

# Meet Sr. Clarita Frericks ...



I was born in 1926 in Quincy - the 12th of 13 children born to a very religious Illinois farming family. I loved the farm and all the animals living on it. We grew our own fruits and vegetables and canned them for the winter months. When my father was injured, he went to St. Mary hospital in Quincy where the sisters took such wonderful care of him even though we had no money to pay for his care. We did, however, have plenty of food, so my parents 'bartered' for his care. All of us children had to help prepare vegetables and poultry to bring to the hospital to help pay for his care. Later, in gratitude, we helped the sisters as they went begging for funds to keep the hospital going. The sister had a car, but a city kid was driving it, so he didn't know how to find the houses and farms - and I would accompany them to help them find all the places. The sisters were always grateful for anything that was given to them.

My family attended about every church function that was ever held, and although my brothers became farmers, two of my older sisters decided to become Franciscan Sisters of the Poor at a very early age. Even while I was in grade school, I thought about becoming a sister, but always put it out of my mind. You see, I was very fond of boys and began dating at an early age. Then, one night I stayed out very late and slept in late the next morning, too. I was even too tired to help with the family chores. In my heart I wondered if this was the right thing for me...if there wasn't more important things to do in life. I decided that this was not right for me, and that was the end of dating! I began in earnest to pray about the more important things in life. At the age of 16, I talked to my mom and dad about becoming a sister. I went into town and presented myself at the convent and asked to see the Sister Superior. I talked to her about my hopes to enter the community, and, as my own two sisters who entered before me were at home for a visit, I returned with them and entered just two weeks later.

After I entered and my training was complete, I studied to become a radiology technician. I served in this capacity at hospitals in Quincy, Dayton, Cincinnati, Covington and Kansas City. Since I was so young when I entered, I had to grow up fast, learning new ways of sharing, and different ways of praying. Yes, I was homesick sometimes, for I loved my family dearly, but the help and encouragement of the other sisters along with daily mass gave me the strength and courage to continue. I loved my ministry, but by far what I loved best began later in life. I spent two years at the House of Prayer, and then went into training in Pastoral Care. Touching the lives of the sick and dying, and being with them and their families through the most difficult of times is a privilege, a reward and a blessing. There are no words to express these moments.

# Touching the lives of the sick and dying ... through the most difficult of times is a privilege, a reward and a blessing.

Having been through so much ill health myself, and having learned a great deal about pastoral ministry, it seemed only natural for me to volunteer for the Blue Angels. We 'Angels' companion dying residents at The Terrace, particularly those who have no family - or whose family members are far away. Truly this is a blessing for me - even all night is not a problem. Most of the time, all that is needed is our presence, our touch and our love. We pray silently, but if the resident wishes, we will pray out loud with her/him for a short time.

Once, while I was watching and praying, the Presence of God was so evident, it is impossible to explain. A nurse came to the door to care for the patient: she stopped in the doorway and said, "Something is different in here!" And indeed it was different: God was truly present! And all who experienced that moment were touched - and blessed. I love this life, and this work, and these people. How much more could one be blessed?

## About the Blue Angels...

The 'Blue Angels' grew out of one nurse's belief that no one should die alone. Mary Ann Wheeler was determined and then inspired. She contacted Mercy-Franciscan Terrace Chaplain Joan Owens and the program was born. They are called 'Blue' because blue is associated with Mary, the Mother of God. And they are called 'Angels' because their ministry is to bring a peaceful, prayerful presence to the bedside of those who are actively dying. Designed especially for those who have no family or whose family and friends live far away, the program helps allay one of people's great fears: dying alone and in pain.

The Blue Angels do not give physical care, nor do they talk about theology or religion. Sacramental concerns are handled by the Spiritual Care Department. Permission is sought from patient or family, and a log is kept at the patient's bedside - both to track the volunteer hours, and to bring comfort to family members who know that someone cared enough for their loved one to keep him/her company during the lonely times. The Angels receive a couple of days training, and meet all the requirements for volunteering in LTC facilities. They are coordinated and scheduled through the chaplain's office. Sisters, associates and volunteers make up their ranks. Their greatest gift is their comforting, loving presence. The Blue Angels do not talk or read or watch TV. They may hold someone's hand. And they pray. Usually silently, but if the patient wants to pray aloud, they will do that, too.

