Sister Georgina Luznicky, OP
1927-2018

A shared love of being onstage, specifically in plays put on by the Czech Social Club of St. Vitus Parish, Chicago, was the catalyst through which George Luznicky and Lillian Hattan met and fell in love in the early years of the twentieth century.

“My Dad was the straight man in the plays of the Social Club,” wrote Sister Georgina Luznicky in her autobiography. “My Mother was a delightful out-going person who always wanted and got the lead in the plays of the Club.”

George and Lillian, both the children of Czech immigrants, married after George returned from World War I. Injuries had left him crippled, but his cleaning and tailoring business provided well for the family.

The couple had three children: Mary, the oldest; Dorothy, who became Sister Georgina; and Edward. Faith was central in the Luznicky home, and all three siblings had a Catholic education. Mary and Dorothy attended elementary school at St. Nicholas of Tolentine – which was staffed by Adrian Dominicans — and high school at Lourdes, and then Mary, who was four years older than Dorothy, went on to nursing school and served in the U.S. Army. Edward, after elementary school at St. Nicholas of Tolentine, attended Quigley Prep Seminary and eventually became a Servite priest.

Dorothy's high school years coincided with World War II, and students her age customarily worked to help alleviate the labor shortage. Her first “real job” was in her father’s business, after which she worked at a shop that sold baby clothing.

George died in late June 1944, at the age of just fifty-two, just after Dorothy completed her junior year of high school. During her senior year, she went to work at the Produce Reporter Company, where she started out as a receptionist/clerk and later moved up to the bookkeeping and then the personnel departments.

She had given thought to a religious vocation ever since eighth grade, when her teacher, Sister Mary Wilbert Blainey, encouraged her to become an Adrian Dominican Sister. In high school, a Sister of St. Joseph pointed her toward religious life as well. But it was her Adrian Dominican cousin, Sister Francita Hattan, who finished paving the way by telling the sisters at St. Nicholas of Tolentine about Dorothy’s desire to enter the convent.

Although she originally planned to enter right after high school, she ended up being needed at home for a time. Her sister had contracted a virus and been discharged from the Army, and her mother had to quit her clerking job to care for Mary when she came home from a Chicago hospital. Dorothy stayed at her job with the Produce Reporter Company for another year and entered the Congregation in June 1946.

“At profession I was given the name Georgina,” she wrote in her autobiography. “At the time Mother Gerald said the name was theatrical – but it suits.”

Her obediences always consisted of office work. “In one of my first letters home, I wrote my Mother that I was back where I started – working in an office and I thought life in the convent would be
different,” her autobiography states. “Sister Rita Marie [Callaghan, the postulant mistress] gave me the letter back and told me it was a privilege to work in an office and to tell my mother that.”

Her first assignment was to St. Mary’s in St. Clair, Michigan, a farming community where she came to appreciate rural life and enjoyed everything about the place. That appreciation of something other than city living only went so far, however; she wrote that a summer assignment to Kelley’s Island showed her she was not a camper, and she disliked being there.

In 1953, after five years at St. Mary’s, she was assigned to teach at Ascension in Harvey, Illinois. Originally, it was to teach second grade, but in the middle of her second year there she had to become the eighth grade math teacher. “By the grace of God and much prayer I kept a page ahead of the students and got through it,” she wrote.

Next, in 1957, she was appointed to St. Luke’s in Flint, Michigan, where she had the experience of teaching second graders in the morning and twelfth-grade history at St. Michael’s High School in the afternoons.

She returned to her hometown in 1960 to teach elementary school at St. Philip Neri and then, after earning her master’s degree in history from DePaul University that year, was changed to Aquinas High School for the next school year. Between the actual teaching, and getting to live with and learn from more than thirty other Sisters, it was an assignment she greatly enjoyed.

She wrote in her autobiography that she and the other Sisters in the convent watched out the Aquinas windows as renovations were carried out at St. Philip Neri School, which was next door to the high school, “and expressed our sorrow for the poor sister who would be appointed principal.”

When the time came, at the beginning of the 1962 school year, the “poor sister” turned out to be her, which “stunned and dismayed” her. But it was a life-changing experience; she learned about administration and leadership, how to deal with challenging people and situations, and how to be a better communicator, and she enjoyed her time there and the Sisters and priests with whom she worked. During her time there she also earned a second master’s degree from DePaul, this one in education.

After her six-year term, she took on a supervisory role as director of education (the title changed several times) for St. Dominic Province and later was elected provincial administrator. She was also a delegate to the Congregation’s Chapter of Renewal. “This was a difficult but a grace-filled time for our Congregation and because of the people and events I grew tremendously; it was a gifted time for me,” she wrote.

Her roles in the province lasted until 1972, when she became superintendent of the Adrian Dominican Independent School System (ADISS) while auditing classes at the Catholic Theological Union. She then spent a year in Adrian working in the Office of Information with Sister Marie Wiedner, the secretary-general of the Congregation, before returning to Illinois to become associate superintendent for the Diocese of Joliet. She remained there for the next thirteen years.

While she was in Joliet, she was asked by Sister Rosemary Ferguson, Prioress of the Congregation, to serve with Sister Marie Wiedner as co-chairs of Re-Membering, the gathering of all Adrian Dominicans held in the summer of 1977. By that time, not only was she in Illinois but Sister Marie was in California – “talk about communication skills!” she wrote. “We worked hard and had fun designing and implementing this gathering for 1,600 of us. … to this day sisters talk about that time with great fondness.”
By 1989, her mother had come to need more than Georgina’s weekend care, and Sister Georgina became a consultant with the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Office of Catholic Education and was given permission to live with Lillian. Sister Georgina cared for her mother until Lillian’s death in 1990, at the age of 93.

Her job as consultant eventually led to the position of director of school personnel. “It was a wonderful way to end a career,” she wrote. “I loved this ministry and enjoyed my time with the Archdiocese for twelve years but in 1999 at the age of seventy-two and [with] fifty-plus years in education I decided to retire and give someone younger an opportunity to enjoy the position.”

In her autobiography’s next paragraph, Sister Georgina reflected on those fifty-plus years spent as an educator. “I was often asked why I didn’t move to another field outside of formal education,” she wrote. “I moved within the field often enough. I wanted to make a difference in the world and what better way than to prepare young people to take their place in the Church and in society.”

But full retirement was not to come her way for another five years. Looking for something to do part-time, she was asked to be the administrative assistant for the Midwest Dominican and Upper Midwest chapters. Finally, in 2004, she returned to Adrian to take up residence at the Dominican Life Center.

After many years of happy retirement, Sister Georgina died on June 30, 2018, at the age of ninety. She was remembered at the vigil service by Sister Nadine Sheehan, Vicaress of the Adrian Dominican Vicariate, with these words:

_I envision her as the stone dropped in the center of a pond in which the ripples go out to touch so many more. It’s impossible to count how many students have been and perhaps continue to be an impact on our world because of her modeling and teaching others to be the key teacher in a child’s life._

Sister Anneliese Sinnott, for whom Sister Georgina was an early superior and principal who encouraged Sister Anneliese to accept the invitation to go to the seminary, preached the next day’s homily. She remembered Sister Georgina as generous, creative, forward-thinking, fun-loving, imaginative, and organized, and went on to say:

_Because her vision was grounded in love, in love of God and in love of those who became part of her life, she taught us, long before it became common among us, that all are welcome. She truly lived the words we heard in today’s Gospel – God is love. She taught the rest of us to “go and bear fruit that will last.”_

…”When I was with her not long ago she asked me if there was anything I wanted to ask her. So I said, “What would you like me to say in the homily for your funeral?” She responded, “Say that I tried.” Georgina did more than try. She succeeded! She truly lived as a Friend of God._
From left: Sister Georgina, 1929; First Communion; High school graduation, 1945

Sister Georgina with her history students at Aquinas High School, Chicago
Left: From left, Mary Luznicky, sister; Lillian Luznicky, mother; Ed (Father George) Luznicky, and Sister Georgina during a home visit.

From left: Sister Georgina, far right, with her colleagues at the Schools Office of the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois; Sister Georgina with Father Bill Sheridan.
From left: Celebrating Sister Georgina’s 70th birthday; Sisters new to the Adrian area formed their own Mission Group. Members are: back row, from left, Sisters Sandra Exley, Leonor Esnard, and Christa Marsik; middle row, from left, Sisters Shirley Ruder, Ruth Rabideau, Joy Finfera, Edith Kathleen Zemke, and Reta Drexler; and front row, from left, Sisters Molly Giller, Marie Bentz, Lorraine Pepin, Anne Gallagher, and Georgina Luznicky.

Members of the 2006 Diamond Jubilee Crowd are: back row, from left, Jean Fitzgerald, Laura Pesick, Ann Romayne Fallon, Joan Donovan, Edith Kathleen Zemke, Jean Librizzi, Georgina Luznicky, Beverly McEachin, Helen C. McDaniel, and Mildred Ann Huber; third row, from left, Anne Richard Baker, Mary L. Russell, Anne Bernadette Stein, Joyce Rybarchzyk, Patricia Cecile Slattery, Denise Walsh, Elizabeth Francis Tekaucic, Sheila N. Flynn, Jeri Renner, and Winifred C.M. Lynch; second row, from left, Ann Patrice Remkus, Therese Groulx, and Jean Irene McAllister; and front row, from left, Barbara Wetterer, Marie Therese Guigar, Virginia Therese Conway, Jean Anthony Sporer, and Michele Gebhardt.