Sister Therese Mary Foote, OP
1926-2018

“My personal history is one directed by a loving Heavenly Father, a loving family, and a loving religious community – and how happy I am to express aloud some of my cherished recollections.

When Sister Therese Mary Foote wrote her first St. Catherine letter¹ on August 5, 1980, she began her personal story with the above words.

Dorothy Marilyn Foote was born April 23, 1926, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Francis (“Frank”) and Florence Walsh Foote. She was the youngest of three children, after Bob, the oldest, and Jean. Frank came from a Protestant family, but as his relationship with Florence grew, “he chose to take instructions in order to learn more about a faith that could influence so beautiful a person as Mom,” Sister Therese Mary wrote.

Sister Therese Mary called her father intelligent, sensitive, and ambitious, an excellent judge of character, and someone with a sense of humor and the ability to persevere. He was a traveling salesman until a comment from little Dorothy changed everything. When he was on the road, Dorothy got to sleep in her mother’s bed, but when he came home she had to forfeit her coveted spot – and was none too happy about it. At one point, she asked her mother, “Is that man coming home again?” and when Frank heard that his own child referred to him as “that man,” he knew it was time to stay home for good.

As for her mother, Sister Therese Mary described Florence as a beautiful, faith-filled, outgoing, gracious, loving, and funny woman, along with being a dedicated homemaker, an excellent cook and baker, and artistically talented. “Words are inadequate to express my love for her!” she wrote.

When the Great Depression hit in 1929, the family was forced to move into the home which Florence’s brothers and sisters all shared. That arrangement lasted for ten years, which Therese Mary remembered as joyful, fun-filled years. “We may have had nine adults telling us what to do, but what love!”

A critical bout of measles, its side effects, and other serious illnesses which followed while she was still recuperating from the first disease threatened her life when she was nine years old. Her family gathered around her in prayer, “an amazing expression of faith,” she wrote, and they sought spiritual help from a cloistered group of Carmelite sisters, whose prayers and friendship led her to develop a lifelong devotion to St. Therese. In fact, she fully intended to someday enter the Carmelite cloister – until life took her in a different direction.

In 1939, Frank got a job in Detroit and the family moved there, settling in St. Ambrose Parish. It was there that Therese Mary met the Adrian Dominican Sisters and felt herself drawn to them, and she entered the Congregation on February 2, 1945, just before graduation. She was received as a novice in August – and was given her religious name in honor of the saint to whom she was so devoted – and made her first profession on August 13, 1946.

¹ To commemorate the 600th anniversary of St. Catherine of Siena, sisters in the Congregation were invited to participate in the writing of “St. Catherine letters” about their lives which they exchanged with other sisters. The project began in 1980.
Her first four and a half years of teaching were spent at Visitation School in Detroit, an assignment which she greatly loved. But in January 1951, she was brought back to Adrian to begin her studies at Siena Heights College (University), and she eventually earned her bachelor’s degree in biology from there.

She made her final profession that summer but when the new school year began she was still in Adrian, wondering where her next ministry would be. Then, one morning during that first week of school, she was downtown at the dime store when she was paged over the intercom to return to the Motherhouse. Mother Gerald informed her she was being sent to St. Ambrose, her former parish, and needed to be ready to leave right after lunch.

She spent the next three years there, during which time she began summer graduate study at Notre Dame. Her master’s degree in biology was completed there in 1958.

In 1954, Sister Therese Mary was sent to Grafton, West Virginia, to teach at St. Augustine School, where five Sisters and a lay teacher handled all twelve grades. The beauty of the area, the friendliness of the parishioners, and the little community of Adrian Dominicans all combined to create an experience she treasured for the rest of her life.

The rest of her teaching experience all came on the high school level; in 1959 she was sent to Mount St. Mary Academy in St. Charles, Illinois, followed by St. Mary’s High School in Royal Oak, Michigan (1965-68), and St. Joseph Academy (1968-71).

At that point, although she had truly enjoyed her twenty-five-year ministry in teaching, she asked to study pharmacy so that she could serve the Sisters living in Maria. “This choice, as I look upon it in retrospect, must have been ‘planned in heaven,’” she wrote. “It leaves me in awe and wonder just how I could have made such a drastic change since I am a conservative person and usually dislike changes. Why the field of pharmacy is also a mystery, since it was rather a sudden inspiration, triggered by Sister Jean Cecile [Hunt, her principal at the Academy, who made the suggestion].”

She earned her pharmacy degree from the University of Michigan and served at Maria as a registered pharmacist for twelve and a half years, from February 1975 to July 1987. Then, after a few months’ sabbatical, she went to work for Perry Drug Store in Royal Oak, Michigan (1988), then Liberty Drug Stores in Southfield, Michigan (1989), and finally Cherry Hill Pharmacy in Dearborn, Michigan (1989-2004).

Sister Therese Mary retired at that point and became a resident of the Dominican Life Center, but she continued to be very active, even serving as a mentor to several Adrian Dominican Associates.

Then, on December 5, 2018, she was being prepared for orthopedic surgery at ProMedica Bixby Medical Center in Adrian when, to the shock of her surgeon, the niece who was at her side, and her beloved Adrian Dominican Sisters, she suddenly and quietly passed away. She was ninety-two years old and in her seventy-third year in the Congregation.

“I am writing with tears streaming down my face,” Associate Elizabeth Heard, one of those women whom Therese Mary had mentored, wrote in a note read at the wake service. “Sr. Therese Mary was my Dominican mother. … She was a bright star in my life. … Therese Mary brought out my best Dominican self.”
Similar words from Sisters and former students were also read at the service, as was a letter that she herself had left to be read at her wake. Sister Pat Dulka, Co-Chapter Priorress of the Holy Rosary Mission Chapter, did the honors.

“I am such a happy person, so grateful to be, first, a child of God … secondly, so grateful to have a rich heritage of a beautiful earthly family from whom I learned love, dedication and devotion, thirdly, grateful for guiding me to the Adrian Dominican Congregation where joy, love, study, prayer have been lived in community,” the letter read in part.

“Therese Mary, thank you for your presence in our lives. Those you have touched in your gentle ‘little ways’ will never be the same; may you now rest in the arms of the loving God for whom you have sought so deeply,” Sister Pat said to conclude her eulogy.

Sister Mary Jane Lubinski, Chapter Priorress of the Adrian Crossroads Mission Chapter, preached the next day’s funeral homily.

... Prayer, community, ministry and study were held in high esteem and Therese Mary embraced each aspect of our Dominican life. Her natural gifts, and maybe compulsion, for precision, attention to detail, order, tidiness, and record keeping made her well suited to her life of ministry in teaching and serving as a pharmacist. She loved to learn and study. In her late 80s the new cosmology and expanding universe filled her with wonder and amazement – imagine, at the end of her life she was being gifted yet again with new and deeper insights from her creator God. She also had a great devotion to Christ and the Eucharist. Her choice of readings\(^2\) reflects this because it is through Christ that she saw the path to the Father.

... Therese Mary lived a life that transformed the hearts of others, simply by her being. By who she was: a pilgrim.

“We are pilgrims. Our home is the heart of God.”

Rest now, dear sister, at home, in the heart of God.

\(^2\) Ephesians 1:2-5 and John 14:1-7.
From left: Dorothy Foote, the future Sister Therese Mary, center, with her sister Jean and brother Bob, 1931. Dorothy Foote, the future Sister Therese Mary, in front of the Adrian Dominican Motherhouse about a month before her entrance, January 1945. Dorothy Foote as a high school student, early 1940s.

From left: Sister Therese Mary with her mother Florence and grandmother Jessie on the day of her reception, August 9, 1945. Sister Therese Mary, left, with Vivian Rumler, RN, her colleague at the Dominican Pharmacy. Sister Therese Mary, left, with Sister Mary Bernard Lynch. The two worked together in the Dominican Pharmacy from 1975 to 1977, though they each worked at the pharmacy for 12 years.
From left: Long-time local community members at the Regina Residence are, from left, Sisters Anne Wasco, Mary Rita Gleason, Catherine Henry Schmid, and Therese Mary Foote. Sister Therese Mary, left, with Sister Rosalie Bulanda, 1984

From left: From left, Sisters Therese Mary Foote, Catherine Henry Schmid, and Maria Goretti Browne. Sister Therese Mary Foote speaks at the 100th birthday party of Sister Maura Phillips on April 25, 2014. Behind her is Sister Mary Alice Naour.
Members of the 2015 Double-Diamond (70-year) Jubilarian Class are, back row, from left, Sisters Joan Murphy, Margaret Mehigan, Kathryn Lumbrezer, and Sister Attracta Kelly (Prioress) and seated, from left, Sisters Dorothy Jehle, Therese Mary Foote, Nadine Foley, and Constance Kelly.