

My Aunt Wissie

By Molly Hegman

My Aunt Wissie was known outside of our family by the title, Sister Teresita. She was a Sister of Mercy who lived in a convent in Mobile, Alabama. Sometimes during the summer she would be assigned to teach summer school in Pensacola. We were all happy when she was there. Some of my oldest memories of her happened during those summers. I remember hearing my oldest sister, Annie, calling out to all of her siblings, "Put on your skirts, get washed up, Aunt Wissie is coming!" We would do as she said and await my aunt's arrival. She always had at least one other nun with her. We hoped that she would bring Sister Bernard because she played cards with us and...she obviously cheated which made us giggle.

When my aunt arrived she gathered us around and inspected our fingernails because she sat in a circle with us and taught us needle work. Of course she took the opportunity to talk with us and teach us about works of mercy. The best time of the day came after lunch. That was when she reached down into her very deep pockets. First she pulled out a very large string of rosary beads but then out came the Hershey Bars!

My mom took me to Mobile when I was in the eighth grade to spend a day in her eighth grade classroom. Her classroom was very orderly and one could easily sense the good rapport she had with her students. Her eyes spoke to her students.

Later I got to know her differently, as an adult. By that time I was teaching also. We had conferences to attend in Mobile. She was very well known in the city. If I mentioned that she was my aunt they would regale me with stories about her, how she had helped them or some member of their family.

While I was teaching in Pensacola I drove my mom and her sister, Aunt Rachel, to visit Aunt Wissie. I loved to sit quietly and just listen to them talk. To this day when I think about them I can feel a blanket of love surrounding me just like I did then.

When Aunt Wissie was diagnosed with cancer my mom and Aunt Rachel went to visit with her at least once a week. They lifted her up with their love until she died.

Many years after she died my niece, Teresita, was working in a restaurant while going to college. She seated a group and started taking orders. When she came to one of the men he looked at her name tag and said that the only time he had ever heard of that name was when he was in grade school when he was taught by a Sister Teresita. Then the stories began.

Two mothers of fifteen children between them and one nun who mothered many children...all altruistic in my eyes.