

SIX TOES IN ETERNITY

The Journals

of

Ronda Chervin

1996 – 2018

Book A

(Book A includes the Introduction and the Entries entitled Notes from the Feminine Underground)

Introduction

I am guessing that most of you who open *Six Toes in Eternity* know me from other Catholic books I have written, from talks at conferences, or from EWTN and Radio.

In 1993, just after my husband's death, Miriam Press published my autobiography called *En Route to Eternity*. At that time I was fifty-six years old. Now, at age eighty I am wanting to write a sequel using the humorous title: *Six Toes in Eternity*.

For those of you who never read *En Route to Eternity*, here is a brief story of my life up to 1993.

I was born in New York City in 1937, a twin, to parents who met in the Communist party but who left to become informers to the F.B.I. while we were in the womb!

We were brought up as total atheists, although $\frac{3}{4}$ of the family came from Jewish backgrounds with one very Christian grandmother.

Eager to figure out the meaning of life, I studied philosophy at the university. Most of the professors, however, with skeptics. By 21 years old I was ready to commit suicide since I couldn't find either truth or love.

But God found me. While pursuing a graduate degree at Fordham University, under the tutelage of the Von Hildebrand circle, a series of miracles occurred. By age 21 in 1959 I became a Catholic. Eventually my twin-sister and my mother became Catholics.

I married an atheist with an orthodox Jewish upbringing. He was book sales- manager, looking for Christ. With a dispensation from his former civil marriage, we married in Rome and had twin daughters, Carla and Diana. He became a Catholic many years afterwards.

In 1964, we moved from Rome back to the United States. He became seriously ill with late-onset asthma. I finished my Ph.D. and we moved to California where I supported the family teaching philosophy at Loyola Marymount University and, later, at St. John's Seminary. During this time I wrote many books and gave many talks. My husband became a playwright and novelist.

After several miscarriages, we had a son, who became a cellist and composer. He committed suicide at the age of 19. Two years afterward my husband died of cardiac arrest.

Why did I write *En Route to Eternity* about my life up to then? Looking back I think it was because God knew I needed the type of healing of memories that could come from trying to get "a God's eye view" of my whole life before I would set forth on quite a different life-style as a widow.

During most of my marriage I wrote journals and letters to a spiritual mentor. Excerpts from these writings up to 1996 found their way into a book published by C.M.J. Marian Publishers called *Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord*. The journal writings and

letters include early adventures in widowhood, also described fictionally in a novel I wrote called *Last Fling*. That book was not published but can be found at En Route Books and Media, click on free downloads.

Other books of mine can be found on www.rondachervin.com

So I am beginning *Six Toes in Eternity* with autobiographical notes and excerpts from journals that start in 1996.

My prayer: Dear Jesus, Mary and Joseph and widow saints, I truly believe that you want me to select excerpts from these many writings to be available for others to read. But, I am a little afraid. I don't want my "drama queen tendencies" to permeate this book. Instead I want it to be a form of heaving up my mind, heart, and soul to you, holy ones, that you may heal me of wounds of the past, and bring hope to those with similar experiences and feelings.

(With a view to avoiding drama queen tendencies I am omitting from these excerpts of the journals some painful experiences that involve others who might not like being described as secondary characters in my scenarios! This will make *Six Toes in Eternity* less "juicy reading," but it will improve my character, so if you are used to, humanly speaking, more exciting stuff from me, offer it up for my salvation and yours or go to www.rondachervin.com and try the novels I wrote during the same time period!

[Note: Every few years, after becoming a widow, I started a new journal with a new title. These titles will now become Book Titles for A-F for 6 Toes in Eternity.]

Notes from the Feminine Underground

August, 1996 – November, 1998

(The title of this set of journals is a spoof off Dostoevsky's famous book *Notes from the Underground*.)

Before picking out excerpts from my journals, you need some back story. I need to tell you about the time immediately after the death of my husband, Martin, in 1993. At that time, we were living with my daughter, Carla, her husband, Peter, and their children, Nicholas and baby Alexander. I was teaching at the seminary in Camarillo, California. The famous Northridge earthquake hit two months after my husband's death. My daughter was terrified. We decided to sell our jointly owned home in Woodland Hills, California. My daughter and her family moved to Sedona, Arizona, and I moved to Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio. I had always wanted to teach at this university I thought was the best Catholic place in the whole world, being magisterial, charismatic, and Franciscan. I couldn't have done so when married because we had moved to California to avoid the horrible effects of cold weather on my husband's asthma. Now was my big chance.

However, something else was on my mind: finding a second husband. Now, twenty years later, I realize that my husband, Martin, was the best man for me, in many ways, and I joke that "the absence of annoyance is not joy – beware married women of thinking it will be!" Of the list of twelve single old men friends I "looked into" the favorite was so frightened when Martin died that when I made a trip to his far away State, he checked himself into the hospital to avoid me! Some of my attempts to find a holy husband are described with humor in my novel, *Last Fling*. At the time these rejections seemed in some cases devastating, but in most cases they turned out to be more of just a "learning experience."

My experience at Franciscan University was surprising and distressing. Even though I loved the President, Fr. Michael Scanlon, and the Franciscans, and the faculty and the students, I didn't fit in. Hindsight, 20 years later, I understand it better. I was a new widow. I needed to be near my family – people who knew me as the wife of my husband and the mother and grandmother of these adult and little children. Being suddenly alone as a professor was, well, lonely. Especially since I didn't meet Mr. Perfect Second Husband. After a year and a half, I left Steubenville, coming back often to speak at conferences.

A theme, fascinating to other widows, that you will follow throughout the journals, is this: if you are a woman, like me, with a pension and widow social security, and you love simplicity of life so that you can live in a room anywhere, you can become incredibly unstable! If you have a house and need your salary to live on, you have to stay places even if they are not “perfect.” But, if you don’t need money and you are not weighed down by a home, as soon as things get disappointing you can try something else. In these journals you will see that in my own opinion I thought of myself mostly as a crazed ding-bat, but sometimes simply as a pilgrim!

In the book, *Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord*, you can read about how I tried to become part of a religious community that accepted older women, including widows, called the Handmaids of Nazareth, founded by Dr. Yvonne Rosedale. Not to repeat what is in that book. I will briefly summarize this experience.

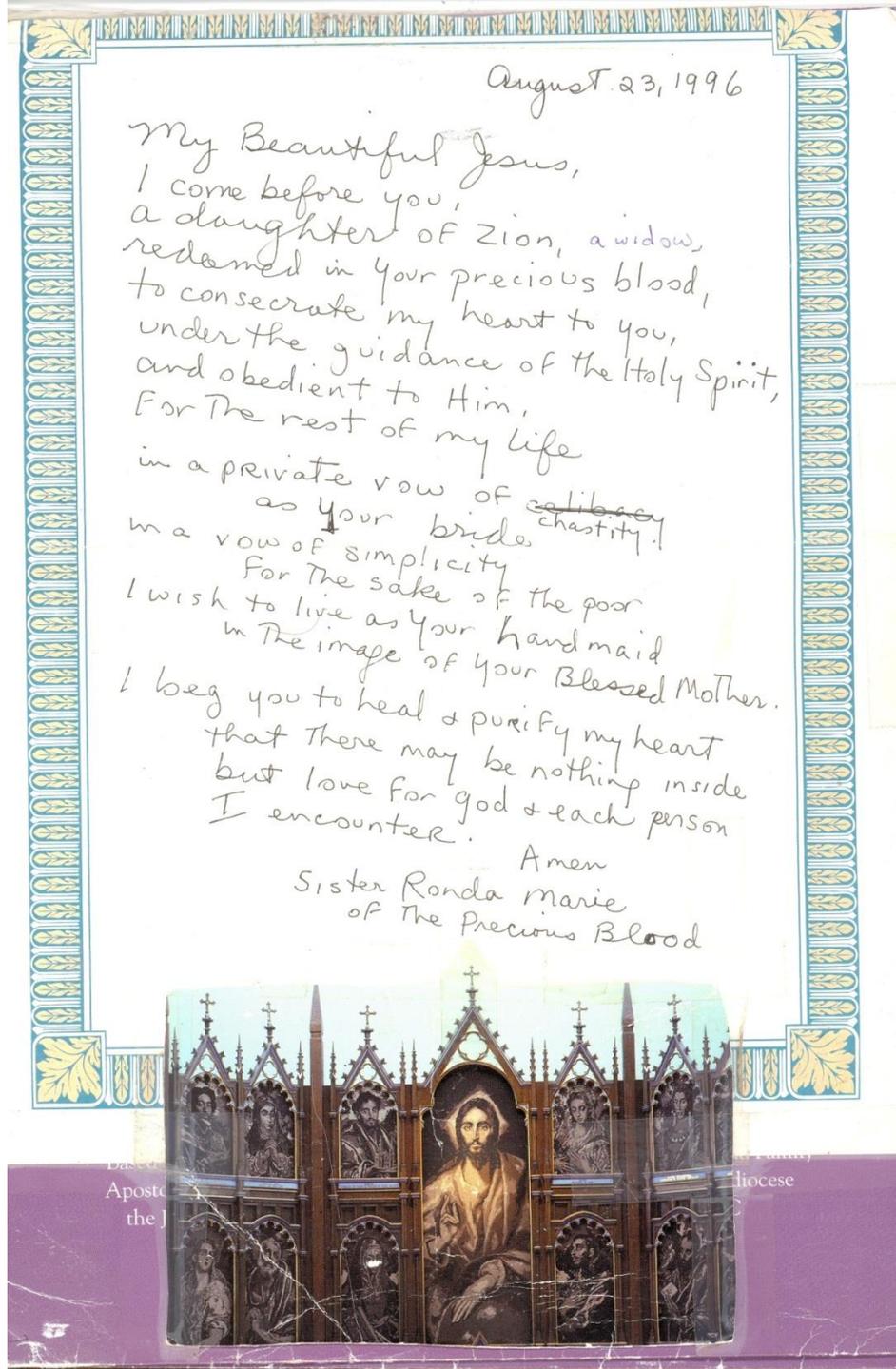
The Handmaids of Nazareth was a community designed for cyber-space where we met twice a year for retreats and otherwise communicated via telephone, e-mail, etc. I loved the foundress, a great-hearted single adoptive parent of many children from all over the world, but had a lot of difficulty with her ways of doing things. So, I dropped out.

Next, I tried a tiny community of with three others people – two men and another woman living in a house together. The rule of the community was that instead of having a daily schedule, besides daily Mass, we would just do whatever the Holy Spirit told us, moment by moment. We lived on the salary of the woman who owned the house and my contributions from my pension and social security and spent a lot of time in Adoration at various churches.

Even though I loved the members dearly, I had problems again with fitting in to aspects of the life-style that didn’t fit me so well. After a short while, I left and moved in with the earthquake-dislocated daughter who was living in Sedona, Arizona.

Throughout the excerpts from the journals, I will insert autobiographical notes so you can understand the context.

(Below you will find my private promise, made on August, 1996) to be dedicated to Christ, not to remarry but to live in my own rule of life for Him and for the Church. This promise can be made by anyone in the presence of a priest.



(When I took this private promise, part of my rule was to live very simply by wearing plain blue jumpers and A-line dresses, as often as possible of the type I could buy for \$5 at the second-hand shop. This way of dressing gave me more discretionary funds to send to Mother Teresa of Calcutta's Sisters and to pro-life causes. However, you will see that a lot of the time that is included in this part of my journals called Notes from the Feminine Underground was about the time when I was still in and out of the community called the Handmaids of Nazareth).

December, 2006

Here in Sedona, Arizona, every morning I go to a Church with huge windows overlooking the red-rock scenery. They have adoration before the morning Mass. Quite a few people sit quietly in their pews. The seats of the church are arranged in a semi-circular manner around the raised sanctuary area.

Unlike the others, I am afflicted with seemingly ungovernable jumpiness. When I hear someone coming into the church, I feel compelled to turn my head to see who it is and to greet him or her with a toothy grin. Then after five more minutes of rapt prayer, I find a need for one of the many items in my tote bag: kleenex, pen and post-its, glasses, tic-tacs, scissors, devotional booklets. Even when I quiet down for ten whole minutes, kneeling, head in hands, engaged in deep prayer, I will suddenly jerk up and grab the pen to write some little note, or bring out a handkerchief for a thorough nose-blowing.

Most of the daily Mass Catholics have grown accustomed to my ways. Some sit at least two pews distance to avoid being distracted by this perpetual motion machine; others sit near and pay no attention.

During my quiet prayer, absorbed in the beauty of the large white host encircled by the gold monstrance, I suddenly thought about the early American Protestant Divine, Jonathan Edwards, who had a lot to say about analogy. This interesting thinker believed that everything in nature was created precisely for the purpose of providing analogies to supernatural realities. God is glad whenever we manage to spot the analogy, as in becoming aware of how the delicacy of a flower points to the delicacy of God's grace.

If nature provides such analogies, perhaps human made artifacts also can be jumping off points for Godly meditation. I was stunned once when a brilliant friend, who was working her way through graduate school doing clerical work, told me that every time she sealed an envelope she would meditate on the goodness of unity over separateness! Get it? The closed envelop, was more together, unified, than the open one!

Now why is it so characteristic of human nature to live on several levels at once - licking envelopes at the same time as meditating on the metaphysics of the universe? The many-layeredness of our psyches has always perplexed me. We are able to do so many things at once. Often, instead of elevating ourselves to a higher level in the midst of menial tasks, we are dragged down to a lower level, from the "sublime to the ridiculous." Is the disunity of the many-layeredness of

our personhood a result of the Fall, or just part of God's way of making us? Did Adam and Eve, before giving into the temptation of disobeying God, have only one thought at a time? Were they what the Germans call "einfach" - one drawer – instead of rows of drawers in the bureau of their characters?

But we are forced, instead, to live out a “many-drawer” existence? In Asian spirituality they call it "monkey-mind" the way our thoughts during prayer slip from the spiritual to the mundane in a dizzying but boring way. Yet God, who was perfectly "integrated," if that word can be used of the Divine level or reality, nonetheless chose to create myriads of beings; eventually millions of millions of human beings. He must like variety, otherwise he could have just made one model of each possible being - one dog, one tree, one cat, one human person.

Very often the multi-layered feature of my life is miserably humiliating. In the midst of taking in the beautiful design on the tabernacle in our church, comes a pain of the lower digestive track. To go to the bathroom or not? Ugh! Even if I decide to forget it, the mood of rapt enjoyment of the artistry in our chapel decor is lost.

(Editing these excerpts again in 2017, I am smiling about the digestive track. Sometimes when I am complaining about this feature of the human body, the Lord seems to laugh at me and convey the idea that this feature of our physical being is a wonderful antidote to our ridiculous pride!)

(This next part of the journal is about my December retreat at St. Andrew's Abbey at Valyermo, California - I am an Oblate of this Benedictine Monastery and the private retreat was given me by Fr. Gregory Elmer, O.S.B., a very dear old friend who has known me for more than twenty-five years. A private retreat can take place when someone goes to a monastery for a quiet time outside the days given over to planned public retreats with many other participants. A monk or nun agrees to work with you personally on whatever issues you choose to bring.

Fr. Gregory is around fifty years old. I first met him when he was studying theology at Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles as a young monk. I was a young philosophy professor at the same place.

Fr. Gregory and I are most different in that he is a celibate monk and for most of my life I was a married mother. Most of all he is very inward and contemplative and I am extremely extrovert and active. On the other hand, we have a great affinity because both of us suffered from similar childhood emotional problems and tend to reach out to Jesus in a certain desperate and passionate way not easily understood by more serene Catholics.

Coming this time for a retreat at this rustic desert monastery there was a new feeling of solidarity with the monks. I was trying for a second time to be a religious Sister in the Handmaids of Nazareth. I felt joy in knowing the perseverance of my brother monks after so many years in their vowed life.

Fr. Gregory suggested that the theme for this private time with the Lord should be total surrender to Christ.

Here are some of Fr. Gregory's main insights. I am paraphrasing his words.

"Ronda," said Fr. Gregory, eyes full of amusement, "it is just like you to think that you will grow in holiness by making more and more heroic acts of virtue."

Examples I could think of would be constantly praying: "Jesus give me the heart for sacrifice of Mother Teresa of Calcutta."

"Heroism", Fr. Gregory continued in his most authoritative voice, "for people like you can be a form of theatrics!"

I settled back on the comfortable couch, notebook in hand, knowing that he would have some unexpected explanation of why what seemed so important to me, prayers to be heroically virtuous, could possibly be the wrong direction to take. I was not disappointed that his thoughts would surprise me.

"Instead of heroic acts of virtue what you need to do is to give up and beg God to give you what you need. That would be more poor in spirit. You are a lot like me. Our cross is that we cannot bear the cross. We should give this cross to Jesus - the cross that we are too weak to bear the cross. Each moment when you feel how weak you are, give that cross to Jesus as a love-gift. Jesus wants to bear our crosses with us. Jesus can bear those unbearable crosses with much more sensitivity and love than we can. He will offer these crosses to the Father for us."

Always very Scriptural in his teaching, Fr. Gregory, dressed in his long black monastic robes, brought in the big gun to prove his point: "We must follow St. Paul in 2 Cor. 10:5, casting down images and bringing into captivity every thought in obedience to Christ. We are not to directly fight with thoughts of despair, hatred, self-hatred. Instead we need to bring them "into captivity in obedience of Christ." We need to give those wretched thoughts to Jesus as a love-gift. He will know how to turn them from lead to gold. So, when those thoughts come, don't think about them. Don't analyze them. No, just give them to Jesus. Analysis of thoughts is an attempt to control them ourselves vs. giving them to Jesus. When Satan sees that we are giving our hateful emotions and thoughts to Jesus he will leave us alone."

"The real cross for the ego," Fr. Gregory resumed, "is that I cannot bear the cross! Realizing that you are too weak to bear the cross, diminishes the ego which wants to pride itself on being good enough to bear crosses!"

Gregory used the analogy of an orchestra. In an orchestra, we, you and I Ronda, are not powerful kettle drums but shrill stringy violins. We have been psychologically abused and also have abused ourselves by carrying burdens we don't have to bear.

"We should pray for consolation like a little baby would. A lonely little baby cries out - and so we should pray to Jesus. It is okay to say to him, 'I will die if you don't help me.' This is not a nervous breakdown but an emotional surrender. When we do this we become kind and gentle."

That certainly rang true. I notice that when things are going very well I tend to become a little smug and full of unwanted advice for others. Under great pain of heart, myself, I reach out to others more tenderly, more compassionately.

Asking him about anxiety attacks in the night, Fr. Gregory developed for me an easy to remember humorous analogy.

"At night," he said, his large beautiful eyes gleaming, "be sure not to listen to the 'radio station' KHell-like station KFAC. KHell is the bad news about yourself the Devil wants you to listen to. St. Catherine of Siena said that if it is making you depressed, that thought is not from God. Christ drowns out KHell. KHell broadcasts in the mind, not in the heart. The army Christ sends to defend me is love. John of the Cross says that the devil can get in the mind but not into the soul. He can only come into the soul or heart if we let him in.

A big subject for me whenever I make a private retreat is co-dependency. I am an expert in entangling myself in relationships of this kind. After idol-worship usually comes disappointment, resentment and then hate. Fr. Gregory tried to teach me "you cannot get your strength from people. Detachment isn't to hate creatures but simply to get your strength from God. The proof of the divinity of Christ is that he could forgive everyone, even those who killed him. That is where he goes beyond the Old Testament. Only God can forgive. Christ sponges up all the sins of the world. Since we ate the rotten fruit we are covered with vomit.

"The Apostles were converted when He came back from the dead and, instead of punishing them, forgave them, saying 'Peace be with you.' You can only imitate God by being forgiving and compassionate."

I objected: "But I thought the twelve step people are always saying about codependency that you shouldn't just excuse people for treating you badly. You need to set up boundaries."

"Forgiving is not excusing," Fr. Gregory explained. "'The enabler' gets enmeshed because she excuses instead of forgiving. Excusing is to say "you are not really bad." Forgiving is saying "you are bad, but I still love you." Enablers are always agitated. To be more peaceful, you must stop trying to fix others. But you certainly can get away from people who are treating you badly."

With this in mind, the monk added: "Melodrama, you know, Ronda, is the theatre of the ego. Making scenes is a way to escape from the long hard work of crucified love called patience. Benedictine monks are to share in the sufferings of Christ by patience. When you are agitated, cultivate solitude. This is good because there is no one to play-act before when you are alone."

"How long do I have to keep going through these horrible co-dependent relationships, Gregory, before I get healed?"

Dramatically, Gregory proclaimed, "Jesus sets us free by letting us 'be killed.' Yes, our ego is killed when we are rejected."

That didn't sound like good news to me, but Gregory added hopefully, that he thought I was coming toward a time of great freedom. I have to let all my hunger for human love get focused on Jesus.

Twisting the Scripture in an unusual way, the monk told me that I am "the pearl of great price" for which Jesus sold His glory. He bought me from the devil by his crucifixion. What is needed is not to try to earn the love of Jesus, but just to accept it.

To decide what to do, Gregory suggested that I ask what conduces to peace and what to agitation. When I feel depressed I should offer those feelings as a love-gift to Christ, and then distract myself by doing many varied satisfying things, such as reading and walking.

"But, but, but, life seems so boring when I don't have any drama in it." I expostulated.

"If you live more in your heart, Ronda, you will not fear boredom. Doubt and boredom are the shadows of the isolated mind."

One of the most humorous statements of Fr. Gregory during the retreat concerned the need to keep the mind busy by reading spiritual works: "If you do not give the mind something good to chew, then you eat yourself - which is a lousy diet!"

At the end of that very fruitful retreat session, I made my customary trip to the monastery cemetery. High in the desert among yucca trees a mile or so above the Abbey there is the most wonderful burial grounds I have ever seen. Long before my beloved dead were interred there, I loved to visit this cemetery just because of the aesthetics of it. Facing miles and miles of uninhabited desert there is a huge granite slab called "the eye of the needle." The reference is to the passage from the New Testament where Jesus says that it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through a needle's eye.

Well, this huge piece of stone has in the middle a concave hole big enough for a camel to get through. Of course, there are no camels in line waiting. The idea is that the visitor should realize that the souls of their loved ones have passed through the eye of the needle into the heavens. The Eye of the Needle is held into the gravelly desert sand by a montage of rocks cemented around the bottom. Those younger than I now am, like to climb up to the hole and peer through at the sky. Round about the stone are the small rock crosses; one section for monks and the other for Oblates.

As an Oblate I would be entitled to burial at this magnificent site where friends like Fr. Gregory might pass an evening strolling through and praying for me.

My husband, a late convert, from an originally orthodox Jewish family, became a Catholic in his late sixties, but not an Oblate. Wanting, however, to imagine himself one day buried with me, my husband agreed to apply to be an Oblate

just to get the grave-site! In a striking instance of grace operating no matter what the dispositions of the recipient might be, my husband actually became much more devout after making his oblation.

The Eye of the Needle cemetery came into a new significance after the death of our son by suicide. (For more about how Jesus consoled us in our terrible grief, see my book *Weeping with Jesus: The Journey from Grief to Hope* – En Route Books and Media). My husband insisted on following our young son's wishes and burying his ashes at sea - ritual facilitated for a not unreasonable sum by the Neptune Society. Feeling attached to the ashes, before delivery to the Society, I surreptitiously took half the ashes out of the urn when my husband wasn't looking, brought them to the Abbey cemetery and buried them under a little bush right near the Eye of the Needle stone. When I later confessed to my secret deed, my husband insisted on visiting the site to pray for his son. When I identified the little bush near the Eye, my husband startled me and other friends present by enacting the Jewish practice of throwing himself face down at the grave-site and wailing loudly talking to his son in mournful grief.

Martin's own funeral followed shortly afterward with full Benedictine solemn rites and a proper gravestone with a metal plaque with his name upon it. Since that time, whenever I visit the monastery for a day of recollection or a retreat, I make it a point to go up to the cemetery for some time of prayer and dialogue with my husband's spirit, my son's soul, and also my mother's ashes buried under the same bush as my son Charlie's. My mother's ashes I had rescued from the pile that was going out to sea many years before.

This time the dialogue at my husband's grave went this way:

"So, dear old hubby, are you glad your wish came true? You always wanted to be sure I never married again and became a nun instead. Now I have done it. What do you think? I'm going to be Sister Ronda Marie, a Handmaid of Nazareth." (As mentioned in the introduction, I later left this community.)

No answer.

"You think this old Catholic yentah (a Yiddish name for a woman of the busy-body type) can make it to holiness?"

No answer. But I thought I could detect an invisible grin.

"Yentah, yes! Handmaid, no! is that what you're thinking old husband?"

I drove down the mountain from the Eye of the Needle with a liberated feeling. I am the Handmaid of the Lord and therefore not anyone else's Handmaid.

More from Fr. Gregory's Retreat - Today on anxiety in the night, I asked. When these demons of fear of someday being somewhere without human love, how would I let the real hero, Jesus, smack them down? I suppose I would have to

picture each terrifying outcome and carefully bring Jesus into that picture. I must imagine him, my beautiful Jesus, right in the picture, as the consoler, the comforter beyond all horror. Then I would have to pray: Jesus, I hope these things will not happen. They are not here right now. Just for today I will let go of these fears. I will believe that you can take care of me no matter what, just as you have taken care of me in terrible circumstances of the past, just as you took care of concentration camp victims, and casualties of all wars. The world you lived in on earth was full of horrors. You didn't slay the tyrants, but you comforted the sheep and gave them hope. So, smack down that demon who wants to tell me that there is no hope, no comfort, only gathering misery.

Referring to Tolkien's book *The Lord of the Rings*, Fr. Gregory proclaimed that the true saving "ring" is poverty of spirit, the first beatitude. It is the humble hobbits of Tolkien's saga who save the day, not Gandolf, the wise magician. Using a more contemporary analogy, Fr. Gregory remarked that "only the poor of spirit have God's "unlisted number." Just dial Jesus and you never get a tape-recorded answer.

"If you pray with the mind alone," the monk told me, "you get the tape recording. But if you call with the heart you get the "hot-line."

I laughed.

Fr. Gregory added: "To imagine that you need to analyze everything about life with your mind is not the Catholic way. It is more a fruit of Enlightenment rationalism."

That last idea really struck me hard. Being a philosophy professor, I have a strong tendency to analyze just at the moment where only heartfelt prayer can bring peace.

Later Fr. Gregory asked:

"Do you, perhaps, think of prayer as getting God inside you? A better image might be to think of prayer as a path into the center of your heart where God already is. When you pray from the center, it keeps deepening. Then you can love others truly from the bottom of your heart.

About anxiety attacks, Fr. Gregory had another analogy for me.

"Set up an 'electric fence'. Now, here are the words that make the buzzer on the electric fence go off: 'should' and 'fix.' When the buzzer goes off, go into the cell of your heart and calm down. If you don't get away from the fence you will become so 'nuclear' that you, so to speak, 'Chernobyl'.

"Don't leave your interior cell until you see the positive lights on the fence which come from the fruits of the Holy Spirit: peace, self-control, joy ...

"When we are deeper in God's love we have more peace also about our loved ones. After all, if I know that God can take care of me, then He must be able to take care of them, also. To return to the Chernobyl image, when trouble comes, if I am deep in God's love I don't have to run down to the basement of the hydroelectric plant to throw switches madly."

"Okay, okay, okay," I responded, amused at Fr. Gregory's graphic imagery.

"But how do I decide what to do for others and where my own needs come first?"

Since my dear monk friend spends most of his time on spiritual warfare, he had an answer to this one as well, as usual, somewhat startling.

"Total altruism is a heresy. If we reject our own needs then they roar out in unhealthy ways. One of the 12 Step slogans is 'keep it simple, stupid.'"

Tired of making notes, in the subsequent sessions, I started only putting down pithy one-liners:

"Instead of having breakdowns, have breakthroughs."

"Keep your life hid with Christ in God - where the Devil cannot find you to peck the graces out of your heart."

A general insight of mine into co-dependency. When one sees that there is great beauty in the personality of another, it is tempting to think that the bad part just has to go away over time, or be expunged by grace. But 12 Step teaches us we cannot change people.

To make it personal again, craving love from men, because my father left us when I was eight years old, I can be willing to accept some degree of emotional abusiveness for a long time in a present relationship to a father-figure. I fail to accept the reality that no matter how much goodness may be in a particular male friend, and how much goodness in me, our combined qualities might equal not love but nightmare.

The following lines demonstrate how easily I can work out a complex mystical rationale for staying involved, even when all the signs point to fleeing as fast as my legs can carry me:

“But I thought I had finally won -

the right to become a swathed nun

heart hidden to all but the divine

He whose love could never, never, hurt me.

And then I could label as demon any vagabond he-man

in latter days,

laugh as I strolled down the path,

making fun of the foibles of years gone by;

pain could become anecdotes that can't make me cry.

I'd crouch in my pew

in my drab dress of blue .

Why? why? why? why? why?

How could You, God, Abba? send me a man

who could touch more wounds with one flick of a finger

than a thousand normal friendly men;

so I could feel

like a creep

before his svelte smile;

so I could feel

like a female slave

when he clapped his hands for instant obedience.

So, I could feel like a feverish workaholic

when he let out an insouciant laugh.

So, I could be sure of total rejection if not today, tomorrow!

So, I could be too agitated to pray

to the only One whose love is love.

Job-ess-like, I peevishly implore God, oh God,

I want no answer I can dig up

From the vast well of my clever formulations;

no answer that sounds like the words of

an imaginary playmate.

I will wait, like Job,

for the answer that cannot deceive

because it issues from the mouth of Truth, Himself.

Do you see me, God

sitting on the ash heap of my dreams of peace,

arms folded defiantly, waiting?

So, the friends of Job-ess, mock:

can God write on an IBM think-pad?

Yet, in the dark

the luminous face of Jesus lures.”

(Now in 2017, rereading this terrible prose-poem, I am appalled. In memory, now more than twenty years later, I have been considering that particular spiritual friendship to have been not so bad! Now, in 2017, I thank my Jesus for saving me from that man. Even though there was nothing sinful in the relationship, how toxic it was and what drama-queen tendencies that poem displays! However, I am including it as a reach-out to other co-dependents, since the story does have a happy ending as follows.)

I don't want to end this entry (about my co-dependent friendship) this way. If I fling my heart into the Sacred Heart I hear Jesus not berating me for folly, but consoling me. He seems to tell me: “You were not wrong in seeing the love that is in this man. I have put it there. You can't avoid being pulled toward love as toward a magnet. Stop castigating yourself and him. Whenever he comes to mind, pray and forgive. He forgives you for being unable to love him as he would have wished. Now follow Fr. Gregory's advice and hide yourself in my Heart until you are ready to start out again.”

And, after making this prayer I decided to call Mr. X after quite a long time of distancing myself from him. I said "Gee, I was reading my old journals and we really hurt each other a lot. I'm sorry for my part in it." He immediately suggested we forget the past and try to be friends. I don't really want to get close to him again, but it felt very good to forgive him and I hope I will be able to forget the past and just pray for him whenever I happen to think about him.

(And, God did answer that prayer and, even though I had somewhat painful friendships afterwards they never reached these awful proportions of woundedness and wounding!)

December 25, 1996

I felt very happy about it being my first Christmas as a Handmaid of Nazareth - a sort of tender, glowy, feeling inside.

My sister Carla got me a Nouwen book. Some years back, given the polarity of our ideas about the Church, we decided to try to make peace by both reading any books that came to our notice that were acceptable to all Catholics no matter what our views. We decided that Nouwen was a safe bet. The Nouwen book my sister sent this Christmas, *Can you Drink this Cup?* is wonderful.

My daughter Carla came to the Christmas Mass. She noticed at the consecration how much the priest believed that the bread and wine was really Christ. My other daughter, Diana, in L.A. who has been doing Eastern style meditation saw a vision of Jesus carrying her cross. A few weeks later she felt flooded with happiness coming from Him. Since neither of them receive the sacraments any more, these signs seemed to show that grace was

still working in their lives. Diana is reading Chesterton and Lewis and wanting to talk to me about spirituality!

December 30, 1996

Often during the holidays, I felt that I belonged in my little cell. That is what I call my downstairs room in my daughter's house. I love this place. It is a long bedroom with picture windows. The view is not of the famous red rocks of Sedona, but rather of some short green trees. I have most of my possessions in this small cell. This in itself gives me great joy since I have always loved simplicity of life and had to fight constantly with my husband, when he was alive, because he loved abundance of good things.

It is a "nunny" feeling to enter my room, leaving the family areas to enter into a more secluded mode. Since my rule calls for considerable time in quiet prayer, it is always good to go back to my cell and keep the rule.

I spent a wonderful New Year's Eve at a prayer meeting in the house of an extended hispanic family. The men each year kill a small calf at New Year's to provide food for the some thirty people who come. When I got to the house with a friend of mine, a whole bunch of small children greeted us with loudly sung hispanic hymns. The living room is a kind of shrine with statues and vigil lights. The prayer group of some thirteen families wants to buy 40 acres and start a community. The rosary, replete with very deep meditations on inner healing by a youth minister who is part of the family, was led by the children. Many of the men prayed as if in a semi-trance. It was incredible to see all the family unity.

January, 1997

The pastor of the Sedona parish, St. John Vianney, Fr. J. C. Ortiz agreed to let me have a key to the church so that I could come early to pray. It just feels special and nun-like to have a key to the sanctuary where Jesus waits patiently through the night until his adorers come in the morning.

Anne, one of those early-bird contemplatives handed me a list of Scriptures of use in allaying anxiety about our children who have left the faith:

Ps. 72:4 "He will save the children of [REDACTED] those in need."

Ps. 102:18 " ... that a race still to be born can praise God ... your servants' sons will have a permanent home and their descendants be in your presence always ... "

Isaiah 49:25 "I myself will save your children."

Isaiah 59:21 "My spirit ... and my words will not disappear from your mouth, nor from the mouths of your children, nor from the mouths of your children's children."

Talking to a Christmas guest about my simple clothing I said it was a sign to me of not competing with other women or looking for men. Indeed, I have quite a different feeling when I am with women friends now and also with males. I feel set apart as a consecrated woman.

Some women like this. It gives them permission, as it were, to jump immediately into conversations about spirituality without the former constant mutual consultations about our emotional problems with the men in our lives. Other women seem alienated by my new identity. Either it reminds them of religious sisters of the past they disliked, or they just sense that I am living in a different world. And, in fact, I do feel much more distant from lay-life.

Someone mentioned that I am always wanting to talk about my own affairs and not listening effectively. Since several people have told me this recently I need to hearken better and work on it as a major flaw of self-centeredness. When I try to understand why I am so garrulous, what comes up is that I am a tad desperate most of the time. Therefore, what is bothering me at the moment, or chatter to cover up what is really bothering me, seems more important to me than topics others might want to talk about. Another problem is that I am more articulate than some friends who are slower about revealing themselves in conversation. Such women or men start in on some narrative and then lapse into long pauses. I tend to jump into the hiatus with my theories or stories.

Occasionally I meet someone even more self-preoccupied and talkative than myself and I hate it. The voice begins to seem relentless and the nervous energy unbearable. Alas!

I pray – "Dear Mary, the ponderer, surely you did not chatter like a magpie. You must have been the best listener in the world. Show me how to change these bad habits. Help me at the root of the anxiety that makes me think I need so much attention from others. Let me have deep compassion for those with problems who cannot reveal them in swift deft language pictures but only with deep sighs and halting speech.

Someone gave me a sheet from a talk she gave about effective listening. Maybe some of you, readers, need to hear this also.

1. To listen effectively you have to enjoy being quiet and relaxed as you listen.
2. You have to listen safely - by just repeating what someone else says in your own words: - for example, Jane says, I hate so and so because she did this and that to me for no reason. You repeat in your own words: Jane, you are angry and frustrated because it seems to you that someone hurt you for no reason at all, right?
3. You have to like being able to understand and calm people down.
4. You can call on God's power of peace.
5. You like to be peaceful and like yourself being calm and patient.
6. You like being a good listener.
7. Wait until people finish speaking before you begin to respond.
8. Let God live in you.

(Many references in the rest of this book will be to a publisher I came into contact with, Jim Gilboy, of CMJ Marian Books. My new publisher is eager to see more on my husband Martin's masterpiece about Christ and Satan in the desert: *Children of the Breath*. He wants to come from Chicago to arrange for my daughter to edit the whole. How I love this book. My sense of Jesus comes a lot from his book. Eventually it went out of print with CMJ, and is now being distributed by En Route Books and Media. It is an incredible book about everything Jesus and Satan might have said besides what is in the NT. Basically, Satan tries to convince Jesus that men are too worldly to ever accept His message. Jesus wins.

I got an invitation to do a parish mission based on the *Kiss from the Cross: A Saint for Every Kind of Suffering*. I am thrilled that I, as a woman, would be asked to do a parish mission! Later I saw that it was hard because I can't hear confessions.

My grandsons stopped going regularly to Sunday Mass with me. I said to them: "The Lord Jesus is bored with adults, he'd enjoy seeing you guys, but you don't have to come." They thought about it and the older said yes and then the younger trotted along. Nicholas came up with a quarter to give in the collected totally unbidden. He asked why we give money and I replied, "So the priest can eat."

from Venerable Conchita

(a Mexican grandmother about to be beatified) (Before the Altar #57)

"What is man without You? The word convinces, but the blood alone persuades, that is to say - the life of sacrifice in union with Jesus. Art makes the orator, but suffering alone makes the saint."

Also from Conchita (Before the Altar, #61)

"I must also be an apostle by keeping silence when others talk scandal in my presence, by my speech in defending the honor of my neighbors, in excusing their weaknesses and defects, in speaking of God, of his love, of his goodness and of his charity to all men.

"I must be an apostle against too much concern with what others think.

"Who passes through this exile without treading upon thorns, without his heart being lacerated and torn asunder? But love makes the cross sweet and pleasant and light. At first the cross is carried with repugnance, then with facility, and finally with love."

From a Hymn written in 1634 (Office of Readings)

We know our sin,

and we are burdened as with some loathsome thing,

And have fallen down just like leaves in the blast of winter:

And the sins we have committed just like winds have blown us all about.

You have taken from us Your brightness and comfort

And have broken us by laying the debt of our sins upon us ...

Your Savior comes, do not be fearful, for it is I,

your God and your mighty Ruler,

Zion's Holy One and your Redeemer."

from St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, O.C.S. (November 9, 1906 Letter to her mother):

"There is a Being who is Love and who wishes us to live in communion with Him. Oh, Mama, it is delightful, for He is there keeping me company, helping me to suffer, urging me to go beyond my sufferings to rest in Him; do as I do, you will see how that transforms everything."

I was talking to Alice Von Hildebrand about my vocation. She said that the habit is so beautiful because it is an outward sign of the inner consecration. That we should come to see that we are more beautiful and attract more people when they are just focusing on our spiritual beauty without any attempt to be outwardly attractive through our adornments.

However, she thinks that it is impossible simply to push a button and will to become more holy. Each of us has faults and we are usually rather blind to them. In the Gospel the blind man says "Lord that I may see." We should beg to "see." And we should pray for others to see. We cannot simply force someone to "see," no matter how right we may be about their motives. It is a matter of humility to be able to see one's weaknesses and not be filled with self-hatred but instead just see that we are loved and forgiven by Christ. Our charitable gentleness toward the weaknesses of others reflects that love and forgiveness and can help them "see" in this indirect way.

I am beginning to think I am not meant for community and should just live my own rule with a private promise. In the course of pondering psychological tensions that arise about community, a friend in Sedona who is also a psychoanalyst had these reflections. They are a little obscure but I found them insightful. You may find them so, also.

"If you are loved as a child, as you, Ronda, was, by people who are looking for mirrors of themselves, you tend to try to earn their love by being what they want you to be. You think they will stay if only to admire their own reflections.

When Fathers leave (my father left when we were 8 years old) you blame yourself for not twirling fast enough, for holding too loose, for failing to hide the fear that he wanted more than you could give...

When fathers leave, mothers clutch their daughters tight and send balloons of hope, praying,

this is enough, these daughter spirits so like mine, and curse the need for more.

And something in her burst inside with wanting to be enough to keep the dark away.

Life, grim teacher, helped her know she'd failed.

But she saw the "Son who died that she might live reflected in the fragment of the mirror she held in bleeding fingers, to never let go ... she, ecstatic, holds, but holds too tight, her fingers bleeding in the night...

They, who could have danced on rainbows earthbound, afraid that madness lies behind the light and in the mirror is the image of the Son, who had to die so she could live ..."

(While in Sedona, I started working on a book called *Seeking Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging*. This was published by CMJ Marian Books and is now being distributed by En Route Books and Media.)

Reading Johnson on Aging, he says that we are upset because we do not have the energy to produce, but the purpose of the time of aging is to grow in virtue and in contemplative joy, not in productivity!

Lines from a poem of Carla, one of my twins, and then a companion poem written by Diana, her twin, after reading Carla's poem:

Twigs in Twilight by Carla

(concerning her longing for faith in Christ)

Let me fill each day with silence...

while the throbbing of salvation

rains its hail outside the door;

let me gather twigs of firewood and pray

for nothing more...

There's a loosened piece of yesterday still singing in my ears,

but a fast deceit of twilight

lends a luster to the fear

that the summer of the audience

is more than I can bear .

I will hobble toward your altar...

I will gather twigs in twilight,

I will push against the bait.

I will light a tiny fire

with its twigs all bundled tight,

in the thinness of the forest

will I build a tender light,

and while mighty souls rush homeward I will

stay and guard the night.

Burning in the Sun

(Diana's response – manifesting her new spiritual venture)

Let me roar into your stillness,

let me show you something more

in the vibrancy of living

than the danger at your door:

The sun is tapping at your window,

making patterns on the floor.

For the strongest armor can't protect the wariest of knight;

through chinks and cracks the Grail you spurn

is gilding you with light...

Tomorrow sings beyond the past

although you bind your feet

as you saltily gaze backward

at the city in defeat-

the rainbow of redemption resurrects

the ghosts you meet.

I can see into your twilight

as I burn here in the sun;

I am firing Roman candles as I run
aimed at burning down your shelter,
Melting us two into one
We can fly far past the moonlight
We can waltz around a star
We can light the night with laughter once again...
your twigs are burning far more bright
than you believe
they are ...

From the Office of Readings during Passion Week Sermons on 1 John -something wonderful from St. Augustine:

"We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as he is" - The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holy desire. You do not see what you long for, but that very act of desiring prepares you, so that when he comes you may see and be utterly satisfied.

"Suppose you are going to fill some holder or container, and you know you will be given a large amount. Then you set about stretching your sack or wineskin or whatever it is. Why? Because you know the quantity you will have to put in it, and your eyes tell you there is not enough room. By stretching it, therefore, you increase the capacity of the sack, and this is how God deals with us. Simply by making us wait, he increases our desire, which in turn enlarges the capacity of our soul, making it able to receive what is given to us.

So, my brethren, let us continue to desire, for we shall be filled (like St. Paul) 'forgetting what is behind and stretching forward to what lies ahead, I press on to the prize to which I am called in the life above.'"

April, 1997

On joy, something beautiful from a tape someone gave me of a Rabbi Sholomo Carlebach called Teachings of Joy and Oneness - quoting from Rabbi Nachmann a famous Chasid of the 19th century:

What the world needs most is not peace but joy. Reb Nachmann says: people only hate when they are sad. Imagine there is someone in the world I can't stand the most, I hate that person, and every day I hate that person more. Now imagine that you are at your children's wedding, dancing, the happiest day of my life, and that person comes to the door. What will happen? I will interrupt the dancing and run to the door and embrace and kiss my arch-enemy and I will say my precious friend and I will not be lying..."

Possibly I don't fit into any group but I am more of a solitary pilgrim bride.

(Rereading this now in 2013, I want you to know that this theme will recur over and over again in this book. Once when I was giving talks at Pecos Monastery in New Mexico, the Lord seemed to say that I didn't belong anywhere. I was to be a pilgrim so He could send me anywhere in the Church. Then Fr. Luke Zimmer, when I was his directee, told me that I absolutely didn't belong in community by the very nature of my personality. But, because I desire greatly to be part of a community I keep trying. By now, 2013, I am convinced I am supposed to be a Dedicated Widow with a private promise and not to be in community but this is after eighteen (!!!!!) attempts in 20 years of widowhood to try to be in a community or start one.)

In Sedona I met a couple with a very unusual story. She had been a New Age "sacred prostitute) and he was a cowboy. In the course of their marriage preparation, they came to me and he made a fire and burned his little book with the list of all the many women he had sex with in the past. They did get married in the Church and became very faithful Catholics but eventually broke up years later, partly due to the brokenness from childhood experiences.

Late snow heavy on the green pine trees seen from the window of the Church: I thought that the wonderful feeling of that sight had something to do with the white purity of the snow on the green life of the tree - so often life does not seem pure and purity does not seem lively.

I went to a healing workshop. I think this message is very important for all of us.

"Do you control your feelings or do your feelings control you? ... First you have to accept the feelings that you have. Let your feelings be as big as they are. Unless you can do this you will end up stuffing, shoving, and storing them to be triggered uncontrollably at another time.

“Make a conscious choice to let go of the feelings surrounding this event or experience so they do not continue to reinjure you. Believe and resolve that carrying bitterness, rage/anger, fear, and resentment only gives that person and or situation power over you which is not part of God's plan for your life. Use some ritual to formalize your commitment to letting this go. (Perhaps you may imagine Christ going to Calvary and He is carrying the situation, your feelings, and this hurtful relationship on the cross. Each nail is one tear, hurt, or ounce of grief you have suffered.)

“Need to forgive and/or to set boundaries vs. holding on to resentment because you are used to it!”

For me to become what I dream I can be seems to me at this moment to involve more being a widow dedicated to the Lord than trying to work through all these emotional impasses. My sense is that I will become more what I am meant to be in the eyes of God by not knocking my head against the wall trying to accept things in the community I can't accept, or trying to change myself in ways that just don't seem to yield. Since I feel mostly miserable about being in the community and only occasionally happy about it, I should get out.

I am great at daily goals but not so good on long-term. What is my long-term goal right now in my life? To let God make me holy. That is clear. But what is the intermediate step?

Would trust in God mean thinking that if I totally live out my vision all by myself, I will find good friends wherever I go? (Rereading this in 2017, I can attest that God has sent me wonderful holy friends everywhere I have gone as a dedicated widow not living in community.

At a healing talk it was suggested to bring Jesus to visit the angry inner child; bring your inner child to God and rest in his arms.

“It is erroneous to think either that feelings are no part of me, denial, stoicism, repression; or that feelings are the whole me and my master. Feelings are a part of me. Col. 1: 9-12 "May you be filled with the knowledge of his will ... so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord . . . for the attaining of all patience, steadfastness, joyously."

A good definition: “co-dependency = letting another person's behavior unduly affect me and becoming obsessed with trying to control that person's behavior.” This reminded me of a priest mentor who used to say “you can't control others, but they shouldn't be controlling you.”

“365 times in Scripture it says “Be not afraid!” That is one for each day of the year. Whenever we over-react we know it is an unhealed emotion.

“A hindrance to knowing God's will and being able to discern is a desire for approval over desire for God's will, or desire for personal comfort over desire for God's will.

A letter to Mother Mary Yvonne:

“After your call from Chicago, I curled up to go back to sleep. Perhaps you were praying for my tormented soul. Then some minutes later, it felt as if Jesus swooped down and took my heart out of my body and held it to His own - an hour of blissful surrender, as you have prayed for me to have.

And it became so clear that He is taking me out of community to be His pilgrim bride.

Lines from the Spiritual Canticle of John of the Cross: - when they look for me on the common, tell them that I have left with my Beloved.

He seemed to tell me that He had brought us together and that He used you to help me focus on Him alone and He used me to help you get launched and we can wave kisses to each other from our separate paths, forgiving each other for the pain we've have caused each other.

Ronda, a widow dedicated to the Lord

Weeping for Charlie - forgiving him for the pain his suicide caused me and everyone else, I got a sense of him with Martin saying to rest, that they would take care of the bringing Carla and Diana back to the sacraments. (Twenty years after this journal entry they came back at the same day on the feast of St. Edith Stein, the great Jewish convert.)

Mother Mary Yvonne responded with great love saying that I had to go in the direction I thought best but that I should take a leave because Jesus told her I will come back.

(Now in 2013, I can report that as it was, I did try again to be a Handmaid but that failed to work out also, and I am not going to put in the details.)

Even though I am on leave from the Handmaids of Nazareth - Mother Mary Yvonne asked if I would continue the series about different spiritualities in the Church. The attached was sent today:

SPIRITUALITY: FRANCISCAN

At a group of faculty at Franciscan University of Steubenville gathering to share about how to apply the Franciscan spirit to their lives, it became apparent that each of us had different aspects of the life and spirituality of St. Francis and his Order that attracted us to this university.

how he personally cared for the poor

his freedom of spirit

his utter simplicity

his contemplative ecstasy

his love for the Cross

his love for creation

his poetic way of loving God etc.

In many ways the Church as a whole has followed St. Francis both as laity and as religious.

All Catholics are enjoined to follow the Gospel in caring for the poor, in loving the Cross and in praising God for the beauty of Creation. All Catholics wish they could experience the ecstatic prayer life of St. Francis - though some would shudder to experience the painful part of contemplative union.

Most Catholics personally minister to needy persons - in terms of corporal or spiritual works of mercy. Family people sometimes 24/7.

The more controversial aspects of Franciscan spirituality usually concern freedom of spirit and simplicity of life.

Freedom of spirit consists, at least in part, in having such burning zeal for the salvation of the world that a Christian is willing to risk looking foolish within their own families and in public to become a fool for Christ. Flamboyance was characteristic of St. Francis, but even a very quiet Franciscan person will demonstrate a counter-cultural freedom of spirit, for instance, by bringing the love of Christ into ordinary conversation as an expression of her own intimacy. Or, reaching out to a person in tears in the back of a Church. Persons with freedom of spirit simply do not start with the thought of what others will think so much as with what the Holy Spirit is telling them would please Jesus.

With regard to simplicity of life, there has always been much controversy even within the Franciscan Order. Few of the early disciples of Francis wanted to live in such utter poverty as did their founder. Some Third Order Franciscans spend endless hours in their chapters debating about what degree of wealth is compatible with a Secular Franciscan vocation.

Pope Paul VI reflects well the universality of the Franciscan spirit in admonishing the people of God that all Christians should have a simple and austere life style in solidarity with the poor.

For a Handmaid of Nazareth who is often living in the world, some questions that could be posed are these:

- have I developed a habit of acquiring unnecessary possessions as a boost to sagging spirits or for other reasons?
- do I feel a need to compete with other women or bolster my own sense of attractiveness by adornments costing money that could be used for my own necessities or to help the needy?
- do I go along with practices that are more worldly than holy, such as viewing television programs that are not helpful to my vocation? (I don't mean watching programs that are just funny for recreation, but rather ones that have too much sex and violence.)
- do I promote a spirit of simplicity in my family by avoiding too many or too luxurious gifts and suggesting simpler less expensive though attractive dress where possible; substituting creative play for more addictive amusements?
- do I actively see where it may be possible to spend less and give more to the needy?

The Franciscan spirit is not to become glum, fearful, insecure and miserable through impossible austerities.

Franciscans always point out that poverty is not an end but a means. Franciscans try to let more God in so that they can do without so much else, in a joyful spirit.

The many Franciscan spiritual themes listed at the beginning of this short piece all come together in an integrated Catholic personality. There is more time for contemplation when less time is spent acquiring things. There is more time to help the poor when there is more joy in creation so that we are not frightened that ministry to the needy might be a downer.

Some Handmaids of Nazareth who have fought addictions such as alcohol, over-eating, workaholism, nicotine, and co-dependency have found that following the Handmaid Rule with its emphasis on greater union with God in prayer leads to surprising liberation from previous tendencies to bondage.

May St. Francis of Assisi intercede for us as we open ourselves to new forms of holiness.

April 24, 1997

My twin daughters, Carla and Diana, arranged a splendid book of loving letters from old friends and family for my 60th birthday – 53 pages worth and also a surprise party at Pizza Hut. It was glorious. I kept crying, I was so surprised and delighted and felt so moved by all that love coming at once - like a foretaste of heaven. It also felt like a gift from Jesus because Carla found a picture on the Internet of the Jesus of the Raphael tapestry in Rome that was part of my conversion in 1958, when that face of Jesus came alive, and made that picture the backdrop of all the pages in the "book of love."

Some wonderful lines from the book:

Evie said I was a super-duper scooper of souls

For Ommy, my Mommy, A 60th birthday wish from Diana:

“Clarity, strength, humility, love, patience.

“And what is clarity but the knowledge that one is on the path toward God? The road is merciful enough to allow detours; the woman on her bicycle with hair streaming behind her., wearing a yellow poncho with fringes is allowed to stop from time to time when dew-filled roses beckon."And sometimes strength is weakness, and when you are smallest, the dog comes to lick away the tears, dear heart, as you cling to his mane when you have need and he roars the demons into silence.

“In your smallness, you can look back at the worst of detours and find the humility to make amends ...

“And Love is everywhere you see it - look! The Light is burning through the leaves of past chapters and all is humbled by His presence. The wolf and the lamb have reached an understanding, and who is that silver-bearded man (Martin, my husband in eternity) walking them into Paradise? Looking over his shoulder yet for the one to come?

“Patience, the road stretches through the mountains for a while, Moses, and you will not be denied the promised land this time ...

“With love and awe and respect - Diana.

Alice Yon Hildebrand said, "She has plenty of reasons to shed tears, but as Kierkegaard put it, how is Christ to dry the tears of those who have never cried?"

Madeleine Stebbins said, "Her courage in looking truth in the eye in her own self, exposing her own vulnerability, weakness, and fallen nature is an astonishing and rare quality. It disarms all pretence in her listeners, and makes her so winning to friends."

Richard and Becky:

“A work of nature where there is no unconscious, touching.”

May, 1997

Funny Mother's Day letter from my daughter Diana in Los Angeles:

Once upon a time, there was a lonely queen of great beauty, locked up in a tower made of regrets. 'I have become a short, fat, evil troll,' she thought to herself cheerfully, as she ran her fingers through her long, wild hair, and knelt on the cold stones and prayed that no one would come to rescue her. In keeping with her new self-image, she determined to add dingy brown to her meager wardrobe of blue, and decided to knit a shapeless garment of this hue for herself. "

Diana then describes how even though the woman thinks she is wearing blue she is really wearing the colors of her whole past full of beautiful colors of children and husband and students. And, finally, Mother Mary tells her son to come and bring the woman out of the hermitage of her little cell into the sunlight of eternity.

Lorraine Van Denburgh gave a talk. She said that trying to move your head into your heart - the obstacle is the stiff neck. If you give up the stiff neck you get healing, peace, and many other benefits.

She said that when you are asking forgiveness from someone between the asking and the forgiveness you need to put "What can I do that would be healing for you?"

If someone is wrong but won't admit it, just keep saying internally: "I forgive you and I set you free." Then you will leave their presence feeling free and peaceful.

Lorraine also said that a way to discern if a word is from God or from oneself is that if it is too good to be my thought, too wise, too loving, then it is from God!

June 1, 1997

More and more leadings to want to have lots of free time to just be available for works of mercy of all kinds vs. always being rushed so that people can't ask me for simple things freely.

Scripture reading about "in my father's house there are many mansions." I am pondering this as related to what counts is the love in my heart and what different groups I belong to is really a means - even though God might want something specific in the way of commitment, I should not be so uptight about every detail of those groups.

This summer my family in Sedona decided to vacation at the San Juan Islands above Seattle with a view to buying land and building a house there. Since their work on computers can be done anywhere, they had a yen to try a new place.

I found the San Juan Islands to be one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen in the whole world. But it involved a 3-4 hour round trip on a ferry to get to daily Mass at a place called Shaw Island where Benedictine nuns support themselves raising llamas for sale. Talking to people on the ferry was a witness to other Catholics on these islands who had never conceived of taking a ferry to daily Mass. This in itself was such a witness to the Island Catholics of love of the Eucharist. Often

The Benedictine Gregorian chant at the Mass was heavenly. It was so strengthening to be "lost" in the Mass vs. my home parish so distracted by my own ministries.

On the ferry I met an ex-Catholic ferry man drawn to my nunnish appearance. The novice habit of the Handmaids of Nazareth is a plain blue denim jumper with a large crucifix and a veil of white cotton trimmed in red. This man said he was in trouble - would I pray. I did and he got out of whatever trouble. I met him two weeks later - I had given him my little Signs of Love - on the sacraments and he greeted me with such joy. It seemed a sign of what I will be able to do even more in the future. The habit evangelizes. Was at an Inn in Orcas eating breakfast and a man at the bar came over and grabbed the large cross around my neck! He was a taxi driver who has been away from the Church for decades because he loves Latin. I suggested he go see the Benedictine nuns.

Coming home from a trip, I arrived at Seattle airport and then flew in a 4 seater tiny plane to the islands - just me and the pilot and God. What if he had a stroke, I wondered?

My dear friend, also a Catholic writer, Patricia Treece visited. On charitable conversation she suggests that one mostly make "I" communications such as "I felt X" vs. "You" messages "You are a blankety blank." It amused me when she said that all the Jews she knew, like me, are always in a lather!"

What causes the 'lathering," Pride - maybe. Just a natural inclination towards anger? Or is it an artistic temperament that emotes first and becomes more reasonable later? The devil delightedly eggs these conflict situations on - appealing to already existing pride and anger and impatience with the imperfections of others.

Whether or not being in a lather is pleasing to Jesus is another question -- I cannot imagine Jesus or Mary being in a lather all the time - and they were Jews.

(Added in 2013: In the book, *Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord*, I explain how, at Franciscan University of Steubenville, I learned about Recovery, Inc. for anger, fear and depression. I have been working this program from 1993-2013 and it has helped me enormously with anger. You will read more about it in future chapters of this book.)

Asked what he is really sure of, my grandson, 7 1/2 years old, said 1) that God is real 2) that there are penguins on Antartica and that friendly dogs wag their tails.

On a trip to speak in San Antonio, Texas, I had, again, a sense of being a pilgrimess. I thought that my adult children are the base, but that I will be sent around. He may make me discontented at home so that I will be willing to go elsewhere for Him.

August, 1997

Hearing the Chant for the Feast of the Assumption on Shaw Island, I felt that these 6 Benedictine nuns had saved the Holy Grail from the storms of Post Vatican II. I thought about how this chapel on an island in the remote Northwest is so far from the home of Jesus in Nazareth yet He is here with me through the Eucharist.

A nun passed by and said to a ewe-sheep: "Hi Margaret, I love you Margaret!" So sweet! It reminded me of You, Jesus, saying you know Your sheep and they know You. And I am one. The Psalms come so alive at a sheep-farm monastery. The yodeling of this sister is like tongues.

In prayer, Jesus seemed to tell me that, "You must stop analyzing everything, so that you cannot be openhanded to receive the gifts of joy I want to give you - like the beauty of this monastery and bay view and the pines and the bells in the wind and the llamas and goats on the ferry and the flowers.

"Expect each day to be nailed to the Cross and then let me lift you down and give you consolation and foretastes of heaven."

God doesn't ask me to understand the cross, squirming around on it, but to accept it and be loving with Him and others. Period!

Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, O.P., Founder of the Brothers of St. John, says hope is a form of poverty.

Do I really expect everything from God alone or am I busy every waking moment trying to save myself?

So tired? God will reach me in this tired body. More for Him to do, less for me? I must trust God at this turning point in my life, to do less with more purity of heart?

Dom Philippe writes about Mary's interior joy "In a secret joy there is always a very special note of depth, interiority, intimacy. It is like a perfume carefully kept in a sealed bottle for fear its fragrance might evaporate. For this very reason there is a note of gravity in this joy. Mary must be joyful for the whole universe which knows nothing. She must be attentive to the presence of God for those who are unaware of it."

We learn what is really wrong with us when we see how this hurts others.

Mother Hildegard of the Benedictine monastery said that the Holy Spirit doesn't make lists. We should not do everything by lists. Try to intuit when some intervention with a difficult person would be good vs. forcing things through.

October, 1997

Being like a little child: a little child goes where its parents go, not worried about the future. Jesus says that my consecration with private vows is a reward, not more work, but sheer joy. He has given me heavy crosses and now he wants to lighten my life.

November, 1997

Someone says that God shares all his virtues with us except one: judgment. When we want to judge we should say - Jesus forgives you, I forgive you, and I am set free.

In an argument by letter with a Rabbi who wants the Church to expunge everything in the NT about the Jews that has led to persecution, I asked if they would want to take out of Passover all reference to Egyptians since there are wars between Israelis and Egyptians?

December, 1997 – In the course of trying to evangelize New Age people, some of whom come to our parish soup kitchen, I met a man of about 45, unmarried. He seemed lonely. After some months of occasional conversations, when no one else was around I asked him if he didn't want children. He said that in his particular New Age vaguely Hindu "tribe" they have sex without condoms but don't conceive babies because of withdrawal. They practice taking the longest time before withdrawal for maximum pleasure. The analogy that came to my mind was if, instead of planting seeds in the ground, someone would use the seeds to play dominos.

Jesus can't sanctify me when I am so busy and troubled about many things. I should never be too busy to open myself in Him. Otherwise I am disappointing him! He could do so much more to make me a saint if I would be more open. Jesus says that when I let him be my best friend with Mary and Joseph and the angels and saints, then I will have peace.

January 1998

Reading Nouwen he mentions "a speaker poured water on hard, dried-out soil saying "look, the soil cannot receive the water and no seed can grow. Thereafter crumbling the soil with his hands and pouring water on it again, he said "It is only the broken soul that can receive the water and make the seed grow and bear fruit."

Women so much like to make a home of a job that leaving a job feels like leaving a home.

Diana says that mothers want their daughters to be twins to them

Quotes from a conference given by the Gootees.

"Anxiety comes from the irrational conviction that things have to go badly!"

"Need is not call. Do not just answer demands, because then you get worn out and cannot do what God wants you to do."

Jesus love me so much he wants me to be with him every moment.

"Fear is useless what is needed is trust." (Mark 5:36)

Meditate on "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (Col. 3: 15)

January 22, 1998

At my Christian writers' group in Sedona someone suggested we all write something about a perfect day for me 10 years from now. Here is my response:

MY PERFECT DAY 10 YEARS FROM NOW

I am seventy years old. It is a weekday. I am living in a large house with all the members of my family there, too, including the Los Angeles family who are not with me now.

I arise without benefit of the alarm clock by the dawn's early light. My bed is positioned so that I can see the ocean out my picture window. I lie in bed awhile gazing at the tranquil sea and praising God for its beauty.

After breakfast I walk a block away to Our Lady of the Sea for Adoration and Mass. I no longer own a car, because I never go anywhere but the Church.

From the windows of Our Lady of the Sea, I can view our ocean. When it is time for the Mass, my whole family, children and all, come to join me. After Mass they leave for work and school.

At the end of each Mass our prayer team, which includes the priest, prays over the sick and anyone in any kind of pain. Each and every hurting person has a sense of healing after these prayers.

Those who can, sit at tables in the social hall and have a light second breakfast together. After chatting awhile, each person, who wishes, exchanges one insight or favorite scripture passage. The priest is one of these persons.

Some stay to pray the rosary together. I talk to anyone after rosary who might want something of me.

By late morning, I am slowly walking back home, taking in the beauty of the ocean once again. On my return, I take a long nap. Then comes a big lunch. Then a walk on the beach with my dog and any grandkids that want to come.

Late afternoon finds me sitting at my word processor writing another in my series of popular Catholic novels.

I pray evening prayer and help with the big family dinner. After our meal everyone who has written something or drawn something shares it with the rest. Then we play a game and end with a family prayer.

I retire about 8 PM to spiritual reading and night prayer.

My cup runneth over.”

Feb. 1, 1998

Mother Angelica got a healing of her chronic problems with knees and legs. Alleluia.

Feb. 11, 1998

Mary Neill, O.P. my co-author, gave a talk that includes a mention of an African tribe where they have two dances: the dance of the little hunger is about hunger for food, security and love, but the dance of the great hunger is about the hunger for the divine. If we think that the little hungers are all that we have, then we try to satisfy these and repress the great hunger. Perhaps I am being led now back into the Dance of the Great Hunger?

One exercise she had was to write out 12 things you want to tell people. I thought of these:

You are beautiful!

God loves you, don't give up!

What will save you is a surprise!

Who you are is more than you know!

Jesus is the great light we have, believe Him!

The Eucharist is Jesus!

The darkness will not overcome the light!

The truth shall set you free, even if it hurts!

You don't have to be someone else to be holy, so accept your funny frailties!

Another striking question: In what ways have I tried to be a Ronda who God never heard of? To be a ballet dancer by taking classes while in college; to want to be a pure contemplative enunciating beautiful sayings and nothing else; to want to be the mother of many children as little Therese's mother was. I had 3 living children but 4 miscarriages.

I wondered whether trying to be a Sister is the same kind of thing or trying to be a quiet woman vs. a proclaimer of truth.

(Now in 2013, looking back I think the last two dreams were fantasies not God's will for me.)

March 20, 1998 DEATH OF CHARLIE RICH

This day saw the death of one of the people most important in my whole life as a Catholic: Charles Rich. To read more about this wonderful Jewish convert contemplative layman go to my web – www.rondachervin.com and click on the link.

March 28 – I was in a huge accident. It involved 2 different trucks plowing into my little car in a freak snowfall in Arizona. I was not hurt at all physically, although the glass from the windshield was in pieces in my lap and the car was totaled. I felt that it was a sign God had more for me to do in this life.

The bad result was PTS that lasts to this day whenever a vehicle on the road seems as if it will hit me.

April 10, Good Friday, I had the urge to give up. Could be just physical exhaustion, but could also have the meaning of needing to give up the whole Pelagian thing and just “be” first and “do” later.

April 21 - Jesus seems to say “nothing is more important than that your little heart take joy in Me and then you can proclaim Me.”

May 8, at Saturday Mass, Fr. J. C., the pastor, asked us why we were there. I said "Because I like to think that Jesus would be disappointed if I didn't come." It was a sort of word from Him, unpremeditated and just in the Spirit.

Mother Mary Yvonne invited me to make first vows. After much dialogue, I remembered reading in the Vatican document about religious community, that one has to put community above the apostolate. And that is what I don't feel called to do. Basically, speaking, teaching and writing come first for me, not community.

(Now in 2013, after trying many communities, I still think this is the central reason why I can't be in community.)

However, Mother Mary Yvonne became convinced in prayer that I did belong and that my apostolate was simply the way Jesus would use me in the community. I wrote these words in my journal: "Well, my Jesus, I am stunned and, yes, a little sceptical about becoming a Handmaid again. Yet I trust that since you gave such joy to Mother Yvonne and such fresh energy, that it is You, speaking through her to me.

(I am not going to detail here all the reasons why I became convinced once more that I didn't belong. I think Jesus wanted me to try again for many reasons but that it still wasn't the right choice.)

May 22, 1998

I have never thoroughly explained what I love so much about the tabernacle in our Church in Sedona. (This is the parish Church, not the famous Frank Lloyd Wright Church in the Rocks). Most often when I pass the tabernacle, while kneeling on the elevated part of the rug underneath it, I will reach up and stroke the raised silverish metal relief of the lamb of God without knowing quite why. Today, I feel an urge to understand the symbol better myself by trying to explain what I find so absolutely wonderful about the art work.

As many of you know, the main tabernacle was for many years on top of the central altar in our Churches. As Catholics entered the pews they would lower one knee to the ground and make the sign of the Cross as an expression of their faith that Our Lord and Savior was truly present in the tabernacle under the species of the host. Since Vatican II, it has been the practice in many Churches to remove the tabernacle to a place to the side. One reason is to create a sacred space away from the altar area where people can pray quietly while others talk to each other, usually softly.

Of course, there are those who object strenuously to this practice. They maintain that it used to be possible to pray quietly in the Church at any time before the flock were allowed to chatter away irreverently before and after services among themselves. In defense, some contemporary liturgists maintain that the purpose of gathering for Mass is not quiet prayer but communal fellowship around the mysteries of the altar. Let those who wish to pray in silence do so in their homes or make visits to Jesus in the tabernacle at other times.

Regardless of the pros and cons of this dispute, I love to kneel before Jesus in our heavy metal tabernacle which is wedged into the corner of the front of the Church.

In the center of the design on the front of the tabernacle is a lamb. Usually I take our little lamb for granted as an apt symbol for Jesus as lamb of God. Of course, there is the high theological meaning - the lamb of the sacrifice in the Old Testament fulfilled by God Himself in Jesus becoming the sacrificial lamb for all times.

Personally, as I gaze at the little lamb figure, it is vulnerability and inexorable pain triumphant that I see. The flag, signifying the victory of the resurrection, is so jaunty and brave looking. Having the Lamb of God with the flag on the door of the house of the Eucharist I find touching. It seems to indicate how the closeness of Jesus to us when He comes inside us in Holy Communion, can only be experienced when we are lamb-like, vulnerable, open to Him and to each other.

If we dare to be so lamb-like, then we can experience peace, represented by the two peace signs, the large P with the X on it for PAX, peace in Latin that are raised on both sides of the lamb.

May my soul be always high and solid, vulnerable and peaceful, in spite of everything in me that makes that seem impossible, such as the aggressive wolf-like traits - loud voice, angry retorts, threats of verbal retaliation.

May 24

From Diana (one of my daughters)

On Any Heavens

"If there are any heavens

My mother will (all by herself) have one

it will not be a pansy heaven

nor a fragile heaven of lilies-of-the-valley but it will be a heaven of black red roses

my father will be (deep like a rose, tall like a rose)

standing near my mother (swaying over her silent)

with eyes which are petals

and see nothing

with the face of a poet

really which is a flower and not a face with hands which whisper

this is my beloved

(suddenly in the sunlight he will bow, and the whole garden will bow).

(Now in 2013, reading this poem of my daughter, I am touched. I am thinking how wounded she, her twin sister, and her brother, Charlie, were wounded by the conflicts in our marriage. This poem seems like a longing for grace-filled healing.)

A priest said the miracle isn't when you get what you want from God, but when you do what God wants!

About giving up traveling to give talks I thought “Next time I hear the song ‘Whom shall I send?’ I will say anyone but me, send someone else!”

(Now in 2013, looking back, I think I needed Jesus to say in my heart that I could stop at that time for a while, and then later it was good to give talks but less often than before. I believe that many times people think that “a word from the Lord” was false when it seems that a road that was cross-filled then opens again but, sometimes, it is because we need a hiatus.)

Jesus seemed to kiss my forehead, as if leaving an invisible imprint of a diamond shape on the head of a horse, and He seemed to say “Thank you Ronda for being my speaker. I will give you worthwhile other work to do for Me”.

On June 13th I had a sense of my soul leaving my body and total unification with God. I no longer want insights about God, only God himself. This reminded me of the famous spiritual book called *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written for those who begin to long for wordless prayer.

July 4, 1998 Airports!

After some thirty years of life as an out of town speaker, I have decided to quit the lecture circuit. But I still have to get through 6 weeks of uncancellable speaking dates. So here I am on July 4th at 6:30 AM at the Pittsburgh airport on my way to New York City. This usually packed stop-over between flights from all over the Western United States heading East is almost empty on this holiday Saturday morning. As I slowly meander through the deserted aisles with an hour and a half before flight time, I count it up again. After just 6 more flights, I may never again have to go into an airport!

Somehow airports, these amazing twentieth century edifices, have come to represent to me the tension of world vs. spirit; the manifold variety of life vs. the joys of solitude; noise vs. quiet; adventure vs. tranquility. And, also, the ironies of Providence. After getting married in 1962, it was I, who hated travel, who wound up making trips once a month as a speaker. My husband, who adored travel, and went all around the world as an international book salesman before we married, had to leave that life due to disabling asthma. He would die of envy whenever he dropped me off at the airport.

"Going to Chicago?" Martin would ask? "Take in the drive around the lake. Get them to take you to such and such restaurant near the Water Tower ... Melbourne, Australia? . . . be sure to make a side trip to Sydney ... I'll never forget that harbor in World War II." Never, never, never, could he accept the fact that I was only interested in seeing Churches and Catholic audiences. In fact, the only time during our courtship that he considered breaking up with me was on a trip to Paris. He wanted to spend a whole day traipsing down the Champs Elysee looking for fashionable clothing for his fiancé. After a trip to Notre Dame Cathedral, I wanted to hole up in the hotel room studying the Summa Theologica.

"Maybe you need to go into long time therapy," he remarked with disgust when he realized he couldn't convince me to waste another hour buying fancy outfits. "This money belongs to the poor," I insisted vehemently.

Anyhow, now that my dear husband has passed into eternity, I would give a million dollars just to see his large body at the airport gate waiting for my return from yet another conference, eyes wistfully looking down the list of departing flights wishing he were off on an adventure.

Today, waiting for my flight, knowing I only have 6 weeks to go, vivid horrible memories of airports come to mind. Because I am working on my notes for this book, I become aware that these bad airport times have often been connected with male/female issues:

1971: Kicking a heavy suitcase across the airport in Frankfurt, Germany, my hands gripping smaller bags, with my six-month old son in a sack on my chest, I was astounded that no one would help. I decided men were so battered by the radical feminist stances popular in that decade, they were refusing traditional roles. Were they saying to themselves, perhaps, "if you think we're all male chauvinist pigs, and you want to be amazons, we'll show you what unisex really means. No more chivalry toward the weaker sex!"

1980's: The feeling of abandonment waiting around airports for connections after meetings with the Bishops on the Committee on the Concerns of Women. (I was one of the women professor experts on this committee). There was a sort of work-bonding between the female consultants and the male Bishops during the sessions - 3 times a year, for ten years at different locations. But then we would split, after the weekend, to different sections of the airport for flights taking us to our homes in States far removed from each other. Sitting at my gate after so much intense interaction, I would feel exhausted, sad, and lonely.

Still, I learned an awful lot from sticking with the Committee. The stereotype is that women are nurturing and men ambitious and task-oriented. It took ten years for me to see that Bishops, being pastoral, are usually exceedingly loving on a personal level. And women professionals, though always empathetic, tend to be more oriented toward results in a work situation. At the meeting I attended after my son committed suicide. I expected, and found, the women moving out toward me in my aching pain, but was amazed at how much love was extended by the Bishops.

After ten years of fatiguing, frustrating work, ending up with a document unacceptable for a 2/3 majority vote, it was the Bishops who kept in touch with us by Christmas card, assuring us of their prayers for our family concerns.

Somehow, it was the busy cold airport scene that took the brunt of the sensation of isolation I experienced after the meetings. I sat for hours in a funk waiting for my connection, compulsively working cross-word puzzles, licking my wounds over debates in the sessions I had lost. I realize that Bishops have to be at least 1/3 diplomat, where women leaders can afford to be militant prophetesses.

Sitting in the airport anonymous in the crowd, I ripped out from the crossword puzzle book out hard puzzles, inexplicably beyond my intelligence, collecting a pile of these and with scowling face cast them into the metal trash bins at regular intervals.

- 1997: Killing time for five hours at Seattle airport. The tiny commuter plane from the city to the San Juan Isles where the family was vacationing, left only infrequently. Returning from a speaking date back East the only connections involved departure at 7 AM in the morning EST; arriving in Seattle at 2:30 PM, thirty minutes too late for the 6 seater. Next one leaves at 5:30 PM and lands at a large island where the ferry to our smaller isle leaves at 9:30 PM.

So many hours of travel and sitting! During the stop-overs of that long day, I am eating, doing crossword puzzles, knitting, praying the rosary, reading a paperback amidst strangers. This gives me plenty of time to muse about the miserable life-style I have adopted. I think about how women were meant to be nest-makers, not adventurers. My daughters are computer experts working out of their homes surrounded by their children. They seem happier doing that than I do on the speaker-travel path.

How did I get into this life-style of constant travel? Not hard to figure out. I am a Crusader for the Church. All over the world people seem to think that it is worth paying to put me on a plane and have me dropped into their cities to teach their people.

Does this mean Jesus wants me to go round and round the country until I drop dead from the fatigue of it all? Every time a trip involves unusually difficult sacrifices I try to convince myself it would be “honky-dory-okay” -by Jesus if I quit.

Up to now, something always intervenes to persuade me that I have to keep it up, after all; such as watching Mother Angelica, in her 70's, with a 40 pound brace around her body, in constant pain, making it to yet another far-away conference. Or, Fr. Hardon in his eighties, bent-over and half blind, staggering through a huge terminal on his 4th trip of the month!

Here in Pittsburgh airport, on July 4th, 1998, at the start of my last round of speaking trips, I shove the notebook with my unhappy airport memoirs into my tote bag. I decide to take a last walk over to the Ladies' Room, before my flight is called. As I saunter over from my Gate past the shops and fast-food places, sudden feelings of love for the crazy airport-world wash over me. The funkiness of it all? The sense that with all its failings, air travel has united the world with friendly skies?

Actually what I have always liked best about the airport is taking in the beautiful faces, figures, and attire of young people. I am especially delighted by the colored skin of the black/hispanic mix women with their glorious intricately

braided hairdos. The slim African origin men with high, high, behinds remind me of films showing lines of scantily dressed black hunters in the Veldt, seeking prey, spears held shoulder height.

Part of the enjoyment of watching others in the airport is the anonymity. Dowdy old-women attract no attention at all. I recall that all the way into her eighties my mother justified dying her hair, painting her lips red and wearing brightly colored shirts and contrasting kerchiefs on the basis that otherwise no one ever noticed old women. Now at sixty I know what she means.

Is there some similar mechanism at work in the way I find myself whenever I am at the airport, making numerous phone-calls at high rates to my close friends? With each call am I trying to confirm to myself that far from being a nonentity in a crowd of thousands of strangers, I am a loved important person to someone?

Contrastingly, dressing as a nun in my drab blue dresses and jumpers also feels like being covered, hidden. Instead of my clothing being self-expression through exterior wrappings, my true self lives within. I no longer display myself in time, but instead invisibly stretch myself toward eternity.

July 14: I have a sense that the pendulum swings in the Church come because whenever one group is in power then what is left out of their theology or spirituality is taken up as a reaction. Otherwise the powerful become *too* proud and obnoxious. Hence "He exalteth the lowly."

There is an opportunity to Jetski at Bradenton Beach in Florida where we are having a family reunion vacation. I want to try. One of my son-in-law's, Peter, makes the sacrifice to take me on his jetski for 10 minutes or so. It feels good, not just the speed and waves, but also like feminine trust in a strong male.

In prayer in great pain all over my body from various maladies. Jesus seemed to say "Why do you think of me as far away, Ronda?"

My other son-in-law, Pete, husband of Diana, who is an agnostic at best, had a dream that he saw a cross made of olive wood and that Martin and Charlie were close and with our daughters dancing in West Side Story!

September 1998

Back in Sedona after a long series of out-of-town lectures, I thought it would be wonderful to devote myself to quiet prayer and peaceful work at my desk on various writing projects. No more pressure of air-travel, strange cities, conference crowds, speeches. I asked Mother Mary to slow me down. Mother Teresa wrote "We cannot put ourselves directly in the presence of God if we don't practice internal and external silence. Therefore, we should make a special point of silence of mind, eyes, and tongue."

Instead, the first month has been filled with difficulties - humungus car problems, tensions at the parish, and worst of all a whole series of invitations for out-of-town work, each one more intriguing and promising than the type of far-flung activities I had decided to turn down forever.

"Come to a monastery in Solesmes, France, and help run a retreat house for English-speaking guests!"

"Come to a huge university in the Mid-west and help with a Newman Center outreach to thousands of students!"

"Work with a holy priest and nun on a healing center in New England."

"Come to a tiny Catholic college by the seashore in the South and help start an entirely new creative program of studies!"

My head whirling with fantasies about these opportunities, peace began to seem even more distant than it had on the lecture circuit. In desperation I grabbed onto a Christian counselor, AL-Anon, and a home-retreat.

The goal of my counseling sessions is to develop more self-esteem as a child of God the Father, and greater intimacy with Christ, so that I can move out to others more from the heart than the head. (Mother Teresa always said that God doesn't need your work, He needs your heart.) Hopefully my life will have a stronger foundation after these sessions. The counselor also suggests being less body-hostile - i.e. taking the body into account as in swimming, eating well, lots of sleep.

I also went on a retreat with the hope of becoming so much more anchored in Christ that I would become detached enough to view the options in a rational manner without so much anxiety. In this way I will be a true Handmaid of the Lord, like Mary, who could not plan her life but was totally surrendered to whatever God would ask of her at each juncture. As reading for the home-retreat I selected excerpts from the writings of St. Bernard, a saint who wonderfully mingled the contemplative and the active; the head and the heart.

Some images that came with this inner work:

- I am not to go up and down in my moods based on exterior elements of life, but instead to be anchored in Jesus. Whether I stay or go, I will be walking hand in hand with Jesus, my Bridegroom.

- I notice that the attraction of lots of the fantasy future places circles around greater closeness to strong male figures. Substitutes for my dead son and husband? But the Scripture says "Put not your trust in princes." Does being weaned from workaholism create a vacuum which I try to fill by dreaming about "princes," i.e. strong male figures who will waft me away to some new site for team-ministry? Is this a sort of addiction? As they say in 12 Step, my life is totally out of control - in my case, out of control from nurturing fantasies that become so dazzling that I cannot see straight?

Another 12 step idea comes into play here about "letting things happen vs. making them happen." Does the anxiety that comes with invitations for future work come from just fear of relocation? Maybe, it comes more from trying to make things happen by psyching-out how idyllic I could make the future? In the NOW I experience the resistance of those around me, but in the fantasy, I have the power to force everyone at the locale to conform to my ideas of how to do things perfectly!

In a book about personality I read about a syndrome that fits me pretty well. It describes a type who finds the present with its petty tasks boring and instead constantly fantasizes about more exciting future places and events. The drive behind such patterns is a desperate craving for missing elements in one's present life.

The counselor projected that after our sessions I would be able to relate to others more from the heart than the head. Later this week there was a situation where a friend accused me of cutting people off forever if they disagreed with me. I was upset at her confronting remarks. Making a list of friends, I could prove that many of them are not intellectual allies but I still love them for other reasons. Then I realized that since the friend who brought it up was one who disagrees with me on some important subjects, her comments were really expressing her own fear that I would reject her. So, instead of spending more time on analysis, I hastened to reassure her that even though I want to reject people who disagree with me, I rarely do so. It seemed to me a sign of progress that I felt her fear in my heart, instead of just thinking about the subject of friendship in an abstract way.

As I type up my handwritten jottings thus far, I feel even more anxious. They come together in the form of a vicious circle - fear leading to fantasy, leading to more fear, stronger fantasies ... ugh!

I wonder, is the Lord trying to show me just how painful trying to evade the NOW and live on the FUTURE can get? Is the purpose to get the fast-forward on my mental tape going so fast that I have to move into Step One - my life is totally out of control? Someday will the slogan "One Day at a Time" begin to look less like a slogan and more like a life-saver?

I think that we cannot just decide to anchor ourselves in God. He has to anchor us in Him. The boat doesn't anchor itself; the captain does. I am the boat. God is the captain.

TRANSITION

A beautiful reading at Mass from Sirach 36:15-16

"Give peace, Lord, to those who wait for you and your prophets shall proclaim you as you deserve. Hear the prayers of your servant and of your people Israel."

Lines from St. Bernard that help:

"The reason for loving God is God Himself."

"Justice should be eager but not hasty. We need to rebuke others but not always right away."

In the midst of these turbulent first few weeks of counseling, 12 step and retreat work, the invitation involving the small college in the South became more urgent. Everything about this option seemed really perfect for me since the Mission Statement and plans coincided so much with ideas I have always had myself about Catholic education.

Exhausted at the thought of another trial-balloon after years of false starts since Martin's death, I prayed before going to bed:

"Dear Jesus, I am too tired to experiment. Can you just tell me which way to go? One day at a time? Lead Kindly Light ... one step ahead enough for me?"

I woke up the next morning thinking that there is no reason why I should be exempt from the Cross of having to experiment. How can I demand that God tell me what to do by a direct mystical voice? Isn't it part of the cross of the single life, even if consecrated, that we are sometimes "too free?" Too many options?

I also see that all these work-missions are pointless unless I am anchored in Christ.

Considering the possibility of continuing my teaching mission in the new setting in the South, a four month semester, January - May, to replace an older priest teaching 10 seminarians - happy images leap out at me:

From Psalm 92 in the Liturgy of the Hours this morning:

"Still bearing fruit when they are old; still full of sap, still green."

In prayer Jesus reminds me that I was begging for a place where everything I need would be there - Eucharist and regular food, and I would never have to drive again. He reminds me that He loves to surprise me; that He always has worked with me through surprise. Also, that He told me that in my fatigue I would need to lean more on the Church. Going to a college run by a fervent religious community would hopefully mean leaning more on others. Overwhelming feelings of gratitude at how great a gift this could be - maybe not a fantasy, but a reality God wants for me.

If I am really to go, then I would see this time in Sedona in a different way - not as the final refuge place - but instead as like the time after the gong when the battered boxer staggers into his corner for the ministrations of his coaches. Just the way these men surround the boxer to pour ointments onto his wounds, massage his back and stuff his thirsting mouth with lemons, so are my counselors during this hiatus, in pitying charity, pouring soothing balm on my bloody scars ... so that I will be ready for the next round in the arena!

On the fourth day of the retreat I seem to hear Jesus saying in my heart "My bride, I am offering you this place in Texas where I think we can be happy together. A bride wouldn't have to say yes out of duty, but maybe you want to say yes to this venture with Me."

This thought is consoling and also challenging. The words presuppose that I am not a slave but a bride and that Christ really is interested more in His intimacy with me than in my work for His kingdom.

Back to Pilgrim Bride image, not necessarily Corpus Christi forever, just for this Spring - more like One Day at a Time? (This was a small college run by a religious order in Texas, Our Lady of Corpus Christi, administered by the Society of Our Lady of the Trinity.

AI-Anon is such an American spirituality - so practical and pragmatic in a good way.

I went to bed and couldn't sleep. Jesus seemed to come to me in a rapturous way as if He were lifting my whole self, up and out. I was pondering happily the interior locution about Texas being a place He thought we could be happy together. This blissful feeling lasted for about an hour. To give myself up to happiness, and not, as they say in 12 step literature, be addicted to suffering.

I also thought about the 12 step idea of how much we need the members of the group. This truth contrasts with the residue of being brought up to be Nietzschean, strong and independent, so I feel ashamed to need these groups. This is the Mystical Body dependence - they need me, perhaps, at this college, for clarity of ideas. I need them for wisdom about daily living.

Since there was still a vague option of ministering to English speaking pilgrims at Solesmes, France, I had a stream of consciousness about Paris and France: Piaf, Chevalier, Rimbaud, La Gaité Parisienne, the Dom Cafe, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Notre Dame, Chartres, Rue du Bac, Proust, Galois, de Gaulle, Pascal, Montaigne, de Sales, Marillac, Vincent de Paul, Bernard, Chantal, Acarie, Marie of the Incarnation, Therese, Eminence Gris, Peguy, Bernanos, Raissa and Jacques Maritain, Baudeliere, La Grange, Daniel Rops, Teilhard, de Foucauld, Monserrat, Montparnasse, Bizet, Bloy, Monet, Manet, Camus, Hugo, Lustiger?

Notes from a session with the counselor: Trace back fear in unresolved situations to loss of father. When I come to face an unresolved situation like Corpus Christi, I should rest in the love of Jesus, anchored in His heart. Pray for it to go smoothly. The anchor is under the storm. I don't have to be at the mercy of the waves of life. I need to be so anchored in God that I live in the Now. The grace is in the Now. Ask God to help me live in the present.

Emotional healing needs safety, not conflict. Avoid unsafe people for me during this time. You have to have safety to be healed. Neediness means out of control. But taking care of human needs is just being responsible - even if they are my own needs. If I don't accept my needs I will find unhealthy ways to satisfy them.

God will bring forth images to show me what I need to work on during the next two weeks. The grace of the last two weeks is to rest in His love which is unconditional. I don't have to worry about Him abandoning me.

Be sure to include adoration prayer.

October 2, 1998

In Al-Anon working on Step 3 I made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him. When my only goal is to become holy - all love of God and neighbor - then I will have no problem with this step because of course He can make me holy in any situation I find myself in. It is when I am thinking that I must guarantee my own earthly happiness that I get into frantic racing thoughts about pros and cons of every option before me.

I need to have arms not only to embrace others, but to embrace my own self in love. Does everyone else have a lovable self except me? Did God create me without a self? Am I only part of a "we?" Pray to get a relationship to myself, to perceive the goodness in me. Psalm 139, I am personally knit in my mother's womb, the handiwork of God. Embrace who I am, so that I am not at the whim of everyone around me. Pray to be a more balanced person - the most balanced person I can be, little by little. I am too harsh on myself. Don't compare myself to very different person like Alice Von Hildebrand. The only true comparison is with myself. I have to befriend myself. No extra responsibilities. This is a time to be alone and let things surface. Healing takes a long time. The Steps empower this by living in the present moment.

October 8, 1998

Christian Therapy: I need to beg Jesus to show me how to love myself in Him, in His heart; to want to be alone more in order to be able to listen better to God.

A sense that the anchor image isn't so good for me, that it would be better to think of Jesus embracing me and out of that to go out to others looking for love and affirming them is okay - just to accept the pain of it when I am rejected by men who are not able to give that much love. My name is yearning. I recall the image of the pilgrim bride in the Church. I am sensing that teaching is my game; much more than parish ministry or sit at home and write and pray.

The little book mark of the 12 Steps called Just for Today is terrific. If you, the reader are not familiar with it, you might want to google it.

Weaning:

It is said that in some traditional cultures, women weaned their babies from breastmilk by blackening the bosom with some noxious smelling ointment. Disgusted, the baby would accept the substitute of food for the previously desired milk. What a graphic image! Whenever I think of it, I picture the large older baby grabbing for the familiar breast and suddenly recoiling from the smell and maybe the sticky feel, crying for a while, and then hungrily accepting the offered food instead.

By analogy, it seems to me that in my own adult life God detaches me from places and people to move me on somewhere else by means of an equally distressing but perhaps necessary weaning process.

Always I begin a new venture full of hope. The beauty of the location is sublime. The people are perfect. God's presence is everywhere, all the time. I could dance in the streets it is all so wonderful, and usually I find some hour of the day when few are about to watch, and literally dance around the Church, the house, the byways of the town.

It is with a kind of bemused ironic smile that I recall now those feelings about a monastery, a college, a city surrounded by Red Rocks. How many hours spent figuring out in detail how to guarantee these paradises forever. In each case I would figure out how to manipulate every circumstance and person involved to want me and keep me. Could I become indispensable by doing a thousand times more than anyone else in my work? Would it work to affirm others with such a consummate choice of words that they would always want such a loving person near?

Such romanticism! So many illusions! What about the many flaws in my own character that could change any Eden into Purgatory, if not Hell, for the people who have to be with me? That would be a long story. Maybe too painful for this moment of reflection?

Just now, there is another question which interests me more. What has God's strategy been through the decades to lead me on, out of circumstances that if tolerably good in some ways, are still not where He wants me to be for the next round?

(Reading this in 2013, I realize that I still have a lot of this syndrome in my life. But also it seems to me that I can't make it seem that God wants me to be a pilgrim, if the real reasons I can't stay in one place is just my faults. Of course, another possibility is that God, knowing my faults, even while He tries to sanctify me, gives me a way out until I would reach such a point that any place would be fine because "God alone is enough.")

Let me begin with a memory so far distant as to be more amusing than miserable.

Off to teach summer-school for a short two week session. A friend of mine had recommended me for the post. Even though she was sure the particular students attending would resist my ideas, it would be good for them to have to hear them anyhow, she reasoned.

Well, the resistance was worse than even my friend had imagined. Older male students sat unsmiling for hour long sessions, arms crossed on their chests. Older woman students smiled at my jokes but then grabbed me in the corridor during break time to explain how irrelevant my ideas were compared to their own better insights.

All was not lost, however. That same school was the location of a group of zealot Catholics I had read about in a magazine article. When I found them I was overwhelmed. They were the most perfect, strong, daring, creative, fascinating Catholics in the whole world. And, as a bonus, they were also fond of dining out with just enough red wine to make even anecdotes about enemies more fun than pain.

The day after my first encounter with the group, I was so happy I danced across the campus to early morning Mass, singing a gospel song about "The Lord turns water into wine."

The euphoria lasted through the whole 2 weeks ending with my writing up a witty letter of application for a job in their branch of the college. The last line was "So when are ya gonna make me anna offer I cannanota refuse?"

Evidently, my will was not God's will. Six months of attempts by mail from my home base to cajole them into hiring me, led only to frustration and anguish. The breast got blacker and blacker.

Rumors of the reactions of the group began to reach me through the grape vine "That woman seems like a nervous wreck. Doesn't she ever relax?" "She's almost as bad as our fearless leader when it comes to workaholism! She'll be driving us all nuts adding new projects to our already overloaded schedules."

The final weaning came when the head of the group, my hero, confessed that he was simply not the saint I thought him to be and just didn't have time even to deal with my letters, no less my presence as a colleague!

I was crushed. Evidently there was no way I could ever suck the milk of human happiness from those breasts!

So, what was the better choice God had in mind for me? At that time, it was new friends who had plenty of time for me and found my high energy stimulating rather than frightening. At the same time, Jesus deepened my interior sense of His presence, gracing me with prayer of quiet.

Another time I will fill out more incidents of weaning. With what motive? To relive the pain again? Not really. More to convince myself that when the present weaning is over, from a place that is very good, but still not "right," there will be solid food in the new places God is sending me. Will I be better nourished by that food, if my dreams of it are more tempered with realism? I hope so. I do hope so. Please let me hope so, God!

October 23, 1998

More coming out of the counseling:

"Pray to be open to the total history of your life, whatever is there, known or unknown, for the purposes of healing."

"Yes, stay with the image of He is embracing me - but not just the best of me, but the whole of me including the whole past. There is no life experience no matter how terrible that makes me repulsive to God."

Beautiful letter from Mother Mary Yvonne when I was feeling so grieved on Charlie's birthday (my son who committed suicide):

"Good night, Ronda. God bless you. I prayed for you tonight. God gives heavy burdens to those He loves greatly. Your burdens have put you in the company of those He loves greatly; He asks them to help Him carry His cross, to shoulder it in their sorrows. And so, you are near to him in all you bear, and tonight He holds you deeply in the flame of His sacred Heart; your heart forever lost in and always falling more deeply into His heart of sorrows and unfathomable love. There, in that place in His heart, is your peace."

October 30, 1998

An old twelve-step saying goes "It's easier to wear slippers than to carpet the whole world." I didn't get it right away. Then I saw it was about fixing oneself vs. trying to fix everyone else.

I thought if I started looking for examples, the saying would stay in my mind longer. An immediate challenge was the problem of holidays. Why do I dislike them so much? The theory that fits best, ugly as it may be, is that such gatherings frustrate my main wish, to be the center of attention. In my tiny birth family, I could often seize center-stage because I was so verbal. I picked up from my mother a way of telling anecdotes, not without a touch of malicious humor, that drew the attention of the others. My sister being deeper and more inward could rarely get a word in edgewise. The teaching and speaking profession, of course, have provided me with a wholesome outlet for those gifts developed in childhood.

At informal gatherings, however, it is rarely possible for one person to be the center of attention unless she or he is being honored in some way. Obviously, at usual social gatherings, no one is going to let one person get up and give speeches! Second best to being the center of attention, I find, is that something is going on that has enough pizzazz to grab my whole attention; such as someone else seizing the stage who has something fascinating, deep, or funny to recount.

At informal gatherings, of course, focused talk is unlikely. Most of the people around are not looking for a structured situation where they will have to be an audience or speaker, but instead a casual set-up where they can enjoy one or two others of their choice without having to either give much or be much challenged.

If everyone is sitting quietly watching some wonderful film, I am happy with that.

I used to expend large amounts of energy at gatherings trying to manipulate the situation so that I could, if not get the attention of everyone, at least get something interesting going by means of asking provocative questions and trying to get the whole group to answer them, the-way I can when I am teaching.

If you knew what my extended family is like, you would realize that it would take a lot of fixing, "carpeting the world," to get any of them to do anything I want at any time. Not quite true. I greatly enjoy just looking at the beautiful faces of family members, eating the gourmet cooking of family members, and I am happy to be able to help by putting steady streams of dishes into the dish-washer or cleaning pots and pans that don't fit in the machine. But between meals, what sometimes happens is that I sit in a corner, knitting, smiling vaguely, and feeling miserable.

Why, you might ask, don't I just leave town for the holidays - say visit a monastery and make a retreat? Well, first of all, the family insists I be there because they love me and want me to enjoy and applaud everything they plan. And, second, even though I don't like some of the things they plan, for the most part, I would still miss them if I absented myself altogether. After all, they are the people I love best in the whole world.

So, now looking toward the oncoming holiday season, full of such informal family gatherings, I ask myself, how could I apply my new maxim "wear slippers instead of trying to carpet the world?"

What "carpeting the world" would translate into is easy to figure out.

What I would like would be to "fix up" the holidays in "my own image and likeness," by super-planning. Say, three days before Christmas, the oldest grandchild would read out the story of the birth of Christ from the Bible. Then the adults might sit in a circle sipping egg-nog telling about their favorite memory of Christmas as a child. Christmas Eve we could listen to Handel's Messiah while the children watched the Life of Jesus for children on kiddie or the little Drummer Boy on TV. After opening presents, Christmas morning everyone, even the majority who are non-Catholic, would go to Mass with me after I pointed out, hopefully without sarcasm, that the word Christmas after all means Christ-Mass! The Christmas dinner would follow around 3 PM.

Since it is not me, but my daughter and her husband, and not myself who are the hosts of the family Christmas, it is unlikely any of my "carpeting" plans will win out. I cannot "carpet the world." So, what would "wearing slippers," be like? How could this holiday be different for me given that it will be stretched out over 2 weeks with six house guests because of the way Christmas and New Year fall out this year?

What came to mind, when I paused to pray in midst of this sad recital of my holiday impasse, was that there could be a new way to celebrate the holidays as a consecrated woman. Could "wearing slippers" be something so simple as deciding how I think a nun should celebrate Christmas, as I should anyway, and then just doing it, joining only in family activities that fit?

What would it be like to announce when the house guests arrive that Christmas is especially holy to me this year because I am a Sister in first vows and so I will be spending more time in the Church in prayer than usual? It would be hard to do most of my praying at home amidst the hustle and bustle of 5 children and 8 adults. Why not, instead, over the holidays this year, take a good two hours for Mass, liturgy of the hours, personal quiet time, right in the Church.

Suppose when I come home I do the dishes, sit around with everyone an hour or so, and then retreat to my room for quiet activities. Later on, I could take the children for walks, have more quiet time, pray some more and see if different family members drift down to my quarters to talk to me. After dinner I could spend an hour or so blending into the common atmosphere, but then go down early for night prayer and bedtime.

(Reading this after all these years, now in 2013, some of these things the family actually does, such as a 40 day Advent Wreath ceremony, and sometimes I do absent myself for breaks.)

New move: I'm not telling them what to do, and they would not be forcing me into a mode that I can't fit into.

(Note: Trying basically to follow this 12 step oriented plan, after the first evening of some tension over differing feelings about Clinton - I got the grace to relax and stop pushing and just enjoy everyone as they were and it was enjoyable. Also spent lots of time on typing up entries for this book.)

October 24, 1998

I am concentrating on 3rd step: surrender to his dominion in the world, in their lives, and my life. I should pray daily for healing of hurts and unknown memories. I am still frantic trying to fix certain situations. (Isaiah 12:1-6) - God indeed is my savior. I am confident and unafraid. My strength and my courage is the Lord and he has been my savior.

I have a greater desire to be quiet and alone.

I got an image of just like if you grab a cat by the scruff of its neck it can't get away, Jesus is grabbing me by my gut so I can't get away.

Therapy session Nov. 3, 1998

My therapist thinks I have more strength than I think but it is deep in me not outside. I need to be more centered. I need to see His love for me being all the time through the day, not just when I am praying - "3rd step?"

When I have a better sense of myself as loved by Christ I will be nun-like without trying to fit some mold.

(Reading this in 2013, I think that being a dedicated widow with my own rule is a form of being a bride of Christ but not fitting into a pseudo-nun mold.)

Just try to be with Ronda. The child-like part needs to be embraced.

The therapist tells me to "visualize yourself at age eight sitting on His lap. I embrace the eight year old and let her bring back memories. Dialogue with the inner child - myself now and the inner child. Ask her what needs to be healed. Trust what comes up; don't dismiss some part of my history. How did the 8 year old Ronda really feel about Mommy? Let that flow. When the child answers write that down.

(This exercise was profitable but too unique to me to put in here as an example for a reader to benefit.)

An assignment for Christian Writers' Guild: (In the group I led, we wrote vignettes on topics such as the below. The best went into a book I still use in ministry to the elderly called Legacy: How to Write Your Memoirs for Family and Friends.)

My First Memory by Ronda Chervin

Tears! Disgust!

"Don't make us eat that!"

Did we say it or did we just think it? My two year old twin-sister and I were about two years old. On this occasion, I remember, we were standing in pajamas in a small narrow kitchen of our Long Island, N.Y. home. The issue was breakfast.

Our father was insisting we eat the runny scrambled eggs he had just made, and we were making a fuss.

My sister's mouth was shut tight in grim resistance. My father was yelling "You're going to eat those eggs, like them or not." It seems now as if it must have been the first time I felt the strength of his anger.

Our father was known never to change his mind about anything he thought was right or true. During the time when we were eight years old, and our parents were separating, we heard constantly about his annoying intransigence. How amazed my mother would have been to learn that a month before his death in his eighties, my father with tears in his eyes admitted he had been wrong about a matter the "rightness" of which had cost him dearly. But that's another story.

Insight into the scrambled egg incident did come from my mother a few years before she died in her eighties. Our mother was reminiscing about how miserable it had been to live with our father. She said that he could be charming. He was a good worker

and even did most of the cooking and housework, most unusual for a man at that time - the 1930's. She also admitted that he did love us children. It was his stubborn fanaticism she grew to hate. All her unhappiness welled up in an especially poignant fashion when a Frenchman she had loved during her days of expatriate Paris cafe society life came to the United States on a business trip. He was an art dealer and was in town only a few days. My mother described her escape that Saturday on the train from Long Island to NYC to see this Parisian love of her life once more. Evidently there was no way this married man was going to rescue his old love from her life of imprisonment with my father, and she returned resigned to her fate.

Could that trip to the city by our mother have been the very Saturday of the scrambled eggs? Did our father sense our mother might be trying to engineer her escape? Did he take out his anger at her on the little twin tots he might have had to raise alone?

What would our lives have been like if one Frenchman had said "oui" instead of "non"?

After that experience as a two-year-old, I hated scrambled eggs for twenty years.

December, 1998

I had a glitch with AT&T where they had seemed to be giving me free minutes for six months, but it didn't happen. I was furious that it wasn't so. I asked myself why I talk so much on the phone?

Always good reasons, or more because I panic and don't talk enough to Jesus on the free hot line?

A lugubrious thought: I am too old for anyone but God to care if I change for the better;

others are too used to me to hope I will be better.

Realization from 6th step that being more drenched in God's love is the only way I could cease to want to be the center of human attention. Then I will want God to take away the defect so that I could still be talkative, friendly, but not be the center. Being a professor, I have the center legitimately vs. in social situations where it is not legitimate.

I would be less co-dependent if I made Jesus, Mary and Joseph my confidantes all day long;

not have energy drain of fear about losing people who love me if I go away to Texas.

December 19, 1998

The goal of my counseling sessions was that I would be anchored in Christ to go forth to Corpus

Christi with less fear coming from unhealed areas. As I am about to start on this new phase of my life,

I, indeed, do feel full of strength; a little trepidation but not paralyzing. Praise be to God!

(This ends the journal entitled *Notes from the Feminine Underground*. There is a hiatus between

these entries and the next journal Face to Face. Some of my life during the hiatus

can be found in a fictionalized way in the novel *The Last Fling*.