Sure enough, the bishop declared that I would have to receive the sacrament again.

I had been attending all of the classes anyway, since there were no other options. And I didn't mind because I wanted to prepare myself for my role in restoring the true Catholic Church to the world. I was proud to have filled two notebooks with details on all of the heresies, old and modern.

The older students talked about "test day" with Father Alphonsus or Sister Fabiola, and they'd warn, "You'd better know your stuff!" Sister Fabiola and Father Alphonsus were considered the intellectual giants of the community when it came to the faith, and the material could be difficult to keep straight. I felt if I could explain well why the so-called Catholic churches were really synagogues of Satan and that the new mass was not a mass at all, I'd be okay. Many of the heresies we learned about ended in "ism," and it was hard to keep their meanings straight: Arianism, Nestorianism, and Pantheism, Manicheanism, Protestantism, and Americanism. Of course, getting those wrong would not be as bad as missing questions about the mass and the bad popes.

As the time for confirmation drew closer, we worried whenever the doorbell rang, fearing that someone from the bishop's residence had come to quiz us.

Father Alphonsus was a tall, lean, young man with large, brown eyes and an authoritative air. He commanded respect. When he eventually came to our house, rather than asking me the questions we had studied, he asked me why I wanted to be confirmed. *When?*

Suddenly he didn't seem so scary, and he accepted my simple answer that I wanted to be a strong soldier for Christ.

I was so happy and relieved that he didn't ask me anything about the Talmudic Jews. I had scribbled numerous pages on this topic and thought I knew the basic ideas. But, when I told my dad what I had learned, which included the "fact" that the Holocaust was a myth, he told me I must have misunderstood the nuns. As a result, my confidence on this topic was low. Nevertheless, I wanted to sound convincing. I rehearsed it all in my mind: the Talmudic Jews were planning to take over the world, but, first, they would have to take down the Catholic Church. They were in the process of infiltrating the Church by becoming clergy, in league with the same people who were responsible for what happened at Vatican II.²⁷

During this time, I was completely unaware that Rabbi Eugene Gottesman of Spokane's Temple Beth Shalom had been contacted by Spokane's Catholic newspaper for a rebuttal to Bishop Schuckardt's assertions. The rabbi called them a vicious distortion of the facts.

"This is the voice of anti-Semitism speaking," Rabbi Gottesman said to the *Inland Register*. "There is no such thing as 'Talmudic' Jews. Furthermore, Jewish Zionism is entirely different from what Schuckardt describes."²⁸ The rabbi explained that Theodore Herzl had founded the World Zionist Movement in 1894 with the goal of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine; Zionism today is concerned only with the state of Israel, not with any kind of world domination. "Whoever makes these kinds of statements against the Jewish people is dressing himself in disgrace," Rabbi Gottesman said.²⁹

21 RELOCATION

In the spring of 1977, the girls were moved from the Villa Maria on Indiana and Second to a new—at least for us—boarding house on Wallace. This building also housed the girls' high school.

We cheerfully carried our desks and chairs down the street and, as always, tried to prolong the activity as much as possible to get out of classes. We stretched the time by making extra trips to transfer our few belongings.

We did not yet know that a more intriguing move was on the horizon for the entire community.

There had been talk that fall about a special piece of property in Spokane that the bishop was trying to purchase. The exact location of the property was, of course, kept secret so that the “enemy” would not be able to thwart God’s plans. The housemothers and nuns were always adding special intentions to our prayers such as “for the health and well-being of Our Lady’s bishop.” So it was not surprising when one night Miss Shroyer added a new intention: “If it be God’s will, we pray for the successful purchase of new church property.” I spent my junior year praying and sacrificing intensely for this blessing.

The girls whispered and speculated about it in the dorms but, later, through my brother Patrick, I learned that the bishop was planning to move the headquarters of our parish to a former Jesuit complex on Mount St. Michael’s, a high bluff overlooking northeastern Spokane. The Jesuits had closed their school there in 1968 due to a drastic drop in vocations after Vatican II. In the following years, it had served as a retreat center and a home for retired priests.³⁰ Schuckardt had somehow learned that developers

were planning to buy the Mount and convert it to industrial usage, thus ending its century-long heritage as a Catholic religious center.

I was privy to the decision to purchase the property because Patrick, then eighteen, had just become a licensed real estate agent and was part of the negotiations. Patrick had finished his education at the boys' high school a year early. He told the bishop what he had learned about the property and offered to throw in his commission to the support of the Church if the transaction went through.

The bishop went for the deal, despite the need for some dishonesty in the process. Patrick and another man in the community were asked to form an investment company as a facade. If the Jesuits had known which group was really buying the property, they very likely would have backed out. As the "remnant Church," which we believed we were, in desperate need of larger facilities, the ruse seemed necessary and justified. It was okay, then, to lead the Jesuits to believe that "Pillar Investment Company" would be considering lease bids from a number of groups.

After months of solicitations for the down payment, and our long prayers of petition after all masses, the purchase went through. I was so proud of my brother's work and generosity.

Thirty years later, Patrick told me how he was discarded from the bishop's circle after politely pointing out that the bishop was about to miss a zoning deadline. Missing it would mean they would lose the opportunity to divide the land according to the bishop's plan. Patrick was never invited back to the bishop's residence except to sign off on the deal. Half a year after the incident, the bishop announced that a "cross" had been given to the community; the cross was the missed zoning deadline. Although the bishop was clearly responsible for missing it, he publicly stated that "this cross" came from the hand of God. Patrick kept quiet about it. Like the rest of us, I think he believed we needed to protect the only remaining, true Catholic bishop. The missed deadline caused a lot of confusion, grief, and disappointment among the laity, including my parents, who had already put money down for the parcel of land they had been promised.

On the last day of 1977, Pillar Investment Company bought the former Jesuit seminary and 735 acres from the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus for \$1.5 million. The names listed on the mortgage were Thomas Drahman as property administrator, his wife

Mary Drahman, and my brother's first and last name, as the real estate agent who had closed the deal.³¹

In January, Bishop Schuckardt shifted the community's center of operations to Mount St. Michael's. Over the next few years, the boys were boarded there, while the girls continued to live in Idaho. This was also when the group was officially incorporated as the Tridentine Latin Rite Catholic Church, and people began calling it TLRC for short.

That Easter, after Midnight mass at the City of Mary, Patrick took me to Spokane for a quick tour of Mount St. Michael's. I had to promise to keep the previewing secret, of course. It was a gorgeous, clear morning with a beautiful sunrise. I was fascinated by the huge, four-story complex and loved inspecting all of its nooks and crannies. Tree-lined walks branched off from the building, leading to the surrounding woods.

The property included a 700-acre farm which, when maintained by the Jesuit brothers, had provided wheat, corn, fruit and vegetables, beef, pork, poultry, rabbits and dairy products. The Jesuits had also made shoes, mended clothing and kept bees for honey.³²

Despite my long skirt, I successfully climbed the steep rungs of the ladder to the roof. I looked over the city thinking, "I'm so blessed to be one of the first from our community to see this place!" I felt sorry for all the people in the city of Spokane below us who had missed the privilege of attending, as Patrick and I had, the only true Easter Midnight mass in the whole world, offered by the only true bishop. Beyond feeling sorry, I also felt responsible to pray that their minds and hearts would be opened to the truth.

My self-absorption had shifted its focus: being obedient to God. I had thoroughly bought into the Tridentine culture, promulgated through statements like this one from a sect publication:

"Catholic culture! Being a Catholic is more than attending Holy Mass once a week; it is a whole way of life...Our faith must permeate every facet of our daily existence, if it is to be the Mother, Teacher, and Guide of our earthly pilgrimage. You (referring to Schuckardt) are trying to teach us this, dear Father; we need the Church and Her guidance, Her blessing and protection at every step of the way."³³

Where I had previously taken pride in showing off my California tan and long, blonde hair, I was now completely in step with the strict modesty code for women. I blushed with shame when one of

the nuns focused her gaze on my chest and remarked, "I don't know what it is, but your clothing is very revealing."

I know what it is—boobs! I thought, but I could only muster a faint "Sorry."

I was as convinced as she was that my breasts shouldn't show at all. I borrowed a vest from one of the girls and added a layer of clothing. Then I examined myself in front of one of the rare mirrors to see if any offending bulges were showing.

"Nope, all is boxy and perfect," I told myself, and I felt I could face the nun again. I thought it would be easier to wear my uniform all the time. I practically lived in it anyway, since we were required to wear it to all church functions, and only changed into baggy clothes on the rare occasions when there were none to attend.

In public, I was always aware of people's stares. Being a spectacle for Christ in that way, though, was a small cross compared to what Christ had done for me. I had completely changed my attitude about outward appearance, but sometimes the pain of sticking out in crowds was difficult.

That August, when the nuns brought the handmaids to a professional baseball game, an announcement came over the loudspeaker that Pope Paul VI had died. All around the stadium, people were bowing their heads in respect. I felt a bit self-conscious as we just kept eating our popcorn and watching the game. I couldn't imagine what people must have thought about our lack of piety. We were so obviously Catholic—with rosaries around our necks—but we were showing a complete lack of regard for the Pope.

I leaned over to Sister and asked, "Should we pray for his soul?"

"Don't do anything right now," she said. "We can't look like we're honoring him. He was a false pope."

Later, in the van going home, we did pray for his soul. The next time I went to confession, I accused myself of being too full of pride because I cared about what the people at the stadium had thought about me.

22

A MOMENTOUS JOURNEY

In religion class I studied *The Public Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by Archbishop Goodier, an English Jesuit who had served the Church in Bombay, India.³⁴ Since he had died in 1939, well before Vatican II, his book was approved for us. Reading it, I felt as if I were right there in the scene, as part of the crowd walking along with Jesus, witnessing his mercy and miracles. I found it satisfying to think of Jesus in a more personal way and began to see him as my friend and model.

The idea was stirring in me to give my life to God by becoming a nun in Schuckardt's Congregation of Mary Immaculate Queen. Whether or not I was truly being called to the life of a nun remains doubtful because our lessons and homilies were always couched in the end-of-the-world scenario of calamities and suffering. I had already witnessed many persecutions against our group, even by parents who, having left the Fatima Crusade and turned against it, had attacked their daughters in public and had attempted to drag them away from the convent.

We were told—and I believed it—that young people could save their own souls and many other souls, by accepting the vocation of religious life in the community. I secretly hoped to have the chance to consult the bishop about God's will in my life. Whenever I'd knelt to greet him after ceremonies, I had always blushed because I felt he could read my soul.

There was no need for me to hurry up and decide at that point, however. For seniors, the priests and nuns always arranged extra classes and retreats dealing with the subject of vocations. That time would come soon enough.

Meanwhile, I was just happy enjoying my time with the nuns rather than imagining myself as one of them. With Nora's entrance into the convent that year, I didn't have to talk with anyone about my "vocation," and that was fine with me.

My growing faith had not inhibited my inclination to play jokes and pranks. One day, I had one of the nuns believing a bizarre story—that I kept adding on to as her gullibility became increasingly apparent—involving a group of us girls who had been commissioned by Fr. Denis to plant a rose garden in another town, as an act of charity for some people there.

"Really?" she gasped, "How am I supposed to make this happen?"

I explained that Fr. Denis said we would have to ride a city bus, immediately, and without supervision. The city bus part blew my cover.

"You girls are so bad!" Sister said, through her laughter and tears.

Fun to trick and surprise, the nuns occasionally surprised us. One of the tiniest sisters set out to correct a group of girls she was preparing for a concert. As she gave them feedback afterwards, she said, "It was obvious the audience loved your performance. But—and I have a very big but—"

The entire group broke out laughing. A few seconds later, she realized what she had said and howled along with the group.

In the beginning of my senior year, Bishop Schuckardt and Fr. Denis Chicoine planned a three-week pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Greece, Italy, Germany, and France. I was approved to go along, which made me feel very special since these trips were ordinarily reserved for those twenty-one and older. I hoped it was a sign that I would be able to speak privately with the bishop about my vocation.

My parents wanted to finance the pilgrimage as an early graduation gift. It was a big deal for them. A few days before we left, a nun told me I didn't have enough money for the journey and that my parents needed to send more. There had been a mix-up, she said, but no explanation was ever offered. I was told to call my parents and tell them I was \$600 short. I could hear the strain in my dad's voice when I broke the news.

"Are you kidding?" he asked, incredulously. "We don't have that kind of money! I'll talk to your mother about this."

They had already put out \$2000. It didn't seem right, and it always bothered me that my parents had to come up with more money for my trip. My dad told me later that he was furious about that call but felt he had to find the money if the bishop said so.

As it turned out, Goodier's book on the public life of Christ was the perfect primer for this pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The pilgrimage was also my first opportunity to see Bishop Schuckardt on a daily basis. He often invited the young men to sit by him on the bus. I assumed he did this to inspire them to become priests.

His face was often red and swollen, and he often seemed to be "out of it" when we were at dinner or on our way to a pilgrimage site. He'd stare out into space or just look down. When his assistants offered him things, he'd sometimes lose his temper, which shocked me. I thought it was because he didn't feel well. I felt sorry for him.

One night he invited me, and a few other pilgrims, to join him for dinner. I was delighted by this great privilege. During our conversation he asked me, "Sherri, which of the holy places we have visited so far inspired you the most?"

"Your Excellency," I replied, "without a doubt, the top of Mount Calvary, where Christ died."

He winked at me and smiled, "We must remain faithful at the foot of the Cross."

Was his wink a sign that he knew? I wondered.

One day he asked me, "Are you asking Our Lady what she wants you to do with your life after graduation?" He repeated this question at various places we visited, adding, "I hope you are asking Our Lady to know your holy vocation."

Embarrassed, I always nodded that I was. I was uncomfortable with these comments in the presence of his aides and some of the nuns. I valued what little privacy I still had. The attention he gave me, however, left me tingling with joy and hope that it was a sign of more to come, in the form of a personal conversation with him. I felt too unworthy to request a meeting with someone so important, and sick on top of that, but I trusted God.

In addition to being psyched about traveling with the only true Catholic bishop left on the planet, the Nancy Drew in me was fascinated that our group had to hide its identity to protect our bishop. We were considered renegades by a lot of clergy in those years. It was kind of fun to engage in covert activities, such as

concealing our prayers for restoration of the one true faith in the countries we visited.

At each stop on our pilgrimage, we pilgrims were counted on to distract officials while one of our priests secretly said special prayers to exorcise evil influences we knew were lurking around and needed to be chased away before the true mass could be offered. Our bishop celebrated the mass at each shrine and we took measures to hide the fact that it was the Tridentine form rather than the sacrilegious Novus Ordo promoted by Vatican II and the invalid clergy whom we encountered at each sacred place. We knew that the enemy—the devil who was guiding the whole modern movement—would be working overtime to sabotage our efforts. We were always nervous when one of the modern priests would linger; we worried that he might discover our true identity.

One day in Italy, we were all gathered in the lobby of our hotel, waiting for Bishop Schuckardt to join us for the bus trip to the Shroud of Turin. Waiting around for the bishop, who suffered from a number of ailments, was becoming a central activity of our life, one we were being trained to view as an opportunity for personal sacrifice. However, on this occasion, the Reverend Mother Loyola sent one of the brothers to ask the bishop if we could go without him, suggesting that he could catch a ride later when he felt better.

Within a few minutes, the bishop, red-faced, emerged from the elevator with his entourage. He motioned for all the religious to gather outside. I followed in the background, hoping we were getting on the bus.

“Where is your spirit of St. Francis and Jesus crucified?” he yelled. “None of you are worthy to see the image of Christ on the Shroud. Get on the bus and remain there in silence, all of you!”

The group climbed onto the bus in silence with eyes cast down. One of the nuns making her way to the back of the bus smiled at me—there was that wonderful “smile in suffering” again. *Wow, they're holy!* I thought. I felt that many souls would soon accept the true faith due to the humility and obedience of these sisters and brothers.

We all made it to see the Shroud on time, but the ride was filled with so much tension it could have been cut with a knife. I was grateful that viewing the Holy Shroud was to be done in the strictest silence.

There was no one I could talk to about what had happened that day. I felt alone in my confusion and worry. Would the bishop yell

again? I had never seen him fly off the handle like that and couldn't understand why he had so harshly reprimanded the sisters and brothers I loved so much and who had done nothing wrong. I reasoned that the bishop had not really meant what he said but only wished to give them an opportunity to suffer for souls. I never heard anyone complain about that incident and wondered if I would be able to suffer in silence, too, if I entered—had to enter—the convent.

On September 29, 1978, Pope John Paul I died in Rome.³⁵ His death and funeral coincided with our pilgrimage.

When we arrived in Rome, I heard the nuns and other pilgrims on our trip mention this coincidence as “providence.” Apparently, Schuckardt did, too. He told his inner circle that, while we were there, he was crowned pope by the Blessed Mother, at the Church of St. Mary Major. He later took the name of Hadrian VII. It would be a few years before someone would tell me about this “miracle.”³⁶

As part of our tour of the Vatican, we waited in a long line to glimpse the dead pope on his funeral bier. I felt sorry for the hundreds of grieving, pious-looking people paying their respects. They obviously didn't have the true faith and access to the only remaining authentic clergy. I offered prayers for their conversion.

23

A YEAR OF DECISION

At the beginning of my senior year in Coeur d'Alene, I was basking in the afterglow of the pilgrimage and feeling comfortable in the security of the group. Despite these good feelings and the occasional shenanigans I engaged in that served to keep my spirits uplifted, this last year at school was stressful in many ways.

Our class of thirteen, most of who had been together since freshman year, was pretty tight by this time. We dreaded the separations we knew we would be facing in June. About half the girls were boarders, so our goodbyes would be even harder. We wanted to make the most of the time we had left together, but we had few freedoms. We asked for simple senior privileges such as permission to converse among ourselves or take a walk without an adult monitoring us. We wanted to be able to plan some special event for the parish or take a car ride to the home of one of the girls who lived in the area. We thought it made sense that we should have an opportunity to practice acting responsibly and making decisions about our lives. After all, we would soon be graduating and would not have nuns or parents watching our every move. Not only were permissions denied, but the very fact that we asked for some privileges was interpreted as rebellion by the nun in charge.

We might have accepted the negative responses more easily if it hadn't been for the favoritism this nun had begun showing to a girl in the junior class. The two of them had started to spend an inordinate amount of time together behind closed doors at the Villa Maria, and we seniors felt ignored and jealous of the attention we thought we deserved. We were on Sister's back quite a bit about it. When nothing changed and we complained about it to the other

nuns in the boarding house, the nuns reacted oddly to this complaint. They told us our class was becoming too worldly. Sweet Sister Borgia was delegated by the other nuns to warn us to be careful.

"If your attitudes don't change, nobody in your class will deserve the honor of being the valedictorian speaker at your graduation."

As it turned out, none of us was chosen for this honor. Sister told us this a few weeks before graduation and, when we protested, she said, "The bishop has already been notified."

We were pressured during this year to decide on our vocations by June. We essentially had three options: marriage, the convent, or single life. Most of my peers and I were miserable as we contemplated the dull prospect of living as a single lay person in the Fatima Crusade. Some of this misery stemmed from the dress code and other confining community rules. Moving out of one's parents' home was not an option until age twenty-five. Dating was forbidden until age twenty-one and, then allowed only with a chaperone. Finding a job that would not lead one into temptation would be very difficult. College, considered by the bishop to be a cesspool of sin, was not allowed. Exceptions were rarely, if ever, granted by the bishop, and few people even requested one.

I did not open up during these discussions with my peers. Keeping secret from them the fact that I was considering the convent caused me a great deal of stress. I kept it to myself, though, because I just was not sure. Since the pilgrimage with the bishop, I sometimes felt I was called but, then, in conversations with the other girls I felt sympathy for them and frustration with the way we were all being treated. These feelings caused bouts of cognitive dissonance that kept me awake at night. I tried to neutralize my rebellious inclinations by reflecting on the "sacrificial way of life" I was striving toward by praying more fervently.

I trusted that, by summer, I would know what to do.

Meanwhile, our senior religion class was essentially a course on the bishop's worldview and conspiracy theories. We had no textbook, but I filled several notebooks from class lectures. I did not think twice about the removal of the American flag from our school premises. I was not aware of it, but at that time the bishop's theories were getting attention in the local media.³⁷ But when I heard about it a few years later, I just dismissed it as another attack of the enemy.

For a senior year assignment, I debated between Matthew's gospel, "Woe to those with child;" "You shall be hated by all nations

for my name's sake" (24:19), and the Good Shepherd gospel of John (10:11-18). Marilee, who had been staying with relatives, came to see me the night I had to decide, and she helped me greatly.

"Sherri," she said in her matter-of-fact voice, "of course, the Good Shepherd, it's so positive!"

That made so much sense to me. I was an optimist at heart and Marilee's recognition of the fact had a way of bringing it out in me. When I recited my composition to the class, Marilee leaned over and whispered, "That was so good! I'd rather think about Our Lord loving me than anything else."

I knew she was referring to the berating our class had received because of our "too-assertive" attitudes.

That spring I began to suffer from terrible stomachaches. I also began discovering blood in my stool but did not tell anyone because of embarrassment. I figured God wanted me to suffer in silence, and I mostly attributed my bodily pains to a lack of exercise.

Our graduation ceremony took place on Friday, June 22, 1979, the Feast of the Sacred Heart according to our traditional calendar. This meant that the ceremony would include a procession around the Mt. St. Michael's property, with special prayers and hymns. The senior girls carried bouquets of red roses and were dressed in long white clothing, white head coverings and white rosaries, all of it approved in advance by the nuns to ensure that the outfits met modesty standards. The veils turned out to be a blessing by hiding the freshly cropped hair of two senior girls. Upcoming graduation or not, the nuns and the girls' parents agreed that it had been necessary to punish the girls for socializing with boys.

We solemnly processed into the chapel, accompanied by the organ, and took our places, girls and women on the left side.

Even though many girls had made it to the honor roll, I felt sad in the knowledge that no one in our class would be valedictorian. Awards were distributed in the middle of mass, following the bishop's sermon, which warned us of the evils of the world some of us were now facing. He strongly discouraged us from leaving the community in Spokane.

"The world that awaits you is ugliness and misery," he yelled from the podium, while banging his fist against it for added emphasis.

He warned us again of the evils of a secular education: "Parents shall answer to God in the fires of hell for their children...[They] spit in the face of God when they allow a child to attend a college or university that is not truly Catholic. They are defying God!"³⁸

As we marched out of the chapel, the steeple bell of Mt. St. Michael's clanged from its fifth story perch. Then we re-entered the church for photos with the bishop in front of the altar. My mind was completely focused on the Tridentine group "program." Although I had just shed tears about our crummy senior year, the blessing of having the bishop with us enabled me to quickly shift my mood. The bishop and the community were now the objects of my passion and joy. I fervently hoped that the bishop would pose with me next to the statue of Christ, and he did! I was thrilled and felt very blessed that such a holy man once again took time for little, insignificant me.

I saw the senior boys posing in front of the altar after the ceremony but had no idea who they were as individuals. I had just spent three and a half years of not being able to associate with boys and hadn't allowed myself to think about them. We had been cautioned not to let our minds wander in "that direction" until we were sure we were ready for marriage. Besides, in my long, baggy clothes and with most of my hair covered, I no longer felt attractive.

A few years earlier, I probably would have dismissed them as a bunch of shorthaired dorks. But now, I looked straight into their faces and actually thought a few of them were cute. I recognized one boy, James, whose sister was a nun. He had a nice smile and friendly eyes, and I liked his sister. Later that summer, when I learned I had developed an ulcer and might not be able to enter the convent, I thought about James for a split second. But Reverend Mother Loyola assured me that, if I regained my health, it would be possible for me to become a nun.

My grandparents flew in from Chicago to attend my graduation ceremony. I was excited that they would have a chance to hear Bishop Schuckardt speak, and I prayed that their hearts would be open to his sermon. They never spoke a word about any of it.

After the ceremony, while everyone was congratulating us outside the church, there was an awkward moment with my grandmother. She smiled, looked me in the eyes and clasped my hands, saying, "Sherri," this is a great day. Are you happy to be out of school and moving back to California?"

"It's been a wonderful privilege to attend a truly Catholic high school, Gammy!" I replied, avoiding the other question.

I had already decided to live in the community in Spokane but thought it wasn't important to tell her right then. What was important was her knowing that I had been blessed with the honor to know the only true bishop and attend the only true Catholic high school in the world. I needed to repeat this as often as possible so that, eventually, my family would believe it, too.

Several years later, I learned what my grandmother had told others after meeting the bishop that day: "There's something wrong with that man."

I went home to Imperial Beach where my mother promptly took me to a doctor for an annual exam. When he diagnosed an ulcer, I was partly relieved because it would postpone my decision about whether to enter the convent. I figured that, maybe, this was God's way of telling me it wasn't his will that I should be a nun. But I also learned an important lesson about paying attention to what my body was telling me.

My mother sensed that something was wrong. She wondered why her eighteen-year-old daughter would have an ulcer. I hadn't told her about the difficulties of my senior year; I was still struggling with feelings of guilt and thought I should probably bear my crosses without complaining. At graduation, my parents had gotten the impression that my classmates and I were happy, and I didn't want to burst their bubble.

I was not home for long when I realized I had no connections left in San Diego and that I sorely missed the community up north. I no longer had anything in common with my old friends, and part of me was too embarrassed to have them see me in my current mode of dress. I decided I'd rather pray for them than see them. I would never be able to explain to them how my youthful dreams of being an actress or an athlete would only lead to perdition. It had become clear that the only crowd I could fit in with were the community people in Spokane. The only question was whether living in the TLRC community meant also living as a nun.

That fall, one of my classmates, now living in Spokane with her sister, said I could rent a room from her. Within three weeks I was

settled in and working at my first job, in a nursing home on the South Hill.

My parents weren't far behind. My father had been asking the Post Office to transfer him to Spokane since Patrick and I had first left for school in Idaho. When a position opened up that year after my graduation, my parents were finally able to join the eight hundred other Schuckardt faithful gathering in Spokane.

My ulcer had cleared up and so I was back to making my decision about entering the convent. I agonized privately over this for another five months.

The TLRC was growing by leaps and bounds. By the beginning of 1980, when the mainstream Catholic Church was losing members, and the religious were leaving in droves, we had mushroomed from a tiny band of brothers, sisters and priests—rejecting “the church of the Beast”—to a full blown organization. The TLRC owned \$3 million worth of property in Washington and Idaho as well as half-dozen chapels around the United States. The organization's mailing list had swelled to 10,000 supporters, and the print shop stayed busy producing literature like the *Reign of Mary*, our official newsletter. More than fifty male religious lived at Mount St Michael's, and eighty-two sisters lived in convents at Rathdrum and Coeur d'Alene.³⁹

A four-story mansion on Spokane's South Hill served as the chancery and plush accommodations for Bishop Schuckardt. That same year, he established Mount St. Joseph's in Colbert, Washington, including a new Villa Maria, Immaculata Girls' High School, and the Convent of Our Lady of Allotting. Individual church members threw their life savings into the real estate deals and, by spring, part of Mount St. Michael's property had been carved into ten-acre lots, thirty-four of which were sold to members for future home sites or as investments.

My parents wanted me to live with them, so I moved into their house in Spokane. I had decided to enter the convent but could not bring myself to announce it to them. I think I knew they would encourage me to think about it some more before deciding. I told none of my friends for the same reason. I also thought my friends would see me as a hypocrite for wanting to join the group I had been so critical of all year.

Most importantly, I feared that, if I talked about it with anyone or waited much longer, I would back out entirely.

24

ENTRANCE INTO THE CONVENT

A week before going in, I finally told my family about my decision. They asked many questions, mainly to ascertain whether I had thought the whole thing through. I assured them that I wanted to enter the convent. During my remaining days at home, I kept myself busy to avoid the pain I felt in my parents' presence. When the day of my departure came, my mother went to her bedroom and stayed there sobbing. She could not come out to say good-bye.

Patrick cut my hair to chin length. After one last look in the mirror, satisfied that my appearance would meet the approval of Sister Superior, I swallowed hard and took a final glance at my parents' home.

My dad and I attended mass at Mount St. Michael's. He walked me to the nuns' van and hugged me good-bye with tears rolling down his face.

On the anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes, I rode with the nuns to my new home at Our Lady of Mt Carmel Convent in Coeur d'Alene. I had chosen that day, remembering that Mary told Bernadette, "I do not promise you happiness in this world but only in the next." Those words helped me to focus on the reward I would receive one day for giving up all that I loved. Sitting in the back seat, I was able to hide my tears during the ride.

There was no ceremony. I just showed up, dressed in black and white, with my hair covered. I later learned that my oldest brother, Alan, had entered the seminary at Mount St. Michael's on the same day.

The sweet smiles and knowing winks of the sisters on my first night seemed to be telling me that they knew what I was going

through and what lay ahead. Though I thought I knew what I was getting into by entering the convent, I found that my impressions from my visits as a boarder girl were incomplete at best. I quickly learned that living in community with thirty other women was very challenging. It didn't take me long to figure out the wisdom behind the many images and the constant references to St. Therese's "little way" to holiness through doing ordinary things in an extraordinarily loving way. I immediately renewed my friendship with this saint. I felt it was no small coincidence that St. Therese's story was one of the first saint stories I had studied in the Fatima Crusade.

Some of the ordinary things in convent life required strong spiritual muscle and no complaining. The constant lack of privacy, for example, and the huge amount of time I had to spend on my knees for minor infractions were probably the worst things I had to learn to live with, not to mention having to show my worn out underwear to superiors to prove that I needed new ones. The silence was hard at first but then I figured out how to use it to stay connected to God.

That first night I was shown my small, narrow bed in one of the upstairs dorms where ten other women slept. The room had only one window and a few religious items on the walls. The beds were neatly made with tightly drawn blankets; mine was under an angled part of the ceiling on which I often bumped my head as I got in and out of bed.

As it was time for supper, a nun scurried through the halls ringing a hand-held bell and calling us to the tiny dining room for grace before the meal. I was the last one in line and filled my bowl with the remaining few ladles of cabbage soup.

I was an aspirant for the first few months, wearing a head covering and the same black skirt and vest over the white blouse that I'd brought with me. Then, with a short, private ceremony in the convent chapel, I became a postulant and donned a blue and white habit with a shorter veil and skirt than the regular nuns wore.

I would spend the next six months in the community as a "guest," studying what it meant to live in community and being examined by superiors who would decide if I could stay. The religious brothers and sisters lived a strict, almost cloistered life. They were never permitted to be alone with the opposite sex and never traveled anywhere without a companion, except in emergencies. Both brothers and sisters made vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience

and lived according to a list of rules governing their daily life. Unquestioning obedience to these rules, and to the superiors who interpreted what they meant in practice, was the hallmark of a good or “holy” religious.

Our yellow, three-story house on Garden Street was called the “Mother House” because the Reverend Mother of the congregation (at that time, Reverend Mother Loyola) lived there. Six of us were new and had not yet taken vows or a permanent religious name. The others, all called “Sister Mary _____” had taken one-year, three-year or final vows.

The house next door also belonged to our group. My job as an aspirant and postulant included working in the basement of the print shop across the street and helping in our kitchen, where I sorted out old, moldy donuts from good ones and inedible KFC chicken from what looked edible. When there was not enough donated food for us, the nuns went on begging trips and sometimes even dumpster-diving expeditions.

The convent cook worked hard and cheerfully in the kitchen all day, making aromatic meals from scratch and finding creative ways to stretch the donated items. Her bread pudding was scrumptious. I rarely tasted mold or anything gross that was missed during the sorting and cooking. While we weren’t supposed to look around while eating, I could see peripherally and found it inspiring to see the nuns happily eating whatever was served, grateful even for the discarded food.

The ceremony at Mount Saint Michael’s, where I would become Sister Mary Redempta, was scheduled for 5:30 p.m. but was delayed into the wee hours of the morning because the bishop was sick. These lengthy delays had become the norm.

While we were waiting, I eagerly anticipated hearing my new name. The bishop had chosen it from a list of three names I had submitted to my superior. Visiting Mount Calvary in the Holy land had been such a special experience for me that I chose names, including Consolata and Evangeline, that had something to do with the crucifixion. My new name would be a constant reminder of the death to self I had embraced. My new life would bring salvation to the souls who would join us because of my sacrifices. We would all be at the foot of the cross together in the latter days.

The eleven of us postulants were in the front pew. After devotions before mass, the brother who was conducting the service announced, "There will be a slight delay. His Excellency is going to be late due to illness. The religious are asked to remain in the chapel to pray for the bishop; lay people who wish to stay are invited to join in praying the rosary."

I was disappointed but willing to pray as long as needed in order to have the privilege of having the bishop officiating at our ceremony and hearing him pronounce my name. I was eager to assure him of my loyalty to his congregation.

After the rosary, Fr. Denis came to the altar wearing the vestments for Benediction. It was another stall tactic, but I didn't mind. I kept thinking of the special moment when I would hear the bishop's voice saying my name. My life as one "dead to the world" would soon begin; it didn't matter to me if it started in the next few minutes or at midnight. But I was getting hungry and tired.

After the first set of prayers, Fr. Denis left the altar. No one else came out to lead any other prayers. I was still kneeling, offering up to God the pain in my knees and back for the grace to have the bishop be well enough to do our ceremony. About an hour later, after I had prayed every prayer I could focus on, we were tapped on the shoulder by the postulant mistress who led us out of the chapel to a room where there was a plate of donated pizza pockets and lemon turnovers.

"The bishop is coming but not for a while," she said. "When you've had enough to eat to hold you over, you can return to the chapel."

I ate slowly because it sure felt good to stand up and give my knees and back a break. When I returned to the chapel I could hear snoring from the back pew. I wondered if it was my dad but thought that it would be a miracle if he were still there.

By the time the bishop arrived and the ceremony began, I felt guilty about wanting to do little else but eat or sleep. Though I couldn't think clearly or pray anything more than "Oh, my Jesus, it is for love of Thee," I was determined to make it through the ceremony. It was too great a privilege to miss, and the suffering seemed right. It was about one o'clock in the morning when I finally heard the bishop say my name: Sister Mary Redempta.

Thus, in a state of complete exhaustion and hunger I pronounced my promises of poverty, chastity and obedience to the superiors under my new name.

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My brother Kevin had come up from California to attend the ceremony. It was customary that, afterward, the nuns could greet their families. Before he could see me, he had to go through the greeting line to kiss the bishop's ring. I found out years later that, after greeting the bishop, Kevin remarked to my parents, "That guy is higher than a kite." My brother was sort of an expert on these matters and I wouldn't have questioned his judgment.