

KATHRYN S. KIRK

Teacher – Mother – Teacher

A Biography Compiled From The Archives
Of Her Loving Husband

Harry J. Kirk

by

Jack Wright

*The loveliest masterpiece of the heart of God is
the heart of a mother. – St. Teresa of Lisieux*

1985

DEDICATION

Once, having a desire to render some service to Our Lord, I considered that I could serve Him but poorly, and said to Myself: "Why, O Lord, dost thou desire my works?" and He answered: "To see thy good will, my child." – St. Teresa of Avila

This all too brief and superficial testament is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Kathryn Schindler Kirk. A self-sacrificing, uncomplaining, and faithful wife, she was also the exemplary parent of seven children – including two nuns and one priest – but praise God most especially, the mother as well of four self-sacrificing, uncomplaining, and faithful wives in her image, who among them mothered 39 grandchildren to God's greater glory.

There are some... (who) take upon themselves a particular obedience... They either place themselves under the yoke of obedience in holy religion, or, without entering religion, they bind themselves to some creature, submitting their will to his, so as to more expeditiously unlock the door of heaven. – The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The original, printed, version of this biography was written by Jack Wright in 1985 using Harry Kirk's voluminous archive of letters, documents, pictures, and other data. The electronic copy of that original has been lost to history. But Jack created a so-called "Master Copy" of the printed version. In the spring of 2021, I scanned that printed version and transformed it into this electronic/digital copy.

The original "Master Copy" was printed on 8-1/2" by 11" paper. In producing this electronic version in early 2021, I took the liberty of reformatting it into a smaller 6" x 9" form-factor more commonly used by the electronic readers in use at that time. Additionally, I took the liberty of embedding the pictures – grouped into several separate sections in the original – into the text individually. My goal was to place each photo into the text at the point in time where its placement best matches the chronology of the story. Placements were made solely in my judgment, and any perceived mistakes are mine alone.

The process of scanning the original document, and using Optical Character Recognition to convert the scanned images into searchable / editable text, was fraught with errors which I painstakingly attempted to correct. Except for obvious grammatical and spelling errors, I intentionally left the text as written by Jack, complete with his numerous "cringe-worthy" phrasings and attempted jokes. I ask only that readers understand that those phrasings were "commonly accepted" at the time the original was written in 1985 and reflect the Jack's unique sense of humor.

This document represents the results of my effort. Any errors are mine alone, and I apologize in advance for any/all of them. I hope you enjoy reading.

Charlie Wright

I – BECOMING (Before 1890)

We are all omnibuses in which our ancestors ride. – Oliver Wendell Holmes

One who undertakes to read a biography has every right to expect the whole story of someone's life, that is, a completed life. After all, as English poet Edmund Gosse has said, "Biography is defined by two events: birth and death." Nevertheless, it shall be the aim of this story to. Show that, for a parent, a biography might better be viewed as a prologue to a never-ending story, since parents live on through their progeny. Beyond that, and again insofar as parents are concerned, this particular story once again confirms the old biblical adage that, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first (Mt 20:24)." That is to say, the parent who enjoyed the lowest public profile in life is most often apt to -have the most enduring and significant impact and influence after death. This shouldn't surprise any Christian, since *submission* remains the very core of Christ's mission, and, the root principle guiding the heroine of our story was, "*I accept!*"

This is a story, then, about Kathryn Schindler Kirk (1890-1979). Much as we might like it to be, it can't be her whole story, since (as we just suggested above) it isn't over yet. Beyond that, who can ever really claim to *know* a person in any genuine sense? In fact, to really "see" a. person, one had best follow the manner of the sailor searching out a. navigational star. One must look slightly away from the object. Focusing on the person directly can only result in a mirage at best. It is well, therefore, to adjust our focus first backwards, to the parents, and then forward, to the offspring. In other words, to really understand a person we must see them in a social context – whence did they come, what formed

them, what legacy did they leave behind. So it is, then, that this tale must begin with a study of our subject's immediate forebearers.

Kathryn Kirk was the sixth of ten children born to George Schindler and Rose Kohout. George Schindler was born 29 May 1849 in Chotiměř, Czechoslovakia¹, about 35 miles northwest of Prague, which travel brochures describe as “one of the most beautiful cities in all Europe.” Famous sons of the area are astronomer Johann Kepler, composers Bedrich Smetana (the opera *The Bartered Bride* and the symphonic poem *The Moldau*), and Antonin Dvorak (symphony #9 – *The New World*) and author Franz Kafka, celebrated for his nightmare-novels about guilt-ridden folks futilely searching for personal salvation. As for George Schindler, both his father and his paternal grandfather were carpenters. Rose Kohout, who was to become his wife, was born 2 Jan 1862, in Budweis, Czechoslovakia, some 80 miles southwest of Prague.

The general area of Czechoslovakia is more popularly known as Bohemia, which is an area of some 20,000 square miles in western Czechoslovakia.

It is bordered by Austria on the south east, West and East Germany on the west and northwest, Poland on the north and northeast, and Moravia (the central region of Czechoslovakia) on the east. The Munich pact (1938) transferred the Sudeten area of Bohemia to Germany which occupied all of Bohemia during WWII (1939-1945). It was abolished as a province of Czechoslovakia in 1948, and in 1960 it was divided into five regions plus the city of Prague (population 1,182,300, comparable to Detroit and Washington DC). It remains the most urbanized and industrialized area of Czechoslovakia even today. Unfortunately, a thrust for liberalization having been ruthlessly crushed by an invasion of Warsaw Pact nations in Aug 1948, it still (1985) suffers oppression behind the *Iron Curtain*.²

1 In 1993, Czechoslovakia was dissolved. As of 2021, Chotiměř is part of the Czech Republic, also called Czechia.

2 Remember, this biography was written in 1985, long before the collapse of the then Soviet Union in 1989, the end of the Iron Curtain, the reunification of East and West Germany, and the breakup of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Popular wisdom has it that *Bohemians* are nomadic intellectuals (usually artists and writers) whose life-styles are indifferent to conventional societal manners and mores. It's therefore important to note, if we are to understand George Schindler, that this characterization stems from the mistaken belief that gypsies came originally from Bohemia. In fact, and contrary to an earlier British belief that they came from Egypt – hence name *gypsy* – they most probably originated in India. George Schindler was no gypsy, but: he was a solid Bohemian. This was well proven by his steadfast adherence to Bohemian traditions. Thus, when he ultimately retired from farming he acquired a house in the city in close proximity to the Catholic church. This nearness was no accident, as Bohemians believe there is a special blessing for the family whose home is, as their sayings go, within the shadow of the church tower, or within seeing distance of the steeple cross.

Again, in the Bohemian tradition, George was committed to the notion that some years should be devoted more or less exclusively to preparing to die. So it was, that George almost lived in church in his later years. He was a daily communicant, and never attended less than two masses on Sundays. He never missed a special church service, including all funerals, and spent an hour before the Blessed Sacrament each week. At home a rosary was the order of the day, and during Lent became a family affair immediately following dinner. Though Kathryn had by this time fled the nest through marriage to Harry, George's strong religious example had no doubt always permeated the home of her youth as well. So, little wonder that George was saluted in his later years for his overall "sweetness", as well as his "spryness" in the garden And, little wonder too, that among the seven of his ten children who opted for wedded bliss (and two of his children chose religious vocations), they all found husbands or wives without so much as a hint of danger from a "mixed" marriage. Given the almost mystical overtones in her father's character, it is not too surprising that Kathryn's homes were likewise always located close to the church, and that two of her daughters became contemplatives.

The Bohemian psyche we've been dramatizing, warrants a little further commentary. For example, since as of 1985 Bohemia still lies behind the *Iron Curtain* which shut off Eastern Europe from the world following WWII, one might expect a nation of "free spirits" to be seething and ready to explode in revolution. And, of course, they tried an even more cautious advance toward freedom in 1948, only to be ruthlessly crushed by "peace-loving" Russia's might. So (according to a dispatch in the Washington *Post* in the fall of 1985), the "free spirited" Bohemians have simply taken another tack. After the fashion of Senator Moynihan's famous policy of "benign neglect" toward the Negroes, Bohemians have adopted a policy of "passive alienation from formal responsibilities" to the state. They have seized upon a "cottage industry" worthy of the name: they have taken to expending their greatest energies on building their own private cottage havens on river-side banks beyond the hub-bub of the cities. They flee to them regularly on weekends, since there, "You can sweat for yourself and" not give a damn about anything else," and, "In the country you have your own place, so you work like hell to fix it up and get the frustration out of your body." In effect, the population has executed a quiet withdrawal from formal civic life, and political life remains frozen as they reserve their best ideas, time, and energy for their private homes and hobbies. Such: is the adaptability, resourcefulness, and quiet courage of the Bohemian strand of the Kirk family ancestry.



Czechoslovakia circa 1900

But, nothing much has changed in Czechoslovakia over the years. Even in George's youth the whole history of Bohemia has offered little promise of freedom or independence to its subjects, to his particular distress. Little wonder, then, that he fell ready prey to the enticing stories of pioneering peers who had ventured to America, there to author fabulous reports of opportunity and even unimaginable success. While anything but a person of indifferent morals, our George did thereupon evidence the alleged Bohemian nomadic inclination, and so opted to risk his own future in USA. His eventual daughter, Kathryn, elaborates the details in a testament with which she honored the memory of her then recently departed brother Fr. Alfred. Schindler, in 1973, thus:

An ambitious and energetic teenager in the 1860s carefully scrutinized the opportunities for his future in his native country of Bohemia in the Austrian Empire. He was not happy with the possibilities presented.

Bohemia had once been an independent province before it fell under Austrian control in the 16th century. Then it became a part of the Austrian Empire ruled by the Hapsburg dynasty. The Bohemians were not content under this rule. Among other things, they wanted their language placed on an equal footing with the German in their schools, courts, and in the administration of their province.

Franz-Josef of the Hapsburg family came to power as the Emperor of Austria in 1848, when he was 18 years of age. He dissolved Parliament, deprived the subject nationalities of all right of self-determination, put the press under rigorous censorship, and ruled as an absolute monarch.

In 1867 the Emperor made a compromise with Hungary which formed the Dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, and ruled this as Emperor-King. But he soon became dissatisfied with his "patchwork" empire of jealous states, and became eager to: gain more land. To be assured of a powerful army for this purpose, he introduced compulsory military service in his Dual Empire. The teenager referred to above, whose name was George Schindler, saw the working and middle classes of

society being exploited by the ruling and. powerful classes. He knew of the compulsory service in the Emperor's. Army. He was-not resigned to submit to the kind of future offered to him in his native country. His family had relatives and friends who had left their homes in Bohemia and immigrated to the fabulous new land of America. Glowing accounts of the new country had-reached them. He decided to go to America. In 1869, then, when he was 20 years of age, George Schindler landed: in New York alone. He went directly to the home of an uncle living near Defiance, Ohio, on a farm. There he started a new and rugged life. There be found freedom.

Just what was this United States into which young George Schindler had so courageously thrust himself like? Well, it had just put the bloody Civil War behind it, and peace once again reigned in the land. General Grant had just been inaugurated, following the impeachment of President Johnson, and the restored unity of the nation was reinforced further by the completion of the first transcontinental railway at Promontory, Utah. There was promise of a period of national unity and progress, a most hopeful tie for venturesome young men.

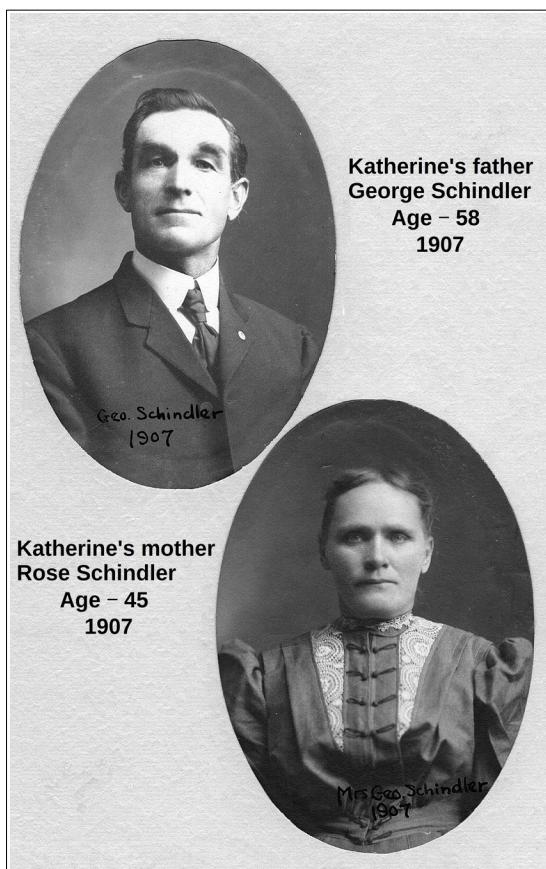
Narrowing our focus next to the local environment in which George found himself, it might be enough to merely remark that it was known as the *Black Swamp*. This was a 20–30 mile band of undrained forest bordering the southern shore of the Maumee River, and extending from the western end of Lake Erie (Toledo) to border-close Fort Wayne, Indiana, with Defiance lying just about midway between. The forest comprised huge sycamores, elms and walnuts that were there when Columbus first set sail for the Indies. It was said that this forest was so dense that a squirrel could travel the 200 miles from Cleveland to Cincinnati without ever touching the ground. It was also plagued by billions of mosquitoes and gnats, and. the summertime heat was renowned as unbearable. Perhaps nice place to visit, but... Beyond that, the area wasn't cleared of bears and wolves until 1850, and wildcats roamed freely until 1873. This is the wilderness which was duly cleared by the gargantuan efforts of individual would-be farmers carving out their own

homesteads by a common hand axe. And, the canals developed to drain the area were said to have cost one life for every six feet.

It wasn't easy going for George, either. After three years-of work he had saved \$300 (earning \$18 a month). In the summer he worked in the brick yards. In-winter he helped supply the wood that fueled the Wabash railroad running between Fort Wayne and Toledo. At the same time, he was working to gain his US citizenship, which he did only three years after his arrival, on 1 Nov 1872, at which time his parents also joined him from the old country. His father purchased the 40 acre-farm from the uncle who then relocated to a Bohemian settlement at St. Michael's Ridge. Later his father disposed of these 40 acres to a son-in-law, and bought an adjoining 40 acre tract on Ayersville Road, about three miles from Defiance.

Partly by exchanging his labor, George was able to acquire 40 acres of his-own to the rear of his father's tract. Later, he added 18 more acres across the road, and then gradually built it all up to a 96 acre farm where he was to raise his ten children following his marriage to Rose Kohout in 1881. Rose, as mentioned at the outset, was also a Bohemian, some 13 years George's junior, who came to this country at the age of ten with her parents in 1872 – the very year in which George was becoming a citizen. At the time of their marriage George was 32 and Rose was 19. They were to enjoy 43 fruitful years of wedded life before Rose died at age 62 in 1924. Their ten children were born on the farm, located in Richland Township in Defiance County, their home and barns being located at the junction of Schindler and Ayersville-Defiance roads, not far from Ayersville.

The Kohout family settled in a community of their Bohemian friends who had proceeded them to America, on a farm north of Defiance. Rose was the oldest of nine children, and attended a nearby country school where she very quickly learned English. As was the custom with those struggling immigrants, she left school when still quite young and got a job. She was employed by a wealthy family in Defiance, doing housework in their home.



Kathryn's parents – 1907

They were very good and generous people who treated her like a member of their own family. From them she received training in American culture and customs, in good housekeeping and cooking. She worked for them until she married George in 1981. Their friendship with Rose's former employers remained steadfast, and they often visited the Schindler home over the years, usually bearing gifts for the children.

Rose's life on the farm brought tremendous burdens, not the least of which wag rearing her ten children. However, she loved them dearly, and never failed to see that each one of them received the best possible care under the circumstances. Needless to say, Rose was by then an excellent

cook and outstanding housekeeper, and her children never felt the lack of anything. It is in these antecedents that one may clearly perceive the seeds of daughter Kathryn's later proficiency as a mother. Rose's splendid and enduring relationship with her former employers also instilled in the formative Kathryn her attitude of mutual respect and affection with her own subsequent household helper, Lucinda Willis, which duly led to Kathryn becoming Lucinda's godmother upon the latter's conversion to the Catholic faith. As to George, he retired from active farming in 1919 at age 70, and the residual Schindler family thereupon moved to 809 Washington St. in Defiance, just five years before Rose died.

The Schindlers' first child, John, arrived on 27 Sep 1882. He was the only child (apart from two who opted for religious vocations) to remain unmarried, and lived with his parents as long as they lived. He was also to be their first offspring to follow them in death, dying at age 76 in 1958. There is an interesting story anent John's first communion. When his father, George, arrived in Defiance, the only Catholic parish in the area was St. John the Evangelist, founded chiefly by German immigrants. The Schindlers therefore became members, even though services were conducted in German. German was also taught in the parish elementary school. As John's first communion time approached, it was required that he spend some time in that school in preparation. As indicated in our earlier capsule history of Czechoslovakia, that nation had suffered mightily over centuries past at the hands of its neighbors, especially Germany. So, though necessarily a member of a German language church, George had no love for the language, even subscribing to-a Czech language newspaper, from which he regularly read to his family. Having rebelled at enforced German in the old country, George was really repelled by the prospect of it now being forced on his son in his new country. So it was that he "too a walk," joining the parish of St. Mary of Perpetual Help, more recently founded by mostly English-speaking Irish.

The second child born to George and Rose was Mary. Born in 1884, she was to become Mrs. Thomas Carey and the mother of three boys, all married – Tom, John, and Jim – the latter being the godfather of

Kathryn's daughter Kathleen's first daughter, Anne. Mary was widowed at the time of her death on 9 Feb 1971 at age 87. This is as good a time as any as to remark on the longevity of this clan. The earliest to go was George's spouse, Rose, at the age 62 in 1924. George himself lived to a ripe 92. Five of his offspring died in their eighties, two in their late seventies, and two still live as this is written (Sep 85): Rose Desch – 93, and Gertrude McCarthy – 91. Only the ninth child, the priest of the family – Fr. Alfred, died at a relatively early age (66) in 1963. Our heroine, Kathryn, died in 1979 at age 88, while her husband Harry still lives at age 96 in 1985!

The Schindlers' third offspring was daughter Anna, who was to become Sr. Mary Alfred, O.P. – a Dominican nun operating out of their motherhouse in Adrian, MI, and devoted to teaching – especially CCD, largely in the area of Detroit, Michigan. Sister deserves a slightly extended remembrance here, since she leaves no progeny to sing her praise. Born in 1885, she died in the infirmary at Adrian on 17 Jan 1969 at age 84. Along the way Sister's health was often less than ideal, but she never lost her zest for teaching, and, indeed, was quite disappointed (though resigned) when relieved of such duties in the summer of 1968 to spend the last half-year of her life in the infirmary.

Sister Mary Alfred's commitment to and love for teaching paralleled her devotion to her family, with which she corresponded frequently, and for which she often expressed loneliness. It's unfortunate, in a way, that most of her surviving letters to her sister Kathryn reveal her concern for other family members rather than reveal anything of herself. In undertaking her published paean to their brother, Fr. Alfred Schindler, Kathryn bemoans, "To our children he was just vaguely known." Even more so would this now appear to be true with respect to Sister. We do know she spent several years in Arizona in the late 20s or early 30s to overcome the tuberculosis with which she had been afflicted. And from her own letters we know that she was troubled from an arthritic limp, for at least the last six years of her life, but that she was undaunted and

remained vigorously active. She especially reveled in her summer assignments to teach CCD in the Farmington suburb of Detroit.

Though her regular term teaching assignments generally centered on Detroit, Sister did relish an assignment to Defiance in 1966-47. She was delighted, but younger sister, Rose (Desch), wasn't so sure it was a blessing. Thus Sister wrote to Kathryn on 18 Jul 66 "Rose doesn't think it's good policy for my being in Defiance. The school seems to have troubles somehow. She is doubtful about our critical relatives. What do you think?" Unfortunately, perhaps, we don't have Kathryn's reply, but subsequent letters suggest that Sister ended up in Cleveland. Thus she writes from St. Henry's Cleveland on 26 Sep 66, "I am working in a new place – quite different from dear old Detroit," and "I'm still trying to adjust to the Ohio system of teaching." In an Easter card Sister amplifies the situation somewhat when she states, "St. Henry's is much different than the Detroit schools – it is a great challenge to deal with these colored people of God."

In Feb 1968 Sister writes of being in a hospital for treatment of a heart condition, and of having enjoyed a visit from Sr. Teresa. She wondered if the Cleveland Carmelites "will ever change some of their old ideas." Sister, it seems, welcomed the changes of Vatican II. And, despite her multiple medical set-backs, Sister was at pains to exclaim: "I still love school. It is great work!" But, of course, we now know that the end was already in sight. Upon her arrival in the infirmary, a fully resigned Sr. Mary Alfred busied herself with knitting and sewing. In keeping with her alignment with the thrust of Vatican II, she fitted the habits for her roommate, and shortened her own habits as she accommodated to the changes of more modern dress. Nevertheless, her condition was now rapidly deteriorating, and an open leg sore and bloating of the arms and body compelled her removal to a hospital. Soon, the end was so ominously near that Sister was returned to the infirmary to die in the more or less serene surroundings of her community. Sister was conscious to the very end, and totally resigned. So, as an Arthur Miller character exclaims in his touching drama, *Death of a Salesman*, we have included this brief

testimony by way of protesting that: *Attention must be paid!* Sister's largely unheralded life and silent passing indeed marked the triumph of another heroic servant dedicated wholly to the will of God.

The forth sibling of the Schindlers was daughter Jeanette, born in 1887. She was to become another teacher, and eventually Mrs. Ed Volk, and was childless. Widowed and sickly, she would spend her declining years (at least the last six, per a recorded visit by Sr. Mary Alfred) in a nursing home in the Cleveland area, where she died on 22 Jan 1969 at the age of 82. Jeanette was followed in the Schindler lineage by another daughter, Margaret. She was born in 1889, and died 26 Jan 1970 at age 81. Along the way, she would become Mrs. John Boehm of Columbus, Ohio, and the mother of two married daughters, Mary and Rose. This brings us, at last, to our heroine.

Kathryn Cecelia Schindler would be the 5th of seven daughters and the 6th of ten children of George Schindler and Rose Kohout. She was born on the family farm near Ayersville in Defiance County, Ohio, on 19 Dec 1890. She would become Mrs. Harry Kirk and the mother of six daughters and one son, thus being the most prolific of her clan. She would die on 21 Aug 1979 at age 88. Before getting on with her story in detail, however, we must complete the calling of the roll of the Schindler family.

Kathryn was followed by two sisters and then two brothers, and thus shared the middle position in the family with older sister Margaret, which might account to some degree for her self-effacing character. First after Kathryn came sister Rose, later to become Mrs. Joe Desch of Defiance, Ohio. She was born in 1992 and mothered two girls and a boy, all married – Mary, Betty and Bill. Rose was followed by Gertrude in 1894, who married Fran McCarthy, and settled in Cleveland. She claims one married son, Bill. (These two sisters, both now widowed and in their 90s, are the only survivors of Kathryn's immediate family as this is recorded in Sep 1985.)



Kathryn's six sisters – Christmas 1912

Next came the "family" priest, Fr. Alfred, born in 1897, ordained on 14 Jun 1924, and deceased on 11 Jan 1963 at age 66. His story is detailed in a tribute, *His Last Call*, authored by our Kathryn following his death. A brief excerpt therefrom is relevant in that it further illuminates the character of the father of the Schindler family, thus:

If our father was expecting more farm help from his family, he must have been disappointed with the arrival (following the birth of his first child, a son) of seven baby girls in succession, (Kathryn was to reel off five daughters of her own before bearing a son). Finally, when the ninth child arrived – a boy – no doubt father had extra-long cigars to

pass out to his friends, a was a custom then ... The head of the house had long cherished the idea that when he grew old his sons would take over the farm he had worked so hard to establish, and would preserve the Schindler name in this country.

This, as he knew it, was the traditional and proper procedure. This was one reason he had left Bohemia and come to America, where his indomitable spirit had overcome many hardships to acquire the kind of heritage he would be proud to pass on to his sons.

As we now know, however, this son was to opt to become Fr. Alfred, priest. Now, George had no opposition to the priesthood as such, but found such a vocation in opposition to his cherished dream. George therefor initially vetoed the priestly “call.” After nurturing his dreams through years of hard struggle toward his selected goal, it was not easy for a man of George’s invincible nature to adapt, but adapt he eventually did.

In any case, the birth of Alfred was soon followed by the arrival of younger brother Bernard, who was born in 1900. He died on 14 Jul 1976 at age 76, survived by his wife and his two boys and two girls – Paul, George, Mary, and Dorothy – all subsequently married. The Schindler tribe thus does live on via Bernard, through sons Paul and George. This, then, completes our cast of “historical” Schindler characters. As can be seen, Kathryn’s generation was largely born in the Republican Conservative era of 1877-1901, spanning from President Hayes to Teddy Roosevelt – a good time for rearing families in America.

II – GROWING (1890 – 1914)

Growth is the only evidence of life.
– John Henry Cardinal Newman

As Kathryn Schindler came on the earthly scene (during the administration of Benjamin Harrison) the nation was snapping the lid on big business with the Sherman Anti-trust Act, sealing our overseas borders with the McKinley Tariff, and declaring the fabled American frontier effectively closed. A business panic and depression in 1893 was somewhat offset by the Klondike gold rush of 1896 (when both radio and segregated schools also first came on the scene), and the economic pump-priming of our Spanish-American War (1898). Following McKinley's assassination, Teddy Roosevelt took the government reins in 1901 – launching the so-called Progressive Era in American politics, even as our British cousins became bogged down in the Boer War (1899-1902). The U.S. population reached 75 million in 1900. *This* was the world of young Kathryn Schindler. As to her family home life, another excerpt from Kathryn's tribute to her priest brother seems timely:

A limited use and knowledge of the Bohemian language was retained as long as our parental grandparents lived. In their small house, near us, they continued to speak their native language, and they urged their grandchildren to speak it. In this, they were not very successful. When we went to their house there would usually be a bi-lingual conversation – they would speak to us in Bohemian and we would answer them in English. But since each understood both languages, no great handicap was encountered. Sometimes our grandparents would come for the evening. Grandpa would bring his violin and try to teach some of us to play it. He himself was an excellent musician.

An American-published, Bohemian language weekly newspaper called Hlas was received regularly at our house. This was our parents' chief source of news from "back home." Father would spend a whole evening reading aloud, while mother was busy with sewing or mending as she listened. We children were free to do homework, during the school season, read, play games, or do anything we wished as long as our activities did not disturb the reading. Should we forget, we would immediately hear a familiar "Sh..." and we knew at once that it was time to reduce the noise. [For a contrasting backward look at this idyllic family scene see Kathryn's portrait of her mother's life after she – Kathryn – became a mother in the next section of this saga.]

In the early years of the family, the only school, easily accessible was the red brick, one-room, un-graded, country school. But soon better roads were built and then, it was possible for the children to go to Ayersville Village School two miles east of us, or to the Defiance schools three miles west of us. In Defiance there were the St. Mary's Parochial School, the Defiance High School, and Defiance College.

As the girls of the family grew older and could be relieved of home obligations they found employment away from home until they married. Some worked as seamstresses, in the homes of the affluent members of Defiance society, some [including Kathryn herself and her sister Jeanette] taught school, one was a bank clerk, and one became a Dominican nun.

Improvements on the farm were made rapidly. Here was rich and productive soil waiting for steady, industrious hands to clear away trees, plant the seeds, and reap the harvest. The response to hard, well-planned work was generous. Progress became almost automatic. With each successful harvest, new and helpful machinery was added. This made possible an increase in the number of acres that could be cultivated, or the number of cattle, hogs, or chickens raised.

Corresponding progress was made in modernizing the home. And before the family retired to the city in 1919 [when George had already done his “three score and ten”, and middle-son Alfred had already abandoned the farm to study for the priesthood], the fringed-top surrey was replaced by an automobile. The circle of family and friends was vast. The Schindler farm [or could it have been the seven lovely daughters?] became an attraction for many St. Mary’s parishioners. There were relatives in distant parts of the county who exchanged visits regularly. There were. Also neighbors and schoolmates.

We were a closely knit and firmly controlled family. Each of us was given responsibilities according to our age and ability. There were no union rules here. The work hours of the day varied with the seasons, the weather, and the condition of the crops Sundays and Holidays were strictly observed as days of worship and rest, except for the chores that were necessary daily. One part of the family would go to an early Mass and return home before the second part started for the late Mass. The babies and young children were thus cared for at home.

In due course, Kathryn attended public schools in Ohio beginning, in 1896 at a typical one-room “little red schoolhouse,” the Baker School, in South Richland Township. Her 1902 un-graded school class comprised 25 children, including three of her sisters and a first cousin. She was in her 7th school year when the Wright brothers made their historic first airplane flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903. During her ensuing four years in high school the world witnessed the start of the Panama Canal (1906), the first radio broadcast (1907), and the introduction of Ford’s Model T (1908). Kathryn (one of only four or five of the ten Schindler children to do so) graduated from Ayersville High School in 1908, her graduating class comprising herself and two boys. This is as good a place as any to note that while both her baptism (1891) and wedding (1915) certificates refer to her as Catherine, a teaching diploma (1913) refers to her as Kathryn. Evidently, she changed both of her names at just about the time of her marriage.

Following her graduation from high school Kathryn attended Defiance College for a year, taking the courses required to qualify her for teaching in the Defiance County school system, which she did for five years in two rural one-room schools.



Rose, Margy, Al, Kathryn, Gert, Bernie – 1913

First she taught at the Kelly School, located two miles north of Defiance College. Then she taught at the Domerville School in Adams Township, Defiance County, Ohio. Whenever teaching in an area somewhat remote from her parents' home, Kathryn boarded at farm houses close to her school. As to Kathryn's teaching style, a letter from niece Mary Kohout, dated 22 Sep 79 states, "Kathryn was my second teacher. She was very strict, and a good teacher. If only we had more like her today." Her "formal teaching career came to an end, however, with her marriage to Harry John Kirk, in St. Mary's church, Defiance, Ohio, on 19 Jan 1915. Following their marriage, they set up residence (until moving to Washington in 1931) in Columbus, where Harry then worked for the Ohio Highway Department.

Whence came this young man into Kathryn's life? Until his freshman year at Defiance College in 1908, Harry Kirk had never "kept company with" or even "dated" anyone. Nor did he even "trip the light fantastic" with a girl through all of college, from which he graduated at

age 21 in 1911 (two years after he began courting his wife to be). Yet in his freshman year he was suddenly stricken with “love at first sight.” The object of his affections was a girl in the class ahead who just happened to walk into a student meeting one evening. Through the balance of his freshman year Harry confesses he likely associated with this young lady, name unremembered, at “mixed” college events such as literary society meetings, but recalls only being alone with her once. Harry provided the ensuing details in a 1981 memo, thus:

It was in the dark of a winter evening. I called for her at Trobridge Hall, the women student's residence, to escort her the 100 yards across the campus to a meeting in Defiance Hall. For a bit of that short stroll I remember holding one of her hands in my warm coat pocket. On no occasion, before or after, was there any thought of an embrace or kiss. It just wasn't done in those days. And yet, this attraction, 'love at first sight' (and how do you explain such a happening), continued for a number of months. She went home to another state for the summer vacation of 1908, and we communicated with each other by mail.

One of her letters, unknown to me, was surreptitiously steamed open by one of my relatives. My dear mother, although she was not the guilty one, was apprised of the content of that letter. That was likely the reason she called my two sisters and me together, and advised us of the risk of keeping company with anyone not of our faith. Well, the object of my affection was the daughter of a Protestant minister. She returned my feeling, but she had a lot more common sense than I. In a following letter to me she told of a Catholic who had married one of her relatives. In that case the Catholic party had adopted the faith of her relative, and the marriage was a happy one. That letter put an end to my 'love at first sight' as suddenly as it had begun. It brought me to my senses.
\\

Down to earth at last, I was nevertheless convinced that married life was my vocation. I decided to look around for a companion who would make up for my own weaknesses,

someone whose character would complement my own. Of a certainty, she had to be one quite zealous in the practice of her Catholic faith. But how could I do this? I had no books to instruct me, and I consulted no other person on how to go about it. So, we come to another case ‘believe it or not.’ On my own I decided to base my choice on complementary physical features. I’m round-faced and my nose is not at all prominent. I considered this not good looking nor well balanced. In any event, about this time (1909) I was invited to a birthday party for a former classmate in St. Mary’s Parochial School, Andy Kunz. There were at that party young men and women in their late teens. My future wife was among them. She was then living with her parents on the family farm, three miles out of Defiance. She was in town for the party and expecting to stay over-night with a girlfriend. It fell to me after the party to escort the two of them home. That was the first time I met Kathryn Schindler. She had angular facial features that contrasted with my own. I then and there decided she was the one for me!

So, it turns out, Harry effectively never dated anyone but Kathryn, and, so far as we know, Kathryn never had any suitor but Harry. As to the validity of Harry’s curious criteria for wife selection, it would seem that their 64 year voyage together on the sea of matrimony that ended with Kathryn’s death in 1979 is evidence enough. Beyond that, a grandson has testified: ‘My grandfather is a man of boundless energy, but he could not have accomplished what he has without Grandma. He is also a man of intensity. Grandma’s smooth unruffled approach to life helped temper my grandfather’s intensity, I’m sure.’ [If the reader be married, this might be the time to check out the spouse’s features. Let us pray that they are contrasting to the reader’s rather than similar!] In any event, the Kirk courtship was to extend slightly over five years, and Harry has no specific recollection of precisely when or how they actually became formally engaged. Such details as Harry does remember are recorded in his aforementioned 1981 memo, thus:

During the over five year period between this first acquaintance and our marriage, there was little chance of

being together often. She was teaching in distant county schools, except in the summer months. During vacation time she returned to her parents' home three miles from Defiance. This was before autos and good roads were common. I was earning my own way through college and had little money to spend on anything else. I learned that finding one's way over three miles of unlighted muddy rutted road in the darkness of night is not a delightful experience. Occasionally I was able to rent a horse and buggy from a Mr. Ficus ... He charged me \$2 – more equivalent today to \$20.

It might be hard to believe today, but on family farms long ago, it was not uncommon to retire at 8 pm, be up at 4 am, and get to work at once caring for the farm animals. So, don't be surprised when I tell you the rules that prevailed when I was courting Kathryn. I was never to stay later than 9 pm. Maybe I could get there by 7 pm. And, my visits were not to be oftener than every two weeks. Looking back, and considering the period of over five years preceding our marriage, I think both of those rules were good for us. Of course, there were months at a time when we were far apart. It got worse when I graduated from Defiance College in 1911, and was off to Notre Dame University, where I also had to work to help pay my way. [It should be inserted at this point that Harry opted for Civil Engineering on the basis of the recommendation of his high school math teacher saluting his math proficiency with the remark, 'You ought to be a Civil Engineer.' Thereupon Harry took everything tending in that direction at Defiance College, and noted that C.E. in those days in that area indicated either O.S.U. or Notre Dame. Harry opted for the latter to secure its religious benefits.

Furthermore, since I wanted to graduate in 1913, I had to (for the college year 1911-1912) carry a class load one and one-half times the normal load. Never in my entire life have I worked harder or longer than that first year at Notre Dame. My school job required me to wait on tables three meals a day. Frequently, after waiting on others, I had no time to eat my own meal because I had to prepare for another class. I was

last to bed at night, and first up in the morning. That first year at Notre Dame I had practically no free time for anything but classes and study. By contrast, my senior year (1912-13) was easy. However, in those days vacations, such as at Christmas, were short and far between, quite different from the experience my grandchildren's' experience as college students. And that's only part of the story.

In Jun 1913, after six years in college and two degrees, I had no job in prospect. In those days you never heard of industrial or other corporations initiating job offers to college graduates. It was about 1 Aug when I got a job at \$65 a month, employed on a street-paving contract for contractor in Fostoria, Ohio. Early in the fall, it became a sewer job, and about 1 Nov, along with other workmen in heavy winter clothing I was off before daylight by horse and wagon to some country location. We were installing steel bridges to replace those washed out in the terrible flood of the spring of 1913. This was the most physically onerous experience of my life. A great understanding and sympathy was then built up in me, and survives to this day, for men who have to labor outside all day in the bitter cold of winter such as prevails in northern Ohio. Your hands and feet get terribly cold. Your lunch freezes. If you go near the outdoor fire for warming, you feel worse afterward than before, and so you stay away from it all day.

Meanwhile, earlier that fall, while still in Fostoria, I was surprised to receive a letter from Congressman Timothy T. Ansberry of Defiance, a friend of the family. He suggested I write a letter to Governor James Cox asking for employment in either the Ohio Department of Public Works or the State Highway Department. This I did. It resulted in a 31 Dec 1913 letter from James R. Marker, Ohio Highway Commissioner, appointing me as an engineer in his department. I reported for employment at the State Highway Department in Columbus on 14 Jan 1914. [Harry was ready to get married then but Kathryn counseled a year's delay.] My work was indoors out of the bitter cold, and my salary was the

munificent sum (to me) of \$100 per month, quite an improvement in pay and working conditions. But Columbus was farther away than ever from Defiance County where Kathryn was still teaching in country schools. However about the end of May, I was sent as superintendent on two road projects in Williams County, adjacent to Defiance County in the northwest corner of Ohio. On that work, in addition to my \$100 per month salary, I was paid my expenses for room and board. Hence I was able to pay my debts and save a neat sum by the year's end. [So, in Jan 1915 Harry and Kathryn, now husband and wife, were settled in Columbus, Ohio.]

The Kirks lived briefly in 1915 at 2304 N. High St and then 454-1/2 W. Third Ave (where their first child, Margaret Mary, was born). Then, in 1916, they settled in for three years at 394 Whittier (formerly Schiller) St (where their second child, Kathleen Cecelia, was born). All five of the subsequent Kirk children were born in the hospital. However, before Moving on to Kathryn's married life and motherhood in detail, the surrender of her ambition for a teaching career must be further remarked. It seems that some considerable sacrifice was involved here, but again let us allow Harry to elaborate:

We were married 19 Jan 1915. At that time I had been working a year as an engineer in the Ohio State Highway Department out of Columbus, Ohio. Around Christmas of 1916, Kathryn seemed quite sad and depressed. I couldn't understand this, and she gave no reason at the time. I assumed it was because it would be her first Christmas away from "home," and surely Christmas in a home with ten children must have been a great joy.

I wasn't to learn the real cause of her distress at this time for many years. As it turned out, our first child, Margaret Mary was born 4 Feb 1916. So, at Christmas time in 1915 her mother was nearly eight months pregnant. She realized that she was facing a great new responsibility in becoming a mother, and having to devote herself to the awesome duties of motherhood. In her five years of teaching she had developed a

great affection for the profession, and a keen ambition to make her mark in that field.

In short, my dear wife's depression resulted from her stark recognition that assumption of the mantle of motherhood would require that she abandon her ambitions as a formal educator. Being a gifted person of demonstrated talent, this was somewhat of a bitter pill, but she swallowed it with selfless courage. Had she been able to pursue her chosen profession, she would no doubt have made quite a name for herself in educational circles. Instead, she resolutely changed course to become the exemplary mother of seven children. Who could gainsay that her personal sacrifice did not better benefit the world? And, please note, her problem was no less than that which confronts and perhaps too often overwhelms any modern day young wives: career vs. motherhood.



Family at home on Farm – 1916

Kathryn Schindler's "career" as a mother shall, of course, be elaborated in the following segment of this saga, but first a further word anent the depth of the impact of willing acceptance of this constraint upon her entirely healthy ambition. There can be no doubt of the extent of her agonizing over the dilemma of career vs. motherhood. Kathryn herself, perhaps inadvertently, discloses the agony of the conflict she may well

have experienced that Christmas in of 1915 in a poem she authored (significantly?) around Christmas of 1962, thus:

AMBITION

Zeal softened with reason is good for the soul;
But ambition, uncontrolled, is deadly.
It is ruthless. It is blind.
It seeks acclaim. It seeks reward.
It drives its victims relentlessly on.

Like the alcoholic, it must have more.
It seeks constantly to further its goal.
It adheres rigidly to a chosen path.
It never sees wounds left behind.
On and on, it must rush to its own destruction.

Dear Lord! Preserve us from uncontrolled ambition.
Drive from us all desire for acclaim.
Make us seek to enjoy the gifts You send.
Let rational decisions direct our feet
To the path that is Your holy will!

Who could possibly read that testimony to inner turmoil without recognizing at once their own allied inner turmoil? It delineates a battle in which we have all engaged at one time or another. It will be a further aim of this simple treatise to show how Kathryn Schindler *won* her battle.

III – NURTURING (1915 – 1931)

The joys of parents are secret, and so are their griefs and fears. – Francis Bacon

The whole world suddenly went wrong in mid-1914. American historian Samuel Eliot Morison categorically asserts that, “Between the firing on Fort Sumter and the attack on Pearl Harbor there was no shock to American public opinion comparable to that of the outbreak of the European war in August 1914.” As every schoolchild knows, it all started with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and, “The initial American reaction was horror, disgust, and determination to keep out of it.”



Kathryn and Harry – 1915

Then came the sinking without warning of the “neutral” Cunard ocean Liner Lusitania on 7 May 1915, with the loss of 1198 of the 1924 lives on board, including 128 American dead. The slide of public opinion toward war had begun. This is the historical backdrop against which Kathryn Schindler chose to wed Harry John Kirk of Defiance, Ohio.

The wedding occurred on 19 Jan 1915 at the St. Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Defiance. It would endure for some 64 years, until Kathryn’s death on 21 Aug 1979. Who was this Harry Kirk? An excerpt from a volume of biographies might read thus: *Harry J. Kirk* – born 22 Sep 1889, Defiance, OH; B.A. Defiance College 1911; C.E. Notre Dame 1913; wed Kathryn C. Schindler 19 Jan 1915; Ohio Hwy. Dept. 1914-29 (Chief Engr. 1925-28, Director 1928-29); Assoc. Gen. Contr. of Amer. 1930-58; Soc. St. V. de Paul 1932 et. seq. (Wash. Pres. 1948-53); Bd. Cath Charities Wash. 1949-68; NCCC Treas. 1950-68; Wash. Cath. Evidence Guild 1932-48 (Pres. 40-42); Nat. C.E.G. Pres. 1940-43. Awards: St. V de Paul Medal, St. John’s Univ. 1954; Kt. of St. Gregory by Pope John XXXIII 1958; *Man of Year* UND Club of Wash 1959. Children: one son, six daughters. This *brief* hardly conveys the stature of the man as husband, father, loyal industrious worker, and faithful servant of the church, however, and he shall forthwith become another principal in the Kathryn Schindler story.

Whereas both of Kathryn’s parents were natives of Bohemia as were all four of her grandparents, Harry’s parents were both natives of Ohio. In fact, on his paternal side Harry was a fourth generation Ohioan, his great grandfather having settled in Mifflenville which was later absorbed into Columbus. As for his mother’s side, both of her parents were natives of Ireland. Harry’s father, George Washington Kirk (1887-1924), was baptized incident to a fatal heart attack at age 56. Harry’s mother, Margaret Cavanaugh (1869-1946), also gave birth to Harry’s two younger sisters, Hazel Kirk Krutsch (1891-1975), and Rilla Kirk Tschuor (1893-1980). Their two children, Kirk Krutsch and Mary Ann Tschuor Burns, now (1985) reside with their respective spouses in Largo, Florida.

With only son Harry's only son Pat becoming a priest, Fr. Daniel, the Kirk clan comes to an end with Harry.

In any event, Kathryn having put Harry off for a year, they were married on 19 Jan 1915. Kathryn was 24, Harry was 25. Kathryn was arrayed in a purple dress which she had made herself. Harry arranged for a horse-drawn cab for the trip from the church to the Schindler farm reception.



The Kirks – 19 Jan 1915

Then the young couple was off by train to Columbus. This constituted their honeymoon. They thereupon set up home-making in Columbus, Ohio, where Harry was then employed by the Ohio Highway Department, of which he would ultimately become the Director. On the basis of a veritable library of volumes dedicated to his life and times, there can be little doubt that Harry was by equal parts fully committed to his professional work and his Church. This conjecture is ventured on the basis

that – apart from citations of vital statistics such as dates of births, weddings and deaths – these volumes are distinguished by a curious and conspicuous virtual absence of information or reflection on his home life over the next 15 years during which his seven children were born. It's almost as though he wasn't there. But, after all, as Fr. Theodore Hesburgh of Notre Dame has remarked, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." Yet, the contrast of this dearth of information on the rearing of his own family as opposed to the wealth of information presented, say, anent his forbears, is simply too drastic and dramatic to be ignored.

Now, it should be emphasized that the foregoing somewhat gratuitous opinion is not introduced by way of questioning Harry's priorities or denigrating him in any way. Rather, it is ventured precisely to highlight the full dimensions of the dominant role Kathryn must necessarily have played in these most critical and crucial years of child formation. Harry himself lends credence to this assessment as when he observed in April 1978 anent Kathryn's increasing gradual loss of mental awareness that, "It would seem that this is God's way of reminding me of my *neglect of her* in the past, and to make reparation now when she has greater need of patient, loving care." Again, in a 1981 memo commenting upon the revelation of letters he received from Kathryn in 1931, Harry observed, "These letters permit a glance into the very heart of my precious wife ... I fear she would not approve of this revelation if she were with us. Nevertheless, I do this as a feeble attempt at reparation for my neglect and insensitivity to the heavy cross she carried." One of the Kirk children lends further credence to Harry's personal assessment, thus: "I sense his (Harry's) drive and compulsion to participate in and run volunteer organizations left her (Kathryn) with the heavy end of home details." Finally, when a son-in-law directly asked who was the *subject* of Kathryn's poem on *Ambition* (incorporated earlier in this treatise), Harry replied quickly and simply, "Me."

The next 15 years (1916-31) recounted by this saga, then, which shall largely recount Kathryn's child-bearing and nurturing years, may

well be regarded as her crowning years in her primary role as *mother-teacher*. Curiously, there had been no discussion by Harry and Kathryn about children prior to their marriage. In any event, children there were to be, and it all began with the birth of daughter, Margaret Mary, in Feb 1916. To be precise, Margaret Mary Kirk was born at 5 pm on Friday, 4 Feb 1916 at 454-1/2 W. Third Ave, Columbus, Ohio. As was the custom in those days, she was born at home. She was delivered by a Dr. Gordon (who had arrived only twenty minutes before), assisted by a Kathryn McNamara, “a trustworthy and efficient nurse.” The full cost of the “blessed event” was \$153.46 (including a pro-rata share for the “extra” expense of utilities such as gas, electric lights and “washings” and a 10 cent error in Kathryn’s addition). Of this stupendous total, the munificent sum of \$17 went to the doctor. (Who needs *Blue Cross*?) The sum of \$41 (for 11 days) plus \$8.60 carfare went to the nurse (which may mark the end of the era when nurses were paid more than doctors). Mary weighed in at a slight 5-1/4 pounds (a “family low” not to be beaten even by subsequent twins), which she more than doubled (12 pounds) in six months. Harry got the word upon arriving home from work via congratulations from Dr. Gordon, who was just leaving. If you think Harry did nothing incident to the birth, neither did the doctor. And, considering only \$3.73 was expended on “drugs,” Kathryn herself did all the “work,” and without, very much relief.

Margy was baptized on 13 Feb 1916 at St. Francis’ church by a Fr. Leyden, as sponsored by Kathryn’s sister Margaret (who had arrived a few days before birth from Defiance to help out) and the pastor, Fr. McDermott. The only other “exceptional” thing about her infancy was a case of scarlet fever at about age one which, despite the immunity normally conferred by breast-feeding, was apparently transmitted by the seeming carelessness of a doctor who had treated such a case enroute to a Kirk family house call. (A sequel to this little episode will be covered anent the birth of the Kirk’s second child, Kathleen. Otherwise, Margy experienced a normal childhood, along the way suffering the then normal childhood diseases – chicken pox, measles, and whooping cough.

Margy began school and completed the first two years of high school at Holy Rosary, with some elementary grades at: Immaculate Conception sandwiched in, due to interim family moves and the fact that Immaculate Conception had no high school. Due to a further family move to the District of Columbia in 1931, she graduated from St. Anthony's high school in Washington in 1933. Having been awarded a scholarship to Strayer Business College through competitive examination, Margaret Mary attended classes there through the summer of 1933. However, she had other ideas of greater personal interest, such that 2 October 1933 became *Landing Day* for her at the Carmelite Monastery in Baltimore, then located at 1429 Biddle St in a most unsavory neighborhood. On 1 May 1934 she received the *habit* of Carmel, and the name Sr. Kathleen of the Holy Family, OCD. She made her simple profession on 14 Nov 1935, and her final vows on 14 Nov 1938. With the Baltimore community she made solemn vows, with papal enclosure on 11 April 1953. In 1961 her community moved to an infinitely more suitable location at 1318 Dulaney Valley Road in Towson, Maryland. There, circa 1971, the community undertook considering and implementing changes in the Church consequent to Vatican II as they related to community life and dress, which seemingly have not been completed as of late 1985.

This is probably the appropriate place to say a few words in elaboration of Carmelites, since both Kathryn's first and last children would become same, and perhaps even more so since they were to become the source of some confusion and concern on the part of both Kathryn and Harry in post-Vatican-II years. This coverage will necessarily be superficial, since hardly anyone these days is a specialist on the subject, few people – including even family members – are privy to details as they pertain to the individuals involved, and charity would in any case compel respect for the right to privacy of the latter. Beyond all that, the Carmelite vocation has historically remained pretty much a profound mystery to the “uncalled” lay-person. So, this brief digression (not really either brief or a digression) shall be confined to a few less obscure facts.

Thus, the discalced (unshod) Carmelites were founded (perhaps “reformed” might be a more apt word) in Spain in 1562 by Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumeda. Better known as St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), she remains one of two women declared (1970) *Doctor of the Church* (St. Catherine of Siena, a Dominican nun, being the other). The Carmelite nuns in the US trace their roots to an English convent in Antwerp which in turn is traceable to a convent in Belgium founded by one of St. Teresa’s nuns. The whole aim of her reform is said to have been to reorganize convent life with a view to intensifying the practice of mental prayer; such that strict enclosure, great austerity and considerable daily solitude were in order. Traditionally, Carmelite nuns were subject to so-called “papal enclosure,” the same being the strictest enclosure which serves as the norm against which all classes of lesser enclosure are measured. Vatican II (*Religious Life – 16*) ruled that it be retained for nuns “totally dedicated to contemplation... (but that it be) modified according to the conditions of time and place, and outdated customs done away with. In such matters, consideration should be given to *the wishes of the monasteries themselves* (emphasis added).” However, Teresa is even more renowned as a writer than as a reformer, it being said that she never wrote a dull sentence, although much of her writing was highly mystical. In mid-20th century her contemplatives numbered some 15,000.

The first Carmelite foundation in the US occurred at Port Tobacco (Charles County), Maryland in 1790. This community eventually relocated to Baltimore, but has since been, restored. Altogether, as of 1984, the US Carmelites had some 64 monasteries, scattered through 31 states. Harry Kirk has visited more than 60, missing only the one in Eugene, Oregon, and two of the three in Massachusetts. Other members of the Kirk family have visited Carmelite monasteries as far away as Hong Kong. (One thing for sure, they’re always “home” when you call – or at least they used to be.) In any event, the main purposes of the order remains *contemplation*, missionary work, and theology. The nuns devote themselves to prayer, especially of intercession for priests, and a little of hidden sacrifice (notably including deliberate detachment from external things).

Perhaps modern awareness of the Carmelites is due to another Teresa, St. Therese de Lisieux (1873-1897), whose canonization in 1925 evoked a spate of books about *The Little Flower*, some of which might well have eventually caught the eye of an impressionable (then Sad nine year old) Margaret Mary Kirk. Certainly Therese's designation as patroness of the missions and "Wurlitzer-voiced" Fr. Charles Coughlin imploring his vast radio audience to chant "Little Flower, in this hour, show your power" did little to diminish her notoriety. (This *Radio Priest*, *The Lion of the Airways*, starting a parish with a mere 30 families in 1926 gained some 40 million radio followers by 1936, and was perhaps at the height of his powers when Margy entered Carmel in 1933.) And, just think – this powerfully influential little saint died at age 24!

Yet a little more must be said about this "most popular saint of modern times," particularly as it is suspected she had a special relevance to this story via Kathryn's two Carmelite daughters, Margy and (as yet un-introduced) Frannie. Therese was the youngest of nine, only five of whom survived infancy – all girls who became nuns, four of them Carmelites. She chose the contemplative life because of the missionary role of prayer, especially prayer for priests. "Sanctity," she once said, "does not consist in this or that practice but a disposition of the heart which makes us humble..." Love issuing, despite faults and weaknesses, in total reliance on the infinite goodness of God, is the keynote of her message. Within 20 years of her death, her autobiography (directed by her prioress sister) had already been translated into 34 languages. Beyond the veritable flood of miracles attributed to her since her death, no doubt a primary basis for her modern popularity is the example of her achieving sainthood in the obscurity of the cloister through the uncomplaining accomplishment of ordinary, commonplace menial duties. She thus inspires hope in virtually all of us who despair of attaining heroic virtue and are so mindful of our inadequacies. Beyond that, this hope is heightened when we note that St. Therese suffered the added handicap of a neurotic condition against which she was to struggle all of her life. In her last 18 months she was afflicted with severe religious doubts, which couldn't be resolved even through obedience to authority, but only through

absolute self-surrender to love for the will of God. Indeed, the message and example of this extraordinary little saint is relevant to us all!

The foregoing should suffice as a basis for any subsequent discussion of Carmelites as encountered later in this saga, and we may now return to the thread of our story. By 1917 the US had been drawn into the war with Germany. Incongruously, this was the same year the US purchased the Virgin Islands from Denmark. (A curious sidelight of the latter acquisition was the more or less coincidental world-wide conversion from the more primitive direct current (DC), to space and weight saving and more efficient alternating current (AC), with the result that natives of the islands to this day refer to it as *Danish* current and *American* current. Now, don't ever say you didn't learn something reading this memoir.) By 1918, American soldiers were over there, and members of our AEF were falling like flies before an insecticide spray on the western front. Meanwhile a half-million folks were dying on the home front, too, victims of a massive flu epidemic. Nor was that the only threat to home front American males. There was the draft. It seems young men were going to really catch it one way or another. There was hope, though, for fathers of two or more children. Never imagine, therefore, that Kathleen Cecilia Kirk and her entire peer group of “second children”) was a so-called unwanted child. She arrived 6 Jan 1918, and Harry was safe – which is not to even suggest that this ever entered his mind.

Kathleen, like her elder sister, was born at home – though a different one, the family having meanwhile moved to 394 Whittier St. (formerly Schiller St., until that became somewhat odious during WW I). She was to be the last Kirk child born at home, the rest all being born at Mt. Carmel Hospital in Columbus. Kathleen was also attended by a different doctor than Margy, and thereby hangs a tale. It seems, that Harry and Kathryn hadn't been too happy with the first doctor's performance. He had been vocally recommended by the street location of his office rather than by name, and after checking via the phone book, Harry had come up with the wrong guy. Unfortunately this was only discovered two weeks before delivery was due, when the nurse bumped into the “proper” doctor

and asked, "How is Mrs. Kirk?" Of course the good doctor had never heard of her. Subsequent investigation by Harry revealed that the unliked first doctor was involved in malpractice charges concerning distribution of drugs to Negroes. Needless to say, he wasn't invited back and was lucky to have, according to Harry, escaped a punch in the jaw. The doctor (Dr. Turner) who delivered Kathleen very satisfactorily delivered the balance of Kirk children.

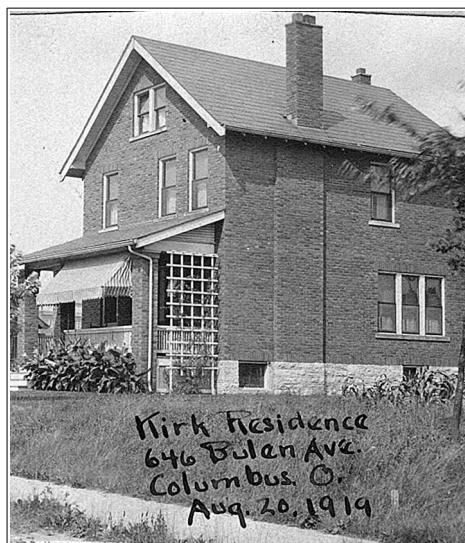
Kathleen was the only Kirk child born on Sunday, and so is "fair and wise, good and gay." She was also, the child born earliest in the day, checking in at a very considerate 10 am. She weighed in at 7-1/4 pounds and did not double her weight in six months; although it is whispered that she has continued to double it periodically since. Kathryn's meticulous baby records also reveal that Kathleen "talked very little before age two" Reportedly, she also has long since more than made up for this. Like all of the Kirk children she suffered the customary measles, chicken pox, and whooping cough, and like her sister Margaret Mary had her adenoids and tonsils removed at an early age. Baptized in St. Leo's church, her godparents were Mrs. George Schindler and Bernard Schindler. Kathleen was to marry and produce ten children herself, six girls and four boys. She was thus the only one of Kathryn's four married daughters who, like Kathryn, had more girls than boys. Kathleen always maintained that God evidently preferred girls. Her multiplicity of nephews always claimed that it took 1-1/2 girls to equal a boy. (Actually, to the extent the latter claim might have any validity, based upon the distribution of sexes among the Kirk girl progeny, the figure 23 divided by 16 or 1.4375 would be more precise than 1-1/2.)

Before moving along, there is one more incident unique about Kathleen's infancy. Margaret Mary's scarlet fever at age one has already been recounted. Now, in those days, this disease compelled both a quarantine and subsequent chemical fumigation of the entire house. Thus at was that day came when everybody in the household spent an entire day out of the house, which was then buttoned up for day-long fumigation by something we might recognize as a sort of aerosol bomb. So it was that

Margy spent the day in her baby carriage. The latter was in due course shunted into the attic until Kathleen's arrival. Naturally, Kathleen was soon its happy incumbent, but not for long. Kathleen almost immediately contracted scarlet fever despite the immunity normally attending those nursing on mother's milk. The problem, of course, was that the buggy was the *only* household item that hadn't been fumigated. What a case that might have made for Charlie Chan. In any event, as far as can be ascertained, brain damage to Kathleen has proved minimal. And, possibly to re-establish her favored position as "the sickly one," Margy closed out the year with an attack of the Spanish flu – which may account in part for her later affinity for Spanish.

So, at last, we rush on into 1919. Peace came at Versailles, but back in the old US no one could toast victory properly. The Volstead Act first defined intoxicating liquor as any containing over one-half of one percent alcohol, and the 18th Amendment then outlawed intoxicating liquor. Historian Samuel Eliot Morison averred that, "College students (no less in the vanguard then than today) who before Prohibition would have in a keg of beer and sit around singing ... *Under The Anheuser Busch* now got drunk quickly on bathtub gin, and could manage no lyric more complicated than *How dry I Am.*" Beyond that, hip-flask drinking is purported to have greatly accelerated an incipient war-time induced revolution in sexual standards. "The best laid schemes o' mice and men Gang aft a-gley." (Whatever that means!) Anyway, at least we now know we can't blame everything gone badly on TV. To continue, then, this even drier story, this is the world into which Kathryn's twin daughters, Gertrude and Lucille, were born on *their mother's 29th birthday*, 19 Dec 1919. By then the family had moved to its first "owned" home at 646 Bulen Ave, and were members of Holy Rosary Parish.

As mentioned earlier, the girls were the first to be born in the hospital rather than at home. Considering the fact of "twins," and the complications anent Lucille's birth, this turned out to be a most fortunate circumstance.



First owned home – Columbus, 1919

Kathryn was having her problems, too, with this birth – her legs were swelling. For this and other reasons Dr. Turner had Harry bring Kathryn into Mt. Carmel Hospital. Following a thorough examination, the doctor announced to Kathryn the next morning, "I'm going to deliver you today." So, the two young Kirk girls were induced slightly prematurely. This, too, was a prudent move, since the umbilical cord was wrapped around Lucille's neck, and she likely wouldn't have survived to term. Gertrude Helene was born at 11 am and weighed 5-3/4 pounds ... Lucille Frances was born at 11:15 am and weighed 5-1/4 pounds, thereby tying the low birth weight record set and retained by Margaret Mary. The twins shared the same godparents, Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Krutsch, the latter being Harry's sister Hazel. Gertrude was to marry and have ten children. Lucille was to marry and have a family record eleven children. There were those who felt she cheated by having twin boys along the way. All of Gertrude's brood were born at Providence Hospital in Washington DC. While most of Lucille's children were also born in Washington, she did also give birth in Annapolis, Birmingham, and Memphis.

In keeping with the Republican Conservative Era then reigning under Harding, the next few years were stable and quiet in the Kirk household as well. The years 1920-21 passed, bringing women the vote, and dispatching Sacco and Vanzetti. This was the era, too, when radio really “took off” by powerful KDKA in Pittsburgh – which, thanks to its pioneering role remains the *only* radio station east of the Mississippi whose call letters begin with “K” rather than “W.” (There *will* be a quiz!) This, was the period when Harry was experiencing the bitter winters on outdoor work doing road surveys and assisting in planning bridge design for Kable and Green Counties. Kathryn, accordingly, was largely left to shift for herself with her four under-foot small children, ranging in age from two to five. She did have a maid in once a week, to help with the weekly house-cleaning, but four pre-school youngsters, including two year old twins can take its toll. And, as we are to learn, Kathryn wasn’t the most robust woman in the word, but, she sure had an indomitable will for doing what she saw as her duty.

Moving right along, we come to the year 1922 and the birth of daughter number five on 12 Sep. Being born on a Tuesday, the nursery rhyme has her as “full of grace,” but some suggest the jury is still out. (Just testing your humility, Dorothy.) She, too, was delivered by Dr. Turner at Mt. Carmel Hospital, at 12:30 pm, weighing in at 6 pounds ten ounces. Her godparents were Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Volk, the latter being Kathryn’s colder sister, Jeanette. Dorothy Anne’s birth was distinguished in the fact that it was the first and only Kirk child for whose birth Harry was not present, he then being deployed on a highway construction job. Dorothy, who was to wed at an age several years older than her married sisters, had eight children. All were born in the greater Washington metro area, but from Providence, Georgetown, and the Seventh Day Adventist Hospitals, thus demonstrating Dorothy’s ecumenical spirit.

Meanwhile, on the Schindler side of the family a most notorious event occurred in early 1923. That was the year the wife of Kathryn’s youngest brother, Bernard, gave birth to a son. His baptism was a big

event at a Catholic parish in Lancaster, Ohio. Harry was there and has recorded this recollection:

"How well recall a conversation in the vestibule of the church that day. Three of us, George Schindler, the proud grandpa, the pastor and I were talking together when George suddenly exclaimed to the pastor, "This is my first grandchild!" At that time I counted four daughters of my own, all of them his grandchildren. Of course, I was aware that George Schindler was happy that at last there was a grandchild who would bear the "Schindler" name, but to say 'This is my first grandchild!' I feigned great anger and protested, 'What do you mean? Your first grandchild! Don't any of my daughters count for anything?' Well, the poor man, he didn't know what to say, but the pastor and I were greatly amused. Thereafter, the newly arrived Schindler was known as 'the Crown Prince.'"

Reverting, now, back to the Kirk side of the family, Dorothy was quickly followed on the earthly scene by Patrick James Kirk – son at last. This was to be Kathryn and Harry's only son. Since he was to become a priest, the Kirk family name dies with Harry, though happily several of his grandchildren already answer to it as other than a surname. Pat arrived on 28 Nov 1923, a Wednesday, and thus might be expected to be "full of woe." If he has been, so far, it's his own heroic secret. Pat weighed in at 6 pounds 11 ounces. His childhood was distinguished by the addition of "mumps" to his list of normal childhood diseases. His godparents were Mr. and Mrs. Boehm, the latter being Kathryn's older sister Margaret. This was, apparently, to be "the" year for Kirk "men," since in addition to Pat being born, Harry was to become Chief Engineer of the Ohio Highway Department's Bureau of Maintenance and Repair.

We had best digress briefly to elaborate the further adventures of son Pat, since it isn't likely he'll leave any progeny to do so, and even more especially because he remains quite properly a great source of justified pride on the part of both his mother and his father. More than this, as Pat has himself already amply acknowledged, Kathryn was highly

instrumental in his happy vacation. Once, in an informal testimonial to his mother before a dinner meeting of the *Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship* Pat had this to say:

My mother used to come to the monastery where I now am – St. Anselm's. She used to come there for our evening prayer, Vespers, on Sunday evenings. That's a solemn prayer meeting where we sing with organ music and what not for about half an hour ... And when I was about ten years old or so, she came down one Sunday afternoon and said: "Would anyone like to come to Vespers with me?" I was just sitting around doing nothing, so I said: "I'll go." So, I went with her

...

As I look back now with the wisdom of hindsight, I realize that I was impressed. A ten year old child may not show that so much, and I really couldn't take it all in, but I was impressed. If I can just reconstruct my memory at that time. I remember that what I saw was people dressed like I am [in cowled black habit] unhurried, going about their prayer-singing very business-like. They do this every day of the year. They don't make a production out of it or do it to please any audience. I know. The church was almost empty. There were only about three or four people in the congregation. If there were nobody there, they'd be doing it anyway. So, what's the only reason left? They're doing it for God – not for men! That got across.

I think we should be aware that children are impressionable. They are impressed when they see us pray, when they see us do something for God. They are impressed when parents pray with their eyes raised, and with their eyes on a crucifix somewhere, and show that they enjoy praying in the presence of maybe just a three-month-old infant. Don't underestimate that children at that age will pick up the message and learn to pray in the most natural way. Whereas, if you say, "Now say your night prayers," and they say their night prayers and you don't, then they get the idea that prayer is something that you do for your parents. The only way you can teach someone to pray is to pray yourself. So, I attribute

little things like that to my mother. That's how I got where I am now. That was a sort of beginning.

Well, yes! But that's not the whole story. For episode two in this particular saga we are indebted once again to Harry's fantastic 96-years-old memory. First of all, unlike the Kirk girls who attended high school at St. Anthony's, Pat attended Gonzaga (whether or not he knew it) at his mother's insistence. She firmly believed her only son, habituated to a home wherein females outnumbered males 7:2, could best profit from *male* high school teachers. So, Pat came under the formidable guidance of the Jesuits. Soon after high school he was off to Notre Dame under the aegis of the Navy ROTC. However, by Christmas 1941 he had decided that pulpits were to be preferred to turrets, and chose to opt for the priesthood. Now, it happened that Kathryn had been somewhat scandalized on occasion by diocesan priests, and so she sincerely hoped that Pat might rather opt to become a monk. This would be the last thing, however, that she would so much as hint. She scrupulously avoided disclosing her own attitude anent any vocational inclinations of the children, lest she unduly influence them in what she considered their most personal decision. It was at this point that, due to WW II threatening the west coast, the 1 Jan 42 Rose Bowl (Oregon State 20 – Duke 16) was set for Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Among other things, they couldn't risk either huge crowds or their potential for imperiling the "black-out" then in effect for coastal areas within range of aerial-attacks (the Japs having already launched weapons-laden balloons off Oregon) from submarines.

It also happened that Gertrude was then secretary to an NCWC (National Catholic Welfare Conference) priest who offered to take her and Lucille to the game. This was an "order" priest of the Congregation of the Holy Cross (CSC), such as are at the University of Notre Dame. Kathryn talked the good Father into taking Pat along. We won't even hazard a guess as to what vocational chit-chat or *example* may have transpired enroute between Washington to Durham and return, and Pat may have in any event already made up his mind. We do know that by June Pat had decided upon the Benedictines located in Vermont. Eventually, of course, he actually ended up at one of the three English Congregations of

Benedictines in the US – St. Anselm’s Abbey in Washington (the other two being located in Portsmouth, RI, and St. Louis, MO).

Now, most religious communities pronounce the three solemn vows (based on the three evangelical counsels) of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The Benedictines, by exception, retain their ancient formula of poverty and *stability*, meaning that the monks vow to remain in the monastery in which they make their profession. This permanent orientation to home-base is unique to the Benedictines. (In like manner, the Jesuits take four additional simple vows, one of which is a vow of special allegiance to the pope that is unique to them.) Stability, of course, is considered to include the two other “evangelical” vows. So it is, then, that no one in the family should have any difficulty ever locating Pat, long since Fr. Daniel, OSB.

Pat entered St. Anselm’s 12 Jul 42, received his habit and new “religious” name 29 Sep 42. (One wonders if the name Daniel was effectively salute to the possible vocational influence and the well-nigh contagiousness of the earnest and enthusiastic evangelical zeal of a young Irish Franciscan brother – long since a dedicated priest – who was a frequent Kirk household guest in Pat’s high school years.) In any event, Pat pronounced his solemn vows 15 Oct 46, and was ordained a priest 8 Jun 49. He celebrated his Silver Jubilee, of course, on 8 Jun 1974. He has proven to be a humble, competent and altogether exemplary priest, as the remarks of his then religious superior made clear on one occasion:

The monks at St. Anselm’s follow the Benedictine rule ... that is, to live a Christian community life. And that is one of the clearest characteristics of Fr. Daniel, that he is in the best sense a community man. This is not so much from natural gregariousness..., but by the sheer simple giving of himself to the service of others. He has never followed a personal career in pursuit of academic distinction, writing, lecturing, etc. He has always made himself totally available in humility and generous obedience to the routine work and life of the community. First of all, he has been unfailingly faithful in sharing the common liturgical prayer of the community, and

for many years has been one of the cantors and most dependable regulars in the first duty of the monastery. Second, he has been constantly available in the unceasing work of teaching in the Abbey school.

Over and above these two fundamental aspects of community life at St. Anselm's, Fr. Daniel has spent almost every moment of his free time in patient work on all the mechanical sides of the monastery's needs. The boilers, the motors, the automobiles, the clocks, and all the multifarious (and why does one suspect the abbot eight rather have said "nefarious") machines which even monasteries live by in our times – all these come under Fr. Daniel's persevering care and inventiveness. A well-known side effect of all this is not the infrequent smudge of oil adorning Fr. Daniel's face as he hurries to vespers. But with all this activity it is still quite clear that Fr. Daniel is very much a man of personal prayer and meditation; and his characteristic homilies combine true spiritual insights, simple directness, and refreshing humor. If the real goal of monastic community life is the unselfish giving of one's self in loving service of God and men, then Fr. Daniel seems truly on his way to that goal.

Well, one hardly has to prod, “Now, Abbot, tell us what you really think!” And one of the most striking things about this portrait is how reflective it is of the fundamental character of his mother. It is as if a sort of osmosis was at work between them in Pat’s formative years, or, as Pat himself has said in another context quoted herein earlier, we’d all be well advised how “impressionable” children are and how powerful can be the parents’ example. Yet as good Abbot hinted anent the “smudge of oil,” above, Kathryn did mildly suffer from this one (seeming to her) deficiency in her favorite son’s otherwise splendid character – a certain degree of unkemptness, the quite natural by-product of Pat’s generous commitment of limited time to inherently “dirty” chores. (One recalls a family dinner party during which a sister insisted upon washing out the good Father’s habit. Now it should be remarked straightaway that Kathryn’s uncomfortableness didn’t arise through any concern for vanity, but essentially from her eminent respect for propriety with regard to anyone

“handling” the Blessed Sacrament, and any associated possibility of scandal to others. St. Catherine of Siena suggests all of this may well be a blessing in disguise when she notes, “He who does not ... strip himself of temporary substance ... finds plenty of friends who love him for their own profit. From these relations, they go on to close intimacies, *their bodies ... they tend luxuriously* (emphasis added), for being without ... humility ... they live not like religious but like nobles.” St. Catherine intimates this evolution often leads to “the transgression of the vow of continence.” Enough said.

Reverting once again at long last to the thread of our story, the year 1924 was a very good year – except for those business moguls and government officials caught up in the Teapot Dome scandal. First, Harry’s father, George, “went to his eternal reward” on 4 Jun at age 56, then Kathryn’s brother Alfred was ordained a priest on 14 Jun, and finally, this was quickly followed by their mother Rose’s happy death on 15 Jun at age 62. For an account of the death of George Washington Kirk we are indebted to the *Defiance Crescent News* of 4 Jan 1924, thus:

Leakage of the heart caused the death of George Washington Kirk, lifelong resident and well known machinist of Defiance, at 8 am this [Friday] morning at his home ... His illness was brief. He went home last Saturday from downtown feeling badly and became bedfast, dying six days later at the age of 56. His beloved wife remains to mourn his departure, comforted by, three children who were there when death occurred.

George Kirk was born in the city of Defiance 13 Aug 1867. He was educated in the public schools of the city and learned the trade of machinist at the Defiance Machine Works. On the 21st anniversary of his birth he was married to Margaret Cavanaugh. Our late friend and fellow citizen possessed two rare qualities, originality and the power to think. His strong, keen mind did not always follow the beaten path. He read much and widely and was a lover of good literature. Sterling honesty and absolute fearlessness were among his notable characteristics. He took a keen interest in

public affairs and was a forceful, pleasing speaker. He was a champion of the common people and believed in a just recognition of the value and nobility of all useful occupations. He was a stern foe of caste, sham and hypocrisy.

An even more poignant portrait of George's demise is painted by Harry in a (herewith somewhat abridged) memo of 13 Feb 1974, thus:

The previous Saturday, returning home from one of his habitual walks, my father had said he was 'out of breath.' This was the beginning of a heart attack. With increasingly severe pain in his left side and arm, from that time on, he could get no rest. He could not lie down in bed, day or night. On being told that, I drove home from Columbus on Thursday, 3 Jan. Next morning I went to Mass, but before Mass was over, I was called out and told to hurry home. Joe Krutsch, my oldest sister's husband, had decided to stay with my father and mother at our Harrison St. home. How providential! After Joe's arrival, my father, who had gone to the kitchen, was felled there with another heart attack.

Now, my own dear mother had been banished from her home, by her own father, when he had learned that she intended to marry George Kirk who did not have the gift of faith. They were married, however, by the pastor of St. Mary's Catholic church. Thereafter, for the whole of their 33 years of married life, George attended Mass with her each Sunday, sang in the choir, listened attentively to the sermons, and thus acquired a broad knowledge of the doctrines, traditions and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, years before, my father had promised his wife, who had prayed for him over the long years, that in the event he was in danger of death, she could baptize him. And so it was, as he lay there on the kitchen floor, that generous soul, Joe Krutsch poured the water of baptism on the head of George Kirk, and recited the sacred words. This was the same George Kirk who, upon observing the death of a dying friend sustained by faith in God, has later written his wife: 'I would say to you with all the earnestness of nature – cherish your faith as the most precious thing you can have in life! There is a comfort and a

sustaining strength that comes from it that I would prize above all things else, could I possess it.'

As to Kathryn's mother's death, Kathryn herself has described this beautifully in her written tribute to her brother, Fr. Alfred, *His Last Call*, thus:

Ordination came on 14 Jun 1924. This was a day of triumph. A goal had been successfully reached. The ordination took place in the Toledo Cathedral. Mother insisted that father go, in spite of her critical condition ... We returned home that evening, and Fr Alfred went with the pastor to St. Mary's to rest and prepare for his first Mass. The next morning before he began his Mass, he brought Holy Communion to his mother in her bed. She had previously been anointed and prepared for death. This was to be her Viaticus, [Viaticus is the reception of Communion when in probable danger of imminent death. It comes from the Latin effectively meaning "traveling provisions."]

Our home was only a half-block from the church, and when the bells rang announcing the first Mass of Fr. Alfred, she heard them ... When we returned home from church ... the doctor ... told us the end was near ... (and) all of us gathered around mother's bedside. None of her family was missing. Those of us who lived in other cities had returned home for the ordination and first Mass ... Fr. Alfred led us in prayers for the dying ... for about two hours. Once while we prayed, mother raised her head slightly and opened her eyes. She seemed to scan the room carefully, and then we heard her faintly ask: 'Where's Bernard (her youngest)?' He stepped forward within range of her fading vision. Then as if now satisfied, she closed her eyes again and her head fell back on the pillow. A few minutes later there was a slight tremor of her body, a gasp, and the end for her time on earth had come ... Two days Later her newly ordained priest-son sang his first requiem high Mass. It was for a priest's mother – his own.

This is the time to introduce a “like mother: like daughter” anecdote fondly recalled by family friend Fr. Atkins after Kathryn’s death, thus:

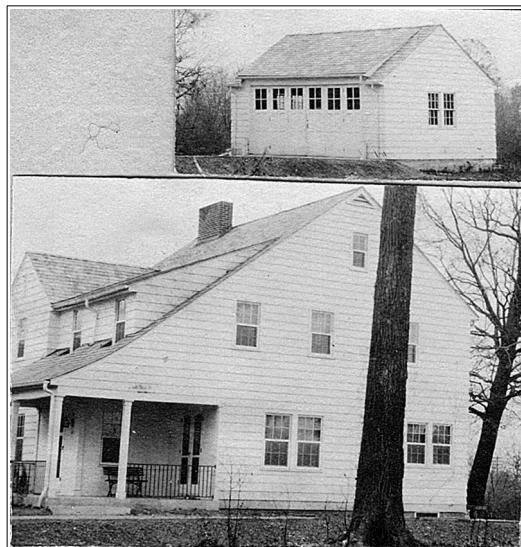
On a holiday in the summer I was invited to go to the beach with the Kirk family. Nothing eventful happened until we gathered for lunch. During a rather long seal prayer for a family picnic, I kept counting the children. Every time my count came up one short. With due apprehension I finally concluded that one child was missing. Everyone started to count but no one got very far in the count before Mrs. Kirk said, ‘Dorothy is missing.’ What amazed me was that Mrs. Kirk didn’t even have to count. She just gave one glance and discovered the absentee. Even more surprising to me was that she knew just where to send one of the children to look for her. [Mothers, apparently, are like that.]



Family at mother's funeral – 17 June 1924

So, we come to the year 1925, when “Silent Cal” Coolidge began his second term, and the Scopes trial dominated the newspaper headlines. The Kirk family celebrated Harry’s becoming Chief Engineer of the Ohio Department of Highways. Soon it was 1926, and novelist Sinclair Lewis was exploring degeneracy in *Elmer Gantry*, even as Pope Pius XI established *Christ the King* as a feast day for universal Church observance. There just wasn’t very much going on in the world at the time, but the Kirks were thrilled to move into a custom-made home of their own design at 455 East-North Broadway in Columbus, in the parish of Immaculate

Conception. Unfortunately, they were to live in their dream home only about five years. Then came 1927, Lindbergh flew to Paris, and the stork flew in Frances Teresa Kirk. Lindbergh won this race by a month, Frannie not arriving until 10:30 am on Friday, 17 Jun 1927. Once again, after an absence of almost four years, and for the last time, Dr. Turner served the family well at Mt. Carmel Hospital. Frannie qualified as the heavyweight of the Kirk clan at 7 pounds, 12-1/2 ounces. Her godparents were Mr. and Mrs. Dewey Tschuor, the latter being Harry's sister Rilla. So, at last, as it turned out, the roster of the Kirk family was now complete – six girls, and one boy, born within the span of 12 years (1916-1927), and – all born at a descent hour of the day!



Custom-built home – Columbus 1926

Since the family had moved to Washington in Jun 1931, Frannie attended school only in DC. She began at a neighborhood public school kindergarten, then completed elementary and high school at St. Anthony's, graduating in Jun 1945. She was thereupon awarded a four-year, full-tuition scholarship to Washington's all-female Trinity College; a very prestigious institution run by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and virtually within walking distance of her home. Scholarships

notwithstanding, it was apparently presumed that high-tuition Trinity would be populated by students. From high-income families. Reputedly, Frannie thus opted to forego the scholarship in favor of Dunbarton College, where she might mingle with less affluent peers. Dunbarton's having ceased to exist may well substantiate its inferred relative poverty; but this need not necessarily validate the ascribed reason for flight thereto.

One could reasonably speculate that in virtue of both her position as youngest sibling, and the relatively extended gap between her and her older sisters (5-10 years), Frannie may well have succumbed early and easily to a shy “insecurity bordering on a sense of inferiority,” stemming wholly from an unwarranted assumption that she could never hope to catch-up and really “belong.” She might therefore have tended never to set her sights very high, resolved to avoid competing, and resigned herself to under-achievement. In short, one senses here the first signs if not the very seeds of a sense of unworthiness that seems to have often haunted her religious life. She sometimes acts as though she has may have always considered herself a stranger within her own family. If this analysis be anywhere near the mark, then the post-Vatican II disparity in “freedom” as practiced in the Philadelphia and Baltimore Carmelite monasteries can only be said to have exacerbated the situation.

All the foregoing may perfectly well be protested as a presumptuous, pretentious, and gratuitous invasion of privacy and a blatant offense against charity. It may equally well be accepted as (for what is intended) a challenge to improved understanding, compassion, concern and “purpose of amendment” on the part of any family member who may feel delinquent in according sister due and proper affection and respect. Evidence abounds that sister seeks and needs love as desperately as any of the rest of us, even as we should have needed no evidence to have known this simply in virtue of our own flawed humanity. A strong case could be made that we would be remiss in our Christian duty if we persisted in ignoring or attempting to obscure a sense of failure on our parts with respect to the situation that most troubled our heroine, Kathryn in her declining years. Even she failed to resolve it, very possibly because

its roots were never identified. Harry, too, is yet nagged by a sense of uncompleted duty in this area, writing as recently as late 1985: “As to the Carmelites, I’m still looking for more light on this.” Well, it will be a collateral endeavor in this treatise to venture a little illumination, on potential solutions as well as perceived enduring problems. But, we get ahead of our story.

The facts are that Frannie began at Dunbarton College in Sep 1945. There, in addition to the normal freshman courses, she took music as an extra course. She also studied music at Catholic University in the summer months. After completing two years at Dunbarton, Frannie applied for admission to the Carmelite Monastery in Philadelphia. She was accepted in due course, and entered on 20 Sep 1947. She was 20 years old, a very private person who had never dated a boy or had many girlfriends. She might have been judged to be running away from a world that she scarcely even knew. She was in no way short on grit and determination, however. She received her habit 17 Apr 1948, and took her perpetual vows on 2 May 1952. The sermon was preached by Fr. Daniel Egan, SA (Franciscan Friars of the Atonement) who has been alluded to earlier in this story.

On 17 Oct 1962 three nuns from the Philadelphia Carmel arrived “on loan” (for three years) at the Carmel of the Incarnation in Durham, NC. Frannie, long since Sr. Teresa, was among them. They were there in response to an appeal from several Carmelites attempting to establish a new foundation in the Raleigh Diocese. Upon completion of the “contracted for” three years, the three Philadelphia nuns returned to stay at Philadelphia. The failed community at Durham ultimately became a community of a more active nature. Such, you might say, constitutes the “official” report. It is not the complete report. While Sr. Teresa was in Durham one of the original indigenous nuns “walked out.” Sr. Teresa, who had formed quite an attachment for her, nearly went with her. This little vignette was to be nearly repeated in Jan 1977, some 15 years later. One of the nuns in Philadelphia left the cloister there. Sr. Teresa was so disturbed that she thereupon “took a three months leave of absence” which she spent domiciled at the home of her older sister, Kathleen, in Washington. At his

time her parents, Kathryn and Harry – then at Carroll Manor, were in their late eighties. They were highly disturbed by this development. Further details on this affair would serve no useful purpose, and the matter is introduced here to this extent only to indicate that sister was considerably distraught and in desperate need of loving family support, and that a mother's (and father's) worries cease only in the grave. With God's grace, this storm was safely weathered.

Since this brings us to the end of our cameo presentations of Kathryn's brood, this is perhaps the proper point to insert a brief word on the dilemma with which the Carmelite experience left Kathryn and Harry. On the one hand, their extremely knowledgeable faith assured them that the vocation of contemplative nun was second only to that of being a priest if, indeed, one can validly make such distinctions in the abstract). On the other hand their personal experience with the widely differing praxis of two Carmelite monasteries of ostensibly shared spirit and purpose, together with the apparent and unexpected tribulations which their two daughters encountered therein gave them pause. One daughter avers that Kathryn seemingly "worried as much about Philly's stubborn adherence to past values as she did about Baltimore's almost impatience to open up." And, be it noted, Kathryn carefully followed the "ordered" Carmelite re-evaluation of their function in the Church. The devoted Kirk parents might be forgiven it they sometimes concluded that their several married daughters (struggling with 39 children in a more hostile secular environment) were enjoying a considerably more stable life. We shall, with one amplifying exception, eschew further discussion of the more personal aspect of the dual dilemma noted, and mainly focus only upon the seeming disparity of outlook and practice prevailing at the two monasteries.

The one exception which might be fairly and usefully mentioned is that Frannie wasn't alone in succumbing for a time to vocation-threatening personal attachments. Thus, a few years after her entrance, Margy became overly preoccupied with a spiritual director. It need only be further remarked that this matter was of sufficient moment that Kathryn paid

weekly day-long railroad visits to Baltimore Carmel over a considerable period. This storm, too was weathered. The point of these heart-rending revelations is that we must realize that contemplatives need our support and *prayers* much as we all profit from theirs. The point is that religious are no less human than are lay folks. The point is that the contemplative life is tremendously difficult and demands sacrifices of a degree we can hardly imagine. Of course the parents made sacrifices, too. One child-recalls Kathryn confessing great sadness at the departure of a daughter to Carmel, and how only the necessity of attending an alarming sickness of another child diverted her sufficiently to enable pulling herself together. At the same time, we lay folks probably haven't the slightest conception of the depth of the contemplatives' prayer life and the full dimensions of their sacrifices in hidden solitude. Never forget that solitary confinement is civilized society's paramount form of punishment short the death penalty.)

And, who else among us is ready to leave home, family, and worldly freedom in the direct service of God? Don't we all more likely reflect the “rich young man” of the gospels, and silently slink away from the challenge? The point is that we owe our two Carmelites an enormous debt of love, respect, and admiration. Beyond that, and reverting to our earlier alleged “brief digression” anent Carmelites, remember that no less than the *Little Flower* was a confessed neurotic, and she succeeded rather marvelously. (And when it comes to being neurotic, who among us would cast the first stone?) Then too, Sts. Augustine and Paul had their “not yet” to conversion, and “thorn of the flesh,” and they did all right. Could it be that the more deficient parties are those of us who set “more-Catholic-than-the-pope” standards – for *others*?

Also, and again adverting to our earlier discussion of Carmelites, recall the stipulation of Vatican II re “consideration” being “given to the wishes of the monasteries themselves” with respect to the specific nature and degree of cloister. Rather the differences in this regard being a matter of lay concern, therefore, they might better stand as blazing examples of good Pope John's goal of “aggiornamento” – that is, updating – both as to internal spiritual renewal and external adaptation to the times. In truth, the

“opening of the window” afforded by Vatican II might be said to be more conducive to *grace* flowing “out” than *signs of the time* flowing “in.” It is easy to imagine that the world might profit considerably more if the existence and function of Carmelites NOT remain quite so obscure as in times past. We must come to accept the full implications of the words of St. John (3:16): “The wind (the Holy Spirit) blows where it will.” We should stoutly resist our propensity for making God over in *our* image. Surely, *diversity* is a signal mark of nature in all of its aspects. It might not be too extravagant to venture that diversity most uniquely gives glory to God.

Now, would you believe we’re already up to 1928? Harry became State Highway Director of Ohio. He was also vice president of the Ohio Engineering Society. His niche in his chosen profession was now secure, he had reached the top. Thereupon fortune truly frowned. Came 1929, and with it the Kirk household was to include the dreaded teenager for the next seventeen years; politics worked a change in administrations in Ohio, and unrestrained greed precipitated the famous crash on Wall Street. Harry had his niche as a successful engineer, but Harry didn’t have a job. So it was that he thereupon attempted to establish himself as a private consultant.

But Dickens was wrong! It wasn’t “the best of times, and the worst of times.” It was by all odds simply the worst of times. This was the middle of the depression, folks, and here’s Harry with a virtually brand new big house (with mortgage to match), a wife, seven small children (then ranging from two to 13), and not even any job *prospects*. Beyond that, it was precisely at this point that Harry received notice that a test revealed the possibility of him having “TB.” This latter worry was eventually alleviated by further tests with contrary results, but not before considerable additional strain had taken its toll. Morton’s (salt) slogan puts it best, “When it rains, it pours!”

It was in the foregoing turbulent atmosphere that Harry undertook the virtually hopeless task of making a go of it as a private consultant. The going was tough. The remarkable thing is: there is not so much as a hint in Harry’s voluminous archives that any of the children had the slightest clue

as to how rough things really were at the time. This is certainly no small tribute to Kathryn and Harry's courage, quiet fortitude, and faith in God. Let's let Harry tell the story:

Many so-called experts kept insisting that, 'Prosperity is just around the corner.' Folks would have been appalled had they known that corner lay over ten years into the future. And, the depression involving unemployment and other difficulties (like foreclosures) did not end until WW II stimulated business activity. By 1930 it was evident that my own business venture was not going to succeed, and I was fortunate to be offered a job by the Associated General Contractors of America in Washington DC. Thus, it became necessary to dispose of our new home in Columbus and relocate the family to the nation's Capital 400 miles away.

I reported on my new job in Washington on 11 Apr 1930 [some 15 months after leaving state service], as my family remained stranded in Ohio.



The Kirk family – August 1930

Harry was to spend the next 14 months alone in Washington. He would board in various homes around town, like in Sacred Heart parish at 16th St. and Park Rd., and would take virtually all of his meals in

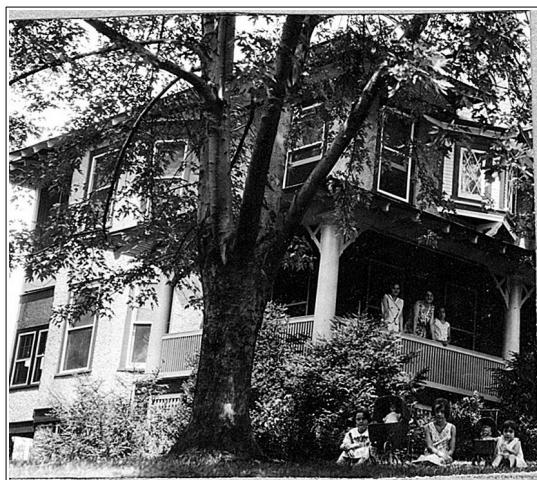
restaurants, being only occasionally invited into some friend's home for dinner, as at Thanksgiving. For slightly more than a year his commitment to learning and acquitting himself in his new job enabled only one brief journey back home to Ohio to enjoy and assist his family. Similarly, Kathryn apparently made only one short visit to Washington, during which Harry was "away" a good part of the time, and Kathryn got stuck with a "program" of house-hunting. It is probable that the woes of only a few war-separated families could match Kathryn's, since a comparable family size would be found only among a limited number of senior military officers – most service folks in any case normally eschewing large families, and the wives in any event having become gradually inured over a period of years to the responsibilities attending regular and extended absences of the man of the house.

This was a trying time for Harry as well. He was an intense, vigorous, dynamic young man of 41, separated from his beloved wife and family, alone in a strange city, adapting to a new job, and plagued by family logistical problems beyond his reach to resolve. Beyond that, the ensuing events included some so bizarre as to defy the most vivid imagination. Harry's written recollection dated 1981 tells the story as seen from Washington, thus:

My dear wife was burdened, unassisted, with the 24-hour-a-day care of our growing family. Her letters give evidence of her physical weakness and mental distress. On top of all this, she had the principal responsibility in trying to dispose of our home. Property values were plunging down. It was a buyers' market. The mortgage payments on our home had to be met. At the same time, under a law effective during the depression, the very bank collecting our mortgage payments could, and did, refuse to let us withdraw our pass-book savings account with them.

Letters [which we shall presently review] tell of my dear wife's futile efforts. Our home was larger than average, which made its sale more difficult. Finally, we made a trade involving a smaller house which we leased to a renter, who

proved hardly able to pay the low rent charged. Then, in early Jun 1931, having purchased a used Willys-Knight touring car for \$500, the family moved to 25th and Hamlin Sts, NE, in Washington DC. Our property in Columbus cost \$15,000. Today it would be worth \$150,000. The final accounting, after we disposed of the smaller Columbus property acquired in the sale, showed that we realized about \$7,000, a loss of over half of our investment. There was more grief yet to come.



First Washington DC home – 1931

About a month after our family moved to Washington, a man from Columbus called on me. He said he was the brother of the man who had purchased our home in Columbus. He announced that his brother, the buyer, had just recently been committed to a hospital for the insane. Under Ohio law all actions by an insane man for 90 days previous to commitment are invalid. So, he was asking that our recent property deal be nullified. Never in all my life had I heard of such a development. However, this time I was lucky, very lucky. I well remembered when the sale was made, having signed the papers myself, that the smaller property involved was in the buyer's wife's name; not his. My caller was trying to pull a big bluff. However, I did not let him know that I was wise to his scheming, and he finally left. I never did hear from him

again. However, I was alarmed. I contacted our lawyer in Columbus and had him go to our safe deposit box there and examine the property sale documents. To our surprise, he found no mortgage to cover the balance due from the buyer. Instead, there was a promissory note by the wife. My wife's and my own understanding with the Realtor handling the sale was that we were to have a mortgage for the balance.

However when it came to the final signing, the buyer refused to sign a mortgage and would only sign a promissory note. The Realtor, unwilling to lose his commission for the sale, did not make the situation plain to my wife. She, inexperienced in such matters, had not called our lawyer to witness the sale. The new owners were trying to re-sell the property but there was an obstacle. They could not give a clear title until they satisfied the “vendor’s lien” which involved the note signed instead of the mortgage. Thus, the Ohio law came to our rescue. There was a delay of several months. We finally collected the principal total of the note, but lost some interest. All of this was a “bitter pill to swallow.”

You get the idea. But, whereas Harry was merely *worried* about many things, the tremendously over-burdened Kathryn was having to do many things – too many things! Her poignant letters of the period (Apr 1930 – Jun 1931) amply portray her pitiful plight. An assortment of excerpts will serve to indicate the dimensions of Kathryn’s burdens back in Ohio, and how she not only managed to cope, but additionally strove to encourage and support the largely unreciprocating Harry (as, remember, the foregoing proclamation of sensitivity and other like expressions of personal regret were authored in the eighties). At the time (1930-31), Harry’s contributions to alleviating Kathryn’s situation included sending his laundry home, and apparently advising her of a private (unilateral) personal vow to welcome as many more children as the Lord might allow. So, it’s not time to hear from Kathryn. In excerpting her letters, we shall for purposes of both clarity and impact attempt a series of syntheses of her statements over the period according to several basic themes: economics of the times, natural domestic burdens, imposed extra burdens, health woes, Harry’s “promise,” and Kathryn’s love and concern for Harry, thus:

Economics – I feel so sorry for men coming to the door asking for work. Some speak of being out of work for months, have families they are anxious to help and cannot. Some are hungry themselves. I have fed a number of them. They seem to be ravenously hungry, and ashamed to beg... We did no special celebrating (over 4 Jul) here. I recalled that last year ... (we had) a picnic in our backyard with the O'Dea family. Most of my time this year was spent trying to pacify the children because they had no fireworks to shoot ... I, too, would like to see the twins take music, but I cannot see how we can afford to have any of them take it right now, with Margaret Mary's doctor bills and now perhaps glasses, and school books, and the increased cost of their clothing and food as they grow older. I have been trying without my help [a black maid named Dorothy Kirk – probably no relation] to try and get ahead to meet coming expenses ... Pat has been getting all my ice from the station, since he has his new wagon. He gets it there for 40 cents/100 pounds. Off the wagon it is 55 cents ... I got 50 sheets of Xmas letter paper with envelopes to match like the one I'm sending you. I thought it would be 'better' than regular Xmas cards. I got them at Kresge's two sheets for a nickel.

Natural Burdens – I had planned to write you a long letter last evening, but Mr. and Mrs. Barry came and it was not done ... There is the usual rush at 'home task' time. I hardly know where to turn first. Today Pat and Dorothy did theirs as soon as they came home, and I just finished helping the twins with some problems before starting this letter ... The Barrys took Frances, Gertrude and I to the Recital. Margaret Mary and Kathleen both did well. Each appeared twice. Kathleen played first violin with the orchestra, and then her piece with Margaret Mary accompanying her. Then Margaret Mary played her solo.

Extra Burdens – About the house, I think it important to have it up for sale as soon as possible. I have gone to see materials at both Clevengers and Wolfords and given the whole job to Clevenger. He has promised to start 6 May and

says it will take about two weeks. I consider it necessary to have all the woodwork in bedrooms and kitchen, bath and toilet room washed before papering is done so as to be ready for them when they come ... If I put up a 'For Sale' sign in the yard, shall I allow realtors to put up their sign also ... What do you think we should do about moving? Would we truck out furniture or crate it for freight? It might be well to sell some of the heavy pieces ... There will come a time Mr. Sweigart describes as 'agony' – the time when people must be shown through from attic to cellar. Then comes moving and getting resettled ... I'll try to tend to the coal next week ... Hopes of my selling are almost dead. Yesterday (a neighbor) said he'd disposed of his lot east of us. I asked, 'How did you sell your lot?' He said, 'I didn't. I gave it away.' I placed two adds in the Columbian this week: one to lease, and one to sell ... The coal is to be delivered tomorrow ... I know some of your ideas about telling the agent how much this house is worth just won't work. I don't believe you realize how hard-boiled these agents and their buying prospects can be. They want their way, and just retire and leave you cold.

Health Woes – My stomach has been bothering me more this week. I'm not surprised. It is impossible to get much relief unless the cause is first removed. Your special diet plan says, 'Always rest 15 minutes before and after meals, and never eat when hurried, worried or fatigued.' If eating three meals a day while waiting of seven children does not cause stomach trouble, it certainly does not contribute to its cure. And if I waited to eat until there was an absence of hurry, worry or fatigue, my meals would be very few. I only hope these children will forgive and forget things I do and say at times that I am ashamed of afterwards, and that I can keep well enough to stay with them until they are old enough to do for themselves ... I must get to bed now as I am so very tired ... I went to the dentist yesterday, then spent two hours at the stores, mostly just looking around. When I got home I really was not fit for anything but bed, but there was still the supper and dishes and the little ones to pacify and get to bed ... I love these children so, and I want to do things for them so they will

be happy on Christmas, and make their home-life such as will lead them into the right path. All of this is a very big job, and if I were doing it for some employer, my conscience would force me to resign, because I see I'm not big enough for the job. But I cannot do that. I must stay and see things go wrong, and try to do more as this growing family demands. How long I can keep it up, I do not know, but hope at least until they are old enough to take care of themselves ... The last two days I have felt so very tired I can hardly drag myself about. I'd like to go to bed and stay there 48 hours without ever getting out ... Grandma wants me to write to her. I thought I would tonight, but my back is too tired. I cannot sit up any longer. I'll try another time.

Harry's Promise – *There is always another worry or fear on my mind. It is there because I know you are not satisfied that we have done and are doing our whole duty as God expects it of us. I fear, not for myself, but for these seven children whom we are responsible for ... Now I shall try to answer the question you asked me over a week ago, 'Did I think it wrong for you to keep this hope and promise in your heart?' I am resolved to answer it sincerely, and trust. You will pardon any offense my answer may give. By having several days to think about it, I feel that I can do so with more sincerity than if I was called upon to do so at once. I sometimes think that God in His wisdom is causing this separation to bring us to a better understanding of each other. First, let me say that I fully intend to do my part to carry out that promise, and am not saying this to try to escape it. I have fought the battle that brought me past that stage and I am now resigned. I do not think that the hope and promise themselves are wrong, but I do think that other things that indirectly concern it are not right. The bringing of children into the world is only part of the duties of parents. To see that they are given the proper care, love and consideration is an equally important duty.*

Took back at my own childhood, I'm resolved to put forth every effort possible to make every sacrifice necessary,

so that in years to come my children can look upon their parents and childhood with fonder memories than I do now upon mine. I think of my mother, and now I can understand how impossible it was for her to give us the love and care which we needed. How her poor heart must have ached seeing us, the way we were cared for, and how many times she must have been hurt at our coldness and unconcern for her. She never had time to regain her strength after one child-birth until she was pregnant again. And all this under the most deplorable conditions, which she could do nothing to change. But God was good to her, and as soon as her children were old enough to care for themselves, she was called to her reward.

I cannot help but think that where conditions are similar to these, if sore love and consideration is shown, and greater effort made to improve conditions, that a heroic act of self-denial is possible. And, that it is sore commendable than to bring more children into the world. You, no doubt, cannot understand what your letter telling me of your promise meant to me. It was only through prayer that I was kept from the deepest despair. There is so much about the needs and care of these children that you do not seem to think of. It all seemed to come before my mind at once. And today, after reading your review of finances, which I was glad to get, I cannot see our way through ... [Again, 4-1/2 months later] I cannot help but think of your hopes for sometime in the future [evidently, another child]. I never did think it would be right for us in our circumstances, but you do. I wonder sometimes if the Lord is not trying to make you [emphasis added] understand that He is not pleased with that promise by keeping us separated like this.

Kathryn's Concern for Harry – *I don't suppose letter writing is much of a recreation for you, but I do enjoy so much hearing from you and find it hard not to be disappointed when a letter does not come ... I wish so much for your sake that we could be with you in Washington. It is so much harder for you to be there alone, than it is for us here. I would like to do*

something to make it more pleasant for you there. Is there something I can do? Try not to get discouraged. We'll just make up for all this in real sincere appreciative happiness when we do get back together again ... Have you done any more swimming since you were home? I think you should do something like that for recreation. Wouldn't it be possible for you to play some golf ... I have put off writing to you all day, because I have been so 'blue.' I did not want to write when I was in that mood. Now, I can't help telling you. I seem to want you and need you so much. I think sometimes I can't stand it here. But then, I can hope that we will again be together soon. I try to think how it will be with us when that time comes.

Somehow I feel that we are going to be happier then than ever before. It is this thought that gives me the courage to go on. Oh, how I wish I could talk to you now!

Surely, everyone has an improved knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of Kathryn by now, and there is little need to add more here about the personal trials of her family-bearing years. Economic conditions gradually got better. The family was soon together again, with all the children in school, so Kathryn's natural domestic burden was considerably relieved. It was the same with "extra" burdens, they were more or less one-time-only hardships, and such as weren't taken over by Harry. One thing, for sure, Kathryn was a fast learner, quickly wising up to the arcane vagaries of the real estate game. "Kathryn's health problems" were evidently somewhat mitigated by the decrease in her burdens, yet there is some reason to believe that she still nursed a serious (if not congenital) coronary deficiency that progressively deteriorated until finally diagnosed in late 1978. She was to continue to be prone to early exhaustion, to the extent of it virtually becoming a family joke, thus: "Daddy often took us on outings on fine Sundays – to a museum, the zoo, the Franciscan Monastery, or Great Falls. It seems mother tired quickly, and consequently was ready to start home from these trips long before anyone else, but rather than complain of being tired, she would say to daddy, 'Frannie's tired.' Soon this became an amusing code phrase for ending any

undesirable family activity, which shows how much sympathy mother ever generated or demanded.”

A daughter recalls another type of incident which occurred shortly after the family relocated to 25th St. in Washington, thus: “Mother was lying on the davenport, as we called it, and I believe there were several of us children around her. I believe it was in the middle of the day when normally she would never be found lying down, so I asked, ‘What’s the matter, mother?’ She calmly replied, ‘I’m dying.’ I was awed enough to remember this, but I don’t recall doing anything about it then. Probably she was up the next day.” At any rate, it seems that Kathryn often drove herself to perform perceived duties, despite a long enduring lack of any substantial physical energy. In fact, she was so aware of the debilitating consequences of multiple pregnancies, both as witnessed in her mother and experienced in herself, that she cautioned at least one daughter of a possible inability to handle further pregnancies. This dear lady literally wore herself out for her family. Having said that, and mindful of the testimony above to her abiding concern for the welfare of her husband, there seems to be little to further remark her selfless love.

So, we come at last to consideration of Harry’s “promise.” Harry had this to say as of 1981:

It may be hard to believe, but readers will have to believe me when I assert here that I have no recollection in detail about the ‘promise to God’ mentioned in those letters of fifty years ago. As of now, I can’t see that I had a right, if I attempted such, to offer a ‘quid pro quo’ deal to God. It may be this so-called ‘promise to God’ was a device to cover up an unwillingness to exercise self-denial and self-sacrifice regardless of my dear wife’s weakness, and the great burden involved in the care of our seven children. This ‘promise to God’ may have been some sort of preaching to her. In 1930 I was age 40 and my wife 39. There was a difference of opinion. It is evident that I preached our duty to have more children. Her letters give ample evidence that she was already overburdened with the care of our seven children, the

youngest then only three years old. Glancing back at the great cross my dear spouse carried fifty years ago, a painful sadness comes over me, reminding me of my selfishness and lack of tenderness toward the faithful mother of our children.

Harry then goes on to note a letter of 4 Sep 1968 in support of *Humanae Vitae*, which “both” he and Kathryn signed, to the then Secretary of State at the Vatican. In the course of this letter the following observation occurs: “In all the current uproar there is a forgetfulness of the virtue of self-mastery and self-sacrifice, of the need to bear manfully the crosses God sends as the unfailing medicine for our ultimate good.” This is written, of course, some 28 years after the “difference of opinion” of 1930. Remember, too, that Harry turned down an appointment to the Naval Academy “at least partly … because I didn’t want to wait another six years before I could be married,” and that in any case he still wanted to get married a year before Kathryn gave consent. Later, in a note dated Oct 1985, Harry observed that, “Children were not discussed before marriage,” and “After the birth of our youngest child (Kathryn) counseled no further pregnancies. *She* used the rhythm system to control birth.” Both the least and the most that now remains to be said is that Kathryn clearly had “a tough row to hoe.” Any comment beyond that would be an extreme impertinence and entirely inappropriate.

It is a tremendous tribute to both Harry and Kathryn, the more so for Kathryn who was always “there,” that all their children remained virtually unaware of the tapestry of vicissitudes woven above. On their own testimony, their childhood memories are uniformly upbeat. One fondly recalls her mother’s stress on achieving some musical proficiency which has not only brought her much personal pleasure but proven to be a boon to her “family.” Another attests to Kathryn having inculcated a progressive interest in books which opened up ever-widening vistas. Another amplifies this by testifying to her mother’s abiding personal interest in worthwhile books, noting that, “If we can judge people by their friends, we can do so also by their books,” and then cites Kathryn’s affection for “a scholarly study of contemplation vs. action in modern thought,” Pope John’s *Journey of a Soul* and Don Marion’s *Christ, the Life*

of the Soul.” Yet another child recalls, “I remember washing dishes together, singing songs in harmony … walking to daily mass together or Tenebrae … (and mother) driving us to school, sewing, cooking, cleaning, singing, planting, praying. I have her (and Dad, of course) to thank for my love and enjoyment of music, of children, of books, my sense of values, and – most of all – my love and conviction of the Catholic Church.”

Another child says, “Mother and daddy together by their example and their teaching gave me a knowledge of my worth as a person and a sense of values which stressed the eternal rather than the temporal. They always did this in a uniform manner, that is, any disagreements which they may have had were resolved in private.” Yet another child recalls, “What I remember most about mother is that she was always “there” … Mother also had the discernment to see what was good in a person and build on that … She was always gracious and *listened* … She was always happy to see you.” Another child says of Kathryn, “She certainly proved that motherhood is not a boring profession but a challenge and a joy!” One is reminded of Chesterton’s famous tribute to motherhood:

To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labors and holidays; to be Whitley [supply master] within a certain area, providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes, and books; to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene; I can understand how this might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it might narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people’s children about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one’s own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone? No; a woman’s function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute. I will pity Mrs. Jones for the hugeness of her task; I will never pity her for its smallness.

Kathryn would certainly find no fault with Chesterton’s view. This is not to suggest, either, that she was anybody’s totally deferring “patsy.” As one child has remarked, “She was certainly uncompromising about

right and wrong, a very unpopular attitude today.” Another child adds, “She taught me to hold to my principles, and not to worry about what other people might say or think. I’m also grateful to her for her encouragement and even insistence on our musical education.” Another child commends Kathryn for her disregard of “glamour,” noting that, “She sewed practical clothes, made well-balanced non-gourmet meals, and gave us practical haircuts,” and buttressed us with her insistence on not being concerned about what others think of you.” Clearly, there was never any hint of discontent, let alone mutiny, among the Kirk troops. One can’t escape an overwhelming impression that, burdened or not, Kathryn was one whale of a good mother!

And, guess what the children – *all* of them, collectively – deem to be their mother’s most outstanding trait: “Her support of daddy in all of *his* achievements!” One goes so far as to say, “I believe she set this early on as her goal when she was carrying her first child … I believe the fact that much of (the biographical) material reflects daddy rather than mother is not the result of his vanity but rather of her choice of self-effacement in order to promote him … So, mother’s greatest achievement might have been to make *daddy* the world’s greatest teacher instead of herself … it was like her saying, “Don’t worry about *me*, it’s daddy’s things that are important.” Who can gainsay such a beautiful testament to tenacious self-sacrifice? Yet, a more basic alternative to willfully pledged dedication as a possible explanation for Kathryn’s unwavering support of Harry does come to mind and warrants consideration: might not it simply have been that Kathryn fully, faithfully, and unflaggingly *loved* Harry. Clearly, her great love is unanimously reflected in the recollections of her children.

IV – SERVING (1932 – 1965)

The highest of distinctions is to serve others.
– King George VI

Now it is 1931 and the Kirk family is in Washington, though they might be more apt to describe it as being in St. Francis de Sales parish. Their home was always more church oriented than city oriented. You will search Harry's ample archives in vain for so much as a hint from single member of the Kirk clan of any angst, anger or anguish over being uprooted from their neighborhood. It's all mindful of *Mad Magazine*'s "What, me worry?" hero, Alfred E. Newman. Nothing, apparently, bothered these happy children. In any event, the family fortunes were indeed now taking a turn for the better, even as the nation itself was about to embark on a *New Deal*. True, there were clouds on the horizon: General MacArthur had to use force to route the Bonus Army from Washington, DC, Hitler was already on the rise in Germany – but who could see that far, and anyway, by 1933 Prohibition would be repealed.

Harry was busy at his new job (Manager, Highway Division, Associated General Contractors of America), and about to launch a life-long labor of Catholic action largely on behalf of the poor. By 1932, all the children would be safely if not conveniently enrolled in St Anthony's School (since Francis de Sales had no such facility), except for Frannie who would be attending a neighborhood public kindergarten. Kathryn could at last draw a free breath, but not for long without a piercing pang in her heart possibly more painful than pleurisy. Even as her youngest child left the nest for school, her eldest daughter and first born suddenly opted to enter the tightly cloistered Carmelite Convent in Baltimore on 2 Sep 1933. Considering both Harry and Kathryn's subsequent substantial knowledge of, and support and admiration for the Carmelites, this initial

“confrontation” entailed some degree of shock. Harry had never even heard of a the Carmelite’s “turn” (a vertical rotatable cylinder, with a side-opening sufficiently confined that it only “opens” to one or the other side of the wall in which it is installed, and used to pass material between people on either side of the wall without exposing the people on one side to those on the other). Kathryn was so devastated initially that only a serious concurrent illness to another family member enabled her to gradually refocus her attention on family duties. As a veteran nun told the postulant at the time, “It is your mother who is making the sacrifice more so than you.” This was really a time for “new beginnings” in the Kirk household. Harry was to begin a love affair with the St. Vincent de Paul Society in 1932 that he would serve publicly through 1977 and never abandon privately. This society, originally called the Conference of Charity, is an association of Catholic laity (which has only recently begun to include women) devoted to personal service to the poor through spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The first conference was formed in Paris in 1833 by Frederic Ozanam. The first conference in the U.S. was organized in 1845 in St. Louis where its Superior Council is still located. In the past 50 years the society in this country has distributed financial and other assistance totaling about \$350 million. As of 1984, there were about 4,300 units in the U.S. comprising some 34,000 members.



The Kirk family – October 1933

Harry was the founder and first president of the first conference in St. Francis de Sales’ parish – not exactly “over the dead body” but

certainly over the virtually inert and immobile body of the then extremely reluctant pastor. Harry's inspiration in this pioneering effort was a dynamic bulldozer of a priest from Ohio, Msgr. John O'Grady, then a professor of social work at the Catholic University and in residence at St. Francis de Sales' parish. The good monsignor was most active in seeking public assistance for Catholic schools and charity work in general.

In the following year of 1933 Harry undertook a collateral career in the Catholic Evidence Guild which he would serve actively through 1948. This is a lay movement for the spread of Catholic truth by means of outdoor speaking, founded in England in 1918, it spread to the U.S. in 1931. The driving force behind this movement was an irrepressible one-of-a-kind Englishman, Frank Sheed. He was a familiar soapbox figure in Hyde Park by the early thirties, and brought his act to the U.S. in 1933. As his biographer son Wilfred has noted:

America's freedoms have not always and everywhere included the freedom to think. For Catholics before Vatican II, the land of the free was preeminently the land of Sister Says – except, of course, for Sister, for whom it was the land of Father Says. For "Frank Sheed says" to wedge itself into this prim hierarchy would require a more sinuous effort even than getting the English to pay attention. Nevertheless, the English years made the attempt possible; I honestly doubt whether a Native American could have done it right then. To begin with, the English view of the clergy was rather more relaxed. Evelyn Waugh, putting it most starkly, claimed that it was the duty of the educated classes to keep the clergy in its place ... So Frank's footwork had to be impeccable ... but all that Evidence Guild work on soapboxes had made the unexpected manageable, and even the dull endurable ... Thus the theology that was to revolutionize the American Church turns out to be just the old street-corner stuff hammered out and refined off the skulls of random hecklers. Frank always attributed his galvanic technique, indoors and out, to those bystanders who decided they had something better to do than listen to him ... Christened by hundreds of backs receding over the years, sharpened by the fine edge of loneliness (he once recited the

alphabet solemnly to an empty square, only to find a man standing in back of him) and kept forever oh his toes by rowdies, he had developed the urgency of a man on a burning deck.

Would anyone deny that there isn't a glimmering insight into Harry's manner in the foregoing account? One Kirk daughter has remarked, "Daddy was (until very recently) always very intense. He is opinionated and verbally curt. He's a street-fighter if you verbally tangle with him. But who knows – it is a cruel world we all grow up in – maybe he had to be that way to survive his world. He is mellowing – at the age of 96." No doubt Harry's Evidence Guild work on soapboxes in Washington's Franklin Park, and in Manassas, Virginia, honed his intense, incisive, and rapier sharp argumentative skills to a point of often crude and rude abruptness. No doubt, too, Harry's dealings with sharp and often fraud-prone contractors while a public official with Ohio's Highway Department also engendered and focused the short-shrift aspect of his demeanor. As the saying goes, neither he nor Kathryn "suffered fools gladly." And like Harry, even his mentor, Frank Sheed, mellowed with time. That old warrior humbly dedicated one of his last published works, *What Difference Does Jesus Make?* "To my godchildren who will react variously," thus confessing that even he couldn't win them all. And Frank left us with such gems as, "The vow of poverty means you never have to pay," and (anent a sermon on marriage), "I was edified, Father, that you seemed to know so little about it."

Now, a question may well arise as to what bearing Harry's preoccupation with St. Vincent de Paul and the Catholic Evidence Guild had with respect to a saga that is purportedly the story of his devoted spouse. Well, the answer is at least threefold. First, it added *indirectly* to Kathryn's household and family workload, since it meant Harry was not only absent all day due to his employment, but was also absent evenings and weekends on his Church work. To paraphrase Neil Armstrong, on setting foot on the moon, "One great boon for Harry, one great burden for Kathryn." Second, it added *directly* to Kathryn's workload, since she gave of herself unstintingly in support of Harry's extra-curricular efforts. She

hosted meetings of his associates in their home; served as Harry's sounding-board, devil's advocate, and general secretary; and inspired and encouraged him generally. Third, and finally, Harry's Church work must to some extent have been a catalyst for Kathryn's ensuing and rather extensive forays into Church work. Free at last of day-long "baby-sitting" duties, Kathryn could now venture to rejoin the stream of life beyond the home, and she did. She and FDR got underway at virtually the same time in 1933.

Kathryn's entry into the field of more or less public service began under the aegis of the women's Sodality Union. It is Harry's contention that she could and should have been elected its president, but while "she was quite active in many Church activities she never pushed herself for office." In any event, the front page of the 3 May 1934 edition of the weekly archdiocesan newspaper (then *The Baltimore Catholic Review*) proclaimed that, "In her report on behalf of the Moral Welfare Committee, Mrs. Harry J. Kirk took up the question of filthy movies." Thus, in response to the archbishop's request, was launched a War on Filth in Films. The Sodality Union established a *Legion of Decency* and set it upon a three month campaign to obtain at least 40,000 signed pledges to boycott theaters exhibiting indecent films. Kathryn was promptly installed as the first president of this *Legion of Decency*. Meanwhile, on 1 May 1934 Kathryn's eldest daughter, Margaret Mary, was at age 18 receiving her Carmelite habit and the "religious" name of Sr. Kathleen of the Holy Family at the Carmelite Monastery in Baltimore.

By 13 Aug 1934, editions of both the *Washington Star* and the *Washington Herald* announced that, "Already assured of success through the cooperation of public spirited theater operators of Washington," the *Legion of Decency* campaign against objectionable films had already garnered 60,000 pledges, swelled by 2,000 recruits via the support of the National Council of Jewish Women. "Mrs. Harry Kirk, head of the drive, said final plans called for a house-to-house canvas for more pledges." Kathryn left no stone unturned, and *nothing* escaped her scrutiny. Thus, when working with the future Bishop Spence in her own parish sodality

unit, she publicly and strenuously objected to his unilateral decision to commit sodality funds to the purchase of church statues without even consulting the women. Displaying an exquisite tact eminently appropriate to a bishop-to-be, Fr. Spence successfully parried this threatening thrust by wryly observing, “Mrs. Kirk, you’re so prudent!” Kathryn quietly subsided. This is mindful of Frank Sheed’s ploy for defusing potential challenges from parish priests hosting his famous lectures as recounted by his son Wilfred, thus:

Toward the end of a fairly rigorous theological lecture, he would somehow manage to suggest complicity with the fuddled Monsignor, or whatever he found himself next to on the platform, as if they’d practically written the speech together. ‘Of course you’ve heard all this many times before from Father,’ Frank would tell the audience. ‘But sometimes it takes a fresh voice to make people listen.’ Father would then do his best to look intelligent. The beauty part of the trick (and Frank played a hundred variations of it) was that the priest was now effectively silenced. His wisdom had been established by this clever foreign fellow: one word from him would blow the whole thing.

In any event, Kathryn’s first venture into Church affairs was thus a huge success, but, she wasn’t through yet. On 29 Mar 1935 the Sodality Union hosted a mass meeting (presided over by the archbishop) protesting against Mexico. This was at the time, not so long ago or so far away, when the administration of Mexico’s President Cardenas was violently persecuting the Catholic Church there. (This sad chapter in Mexican history is vividly dramatized in Graham Greene’s powerful novel *The Power And The Glory*.) Following the welcoming remarks by Rev. Joseph V. Buckley, spiritual director of the Union, both the *Washington Star* and the *Post* reported that the first main speaker, Mrs. Harry J. Kirk, then sketched the accomplishments of Sodality Union’s *Legion of Decency* in Washington, concluding that “We pray that the zeal for better morals will reach the Powers of Mexico.”

Then, almost before anyone could say “time flies” it was mid-1935, and the nation had invented Social Security. This Act and similar bold initiatives prompted Winston Churchill (then out of office, and not yet acquainted with his future wartime partner) to remark, “Roosevelt is an explorer who has embarked on a voyage as uncertain as that of Columbus, and upon a quest which might conceivably be as important as the discovery of the New World.” (Would that your author could toss off phrases like that!) In any event, this compelled Kathryn to produce a birth or baptismal certificate to prove she existed. Naturally, she petitioned the church of her youth, St. Mary’s in Defiance for the latter, but *no such record was to be found!* Fortunately, it was of course finally found among the records of St. John’s parish. In the interim Harry solemnly importuned Kathryn anent the possibility of the absence of a baptismal certificate rendering their marriage sacramentally invalid and all their children illegitimate. Somehow, it’s difficult to picture Kathryn as being amused. (One daughter remarks, “Mother rarely laughed. Maybe she had heard all of daddy’s jokes too often. Certainly, she never laughed *at* other people, although she could laugh heartily *at herself*.”) Another family member says, “If you didn’t really know her, she could strike you as pretty grim.) Meanwhile, on 14 Nov 1935 Sr. Kathleen made her simple profession of vows at the Baltimore Carmel,

In 1936 the Kirk family relocated from St. Francis de Sales to St. Anthony’s parish. This was to be their last home, surrendered for entrance to Carroll Manor in 1966. Harry immediately became a member of the parish conference, which membership was to continue until 1977. Meanwhile, by 20 Nov 1936 Kathryn’s name once again peppered the press as she was *appointed* first president of the reorganized Women’s Retreat League of the District of Columbia. One of her first functions was to head a committee of 30 women planning a city-wide rally in honor of the archbishop for 12 Jan 1937. Her primary function, however, was to further the reorganizational objective of rendering the Retreat House more financially viable through the greater promotion of retreats for women. Kathryn undertook this with her customary vigor, and was sufficiently successful as to be *elected* for a second term as president of the league.

It may be of interest to note that the Retreat House was founded on 28 Oct 1930 by the Society of Atonement, the same group to which Fr. Danny Sage (referenced earlier in this saga) belonged. This society has a remarkable history, having originally been an Anglican Order.



Otis St. home – Washington 1936

It was granted unique papal permission in 1909 enabling its entire community of priests, brothers, and sisters to be received into the Church. The Retreat House was an adjunct to their seminary constructed of the same property in northeast Washington in the shadow of the Catholic University. The timing of this venture was no less dismal than Harry's opting to be a private consultant, coming as it did on the heels of the stock market crash of a 1929. Hence (according to the league's *Highlights of the First 25 Years*), "The first three years it was a continuous struggle to maintain the House and meet the interest payments, let alone reduce the mortgage." In 1933, a new on-site Superior, Sr. Mary Michael proposed an auxiliary – the Retreat League – "to advocate retreat work and make it better known." Success was slow but sure, until the fall of 1936, at which time Sr. Mary Michael for Ireland, and the archbishop appointed a zealous

aspirant for episcopacy “to increase the number of retreatants and relieve the financial difficulties of the House.” Thus: reorganization of the Retreat. League, and Kathryn to the rescue! In its first year the house served 400 retreatants and by 1955 there were more than 6,000. She had help, of course, but once again Kathryn had an impact.

Now we’re into the late thirties. In 1937-38 FDR began his second term by trying to pack the Supreme Court, the Japs sent the U.S. gunboat *Panay* packing, and Hitler packed his troops first into Austria and then into Kathryn’s ancestral homeland of Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, on the Homefront, Sr. Kathleen took her final solemn vows on 14 Nov 1938. Hitler, of course, dominated the world center stage in 1939, first protecting his eastern flank via his non-aggression pact with Stalin, and then launching WW II with his vicious thrust into hapless Poland. Again, on the Homefront, American film goers were reaping – via John Steinbeck’s bitter perspective on American poverty – *The Grapes of Wrath*. More to the point, in 1940 the government initiated Selective Service, and attempted to assist threatened England by offering 50 overage destroyers to Britain in exchange for rights to largely Caribbean bases (Argentina, Newfoundland, of Atlantic Charter fame, being another base in the package). Speaking of age and 50, 1940 was the year Kathryn attained her milestone fiftieth year. Time marches on!

The year 1941 was, to say the least, memorable for anyone then living. It began with Lend-Lease, segued into Hitler’s invasion of Russia in mid-year – which also saw the advent of the so-called Battle of the Atlantic and ended with the Japanese smashing Perl Harbor. Meanwhile, Kathryn was making her mark in yet another field of endeavor, garnering *Second Prize* as awarded by the National Conference of Christians and Jews for excellence of Church publications in virtue of her astute editorship of the St. Anthony’s Parish Bulletin. This was merely the first of her many accomplishment in the literary field, as will become evident in the course of this saga. Yet, for Kathryn, the big event of the year was of a somewhat more somber character. On 16 Sep 1941, her father, George

Schindler, died. Kathryn herself records this event in her paean to her priest-brother, *His Last Call*, thus:

Our father continued his attendance at daily Mass and Holy Communion each day until Feb 1941. Then illness prevented his going to church, but he was privileged to continue receiving Holy Communion in his home until 14 Sep, when he entered into a coma. Two days later, 16 Sep 1941, he passed away. He died fortified with the grace of the sacraments of the Church that had sustained and strengthened him throughout the 91 years of his active, vigorous, and zealous life. They were years in which his indomitable spirit contended with many a struggle or adversity. Yet, through them all he never wavered in his faith and trust in God. May each of us appreciate this priceless inheritance he left us – the example of his faith and trust in God – and emulate it. His requiem Mass was said by the same priest who had said the requiem for our mother – their son. It was said at St. Mary's church – the place of so many memorable events in our family.

The years 1942-43 fairly whizzed by, with the Great War dominating everyone's life to some degree. On the Homefront, only-son Pat would enter St. Anselm's Priory on 12 Jul 1942 at age 19, and profess his simple vows on 30 Sep 1943. Perhaps even more portentous, Pat's older sister Kathleen was wed on 14 Sep 1942, and his sister Gertrude on 21 Aug 1943; two events that heralded an ever-expanding family. Shortly thereafter, on 4 Mar 1944, Lucille was married, and this wedding was succeeded in turn by that of sister Dorothy on 15 Oct 1949. With the latter event, we momentarily jump slightly ahead in our story to periscope the Kirk family baby boom, or rather – ka-B-O-O-M! Who would have imagined that these four Kirk girls would, over the span of the next 19 years (1944-62), spawn 39 splendid and sturdy grandchildren? In that period there was not a year passed that at least one grandchild wasn't added to the fold, and there were eight years that witnessed the advent of two, three years that witnessed the advent of three, and two years that witnessed the advent of four – and with only one set of twins in the lot. The girls mothered ten, ten, eleven and eight children, respectively, with

the “winner” scoring with twins, and the mother of eight enjoying the alibi of a relatively late (compared only to her sisters) marriage. It remains to remark only that these manifold “blessings” numbered 23 boys and 19 girls. This may be variously interpreted (according to the reader’s sex) as signifying that the Lord clearly favors boys, or that it takes about 1.2 boys to “equal” one girl. In any case, Glory be to God!

Everyone remembers that 6 Jun 1944 was D-day, but the fact is that insofar as the Kirk clan is concerned it was preceded on 2 Jun by the infinitely more significant G-day! That was the day, 2 Jun 1944, of the advent of the first of 39 Kirk grandchildren, in the person of Pete Meehan. Now, it is noted that the first off-spring in fact sprang from the second-married Kirk girl, and that the husbands of both the first and second-married were then naval officers. Be it known to one and all, however, that the proud first-father enjoyed continuous shore duty, whereas the first-husband was often at sea – in more ways than one. The record *must* be set straight. Needless to say this particular distinction soon became nebulous to meaningless as a veritable stork attack overwhelmed Kathryn’s four married daughters. At this point it became evident that “you can’t tell the players without a score card,” so it is necessary briefly to identify the girls’ husbands. Kathleen married her high school sweetheart, Jack Wright, a native Washingtonian and former (USNA) *Boat School* boy. Gertrude married a fugitive from New Jersey and later IRS-*enforcer* named Bernie Meehan. Lucille married a young Marine officer and later G-man and thence Sheriff of Cook County, Illinois, named Joe Woods, who originally hailed from Ohio. Dorothy married a lad from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Later (Shhh...!) a trench-coater at the *Spook House* (National Security Agency), code named Larry Noel. So, the Kirk progeny come out named Wright-Meehan-Woods-Noel. Got it?

Pete Meehan was followed by George Wright on 18 Nov 1944. Then came 1945, and on 5 Feb came “Little Joe” Woods – now taller than his six feet plus Dad. Then Pat Meehan checked in on 27 Dec (“Merry Christmas & Happy Birthday, Pat” – one present!³). Notice: the males

³ The term “one present” is Jack’s way of noting that someone’s birthday is so close to

were off to a 4 – 0 start! But, even as “there is a time to be born,” there is a time to die;” and so, Harry’s beloved mother Margaret passed to “her eternal reward” on 15 Jul 1946 at age 77. She had been staying for some time with Harry’s younger sister, Rilla Tschuor, where she was stricken with a severe hemorrhage on 19 May 1945. The doctor had disclosed to Rilla (but not to Margaret herself) as far back as Feb that Margaret was harboring an apparently inoperable and malignant tumor. The doctor indicated that the hemorrhage signaled the beginning of the end, and predicted death within 24 hours to six months. He had not reckoned with the stout courage of this frail appearing little woman of incessant (prayer and boundless faith. She was to live on for 14 months, thanks in no small way to the remarkable unstinting twenty-four-hour nursing care provided by Rilla.

Harry’s mother’s last months were a trial to her and to the household, but you could never have deduced this from the demeanor of the folks concerned whose every apparent thought was for “others.” By 9 Jun, Margaret was up and around and in no pain. But, by 19 Oct she was much worse and on pain pills almost continuously. On 9 Mar the doctor gave her three days, yet Margaret went on praying constantly and even writing weekly letters to family members. Finally, on 27 Apr came her last letter, a plea for prayers – for Hazel and Joe Krutsch (the latter by then having suffered two heart attacks). In the latter part of Jun the frayed and distraught Rilla initiated several undated letters (time by then meaning nothing to her) which clearly betrayed that she herself was dying for sleep, and indicated that Margaret was by then too sick even to have letters read to her. The last two weeks of her, life Margaret was bedfast, and by 10 Jul for the first time could no longer recognize anyone. She passed away at last on 15 Jul, and Kathryn’s brother, Fr. Alfred, then pastor of St. Catherine’s in Toledo, sang her funeral high Mass on 18 Jul 1946. At last, both Kathryn and Harry, now in their late fifties, were bereft of parents.

Christmas that their birthday often gets “lost in the shuffle” of the Holiday. As a result, they rarely receive more than “one present” on their birthday – *if* any explicit birthday celebration is conducted at all.

Reverting once again to the thread of our story, with 1945 also came the death of FDR, A-bombs, and the end of the war, and the latter two not necessarily *post hoc ergo propter hoc*⁴. (Parents will explain the latter to post-Vatican II offspring.) As the war wound down, Kathryn could be found as an aid in the American Women's Volunteer Service. This was a service to all-alone, first-week “young mothers” (like service wives and displaced government girls), and focused upon helping with new babies whose fathers were overseas – as with oil and water baths, rinsing out baby clothes (no diapers), dishes, dusting, help laying in food, relieving anxiety, and the like. Yes! Kathryn did her part for victory on the Homefront, too. And, as the war segued into peace and then into the *Cold War*, Kathryn could be found in 1946 as a volunteer in the service of the DC chapter of the American Red Cross. Friends, this lady was a genuine female activist before the term was even invented. And, speaking of lady activists, the first Kirk granddaughter had the temerity to show her pretty face, actually the face of Terri Woods, on 14 Nov 1946. Trying desperately to balance the secular vs. religious scales, Pat (Kirk) pledged his solemn vows on 15 Oct 1946.

Then, suddenly it was 1947, and Kathryn and Harry could celebrate “no more teens” on 17 Jun, Frannie’s 20th birthday. Frannie would complete her second year at Dunbarton College in Jun, and then opt to enter the Carmelite Monastery in Philadelphia on 20 Sep. This was the year (1947) when, it was said, “TV came into its own” as it was by then “in wide use.” So, Frannie escaped its ill-famed influence just in time. Meanwhile, Pat was solidifying his position in his monastery through reception of “minor” orders (an oxymoron if there ever was one) at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. These “religious” overtures and the “battle of the sexes” were at the same time balanced by the arrival of Anne Wright on 8 Mar, and “BL” Meehan on 2 Jun, and then the world ushered in the year 1948.

Doughty little Harry Truman ambushed the pompous Tom Dewey as he charged toward the White House, and curmudgeon Harold Ickes (as

⁴ Latin translating literally to: “after this, therefor because of this.”

carry-over Secretary of Interior) dealt the Evidence Guild a fatal blow, by instituting regulations governing speaking in public parks that made the obtaining of requisite permits too formidable. We can only hope that Harry's dismay and frustration was somewhat allayed by the concurrent challenge of a new assignment at AGC as manager of its Research and Safety Department. On 15 Feb the family welcomed Mike Woods, who would eventually become its only⁵ and unforgivably undersung Viet Nam hero. (As distinguished from WW II which made ordinary men heroes, Viet Nam⁶ regrettably made heroes ordinary men. This remains a national shame. So, let's sound it loud and clear right here: *WELL DONE, Mike Woods!*) On 17 Apr Frannie would receive her Carmelite habit, and the "religious" name of Sr. Teresa of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. On 4 Dec Pat would became a deacon at the hands of the archbishop, again in the Shrine. Last but not least, another "one present" boy would be born on 22 December, Charlie Wright.

To close out the decade of the fabulous forties, Harry effectively supplanted his Evidence Guild vacuum by joining the Board of Catholic Charities, which post he held through 1970. Overall, the end of the decade of the forties warranted mixed reviews. This was the time of the Berlin airlift, the USSR's first atomic bomb, and – the loss of the first Kirk grandchild, Kathleen Meehan. She was born, with Kathryn herself virtually serving as midwife, on 20 Sep, but by 2 Dec she was gone – simply too frail to survive. She was grandchild number ten and our first "for sure" family saint. There were other positive aspects of 1949: Pat was ordained Fr Daniel on 7 Jun; Fr. Alfred Schindler celebrated his silver jubilee on 10 Jun – and Kathryn rejoiced in a rare Schindler family reunion; and lastly, Dorothy was married on 15 Oct 1949. The latter event meant that all the Kirk children were now out of the nest, and Kathryn and Harry were alone at last, and their formal "on-site" parenthood of some 34

5 Jack, writing this in 1985, apparently forgot about his own son Charlie (to be introduced momentarily in this tale) who also served in Vietnam in 1972-73.

6 In this work, Jack uses the two-word construction "Viet Nam" which was common at the time, as opposed to the contracted form "Vietnam" which has since became the more accepted construction.

years was now effectively at an end. Kathryn may be forgiven if she signed a silent “Hallelujah.”

Soon we were into the fifties, largely the era of Ike Eisenhower on the national scene. Whatever one may think of Eisenhower, his strong, steady, underplayed approach to the presidency seemingly set the tone for the serene fifties – once he set the Korean “police action” behind us. Certainly, we had no foreboding of the turbulent sixties soon to come. Speaking of sixty, that was now Kathryn’s age, and no doubt she welcomed some serenity, but she still kept busy throughout the fifties. In fact, the enumeration of the multiplicity and variety of her efforts recounted herein most likely will shock many of her younger grandchildren, who may unfortunately remember her only as a quiet, unassuming and retiring old lady who hugged the background at family parties in her later years. But Kathryn was still hard at work through the first half of her sixties, editing the *Sodality Union News*, and serving as a volunteer aid and book-reviewer at the St. Matthew Cathedral Study Guild Library among other things. Two published examples of her book reviews dealt, respectively, with Dietrich von Hildabrand’s *In Defense of Purity*, and Mortimer S. Adler’s *How To Read A Book* – hardly easy pickings. Kathryn also authored an extended piece for *Catholic Library World* entitled, “Steps To Be Considered In Preparing A Book Talk.” As for the Guild, it comprised a group of lay folks dedicated to making good Catholic reading material more readily available to city workers in the cathedral area. Kathryn indicated the basis of her dedication to this effort in a letter circa that period to Sr. Kathleen, thus:

I think the importance of reading good material cannot be overestimated. Didn’t someone once say, ‘We are what we read’? Anyway, I think that is very true. It is a sad thing to see so many people waste their good time reading things that are actually doing them harm, when their time could so profitably be used reading worthwhile things. A group of people here have formed what they call The Study Guild Library. In order that they may keep the place open to the public for longer

hours, they have called for volunteers. I'm one, and I find it very interesting.

Meanwhile, Harry was additionally assuming the job of Treasurer of the NCCC, which post he held through 1968. And, life went on, with the appearances of Martha Wright on 29 Jul 1950, Larry Noel (daughter Dorothy's firstborn) on 11 Aug, and Cele Meehan on 21 Sep. The Kirks could now claim 13 grandchildren, and Harry did! This was also the year that Harry and Kathryn, together with Fr. Dan, started a series of summer vacation trips to Canada that extended through 1953. It is at least a post-facto consensus of family members (apart from the participants in these strenuous automobile treks) that "Kathryn would rather have remained at home in bed." She had a lot of resting to catch up on, and never found traveling (apart from journeying to enjoy family sojourns) all that satisfying. So, chalk up these further instances of deferring to her husband's wishes. At the same time, the Kirk family put the welcome mat for Tom Woods on 14 Nov 1951, Mimi Noel on 26 Nov 1951, John Wright on 24 Aug 1952, Margy Meehan on 11 Nov 1952, Mike Noel on 7 Nov 1953, Mary Woods on 15 Nov 1953, Mary Wright on 20 Feb 1954, and Greg Meehan on 17 Dec 1954 (and welcome to the "one present" club, Greg). You'd have to say those Kirk girls (and presumably their husbands) were really busy in what, for them, was probably anything-but the "serene fifties." Nor let us forget the family religious: On 30 Apr 1952 Sr. Teresa pledged her solemn vows, and on 11 Apr 1953 Sr. Kathleen and her community pronounced solemn vows and accepted so-called papal enclosure.

Turning to the last half of the fifties, the Kirk family might be forgiven for failing to note *Sputnik* in the heavens in 1957, or Castro in Cuba in 1959. They were too busy observing unbelievable activity in the nursery as 14 more grandchildren put in an appearance, thus: Bill Noel on 5 Jun 1955, KT Wright on 31 Aug 1955, Lucy Woods on 1 Oct 1955, Tim Meehan on 22 Jun 1956, Pat and Dan Woods the only twins) on 9 May 1957, Monica Wright on 28 May 1957, Harry Noel on 10 Aug 1957, Jimmy Woods on 11 Apr 1958, Brian Meehan on 7 Apr 1959, John Noel on 16 May 1959, Maureen Wright on 3 Aug 1959, and Vincent Woods on

27 Aug 1959. By the way, this method of presentation serves three purposes: it is historically informative, it enables each grandchild readily to spot which other grandchildren “bracket” their birth, and, it tends to account for any upset Kathryn may ever have expressed to anyone over the veritable hemorrhaging of her daughter’s wombs. Writing to Sr. Kathleen on 8 Feb 1958 Kathryn says, “Let me say two things about your married sisters and their families ... I feel that their welfare and progress depends greatly upon you ... So, please pray hard for them ... (as) these are trying times in their lives and they face hard decisions.”



The married Kirk sisters – May 1959⁷

Again, in another letter to Sr. Kathleen of this era Kathryn observes, “I once heard a retreat master (obviously among the first half-dozen of his own brood) say, in speaking of large families, ‘After the seventh child I withhold judgment (Stout fellow!) – Is it generosity or selfishness?’” -- Kathryn then went on to remark, “Our four mothers, harassed and over-burdened as they are, still are devoted to their broods, anxious and concerned about their welfare, even though they must sacrifice every pleasure for themselves to care for them. I Pray God will keep them well, so they can raise all of them for heaven. For me, it used to be a pleasure to see them in their homes with their children, now it has become my cross. When I go there I must try to be gay for their sakes, I

⁷ Note the two Carmelite Sisters (Margy – Sr. Kathleen and Frannie – Sr. Teresa) represented in the picture via nun dolls on the table in the foreground.

see so much that has to be overlooked, that it takes several days after I have returned home to become calm and to regain some peace of mind. Perhaps my growing old has something to do with this.” By then, Kathryn had her “three score and ten” years well in hand and may well have imputed her own distress to her daughters, for, Lord save us, they weren’t through yet – nor was Kathryn herself for that matter.

Somehow, Kathryn managed to sandwich in a trip to Mexico City with Harry in Aug 1955. Actually, this trip might better be labeled *Tour of Mexico City’s Carmelite Monasteries*, because the Kirks persevered in searching out eleven such communities there, seven in the capital city itself, two in Pueblo, and one each in Toluca and Tulancingo. And, “search out” is the proper phrase, since the Carmelites have existed largely “underground,” because the revolutionary Mexican Constitution of 1917 (inspired by atheistic communism) outlaws all religious communities. Following the revolution in 1910, many Carmelites fled into exile in the USA, so that many of our communities (for example, the one in Buffalo) had their origin in Mexico. The persecution under President Cardenas in this period forms the background for Graham Greene’s great novel *The Power And The Glory*. With all this, Kathryn still found the time and energy to acquire a meritorious award for her service as regional chairperson for the annual Community Chest Campaign in Oct 1955. Then, on 5 Aug 56 she was off to Defiance for the last major Schindler family reunion. A picture of the event reveals all ten children present except for John (who was to be the first to die, a mere 2 years later in Aug 58). If Kodak can believed, Kathryn was both the tallest and the slimmest daughter.

In the fall of 1956 Kathryn repeated her fund raising performance for the Community Chest with its successor organization, the United Givers Fund. A neighbor fondly testifies to Kathryn’s relentless devotion to others at this time, thus:

Kathryn in her seemingly quiet way would surprise one with her activities. She was Prefect of the Sodality before my time and, when we arrived, Area Coordinator for the United

Givers Fund – such to my regret as I fell into her trap as Captain for one of her areas. I didn't realize the years of work that would mean and can't help but hold this against her – but how could one refuse when she was very actively doing her part? She also organized a neighborhood group to study the Mass and was one of the moving forces in a Literary Discussion Club for Sodality women. One felt at all times that her religion was deep and sincere. We also had a Spanish Club on Otis St of which she was an interested member. [One wanders when she slept.]



Defiance reunion – 5 August 1956

So, we come to the first half of the turbulent sixties and, indeed, the first half by itself would have been quite enough. This was the time, remember, of the U-2 embarrassment, the Bay of Pigs debacle, the international scandal of the Berlin Wall, the nerve-wrenching Cuban Missile Crisis, and the heart-wrenching assassination of JFK. Nevertheless, the intrepid Kirk girls continued their contribution to the population *explosion* (or were they its cause?), presenting Tom Noel on 22 Sep 1960, Herbie Weight on 19 May 1961, Rose Woods on 5 Jul 1961, Carol Meehan on 6 Aug 1961, and finally Rita Noel on 30 Mar 1962. Perhaps Herbie Wright displayed the most prudence, taking one brief look around, and then giving up the ghost a mere three hours after birth, succumbing to a respiratory inadequacy – thus becoming our second known family saint. So, at last, the 19 span of Kirk girl fruitfulness came

to an end with grandchild number 39, Rita Noel. Kathryn's long agony over the fecundity of her married daughters (or, might she have viewed it as at least *prima facie* evidence of the selfish, insensitivity of their husbands) was over at last.



The Kirk wives – July 1960

Meanwhile, on the religious front, there was both good news and bad news. As for the good news, there was the momentous fact of Vatican II – the first truly and uniquely *universal* Council in the entire history of the Church. In all, 2,860 Fathers attended, from all over the word, save 274 missing from communists countries. The Council comprised four sessions extending from 11 Oct 1962 to 8 Dec 1965, and issued 16 memorable and mostly pastoral documents which are likely to guide Church development through the 21st century. As to more good news in the religious realm, but on a more provincial scale, Sr. Kathleen's community moved to more spacious, peaceful, and rurally oriented quarters off Dulaney Valley Rd. near Towson, MD, on'31 Aug 1961. Kathryn, Harry, and Fr. Dan, among scores of other community friends and relatives were on the scene to help out.

Now, as to the bad news, on 16 Oct: 1962 Sr. Teresa in Philadelphia was also making a move, taking off with two other members of her community to attempt to bolster a faltering, fledgling Carmelite activity in Durham, NC. The commitment of the Philadelphia contingent was for three years, and this period was to be a stormy one, indeed, for the

entire “expanded” Durham community. At least relatively free at last of the long endured anxiety attending the repeated pregnancies of her married offspring, Kathryn was now to be carried along for well-nigh the next three years on the periphery of the storm vortex centered in the North Carolina Carmel. Not only was the community itself an amalgam of conflicts among radically differing temperaments, Sister herself suffered acute personal psychological problems.

Sr. Teresa has alluded to all this only in terms of “problems” and “difficulties,” and an on-site visiting male Carmelite superior has volunteered only one additional descriptive term – *inter-personal entanglements*. No more need or should be said, this being sufficient to indicate that the situation was real, deep-seated, and traumatic. There is a rather large file of almost weekly letters originated by Kathryn during this period to support and encourage Sister and try and resolve matters. Suffice it to say that by 12 Oct 1965, one Philadelphian had returned to Philadelphia, one had opted to remain at Durham, and the third, Sr. Teresa, was completing what was to be nearly nine month’s psychiatric care beginning on 30 Jul 1965. Happily, Sister weathered the storm ““to fight another day,” which is more than two original members of the Durham community managed, as they left the order. Needless to say, this episode must have inevitably taken its toll on Kathryn’s always suspect physical stamina, which was often sustained only by her dogged perseverance and unflagging faith in Almighty God.

As though all this wasn’t enough, Kathryn was to endure yet another devastating blow in the interim on 11 Jan 1963, when her priest brother, Fr. Alfred was fatally stricken with a heart attack. Of course, Kathryn quickly accommodated to the will of God and praised Him for rewarding her dear brother with his heavenly reward, but the initial news had been an alarming shock. Kathryn herself tells about this in a personal memo of the period, thus:

About 8:30 pm on Friday, 11 Jan 1963, Harry called me to the phone, saying that Fr. Alfred’s secretary wanted to talk to me, I went jubilantly, thinking she had put the call through

for him, and I was expecting to talk to him. On my way to phone I said to Harry, ‘Take the extension phone upstairs so we can have a three-way conversation.’ Instead, I found his secretary still on the phone and trying to do a difficult task as gently as possible. She said Fr. Alfred had a heart attack at 4 o’clock ... (and) he was taken to the hospital and died four hours later. Was it shock, stupidity, doubt or what, but for seconds that seemed like hours, I was speechless. Then I heard her say, ‘Are you all right? Is Mr. Kirk there?’ ‘Yes, yes,’ I said as my mind began to accept her message.

The funeral followed on Tuesday, 15 Jan 1963 in St. Catherine’s church in Toledo, which Fr. Schindler had built and dedicated only two years before. Kathryn, Harry and Fr. Dan flew out, there to be joined (among a raft of other relatives and friends) by five of Kathryn’s sisters. Missing was Jeanette (Mrs. Volk) too sick (partly paralyzed and confined to a wheel chair) to come from a Cleveland nursing home. (Incidentally, Rose, Mrs. Desch, remains as the only survivor of Kathryn’s immediate family as this is recorded – 10 Nov 1985 – sister Gert, Mrs. McCarthy, having died in the course of this effort on 2 Nov 1985 at age 91). As for Kathryn’s brothers, John, the oldest, had predeceased Alfred, and the youngest, Bernard, in California, was cautioned by his doctor that he was too sick to risk the drastic temperature change – it being zero in Toledo on the day of the funeral. Following it, Kathryn almost immediately set about authoring and publishing her previously quoted testimonial to her late brother, *His Last Call*, which was no small feat. Yet, all in all, this event sounded an alarm in the Schindler family. They could no longer escape noticing they all were now rapidly growing older, accumulating infirmities, and becoming increasingly vulnerable to death. All of this apparently gave Kathryn pause, and it was about this time that she initiated the following note to her beloved husband, Harry:

You have an annual interest you call your Christmas Project, a worthy project that portrays zeal to help the poor. [Harry organized his St. Vincent de Paul Conference to solicit their every client for a Christmas List, complete with clothing sizes and the like, and then enlisted Catholic University and

Trinity College students to do the actual shopping, and deliver the gifts on Christmas Day.) You give it your unlimited attention. You are determined to work it well. In doing this (I'll use a homely expression, the origin of which I do not know), 'You have a bear by the tail.' Each year this bear grows bigger and stronger. Each year you should subtract from your required work load. But you are holding that tail now, and he is wearing you out. You can't let go! So, how will this contest end? Pope John XXIII is quoted thus – 'See everything, overlook much, and charge a little.' You've reversed two of these words. By your actions, you say – 'See everything, overlook a little, and change much'. Unless you can get those exchanged words back in place, that bear will surely win this contest and fast! Prepare for that!

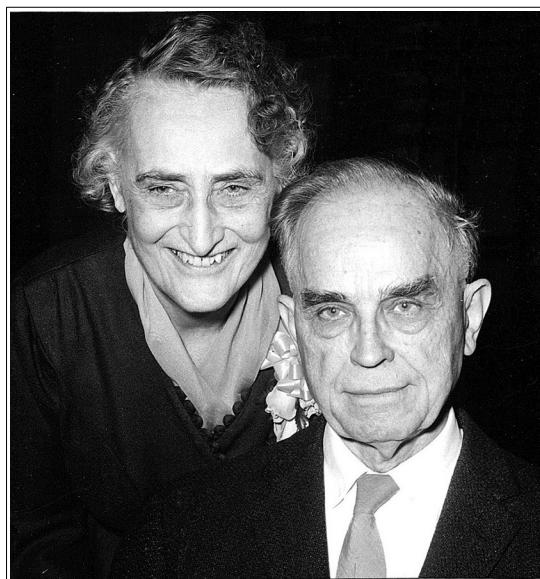
Meanwhile, other preparations were afoot. The time had arrived to arrange a proper celebration of Kathryn and Harry's Golden Anniversary – a fitting tribute to their fifty year commitment to marriage – a salute to that grandest of all forms of service: the selfless service of two people to each other through holy wedlock. Kathryn again recalls what happened in a memo dating from that period, thus:

Many weeks before our actual golden wedding anniversary date – which is 19 Jan 1965 – our four married daughters and Fr. Daniel had been consulting with each other to pick a suitable day for the celebration. As a result of their consultations, 30 Dec 1944 was chosen; because at that time the five grandchildren now in college would be home for their Christmas vacations. They were Peter and Pat Meehan, George Wright, and Joe and Teresa Woods. Fr. Daniel would have a vacation from the classes he is attending at American University, and his pupils at the Abbey School would also be off for Christmas vacation ... On 30 Dec, our four families (four daughters and their husbands and 36 grandchildren – only Mike Woods and our two deceased infant grandchildren were missing) gathered at St. Anselm's Abbey for the 12 noon Mass. Fr. Daniel was the celebrant ... After Mass we all assembled at the Franciscan Monastery Pilgrimage Hall. A photographer met us there for a picture taking session. Then

our meal was served. It was an ideal private place, where children and adults could enjoy each other's company.



Golden Anniversary Celebration – 1965



Kathryn and Harry – 19 Jan 1965

Clearly, a fine time was had by all. The only obvious questions remaining would be: How did they do it? How did they get that far? What was the secret? Harry provided the answer, an answer which would have

made the by then departed Kathryn immensely proud, on the occasion of another wedding anniversary reception (on 22 Jan 1983), thus:

Looking at conditions in the world today, it is dreadful to note that one of every three or four marriages ends in divorce or separation. What a tragedy for married couples, and even worse for their children! What can be done to prevent this heartbreak and hopelessness? When we experience bodily pain or discomfort, we go to a doctor for help. We tell him the whole truth about our symptoms. Thereafter, we follow his advice and take the medicine which he prescribes.

The principal factor causing separation and divorce is the neglect by husband and wife to give the same attention to the health of their immortal souls as they give to their perishable bodies, and their failure to ask the help of the loving God – the physician of their souls. Thus, they become afflicted with evils more deadly than the diseases of the body – apathy, hopelessness and despair. A frequent examination of one's conscience will reveal the symptoms of the soul's illness – selfishness, lack of self-sacrifice or self-control, neglect of needs of others.

The next step is to ask the help of the doctor of their souls, their loving God. With sincere repentance and firm purpose of amendment, laying their symptoms, before God's representative, the priest, and following his advice and prescription, they can be certain of the healing of their souls. Just as their perishable bodies need a proper earthly diet, so for their souls they have the heavenly diet of the Holy Eucharist. By the faithful use of these heaven sent remedies, we can be sure of loving hearts and real peace and joy forever more.

Hear! Hear!

V – FADING (1966 – 1979)

*Fades the light, and afar goeth day, cometh
night.* – Bret Harte

The sun was now slowly but inexorably beginning to set in the life of Kathryn Schindler Kirk. This was perhaps first signaled by Harry's formal retirement from gainful employment in Mar 1958. The death on 11 Jan 1963 of her dear brother, Fr. Alfred, no doubt shocked her into an even more profound awareness of her own vulnerability. It must have been at about this point that she at last stopped, drew back, and took a long and careful look ahead down the path she and Harry might yet have to tread. Her Czechoslovakian heritage might be said to now have begun surging to the fore. Remember her father, George, and his adherence to the Bohemian tradition of setting aside a goodly number of what reasonably figure to be the last years of one's life to *prepare for death?* Now approaching 75 (George Schindler had been about 70), this would have been the appropriate time for Kathryn to beat a retreat from worldly concerns, and this (at least in retrospect) is precisely what she seems to have done.

If she kept score, and there is no reason to believe that she did, it is quite probable that she might well have, like St. Thomas Aquinas did with respect to his prodigious theological writings, concluded that all her considerable machinations in the realm of public service were "Just so much straw." The mark anyone leaves in this area of endeavor is much like the hole one leaves when withdrawing a fist from a pail of water. Individuals die, but the institutions they serve live on, as though nothing has happened. Too late, too many of us come to realize that the only enduring testimony to our genuine earthly contribution is the "children" we leave after us (spiritual, of course, as well as biological). Prescinding from the purely spiritual aspect, physical parenthood, worthily practiced,

has to be the supreme monument to human endeavor, and the paramount aspect of parenthood is motherhood.

Somewhere Chesterton has observed that, “Nothing can ever overcome that one enormous sex superiority that even the male child is born closer to his mother than to his father. No one, staring at that frightful female privilege, can quite believe in the equality of the sexes.” Little wonder, then, about the unparalleled uniqueness of a mother’s love. The late great Dominican theologian Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange elaborates this in a relevant way, thus:

Love usually demands three things of us: that we go out of self by tending toward the one to whom we would do good; that we be united to him by a close communion of ideas, sentiments, and desires; that we devote ourselves to him, give ourselves to him, and if need be, sacrifice ourselves for him, that he may be made better and may reach his final goal. A real mother images this kind of love. No mere emotional delight in the loveliness of her child contents her. She must both will and do him good, going out of herself, forgetting herself, abandoning all the preoccupations of self-love and egotism to reach out to her little one. When she takes him up, puts her arms around him, and holds him close, it is as though she would become one with him. Wholly and always devoted, her love leaps up to meet his every need, and when he is ill nothing can take her from his side where, day and night, she cares for all his wants. From her he learns to walk and talk and pray; she it is who first awakens his mind, his heart, his soul.

Dare *any* man deign to compete with that totality of devotion? Does this not, incidentally, provide a rather stupendous insight into the necessarily marvelous uniqueness of Mary, as Mother of God? Again, as Garrigou continues, “By endowing these qualities of truly generous love with infinity, we can discover something of the meaning of God’s love for us. Rightly did Isaiah compare His mercy to the tenderness of a mother for her child, because the tenderness of a mother’s heart *has its source in the infinitely greater goodness of God* (*emphasis added*).” It is precisely in

this perspective that Kathryn can truly claim the title of “mother” for every moment of her self-effacing life. True, she devoted virtually as many years to her public ministry as Christ lived, but these began after her children left the nest, and in due course they came to an end. But, as the next segment of this saga will clearly show, Kathryn never even began to relinquish the reigns and corresponding responsibility of her motherhood – continuing to love with all her heart, even as her worn and weary heart waned and wound down to its inevitable final loving beat.

So, we enter the last half of the decade of the sixties – the era of LBJ’s so-called *Great Society*. American theaters were alive with *The Sound Of Music*. Vatican II came to an end on 8 Dec 1965 even as the US escalated its ill-fated effort to seize peace in Viet Nam through increased military force. It was then that Kathryn and Harry made ready to quit the scene as house-owners and home-makers and retreat to the security of a less demanding nursing home environment while they still had wits and strength sufficient for the extremely complex switch. Kathryn explains the basis for the above with her customary lucidity in a Letter to Sr. Teresa of 27 Aug 1965, thus:

At our age (75/76) we can expect to become more or less incapacitated in the not too distant future – so we want to put things in order while we’re still able. On our application [1 Sep 1965], in answer to the question, Reasons why you wish to live at Carroll Manor House we gave four reasons. They are: 1) To continue attendance at daily Mass as long as we remain able to do so, 2) To be assured we are located in a place of safe refuge in and when we become unable to carry the responsibility of caring for our own home, 3) To be assured the survivor will be cared for “when death us do part,” and 4) To avoid us becoming an extra burden to any of our four married daughters, who are courageously caring for their own large families, as well as (in some instances) for a husband’s parent or parents.

So, planning began, and before you could say “Carroll Manor here we come,” it was 1966, and actor Paul Scofield was triumphing in film as

St. Thomas More (one of those rare “family man” saints) in *A Man For All Seasons*. It somehow seems appropriate at this point in the Kirk life saga that Uncle Sam Launched Medicare on 1 Jul 1966. It was perhaps fortunate, too, that the Kirks abandoned virtually all of their property just before the nation exploded into the urban riots of “the long, hot summer” of 1966 in Brooklyn, Buffalo, Rochester, Toledo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and Los Angeles. Many persons were killed, and property damage was enormous. Washington couldn’t and wouldn’t be far behind. Kathryn and Harry, of course, were now already neck-deep in reviewing and discarding much of the accumulated baggage of some 51 years of living together, some of which had been on hand from 1915. | It should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with Harry’s propensity for squirreling things away (a trait, we hasten to add, which has greatly facilitated this very project, thanks to his ample archives) that a search of the Otis St. attic revealed his second-grade report card. (What’s more, we’d bet the mortgage that Harry not only hung on to it, but that he has since made at least 10 Xerox copies of it!) So, it came to pass, the Kirks put their house up for sale in Feb 1966 and signed a contract to sell it on 7 Apr 1966, with execution to be “within 90 days” – which latter eventually had to be extended to a 1 Aug “quit the premises” date.

The hang-up was gaining entrance to Carroll Manor. During the extension period Fr. Dan broached a proposal anent Harry temporarily relocating to the Abbey, since single rooms were more immediately available at Carroll. Kathryn categorically states in a letter of 7 Apr 1966, “I give it immediate and flat rejection,” but three days later, Harry had importuned her into accepting the offer. So it was that Kathryn was to enter Carroll Manor for what turned out to be thirteen years on 23 Jul 1966. (By 8 Aug, a mere 16 days later, the indefatigable Kathryn had already taken up the daily reading of poetry to a blind and nearly deaf but mentally sharp 94 year old lady inhabitant.) At the same time, Harry relocated to Fr. Dan’s Abbey for what was to be an eighteen-month’s separation, exceeding even the separation occasioned by their relocation in the early thirties from Ohio to Washington by four months. Of course, this time they were within hailing distance, and Harry visited with Kathryn

every day. An amusing sidelight of this arrangement, however, was that Kathryn and Harry became a *cause celebre* throughout St. Anthony's parish in virtue of a rumor to the following effect: "Have you heard that the Kirks are separated?"

This, then, was the beginning of the end for Kathryn – 23 Jul 1966 – the period of her declining years was now underway. She was 76 years old (she would live to be 88), and in Bohemian fashion she was now free and focused upon preparation for death. She herself recorded the transition from active to more or less passive life in a letter of 8 Aug 1966) thus:

The actual moving did become a disturbing thing for me, and each of you [her children in the area] did so kindly help out at great sacrifice of your duties to your own families. The fatigue did cause me to become somewhat disoriented and forgetful, but I'm happy to say that in my two weeks here I feel that I am back to my normal self again. Personally, I feel like a queen – relieved of all responsibilities of house-keeping, shopping and other duties. But, best of all, daily Mass is so conveniently possible under the same roof under which we live. So, come cold or sunshine, rain or snow, we need not be deterred from attendance, and we're so closely united in daily Mass.

Then it was 1967, the year of the calm before the storm.

Hollywood answered the race riots with a precious piece of fluff featuring Kate Hepburn called *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner*. It was designed to dramatize how easily blacks and whites could get along – convincing possibly only Spencer Tracy. In South Africa Dr. Christiaan Barnard performed the first successful heart transplant operation, thereby ostensibly proving at least that the apostles of apartheid had hearts. Harry responded in May with a little surgery of his own – a re-upholstered hernia. Meanwhile, in the mid-east the Israelis virtually demolished the Arabs in the so-called 6-Day War of 6-10 Jun, thereby emulating in reverse the miracle of God's creation of the world in six "days." This was when Israel occupied Jerusalem apparently to stay, much to the chagrin of the Pope, who like the PLO (war makes strange bedfellows) still doesn't

recognize the state of Israel officially. Amidst all this, a now serene Kathryn “occupied” new and larger quarters at Carroll Manor, awaiting the return of Harry of whom she then wrote, “He’s so attentive and faithful to every wish of mine. It’s really fabulous. After about five months I can look back and say I haven’t had a single regret about the move. Then, it was suddenly 1968.

Like MacArthur, Harry did “return,” and on 9 Jan 1968. Ah, 1968, a year like none other. Already there was trouble in paradise, as by Sep Kathryn was writing, “Seldom if ever do we get to talk to a nun. They never seem to have the time to stop for that. The problem of lay helpers is very fluid. They only seem able to keep them for a short time. The quality of their service is very poor.” In Washington, LBJ successfully championed Civil Rights. In Rome, a resolute but somewhat rudely rebuffed pontiff reminded Catholics that they had no *rights* to artificial birth control. Rhythm was in, “the pill” was “out.” By 4 Sep 1968 the Kirks had a letter off to an old friend and the then Vatican Secretary of State supporting *Humanae Vitae*, “even if it be only a voice crying in the wilderness,” and offering “consolation to His Holiness” over “the aftermath of the (adverse) reactions expressed by many.” The letter went on to remark that, “In all the current uproar there is a forgetfulness of the virtues of self-mastery and self-sacrifice, and of the need to bear manfully the crosses God sends as the unfailing medicine for our ultimate good.” Now, one might be tempted to remark that perhaps such observations come more easily to these approaching 80. Certainly, at precisely half that age Harry himself had seen things quite differently, as his earlier referenced “Promise to God” suggests. But, as a president of some renown was once fond of saying, “That would be wrong,’ and more than that, it would be beside the point.

The fact of the matter is that whatever are the validity and merit of the key stipulation that “*each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of Life (Art. II)*,” the age of the individuals involved is entirely irrelevant. One might reasonably argue that *oral* assimilation of a pill hardly *blocks* remaining open “to the transmission of life” (in contrast,

say, to the variant *Star Wars* “Strategic Defense Initiative” – better termed CDI – Cervical Defense Initiative) that every ugly state-of-the-art birth barrier yet conceived by heavily invested but morally bankrupt capitalist creeps. Such won’t be argued here (even though prohibiting the pill does seem to betray at least a tinge of the anti-scientific biblical fundamentalism that yet leads Christian Scientists to inveigh against the evils of blood transfusions). Rather, we would inject only a note of caution, a plea for prudence. The point is, absolute knowledge is hard to come by. Perhaps Aristotle (so often invoked by no less than St. Thomas Aquinas) puts it best in his discourse anent elderly men, thus:

They have lived many years; they have often been taken in. and have often made mistakes. The result is that they are sure about nothing ... They ‘think,’ but they never ‘know’; and because of their hesitation they always add a ‘possibly’ or ‘perhaps,’ putting everything this way and nothing positively ... They have been humbled by life. [Perhaps playwright James M. Barrie has summed it all up best in his remark anent no longer being young enough to know everything.]

In other words, we must keep in mind that there are really very few pure blacks or whites, but rather, a huge array of varying shades of gray. And speaking of blacks and whites, we now arrive at the time when Martin Luther King was assassinated, and then Stokely Carmichael tried to emulate the British fleet of 1812 by burning the nation’s capital to the ground once again. Then the Rev. Ralph Abernathy led his “March of the Poor” on Washington. Nor did our troubles stop at our shoreline. The North Koreans seized the electronic snoop-ship *Pueblo*. In Viet Nam the Tet offensive threw our nation’s hopes for peace for a loss. In Europe, the USSR crushed our ancestors in Czechoslovakia, An article from the 29 Oct 1977 edition of the Jesuit magazine *America* (as preserved in Harry’s archives) tells the story, thus:

Early in 1968, the people of Czechoslovakia thought spring might be coming in more than a literal sense. Alexander Dubcek, who had been elected First Secretary of the Communist Party in Jan, was restoring a degree of

freedom as part of what he called the Czech ‘Road to Socialism.’ But, before summer ended, the hope of that ‘Prague Spring’ had been savagely blighted, and the new road dwindled into a trackless waste. The Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia during the night of 21-22 Aug; Dubcek’s reforms were canceled and, in 1970, he himself was expelled from the party.

The article then goes on to recount the then (1977) continuing repression still being suffered in the original homeland of Kathryn's parents. Religious are under siege no less oppressive than that alluded to earlier anent Cardenas' Mexico, the article noting "Most sisters have been forcibly resettled in 40 houses known as "concentration convents," where they sometimes live four and five in a room." Harry appended a hand-written note: "Do include your parent's native land in your precious prayers." That's something we should surely do, especially as the 21 Nov 1985 edition of *The London Tablet* notes that, "At present 10 of the 13 dioceses in Czechoslovakia are vacant," and that, "Little hope of successful negotiations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See of the appointment of bishops to vacant sees emerged from a long interview ... (with) the Czechoslovakian minister of religious affairs. What we have here is a too long continuing denial of basic human rights (notwithstanding the much heralded 1975 Helsinki agreement) about which much of the world chooses to remain either oblivious or silent. Let us, indeed, resolve to pray for the relief of our relatives and brother Catholics in Czechoslovakia.

As for our relatives enjoying the peace and safety of our shores in 1968, our troubles – and there are always some – were of a less general nature. Specifically, Kathryn's daughter Kathleen went to Georgetown hospital to repair the cumulative female damage of more than ten pregnancies. Kathleen's daughter Anne flew in from her dental assisting in the Boston area for several days to shepherd the Wright household in the interim. Kathleen was well back on her feet by 3 Oct when her son George was to lose one of his (feet), and almost his very life, by miraculously ejecting from the cockpit of his Navy jet-fighter aircraft at virtual ground

level and a speed in excess of 345 mph a mere 1-3/4 *tenths* of second before it exploded in a fireball. This same year Kathryn's daughter Sr. Teresa went to Cleveland for some Carmelite pow-wow, and Kathryn's sister, Sr. Alfred, reported on a nice visit with Frannie. Lastly, but hardly least, this was the year that Kathryn's daughter Lucille brought her then six year old daughter Rose to town in a special capacity. Rose suffered from birth with cystic fibrosis, and was the selected *Poster Girl* for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation's annual fund-raising campaign for 1968. Rose was a registered out-patient of NIH in Washington from age 6 months (transferring, of course, to a kindred organization upon the family's relocation to Chicago), and was nursed through a chancy infancy and childhood by an incredibly indefatigable mother to her current (1985) ripe old age of 23. Nice going, Rose! *WELL DONE*, Luie! Thus, 1968 then drew to a close with the election of Richard Nixon to the presidency as the US population hit 200 million – and, this time, the Kirk girls had nothing to do with it!

The year 1969 was the year of fulfillment for JFK's promise to land a man on the moon within the decade of the sixties, and was the year Warren Burger landed in the Supreme Court as its new Chief Justice. Meanwhile, John Wayne cavorted on the silver screen, winning an Oscar for his imitation of *True Grit*. And, speaking of grit, the year 1969 was an ambivalent one for the Woods clan. On the one hand, they celebrated the ascendancy of the paterfamilias' sister Rose as the confidential secretary to the President of the United States. On the other hand, they sweated out the Viet Nam tour of son Michael. A letter from Kathryn to Michael of 16 May 1969 evidences her anxiety for him as well, and incidentally fixes for all posterity the approximate natal date of Fr. Dan's beard as about 21 Apr 1969. (A true PUN-dit might say that both Michael and Fr. Dan were then undergoing "hairy experiences," but no such nonsense will be ventured here.)

Kathryn, with the rest of the entire Kirk clan, also was then sweating out the Woods paterfamilias' term as Sheriff of notoriously dangerous Cook County, Illinois. It was Sheriff Woods, remember, who

among countless other dangerous exploits, took into custody the Looney-Tunes *Chicago Seven* (the eighth member of the original cast, Bobby Seales of the *Black Panthers*, drawing a four year jail sentence for contempt mid-way in the trial). Oh yes, Kathryn had plenty to be anxious about in 1969. Starting right off, she lost: two of her sisters, Sr. Alfred on 17 Jan at age 84, and sister Jeanette on 22 Jan at age 82. By Jun, Sr. Teresa was back at Downingtown for a spell of further psychiatric support. Harry turned 80 that year; and could at last be said to have fully retired from the formal Church work which had consumed him for so many years. All in all, the closing out of the decade of the sixties was a particularly vexatious time for the Kirk clan.

On the national scale, the seventies got off to a bad start. There was the tragic Kent State fiasco, and the legally and otherwise highly controversial invasion of Cambodia. Yet, George C. Scott parading as Patton on the screen somehow managed to make Americans, from the president on down, proud of themselves. This was to be Kathryn's final decade on earth, and throughout its entire course the debilitating effects of her mental anguish were far to exceed those consequent to her ever-increasing physical infirmities. To begin with, she lost yet another sister, Margaret, on 26 Jan 1970, but by far Kathryn's biggest worry was her youngest daughter, Sr. Teresa. The latter anxiety, dating at least from 1966, was to extend with little let up to at least 1977 – substantially the end of Kathryn's fully cognitive life.

Apparently, Sr. Teresa's problems had their genesis during the period of her sojourn at Durham as alluded to earlier in this treatise. They were to hound her, and – vicariously – her parents, for much of the ensuing decade. It is reasonable to presume that whatever the genuine root of the difficulties might have been, they were to some degree exacerbated by Sister's age through this period. Aristotle held that, "The body is in its prime from 30 to 35; the mind about 49," Beyond that, generally accepted statistics indicate that for American women menopause normally occurs around age 48. By all reckonings, then, the early 70's might well have been expected to be crucial, even turbulent, for our celibate little sister.

Her physical prowess already lay behind her, even as her powers of intellect and imagination were peaking, and the end of her child-bearing capability was in sight. She was at the climacteric of the ultimate female dilemma, to be or not to be – a mother.

At this point one might well object, “Hold it!” This is scandalous speculation and a rank invasion of privacy!” There are good and substantial reasons, however, for staying the course on this one. First, Frannie herself noting that her parents’ correspondence of the period included material “not complimentary” to her, generously proclaimed, “As far as I’m concerned, you can use anything about me, good or bad.” Second, her father himself preserved the relevant source material and made it available. Third, little of what will be said here will be news to most readers. Fourth, reviewing the situation should make all of us more acutely aware of our personal dereliction of duty as “good neighbors” to Sister during her time of tribulation. Fifth, it is reasonable to hope that we may all learn something of value from this recounting of the situation, and be the better for it in terms of being more understanding, tolerant, and supportive in the future. Sixth, and most pertinent to the purpose at hand, only in this way can we expose the “cross of mental anguish” humbly and perseveringly borne by Kathryn in her declining years. Seventh, and finally, in the end this is a tale of triumph of the spirit which can only lead us all to love, respect, and admire Sr. Teresa the more. She did after all, with God’s grace, little help from us, and by dint of tremendous personal fortitude – *PRAVAIL!*

Having said all the foregoing, it seems almost superfluous to go much further into detail. So, we won’t labor the situation and, in particular, we won’t bother to additionally qualify certain observations or digress into lengthy explanations. We’ll go the “bare bones” route. Thus, on 5 Jan 1970 Kathryn writes Frannie, “Please try to get hold of yourself. I’m very worried about you. Who do you think you are?” Pretty blunt language that, in any context. Actually, it was as far back as an 11 Apr 1966 letter to Sr. Kathleen, that Harry had remarked, “We are concerned about your little sister and our youngest child, Sr. Teresa … Sometimes we are confronted

with the possibility that she might not be able to continue in Carmel ... From an item in one of her letters, it would seem she has considered this." Now, continuing her letter of 5 Jan 1970, Kathryn says, "I am very worried about you and unless you resign yourself to (the doctor's) care, what may happen to you. *You are totally unprepared to face this rough world on your own* (emphasis added) ... So please for your own good, do try to be patient and content with things you cannot change ... Forgive my bluntness. I feel I must write as if I were talking to you – my daughter – face to face." Kathryn then concludes with a profuse profession of abiding love. In another letter of this period Kathryn delights in discussing a CCD biblical theology course that they were then taking concurrently.

The nature of the problem (or certainly a major one, if they be multiple) is ever coming into clearer focus, and it now carries forward into 1971. Harry confesses in a letter of 26 Feb 1971 that a letter from Frannie of 21 Feb "was very touching, not to say alarming," and quotes Frannie as saying, "I am lonely and unhappy because my faith is weak and I want to see Christ," and (referring to a visit from her sisters of a few days before), "I can't help it, but I envy them." Of course, her married sisters had many burdens of which Frannie remained blithely unaware, and thus she continues, "So, it is just as well that. I don't see them often," (It's mindful of how middle-aged maidens avoid weddings like the plague. They can't bear the sight of a happiness that they can no longer reasonably hope to ever experience themselves.) Clearly, Sister was suffering, but there is no record of any forecoming family help, except the frequent inspirational epistles from the ever-faithful, ever-loving mother, plus an occasional P.S. from Harry, and a now and then drop-in visit by the Noels whenever they visited other Pennsylvania relatives.

So, Frannie was looking over her shoulder wistfully at the imagined uninterrupted blissfulness of the married state. Now we really have "the problem" nailed down. Right? Wrong! There's more to it, as a 7 Sep 1971 letter from Kathryn to Frannie indicates, thus:

First, I must advise you to banish the thought that married life is 'heaven on earth.' This is no more true than to

say that life in a contemplative community of religious is 'heaven on earth.' In each case we ask for God's guidance in making our choice. We were sincere in our prayers at that time. We were earnestly asking God to help us to make the right choice. Do you think God failed to hear our prayers? Do you think God made a mistake? [OK, so maybe we were right in the first judgment? No! There's more, read on.] In your letter of 22 Aug you wrote of the differences between yourself and your Sister, Sr. Kathleen of Baltimore, and the differences between your communities. You also compared the part your respective communities are taking in the changes in your way of life. You said that your community went to only such meetings as were called by the Father General, and that he'd stopped calling them. You also called yourself a drop-out 'not only I'm personally disposed to be so, but because our community is one.' These are indeed troublesome thoughts.

Kathryn then went on to confess incompetency to address changes in a religious community, but clearly we now have another dimension of Frannie's then on-going difficulties. Now, marriage not only seems an appealing alternative life-style, the religious life-style as practiced in Philadelphia is now implicitly repudiated by apathy in the face of the envisioned greater liberalism at Baltimore. The pressure for a move is now on from two directions. A crisis was fast developing. This conclusion is evident and confirmed in Kathryn's follow-on letter of 17 Dec 1971. Kathryn gets right to the point:

"God does not permit sincere vows to be made by these incapable of keeping them – be they marriage vows or vows of a religious ... Many times much suffering must be undergone by some in order to keep from breaking a vow. How often we read of great saints who have suffered tremendously, rather than break their promise to God. [Be it noted that nor had any of Kathryn's sons-in-law, which may have been some benefit to Kathryn's daughters.]

The foregoing was no doubt intended as medicine, but the final thrust emphasizing pride that none of the seven Kirk children had been unfaithful to a vow, at least taken alone, might well be thought to have

been pretty strong stuff for Somebody so obviously “on the ropes.” But, it can’t be taken alone. Kathryn went onto remark several then recent instances of performance by Sr. Teresa that contradicted Sister’s profession of little personal worth and inability to function usefully alone. Kathryn also went on to encourage Sister to focus less on self and, strive to serve “others” more. Finally, Kathryn reiterated her pride in and great love for her youngest child. Ah, “*youngest child*,” and effectively youngest of a *series* of daughters (five to eleven years older!) – Here, perhaps, lies another key to poor Frannie’s trials and tribulations.

How could she ever hope to compete, indeed, how could she even hope ever to catch up to them? It might well be expected that, as she strove for the parental approbation that is a primal motivation of the human species, she would become uncommonly excited by the slightest accomplishment, and exceptionally discouraged by the slightest failure. Certainly, she would always feel driven to try to measure up to expectations if not to excel, and, sensing any possibility of failure, being easily and readily diverted to some other endeavor. In short, she began life as “low man on the totem pole” in virtually a worse case situation. Through no fault of her own, she was “an accident waiting to happen,” As the eternal “baby of the family,” Frannie simply was never really allowed to grow up. “Becoming like a little child” is all well and good “to enter heaven,” but the operative word (a popular phrase in the 70’s) is “becoming,” that is, one must first have been something else, say, like an adult free to make that very decision. In any event, the life Frannie freely chose, with God’s grace, promised the very least of what she needed most: recognition and praise, respect and acceptance, honor and appreciation. Of course, it also promised the greatest prestige and reward for challenges overcome. And, Sister DID overcome – about which, more later.

In this struggle, Kathryn’s contribution was considerable and probably crucial. Hence this rather lengthy recital. And, the lesson learned at the price of much personal anguish, and which would stand us all in good stead, is simply this: when it comes to questioning God’s will, it isn’t important that we *know* but that we *believe*; it isn’t important that we

know but that we continue to *hope*; it isn't important that we *know* but that we *love*; “faith, hope and charity, these three” – that's what it's all about! Or, as St. Thomas More's succinct rebuff to his daughter's counsel to sign Henry VIII's oath had it, “Finally, Meg, it isn't a matter of reason; finally, it's a matter of love.” In short, it is futile to tax our puny minds overly in an attempt to comprehend the “unsearchable” ways and wisdom of Almighty God.

The foregoing trial, then, and an allied concern over Sr. Kathleen were Kathryn's primary preoccupations as she tried to prepare herself for death. Sr. Kathleen was not only Kathryn's eldest child, she was the eldest of a series of daughters. Margy was “queen” of the family roost – virtually the very opposite of Frannie. As Vatican II drew to a close in 1965, Margy was just over the hump of age 48, whereas Frannie at 38 was just entering her decade of feminine inner turmoil. Advantage – Margy. Philadelphia Carmel would tend toward a conservative reaction to the Council, whereas Baltimore would tend toward a liberal reaction. Without debating the merits of these dissimilar reactions, it's safe to say that both Margy and Frannie inclined to a liberal temperament. (Their maternal-side ancestors were, after all, Bohemian.) Again, advantage – Margy.

Finally, to elaborate Margy's already noted advantage of position in the family constellation of siblings, she was disposed to take charge, to give orders, to keep up to date, to be in control. She could and would work hard for a cause in which she believed (for example, her 50th anniversary celebration of *Iolanthe*), and she believed in Vatican II. She was temperamentally equipped, in fact, to make a good religious superior. (For the benefit of any incredulous reader, your interlocutor acquired the requisite doctorate in psychology in a Public Library between 14-16 Nov 1985, and has a library card to prove it!) Well, you get the idea, all the' advantages fell on Margy's side, and no doubt she could legitimately claim that so far as she was concerned, she had no problem. She, and her community were, however, a: king-sized problem for our dear Kathryn, especially as she strove to referee and reconcile the emerging night and day differences of philosophy her two daughters were experiencing in

their respective communities. We recount this dilemma, therefore, only to indicate the range and variety of vexing problems Kathryn was called upon to confront as her physical and mental equipment gradually but steadily wound down from her lengthy labors in the vineyard of the Lord. One could say her entropy (energy unavailable for useful work) was rapidly tending toward its maximum, but you won't read that here.

A little documentation is next in order. The subject under discussion is Margy's apparent part in an on-going dilemma concerning the potential marriage of a granddaughter to a non-Catholic, – specifically to a Jew. (Only later would such dilemmas take the form of praying that the principals of a love-in would in fact marry.) Kathryn thus writes Sr. Kathleen on 12 April 1972:

I think we should apologize to you for our harshness of speech and bluntness of talk ... When I left Washington Sunday, my mind was a jumble with no definite thoughts on the subject ... but as we drove along I learned: Fr. Dan's opinion on the subject; [the involved parents] opinions as related to us by Fr. Dan from his conversations with them; the thoughts of a teacher from the College of the female principal) who is well trained to lead and guide girls ... in all their problems; and ... we also learned something of the personality of [the male principal] from (the afore-referenced teacher) who had talked with him several times. It is all a very serious problem, and the future doesn't look bright ... It was good to observe the unity of thought among all of us on the ... problem ... However, I noted that unity of thought was not complete among us all as we discussed the situation [upon arrival in Baltimore]. I noticed that you, Sr. Kathleen, seemed to be changed, and I'm not sure that the changes I noticed are all good. So, that raises an entirely new concern for me to think about and pray for [emphasis added].

I am ready to accept changes made for us by the officially organized Church. But I do not think that God has changed, and neither has human nature with all its weaknesses. We need the guidance and support of God's grace

that we receive through the Church and the sacraments. The cloistered nuns were an edifying influence on other people, and still are thought of with great awe, respect and admiration. I remember our trip from Biddle St. to Towson on your moving day. I sat next to you in the car. You tried not to look out about the streets too much, in order not to become too distracted. Perhaps that was extreme, but it reveals more vividly the contrast that has taken place since then. Now I think of your trip from Towson to Philadelphia with two Jesuit priests in a car in the recent past ... How 'far out' can you go? What is to become of the respect and edification effected in visitors ta Carmel in the past?

Another point I must raise here and now is in regard to your undirected reading. Today there are floods of books and papers thrown at us that are not entirely free of commercial motives. Authors with advanced college degrees are competing with each other for selfish or commercial reasons and are writing things that become traps for readers with fewer or lesser degrees or less guile. A book you passed to Fr. Dan to read is by an author who is very severely condemned by better religious scholars. I picked up a book by him to read. After perusing it briefly, I dropped it like poison. I always had to avoid poison ivy when a child. This seems the same. I tell you this because I want you to know my concern about the effect of such reading on your own life. None of us can take such chances. Who guides or directs your reading? [Earlier, Kathryn had asked, 'Do you need a new Spiritual Director?']

Prescinding from any merits of the case (which is irrelevant to our purposes), the deep concern of poor Kathryn is evident. Note, however, that even so she didn't explicitly take sides, rather, she merely communicated her worry and raised questions. Of course, she typically closed with a profession of undiminished motherly love. This, remember, was Apr 1972. By Jun 1974 Kathryn's concern yet remains unabated. The occasion was, of all things, the celebration of Fr. Dan's Silver (25th) Jubilee at the Meehans. Larry Noel was the innocent toastmaster, and Kathryn might reasonably be said to have become furious that, Sr.

Kathleen inserted a statement in his prepared notes to the effect that Sr. Teresa was not present due to the decision of her prioress in Philadelphia. (Some folks in the sporting world might be inclined to label such an action a “cheap shot,” but who among us is from the world of sport?) In a follow-on letter to certain of her children Kathryn remarks anent an enclosure, “You will see that the statement Sr. Kathleen entered into Larry’s notes was not ‘the whole truth.’ Sr. Teresa wrote, ‘If it is really my decision, I don’t want to come.’”

Kathryn then went on to elaborate that she and Harry were really edified by the thoughts expressed in Sister’s letter to the. She goes on, “On the other hand, we have become alarmed at Sr. Kathleen’s efforts to force Sr. Teresa to be at the gathering on 9 Jun 1974. In one letter to us she wrote, ‘Be sure to give me a lot of time with her alone!’” Kathryn continues, “I can well understand why Sr. Kathleen’s is the *only* incoming mail to Sr. Teresa that is pre-opened … But I can’t understand Sr. Kathleen’s intolerance of others’ opinions of the manning of ‘renewal’ and ‘adaptation’ as she interprets this She demonstrates quite openly in a long distance phone call to her mother on 2 Jun, when she said, ‘*You don’t understand. Let me talk to daddy*’ That was her request. Not satisfied with my response, she further insisted that I have Fr. Dan call her ‘as soon as possible – the time is short.’” All of this was clearly a bitter pill for Kathryn and tried her patience sorely. As for Harry, he adds his own postscript on the face of the afore quoted letter initiated by Kathryn, thus: “I think Sr. Kathleen is very much in need of our help and prayers.” It remains only to remark, as suggested earlier, that Sr. Teresa might well have opted to eschew gatherings of her happy-appearing married sisters without regard to considerations of “renewal” or “adaptation.”

Should you yet harbor any doubts as to-how troubled Kathryn was about all this business, she herself adds a further postscript by way of a letter to Sr. Teresa of 17 Aug 1974, thus: “Yes, Sr. Kathleen did come to Meehans for Fr. Dan’s Jubilee Mass, and again for Margaret Meehan’s wedding. On both occasions there was very little time for visiting her alone. I hardly know how to express my feeling when I see her there.

Perhaps it is sadness, embarrassment, disappointment, awkwardness, concern for her welfare, etc. I only know it is not joy." (One is reminded of the Virgin Mary's appellation as *Mother of Sorrows*.)

Viewed one way, the dual flood of vicissitudes visited upon Kathryn in this period of her declining powers by her two Carmelite "treasures" might seem to suggest (on their part) obliviousness to or insensitivity for their mother's distress. From Kathryn's point of view, however, any such "finger-pointing" would be totally unacceptable, as her own conduct amply testifies. She never took refuge in her inherent authority as ever-lasting mother. She never pleaded any special deference being due her greater experience. Her sense of dignity remained unruffled even by blatant disregard for her importunings (always conceived in the best interest of others) which dismissal less humble folk might well have deemed disrespectful, insulting or even threatening. Real or imagined personal affronts disturbed her not in the least. Such considerations simply never entered into the calculus of her character. Her prime concern was *always* the welfare of her children. An equally abiding and only slightly lesser concern was the possibility of scandal to innocents or the uninformed. The "hurt" she felt was for others, never for herself – but, it had to wear her down.

All of this, you will recall, having begun about 1965, sort of peaked in the first half of the seventies. Nevertheless, life went on, and other things were happening in the world and in the family. As a benchmark for younger readers, 1971 was the year Gene Hackman solved the *French Connection*, 1972 was the year Marlon Brando became *The Godfather*, in 1973 it was Miami 14:Redskins 7 as Redford and Newman cavorted in *The Sting*, and in 1975 Jack Nicholson was the *One (Who) Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. And, by 1972 Nixon was already into his second term. Then, suddenly Vice President Agnew was out by 1973, and Nixon himself by 1974, and the nation had "a Ford instead of a Lincoln." In fact, 1973 was an all-around very bad year. There Was also the oil embargo and energy crisis with the resulting long gasoline lines, the Yon

Kippur War, the end of the U.S. draft (how did that get in here?), and the Supreme Court's lamentable abortion ruling. Was it all so long ago?

On 9 Feb 1971 Kathryn lost her sister Mary at age 87. Meanwhile, in Apr 1972 our irrepressible Kathryn, herself then 82, enrolled in Fr. John. L. *McKenzie's SEEK*, a contemporary guide to a gospel study program. At the same time, Fr. Dan was now heavily involved in the Pentecostal movement with a charismatic Group centered at Catholic University. Allusion has already been made to the 25th anniversary of his priesthood. In 1975 Kathryn and Harry celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.



Kathryn and Harry – 60th Anniversary – Jan 1975

Archbishop Baum marked the occasion with a special blessing. In a letter to a family member about this time, Kathryn, ever the Bohemian preparing for death, observed, "For my age my physical condition is good. But I do pray that I will continue to want only to do and read such things

as will help me to become completely acceptable to God when the time for my death arrives.” In a later Letter that same year Kathryn, ever the mother, remonstrates with a daughter, thus: “In regard to (someone’s) mother, I think it right to say that to judge her and accuse her, without knowing more of her background would be a guilt of some kind on the part of the accuser. One should know more of her childhood, her parents, her husband and other related things, or one could be said to be guilty of rash judgment to say that she has become ‘sour or selfish’ now.”



The Kirk family – January 1975⁸

And so, we turn the corner into the fateful (for Kathryn) last half of the seventies. The year 1976 brought us the fabulous U.S. Bicentennial, the not so fabulous Jimmy Carter, and a world population of four billion. Harry spent the month of April in Providence Hospital, recovering from two operations. On 14 Jul Kathryn’s youngest brother Bernard died at age 76. He had been a bit of a rover, retiring to an RVH and seeing the country from FL to CA and points in between. Meanwhile, Sr. Teresa was ominously researching the subject of “vows” in Philadelphia. Kathryn’s year was up and down, but it was clear that she, like the decade, had reached a. turning point. In an 8 Jan 1976 letter to Sr. Teresa she reported, “My failure to keep up to my former ability or capacity lies in something we call the *memory* or our recollection of the past. It seems I have lost

⁸ Note that Frannie (Sr. Teresa) is not actually present, but is represented by the picture inset placed in front of Fr. Daniel.

some of that. For an appraisal of something being discussed, I must first turn off one light bulb in my memory, and search for another to be turned on in its place, before I can partake in the conversation. By the time I have found the bulb needed, I have lost the thread of the conversation, and any comment I could then make would sound very stupid to say the least."

Again, on 23 Jan she wrote, "For me to compose and write a letter now is a major task. My memory works so slowly that sometimes I start writing a sentence, then, before I get to the end of it, I have forgotten what I wanted to write." She then went on to express her continuing, distress cover Sr. Kathleen attending both John Wright's and Cele Meehan's weddings, concluding, "It does not make me happy to see her there." She was also disturbed by Sister's secular dress.

In Jul 1976 Kathryn managed to author a short paper *How To Crochet An Afghan*. If that doesn't indicate that Kathryn still had her wits about her, a letter of 1 Sep 1976 to Sr. Kathleen in response to a query about married priests does. Kathryn wrote: "It is impossible for one person to have two such vocations at one time and be successful at both ... There comes a time in each one's life when God asks us to decide our future. And He guides us in making our decision if we ask or pray to Him about it. Proper perseverance in living according to the decision is necessary. No life here is heaven on earth, and each of us must expect sorrows sometime during our lifetime. This does not mean that we have made a bad decision, or that God made a mistake in choosing him for the priesthood, or that he must not accept sorrows or sufferings while here on earth. Nor would God want him to live two vocations. I feel confident that he has no right to think that God is calling him to live a married life. Something in his priestly life needs correcting and he is not listening to God's will for him. He needs help!" (Kathryn was always forthright, honest, sincere, and above all – consistent. She strove valiantly to break out of the pre-Vatican II mold in which she had been raised, by reading good material assiduously and even taking correspondence courses into her eighties. Yet, it must be re marked that a trace of Tridentine tunnel-vision enabled her to overlook St. Peter, the Eastern Rite Church, the restoration of a married

permanent diaconate, and the splendid husband of one of her own granddaughters.)

Kathryn went on to conclude the foregoing letter rather cryptically and poignantly, "Harry and I have now reached another stage of our married life. It is often lonely for me, and I find myself more and more hoping that the time will be short before we are called." It may be that Kathryn was now merely registering exhaustion over the seemingly never-ending responsibility of responsive parenthood. This appears to be borne out somewhat by her following letter of 26 Nov to Sr. Teresa, "Now I can say that I know I am quite a changed person! No one can know that better than I do myself ... Yesterday your sister Gertrude Meehan had a gathering of all her Children at her house. Fr. Dan took us with him, and I want to try to tell you how I felt while there with them. *I could not remember the names of Gertrude's children and grandchildren, and often got then all confused.*" This must have been just about the time she attended a family dinner at Kathleen Wright's house. This time the group included Harry, Fr. Dan, Sr. Kathleen, and the three Washington area married daughters and |their husbands. At one point during the meal Kathryn, turned to the son-in-law sitting on her left and bemusedly exclaimed, "Who *are* all these people?" Like the aid soldier in General MacArthur's barracks song, Kathryn was definitely starting to fade away."

Things were apparently to get worse in 1977. Sr. Teresa was to spend Jan to Apr at the home of her sister Kathleen. Enough has already been said to indicate what a traumatic development this must have been from Kathryn's perspective. Suffice it to add only that this event was the *beginning* of Sister's ultimate triumph over her long-standing troubles. The key to her victory may lie in the fact that this venture marked the *first* largely independent *personal decision* of such magnitude that Sister had made since entering Carmel 30 years before. With, this cast of the dice Sister established at least in her own mind that she was then master of her own destiny – whichever course she thereafter came to take. It was a courageous action on her part, however disheartening to Kathryn. To be sure, all Sister's problems didn't disappear in a nonce, nor did the full

extent of the less than completely green grass she may have expected to find on the other side of the street in a mere three months. Nevertheless, there was general falling of the scales from her eyes. One dramatic example might suffice. Sister was want to walk to and from daily Mass from the Wright home. At first she wore her Carmelite habit and was overwhelmed by welcoming friends who would offer her rides and various other suitable invitations. Then, one day she wore secular dress and – was completely ignored! Besides teaching Sister an important lesson, that experience may well say something positive in favor of “uniforms.”

On 27 Aug 1977 Kathryn once more writes to Sr. Teresa then back in Philadelphia, “I always read with pleasure *and anxiety* (emphasis added) your letters to Harry and me. Yet I do not write to anyone now, unless in some way demanded to do so. Because you said you are conscious of ‘great disorders’ within you, I feel I should try to write you again ... I want to be able to help you if I can ... It will take a very long time to try to get my thoughts together, but your 22 Aug letter to Harry convinces me that I should do so, so here goes. First, I’ll try to explain the working condition of my mind at this point in my life ... My memory is so short, it is a trial to have me try to talk.” Kathryn concludes by saying, “You couldn’t guess the hours I’ve spent in writing this!” Clearly, it is now virtual torture for her to persevere in articulating her thoughts, but it is not evident that this is comprehended or fully appreciated by the addressees of her letters. Nursing Home specialists will tell you that children are the last people in the world really to see and understand that their parents (in whom they have often personified ultimate authority and wisdom all their lives) are no longer adequately oriented or even totally lucid. In fact, even when so informed by impartial folks qualified to judge, they simply refuse to believe it. And, in fact, Sr. Teresa was no longer even “seeing” her mother. Hence, no child of Kathryn’s can hardly be faulted for failing to recognize that Kathryn’s brain had reached a stage which computer specialists are want to call “overload.”

Increasingly, Kathryn simply could no longer cope. This state of affairs was perhaps an even more severe trial to Harry than it was to

Kathryn herself. He appended a postscript to Kathryn's letter, thus: "Reading the above, I think it is wonderful that your dear mother is so aware of the deficiencies that advancing age is bringing upon her. It is God's way of detaching us from this world (taking away our own human powers) so as to make us more ready for the eternal life to come. As for me, I'm convinced it is God's way of teaching me patience (and how much I need that) and to have me grow in gentleness toward your mother when she fails in remembering, and thus to grow to love her all the more. You see, I need patience, and she needs understanding love." And matters were yet to get much worse. Kathryn was about to embark on a final two-year count-down to death. It began with an incident on 24 Oct 1977, and the entire episode is recorded by Harry in a memo of the next day. It is incorporated here in a slightly edited form, for improved chronology, thus:

For two or three days Kathryn had complained about pain in her left arm and particularly in the shoulder; I thought it was merely bursitis. Following the close of rosary devotions at 2 pm on Monday, 24 Oct, we took a walk together in the environs of Carroll Manor. As we approached the Manor entrance drive she said, 'I want to rest on the nearest bench. My arm is hurting again.' And, she held her shoulder. Later, at the evening meal, she was not herself – eating sparingly.

It had been our custom for quite some time to recite compline together, following with a meditative reading of one of the sermons of John Cardinal Newman, the Anglican convert. We did this after undressing for bed. She had gone to the bathroom. When she returned she sank down into her reclining chair in terrible pain – in her arm, she said. I decided it was time to call the nurse, although she told me to wait until morning.

So, I went out and spoke to the nurse on duty, Mrs. Washington, and also to Sr. Anne Margaret who is usually not on duty at that hour. I asked them to see Mrs. Kirk who I thought was suffering bursitis. When they both came in she told them the pain was in her left arm and across her chest. I heard her say that and burst out, 'That's angina!' Sr. Anne Margaret

turned to me and remarked, ‘So says Dr. Kirk,’ and she and the nurse left the room at once. They soon returned, reporting that Dr. Collins was on his way. As per his orders by phone, Kathryn was given a hypodermic, and a cylinder of oxygen was wheeled in and connected for her.

Dr. Collins had been busy in his, office all day. He’d been too tired to get his evening meal, settling for a sandwich. It was wonderful, in spite of this, that he came so quickly. He satisfied himself as to Kathryn’s condition, then, as he was leaving, he stopped at the door to suggest, ‘She should be anointed.’ How very thoughtful and wise of him to warn us. I could not call our son, Fr. Dan, because it was then after 9 pm when the Abbey phones are cut off. So I had Sr. Anne Margaret call the Manor’s chaplain, Fr. Weber.

Fr. Weber had been watching Monday night football, and was there almost immediately. A bit old-fashioned, he used the old ritual of Extreme Unction. He gave Kathryn general absolution and added the papal blessing. As for Kathryn, often during the past year or two she’d expressed in great sincerity her desire that God call her any time, but by now [the next day] she was free from pain and quite comfortable.

The foregoing, then is a recital of Kathryn’s first *identified* heart attack or bout with angina. She was to experience a virtual “instant replay” exactly one month later on 24 Nov 197, Thanksgiving Day. Harry, Kathryn and Fr. Dan had celebrated it at the Meehans, and were returning to Carroll Manor. Noting she had not spoken enroute, Harry turned to Kathryn riding alone in the back seat and observed, “You’ve been awfully quiet.” Her weak response revealed at one that she was again suffering an “angina attack.” Once in their room at Carroll Manor, Harry helped her lie back in her big reclining chair. Her left arm was in deep pain. Harry then reports, “Shortly, to my surprise, she prayed aloud, ‘Dear Lord, I thank you’” Soon thereafter she turned to me saying softly, “The Lord arranges things so wonderfully. Just think, this did not come on until we had left the Meehans and so it did not disturb their Thanksgiving joy.” She did not

complain of her pain, indicating it was God's will and part of life's ending. Quite peacefully she said, "I am ready to go." The nurse soon came to administer some medicine to relieve the pain. They undressed her and put her to bed. "This," according to Dr. Kirk, "is the tale of her second heart attack." And things would continue to deteriorate rapidly in 1978. Another memo by Harry (slightly abridged herewith) is pertinent:

It was 17 Apr 1978. I was about to leave my room for 7 am Mass in the chapel. I stepped into Kathryn's room and found her asleep. It was time for her to get ready for 7:30 breakfast. My awakening her brought a great surprise. She sat up in bed and began to talk, but it was incoherent speech – not one understandable word. She was unable to comprehend anything I tried to tell her. This was a sad and frustrating moment for me. Never before in our entire 63 some years of wedded life had anything like this ever occurred. I immediately summoned the floor nurse. Neither could she elicit any coherent response from my dear wife. The nurse proceeded to check pulse and blood pressure and then departed to call Dr. Collins. He issued instructions and promised an early visit. The nurse ordered continued bed rest and arranged for delivery of breakfast to our room.

Following a liquid lunch, Fr. Dan arrived to administer the sacrament of the healing of the sick. Dorothy arrived shortly later, and the three of us then proceeded to pray for God's mercy on Kathryn's behalf. By this time my dear wife was almost completely recovered from her confusion and expressed her gratitude for our prayers.

It was about then that Dr. Collins and Sr. Anne Margaret made their call, after which the doctor took me aside. He said Kathryn's condition was due to a reduction of the blood supply to the brain. This was caused by clogged arteries. The condition would not improve, but would grow steadily worse. She would, however, have periods of lucidity. Multiple medications were prescribed, Kathryn was not to overly exert herself, and she'd probably sleep more than she'd like.

For more than a year Kathryn's recollection had become weaker and weaker. Her ability to concentrate had diminished. Any interruption derailed her train of thought. Conversation with others was therefore difficult to impossible, and she avoided it. It was even difficult for her to concentrate to read. She'd watch the evening TV news, and occasionally enjoy Lawrence Welk's musical program on Sunday evenings. It was edifying to note that she very conscientiously spent at least a half-hour a day in prayer. And studying Holy Writ as it pertained to preparation for daily Mass. All the things of this world, memory of the past, awareness of the present, physical and mental fitness are being taken away. At times, feeling quite helpless and useless, she confessed 'I wish I could die.' Long ago, we together made the solemn vow for better, for worse ... in sickness and in health until death do us part.' Now sickness has come. May God call us together, so that even death will not part us.

Now it was 6 Aug 1978, and Pope Paul VI died of a heart attack at age 81. By 26 Aug Pope John Paul I had already taken his place, and then suddenly he too was gone, dying of a heart attack at age 66 on 28 Sep 1978. On 16 Oct Pope John Paul II began his still (25 Nov 85) continuing reign as pontiff. Meanwhile, Kathryn continued to fight on – well, not really. She might better be termed a reluctant survivor. Once again Harry describes the situation, this time in a memo of 19 Dec 1978:

Kathryn's brain no longer records what she hears. At least, the impression is so dim she can't recall. It is like a worn-out typewriter carbon paper. In conversation she has great difficulty remembering names. If her train of thought is interrupted she 'gets off the track.' Thus, conversation is quite difficult for her, and she is inclined to avoid people. I may mention the name of one of our children. She has to stop and think hard to know who that is. She may ask the date or the time of Mass. I make response. A minute later she may ask the same question. The answer doesn't record the first time. It's the same way with seeing people or things. The impression is so dim, she recognizes little. She watches TV news, but she couldn't tell you what she saw. She spends long hours

crocheting, claiming that's the only thing she can do. She no longer uses the typewriter – too many gadgets to monkey with. She can no longer concentrate to read except for a few minutes.

For Kathryn time is now flashing by faster and faster, and we're into 1979 – her last year on earth. It's to be the last year for a few other notables as well: Arthur Fiedler finally "left" the Boston Pops after 50 years, poor (actually!) Nelson Rockefeller said farewell to his secret young lady-friend, and the super-macho John "Duke" Wayne net his Waterloo. The Latter is said to be a death-bed convert. If so, he even won his last big battle. Meanwhile, Hollywood celebrated divorce with *Kramer vs. Kramer*. Washington DC celebrated a 34" snow in February. Jane Fonda gave us the *China Syndrome*, about a narrowly averted nuclear power plant disaster. Barely a month later life duplicated art, and we got the real thing at TMI – Three Mile Island. "Talking heads" representing our government were immediately on TV assuring one and all that the power plant would be back on line "in a few days." *Six years later* they finally had the *undamaged* unit powered up, and conceded the damaged unit would never again be used. So much, then, for the wisdom of government "authorities." As for Kathryn, she was still "powered up," but barely. On 13 May she made her last attempt at letter-writing, just three months before she was to die. Harry said of it, "It is as though one made a print using a negative upon which several exposures had been made at intervals. She wrote at Carroll Manor in Hyattsville, MD, but thought she was in Ohio, she confused the fact that she was the mother of seven children with the fact she was herself one of ten children, all our children were born in Columbus, and so on." Let's just let this poignant letter (reproduced in full and un-edited) speak for itself:

As the mother and father of two Carmelite daughters, my husband and I are now living in a Home for the aged here in Columbus, Ohio. My husband is a graduate of Notre Dame University. We have ten children, all born in various parts of the state, and now living in Ohio and various nearby states. Since I the mother was a public school teacher and the mother

of all ten children of the Kirk children and the teacher of many children in Ohio Public School children, I find articles about these and other children I knew finding places in the various publications about them very interesting. Two of them are about nuns I know well and are nuns in a Philadelphia in a nursing home. I want to write to her about having located her. An article from a paper prompts me to say what her article means to me. I may ask my husband to write.

Clearly, the beginning of the end was now already coming into view, and by noon of 20 Aug 1979 it was at hand. A 28 Sep memo by Harry tells the story of Kathryn's last hours:

At the noon meal in the Carroll Manor dining hall Kathryn was in good spirits. Having finished eating and back in her room – I think I was reading to myself – upon looking up I noticed her sitting very still. 'What's wrong?' I asked anxiously. 'I'm in pain – both arms and my chest,' she replied. This had happened on other occasions. Even with severe pain she would remain silent. After discovering it, I would chide her for not telling me. She'd never remember her nitro pills. So, at once I placed one under her tongue. It didn't seem to help. So, I gave her a second, and even a third.

She was in a sweat, and I continued to wipe her face, forehead and neck with a towel. In the meantime, at my call, the floor nurse and aids rushed to her aid, checking pulse and blood pressure, and putting her in bed. Thereafter the nurse called the doctor and gave her a hypo of Demerol. A cylinder of oxygen was wheeled in and administered. 'That makes a difference,' she said. The doctor arrived at 3:30 pm, and soon ordered an ambulance to take her to Providence Hospital. Oxygen was administered enroute.

During all the period before the doctor's arrival, I sat beside her, constantly wiping the sweat from her face and neck. She didn't want me to leave her for a second. Three times she vomited and I had to dispose of it in the bathroom washbowl. 'Don't leave me,' she would implore. As forgetful, as she had become of time, place, friends, and many other

things, she never forgot her loving God. Early in this attack she said, 'I think I'm dying. Ask the priest to come and give his blessing'. Soon thereafter, Msgr. Joseph Weber, the Manor chaplain, administered the sacrament of healing of the sick, and finally the papal blessing for the dying. Kathryn had already been to 9:30 Mass and received Holy Communion that morning as on other days.

Only three weeks before when I awoke her and told her to dress for breakfast, she spoke up: 'I think I should be anointed.' She seemed ever alert for the final summons. On that occasion I took her to the room of the blind priest, Msgr. Edward Roach, and he administered the sacrament. As great as was her joy at this it was hardly equal to that of this lonely priest, confined by himself for long periods in the darkness of his blindness in his room, to finally be called upon to exercise his priestly faculties.

About 4:00 pm, continuously receiving oxygen, the ambulance took her to Providence Hospital, where she was taken immediately to the coronary Intensive Care Unit, there to receive the requisite attention for her critical condition. Fr. Dan arrived at the hospital at just about this time. We were permitted to see Kathryn for a few minutes about 6:30 pm. It was a blessing that I did not then know that these few minutes would be our last together in this life. Three or more hours had elapsed since last I had tried to comfort her at Carroll Manor. Her span of recollection was so brief, I doubt she recalled what had occurred during that interval, but she did realize that I had not been with her. Now propped up bed, she looked very weary and worn. To my dying day I shall never forget the last words she spoke to me. Looking up at me with fading eyes, she said weakly, 'I thought you had abandoned me.'

The Providence Hospital chaplain made his rounds to give Holy Communion about 8:00 pm that evening. Kathryn was unable to recognize him. Fr. Dan and I were permitted to look in on her about shortly after midnight. Her breathing was quite labored, even with the oxygen cap over her nose and

mouth. The weakened heart and lungs were waging a losing battle. Her last breath came about 2:00 am. At 2:15 am, Fr. Dan and I were told we could see her. And there she lay very still, prone on her bed. Her soul had fled this vale of tears. Fr. Dan looked at her remains and said, ‘That is not her!’ Of course, what he said was quite true. Her real self had been called to her eternal reward.

Kathryn Schindler Kirk, teacher – mother – TEACHER, died at 0150, 21 Aug 1979 of a myocardial infarction at age 88. Unfortunately, the record is mute as to acquittal of the Czechoslovakian tradition anent the last filial obligation of the faithful eldest son to his mother – to close her dying eyes. (Sadly, there was a newspaper account in the *Washington Post*, as recently as Nov 1985, recounting how the communist Czechoslovakian government denied this right to Bishop Paulo Hnilca because he “had to face the consequences for leaving his homeland.” At the same time, it is well to be once again reminded to pray for one of our ancestral native lands.)

Somehow, it seems that we should stop right here, that this marks the end of Kathryn’s story. The only trouble is: it DOESN’T! That is why this account of her life shall not even address the subject of her funeral. It was tantamount to an aberration. It’s something like the old saying, “the hurried upper I get, the further I fall behind.” For sure, the more dead Kathryn got the more she seemed to live – as our final chapter shall elaborate. Meanwhile, Harry was still very much alive. (This seems as good a time as any to remark upon the appropriateness of him being a civil engineer – a builder of roads and bridges. History tells us that the road and bridge building that occurred under the aegis of the Roman Empire greatly sped the spread of the Christian faith. In more ways than one, then, Harry too was a vital catalyst in the spread of the faith.) In any event, scarcely one month after Kathryn’s death he was celebrating his 90th birthday. His brief speech at a family celebration of the occasion warrants incorporation in part at this point:

It was only one month ago yesterday that the loving and merciful God summoned my dear wife of over 64 years to her

eternal reward. While, for your sake, I regret she is not here with us today, I'm comforted that for her sake she is not here. As you would greet her it would be painful for her to say to you, 'I don't remember your name.' During the past two years a loneliness had grown in her heart. Gradually the power of recall had been taken from her. The happy recollections of the past were hers no more. Often she would say to me, 'I may not be here tomorrow.' Alertness to the present scene gradually dimmed. God was taking from the chalice of her heart all attachment to things of this world, so He could fill it completely with the joy and glory of His presence.

So, at last, Kathryn enjoys her eternal reward. But, what does that really mean? The gospels give only the most cryptic hints. Theologian Karl Rahner attempted to give some further hints a mere 46 days before his death at age 60 in Mar 1984. It is all vain speculation, of course, but so beautifully expressed that remarking it here seems a fitting way to conclude this segment marking Kathryn's death:

I am afraid that the radical incomprehensibility of what we actually mean by 'eternal life' is trivialized, and what we call the 'immediate vision of God' is reduced to one occupation among others in eternal life. The unspeakable wonder that the absolute Godhead in itself should simply and directly descend into the narrow realm of our creaturehood is not properly perceived. It is the task of the theologian today, one that I confess disturbs me that I have not mastered, to find a better model to represent eternal life: one which in principle excludes any such trivialization.

But how? When the angel of death has gutted our spirit of all the useless rubbish we call our history when all the stars of our ideals with which we have presumed to adorn the heaven of our existence fade and are extinguished; when in faith and hope we have accepted the vast and silent emptiness of death as the true essence of our beings; when our life, up to now, however long, simply appears to us as but one brief interruption of our freedom which took place in a moment of time extended as it were under a magnifying glass, an

interruption in which question turned into answer, possibility into actuality, time into eternity, freedom offered into freedom attained; and when in a shattering shout of joy it turns out that the vast silent emptiness which we experience as death is filled with the Mystery of mysteries which we call ‘God,’ filled with His pure light and His all-embracing and bestowing love; and when out of this fathomless mystery the face of Jesus, the Blessed One, appears to us and looks at us, and this concrete individual is the divine surpassing of all our correct surmises about the incomprehensibility of the fathomless Godhead – then, much as I would like to be able to describe more accurately what happens, I can only, stammering, point out how one can in anticipation await ‘the One who is to come’ by experiencing the descent of death itself as the very ascent of what is coming.

VI – LIVING (After 1979)

One generation passes and another comes.
– Ecclesiastes

So, our story comes to a close – or does it? What meaning and inspiration might we draw from this simple tale of one woman’s journey from “womb to tomb?” Will the real Kathryn Schindler Kirk please stand up! Who was this woman? What did she mean to us who knew her, profited from her, and loved her? What did we learn from her? What can we learn from her even now? What is her significance to us today? What is her legacy to us?

Naturally, any such determinations necessitate a taking stock. Judgments must be made – subjective judgments. Being judgments, any findings will vary for different folks, and being judgments, they may be faulty and they surely must be tentative. Yet, if we are to derive any continuing benefit from our exposure to the influence and inspiration of this splendid human being we must, consciously or otherwise, perform evaluations and draw conclusions. So, with great caution and over-riding charity, let us begin.

What faults might this woman be said to have exhibited? Her husband and her progeny would probably be quick to proclaim in unanimous unison a resounding “None!” Certainly Kathryn’s loved ones are nowhere on record as ever having found any fault in or with her. That’s good. That’s beautiful. It is also, and uncommonly, probably very nearly accurate. Yet, we all believe that only Christ was “without sin.” Beyond that, a more balanced perspective should enhance the credibility of her acclaim. Thus, let us reflect on this a little deeper.

Like good Pope John before her, Kathryn's last years were replete with "My bags are packed" and "I'm ready to go" references. Moreover, these utterances were always tempered by the addition of the phrase, "God willing."

Yet, at best, such confessions of eagerness for death might betray a lack of fortitude for further personal perfection, or a flawed awareness and appreciation for "how unsearchable are His ways" as the Lord can use even our infirmities or apathy as an instrument of His grace for the salvation of others. At worst (especially for one not continuously suffering pain), they at least hint a disturbing possibility of complacency or presumption. Certainly, of all the judgments we are unqualified to make, self-judgment has to be the one most fraught with risk. None of this is to suggest that Kathryn's accommodation to death reflected any degree of all (or even one) of these potential defects. What it IS intended to convey is the extent of the peril which we have the temerity to confront whenever we deign to judge anyone: *good* as well as bad. Beyond that, we often profit more from faults observed than from virtues. We learn what to eschew as well as what to emulate. No doubt, Harry best characterized Kathryn's expressed readiness to die when he referred to it as "her loneliness for God and heavenly peace", for which he also then began to pray as an antidote to worldly attachment. Aging does have its compensations. In the course of the process we come to recognize that desire or ambition, no less than possessions, rob us of the ultimate freedom for which we all yearn. We all come to learn, as St. Augustine said long ago. "You made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until we rest in thee."

In this broadened perspective, we may now more safely undertake a review of Kathryn's legacy of inspirational virtues. We may now be unstinting in our praise, if such be our inclination, without fear of fairly being charged with familial prejudice or partiality. At the same time, and failing to undertake any such review, we might take for granted as our very own that which has, in fact, been passed on to us. Without such review we might remain unaware of, and thus fail to acknowledge – let

alone repay or give thanks for, our tremendous debt to our loving ancestors. So, at last, we come to consider that characteristic of Kathryn which is so uncommon in our day: her total and unswerving commitment to her marriage vows! We speak, too, of the old or traditional triple vow of – love, honor, and *obey*. It is only fitting that we take them in *reverse* order.

If there is one thing worse than waving a red flag in front of a bull it might be challenging a modern day feminist over the marital vow of wifely obedience to husband. “Get out of here! I mean it!” But, what does this vow really mean? Kathryn’s patron, St. Catherine of Siena, gives us a hint. In her famous *Dialogue* (with the Lord, as dictated by her to especially allotted *secretaries* while she was in a state of ecstasy), she remarks: “Such as … wish to … restrain in everything their own will … (place) themselves under the yoke of obedience in holy religion, or, without entering religion, they bind themselves to some creature, submitting their will to his (sic), so as more expeditiously to unlock the door of heaven.” This is strong meat indeed for today’s young women, and as with Christ’s words about the Eucharist being His body and blood, it is precisely at this point that many women choose “to walk no more” in the Lord’s way.

St. Paul more or less elaborated the point in his first epistle to the Corinthians: “If you are a wife, it may be your part to save your husband, for all you know; if a husband, for all you know, it may be your part to save your wife.” *Right here* is basis enough, purpose enough, motivation enough for any marriage. What a sublime challenge! Yet, many would bicker over who’s in charge – surely a give-away of deadly and self-defeating pride. Perhaps Carlo Carretto best illuminated the underlying secret of this vow of obedience when, having observed that St. Augustine always preached, “Love and do as you will,” Carlo added, “That is the crux. *When I love I can no longer do as I will!*” THIS is what dedication to the marital vow of obedience really means: through TRUE love, we are naturally disposed to submit to the will of our beloved. We switch our focus from ourselves to others. This Kathryn did unstintingly! In fact, and

mindful of St. Paul's words as quoted above, one might reasonably question whether unswerving submission to another might not, on the one hand, reflect an abdication of our being in the image of God most especially as we exercise our free will, and on the other hand, possibly impede if not imperil the spiritual growth of one's spouse, for how can one who always has his own way ever learn submission of the will and thus overcome self-centeredness? The answer to this riddle probably lies between acknowledgment of the fact that ultimate submission doesn't mean constant submission or preclude discussion or even sometimes successful persuasion, and Sirach's counsel of "Moderation in all things."

Then we come to the vow concerning the honoring of one's spouse. Well, there can be no question but that Kathryn honored Harry. In fact, it might be averred that Kathryn's only temptation against patience most likely was precipitated by her haste to forestall him publicly appearing to be insensitive, intemperate, or intractable. She was the constant tactful guardian of his image. More than that, she strove mightily to live up to the sometimes time stringent demands he levied upon her, whether explicitly or implicitly, and always without any complaint on her part. She served him well and faithfully as wife, child-rearer, cook, teacher, nurse, house-keeper, traveling companion, and even real estate agent. When she was no longer able to undertake public burdens due to failing health, she still performed loyally as his private executive secretary. A grandson recalls: "In all Grandpa's many activities Grandma assisted and aided him in many ways. I recall her helping him with his office work and many other projects at home. I'm sure she did more than his full-time secretary at work did in terms of hours spent ... Again, (she) deserves partial credit for the many awards bestowed upon him."

While Kathryn could and would always articulate her own viewpoint, and do it well, she would also always – within the bounds of generally shared religious principles – ultimately defer to Harry should differences persist. Yes! Kathryn *honored* Harry through more than sixty years of married life – but, admittedly, no less than he honored and served her. A priest friend recounts: "When I knew Mrs. Kirk, (she) was

venturing into the politics of Catholic ... women who were doing things for the Church ... However, she was not experienced in dealing with those who knew how to get their own way, regardless of whom might get stepped on in the process. This caused her considerable anguish. So, she would relate her thoughts to her husband, Harry. He listened patiently and made few if any comments. Then, maybe the next day, he would tell of an experience he'd had in politics (It must be remembered that he was in big league politics all of his life as one time Chief Engineer and Director of Highways in Ohio, and later with the Associated General Contractors – a very exclusive group ... in the business of building bridges, super-highways, or sky-scrappers.) Mr. Kirk had a wealth of experience in dealing with shrewd men. So, Mr. Kirk would tell of an experience he'd had which paralleled the problems of his good wife. Without: any suspicion that he was advising her what to do in her difficulties, she would realize her situation ... I don't think she ever tumbled to the fact that her husband was just making up a story that would suggest to her what to do." In short, Harry and Kathryn respected and supported each other.

This, you see is precisely where the final vow – LOVE – comes in. It is the life blood of the process of marriage that makes everything else not only work, but relatively easy. Love subsumes honor and obedience – or any other commitment. Love, after all, implies an object. Love by definition is other-centered. Love compels both subject and object. It's inherently a two-way street. It implies a circuit. One might even hazard the idea that this is why there is a Trinity – that sublime perfection of the circuit of love. Graham Greene has said somewhere that, "Love demands a victim," and this is certainly true to the extent the Father "needed" the Son. God, who is Love, demands a Beloved AND the Holy Spirit which links that infinite love. The Trinity comprises a closed circuit of Love. All of this may not be so much of a digression as might at first be assumed. Perhaps this is the only or best way to elevate the nature of love to its fullest proper meaning. Only when approached through the paradigm of the Trinity does married love take on the sublime aspect proper to it, and reveal the rank tawdriness of the American obsession with sex as being the essence of love.

Yes! Kathryn loved Harry, and Harry loved Kathryn – in the full dimensions of that sacramental love wherein each puts the other first, always invoking the Holy Spirit. It should not surprise anyone, then, that neither Kathryn nor Harry looked upon their wedding vows as demeaning, stifling, or oppressive. Rather, they perceived them as a sort of mutually sustaining umbilical cord, an indispensable source of strength, a conduit of grace. Their vows were the mortar, if you will, that held the whole edifice of their marriage together. To paraphrase the motto of our Post Office: Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night could still or even penetrate the joy of their journey through life in *vowed* togetherness. Kathryn herself testified to this in an original poem marking their 50th Wedding Anniversary, thus:

THOUGHTS OF A GOLDEN JUBILARIAN

Today we are golden jubilarians;
 Today we have reached a goal,
 Not because of special talents we own,
 Nor special attractions or glamour we claim,
 But because God, in His goodness, gave us both the grace
 To always remember that
 WE HAD MADE A VOW.

A vow is a sacred pledge – a pledge we made before God,
 A promise to be kept 'til death us do part;
 It directs the way – it guides the course, if
 Through the years, both remember that
 WE HAD MADE A VOW.

On that diversified 50-year journey we've tread,
 There was sunshine, and sometimes there were clouds,
 Sometimes the highways were smooth, and sometimes rough,
 But through all the changes, and places both far and near,
 We've reached this goal because we both remembered
 WE HAD MADE A VOW.

Now we know our highways end must be near,
 We travel serenely and slow.
 Little ripples may arise, or rough spots appear,
 But we trust that we both shall always remember that
 WE HAD MADE A VOW.

Here we have the key virtue dramatized by Kathryn's very life – or, indeed, any really noble life – *commitment!* We've already noted St. Catherine of Siena's remarking the centrality of the vow of obedience to the religious as well as to married life. However, as we know, religious must customarily take three vows: of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Thus, there is the story of a prospective monk attracted by the poverty of St. Francis of Assisi. He was in due course invited to share a monastery meal. Well, it turned out that this day was some feast day especially celebrated by Franciscans, and so he was treated to platters of fancy hors d' oeuvres, bountiful drinks and all manner of goodies. So it was that the prospective monk exclaimed, "Wow! If this is poverty, bring on chastity!"

At the very least, this story suggests what a skewed view we all may sometimes have of the real natures and priority of worthy virtues. Perhaps the seeming abhorrence of commitment to obedience by modern youth, which is hardly flocking to monasteries and opts to merely "live together" rather than to wed, is in good measure a mark of misplaced emphasis by our ecclesiastical leaders. Our Church might be said to have too long affected a primacy of chastity over obedience. For every sermon on poverty we get maybe three or four on chastity and scarcely none on obedience. This is precisely why Kathryn's commitment to obedience might be her greatest living memorial. If her life and our memory of her left us not a single other shred of inspiration, we have this peerless example of unflagging commitment. Let's pray that our recollection of her stalwart self-less devotion, this monument that was her marriage, may always be enough to keep us all going.

So, we conclude this portrait of Kathryn Schindler Kirk even as her full story continues to untold, her influence radiating evermore outward like ripples from a pebble cast upon a pond. KATHRYN SCHINDLER KIRK: *Teacher – Mother – Teacher!* Whence the unremitting power of this remarkable woman? She was first of all, of course, blessed with an exceptional faith – the gratuitous gift of Almighty God. But more than that, she was a loyal and tireless worker in the vineyard. She didn't bury her talents, but neither did she flaunt them. There, perhaps, lies one secret

of her pedagogical success as a passer of the torch of faith. The term “low-profile” might have been invented to describe her. She was unobtrusive, unassuming, and self-effacing. And yet, a sort of “magic” was at work around her. For example, it was the practice in the Kirk family home that everyday someone in the family would rise early and walk to mass – their homes always being purposely located very close to the church which was the center of their life. In the words of one of the Kirk children, “And, the strange thing about that: there was no law laid down, no pressure, no peer pressure even. I was perfectly at ease, any time I felt tired, I was free to sleep – without feeling I was frowned upon. I don’t know how that worked. It was just the most natural, unforced thing in the world.

At the same time, Kathryn was oh so calm, steady, and utterly *consistent*. She never proffered unsought advice, never cajoled, counseled, or compelled any specific course of action. Thus another child has remarked, “I never was anything but free to go where I liked and to do what I wanted to do without ever having to report – except for what I wanted to share for the joy of it.” More significantly, perhaps, two sons-in-law are on record on this point. One states: “I expected the usual interfering from a mother-in-law. Kathryn Kirk was the exact opposite almost to the extreme. She never gave advice … you had to ask her for it. She never interfered, yet she was ready to help – if asked.” The other adds, “I can’t recall a single instance of her ever attempting, even subtly, to tell me what or how to do anything, either as regards myself or the handling of our children … In short, she never preached. She just showed the way by example. Finally, a Grandson reflects, “She never seemed to interfere with the lives of her children as is so often the criticism of parents” So it seems, Kathryn rarely if ever felt compelled to suggest or advise, let alone admonish or punish. She merely *acted out* her own beliefs and principles – hour by hour, day in – day out, year round, with the effect that everyone else was simply drawn along much like a steady stream sweeps along every floating object within its compass.

That was the thing about Kathryn. The nature of her “way” was the exact opposite to that of the standard caricature of the British clergy.

Reference is made to the custom in England of calling *signposts* “clergymen,” since they only point the way, but don’t go along it themselves. (When they removed the labeled “fingers” during WWII to confuse imminently expected Nazi invaders, British wits promptly began calling the bare posts “bishops,” since they no longer even pointed the way.) Kathryn was no mere signpost, rather, she was like the military field commander who could always be found well out in front of his troops. Her unfailing active example exerted a quiet and unseen but overwhelming power, much like a hidden magnet. Under the spell of her example, everyone within her range became an iron filing and was just drawn to follow. Thus, she still remains a potent force with all those who were ever privileged to know her.

Yet, one must seek still further to grasp the source or nature of the inner strength which translated into Kathryn’s almost mystical power over others. Her predominant (or perhaps only most obvious) characteristic would seem to have been an almost serene patience. An example from the world of sport seems most apt at this point. It’s from a book by Lawrence Ritter which purports to be the story of the early days of baseball by the men who played it. It is entitled *The Glory of Their Times*, and here is a relevant excerpt from a pitcher, “Sad” Sam Jones (1892-1966), one of Kathryn’s contemporaries:

You know, I think one reason I pitched so long is that I never wasted my arm throwing over to first to keep runners close to the bag. There was a time there, for five years, I never once threw to first base to chase a runner back. Not once in five years. Ripley put it in Believe It Or Not ... What you do instead of throwing is LOOK at the guy on first. Yeah, that's all, just stand there on the pitching rubber and look at him. No need to throw. If you stand there ready to pitch, and just stare at him long enough, it will get to be too much for him and he'll lean back toward the base. Then you pitch. Or else the batter won't be able to stand it anymore and he'll step out of the box and call time. That's all you have to do – just stand there and wait.

Right there you have two more elements of Kathryn's subtle power over people: patience and "the look!" As to the force inherent in patience, isn't it written somewhere that *the meek shall inherit the earth*? Be that as it may, there is plentiful testimony that Kathryn always took time to explain things to her inquisitive grandchildren. One reports, "It was Grandma who explained to me that the small round holes in sidewalks were places where pebbles used to be when they were new, but that many years of feet walking on them had worn the pebbles loose so they were washed out by the rain. She always took the time to explain complicated things like that." Another grandchild recalls that on his first trolley ride it was Grandma who, "explained to me what was happening when the overhead rod was retracted and the car switched to an underground third rail for power half-way into town."

A third grandchild recounts how one day Grandma took time out to show her how to knit, and kept her cool on discovering that her subject was a confirmed left-hander: "So, Grandma had to reverse everything she did so it could be transferred to a left-hand brain. It took a great deal of concentration." And, one might add, patience! (But, of course, science has since shown us that left-handers are the only ones who are "in their *right* mind.") Finally, a daughter-in-law confesses, "I remember with amazement and pleasure the first time Grandma saw my second child. She was a new baby ... (and) I had laid her on a blanket on the floor. Grandma, then probably close to 80 years of age, got down on the floor and played with her, eyeball to eyeball, not for just a minute, but quite a while. I was very impressed." Patience! Grandma had it.

As to the Kathryn's "Look," that requires a little elaboration: One eventual son-in-law recalls his first meeting, thus: "I remember the granite face imperially ensconced behind the wheel of a huge, pull-down-seat Willys-Knight. Frankly, she scared me to death." The comment of a priest friend of the family incidentally suggests some basis for this fear when he notes, "I was afraid of her. I had too much to hide. She was very perceptive. I knew I could not lie to her, and get away with it." So, Kathryn did, indeed, have "a look," but it was never accusatory, never

disdainful, never threatening. Neither could you say that it expressed disapproval or even disappointment. If anything, it conveyed a notion that “You’re entitled to your opinion,” or as folks used to say, “That’s *your* red wagon” – you’ll have to pull it! In other words, it conveyed the notion of freedom! And yet ... here was such compelling force in those deep, dark but seemingly totally accepting eyes. You were completely free to go your own way, but never without self-generated discomfort should you chose something even slightly at variance with Kathryn’s quiet example.

There was yet another aspect of Kathryn’s unique power, which might best be described as charity of speech. The reported “last words” of Death Valley Scotty seem relevant: “I got four things to live by: Don’t say anything that will hurt anybody. Don’t give advice, nobody will take it anyway. Don’t complain. Don’t explain.” The first three principles suit Kathryn to a “T,” and need no elaboration. The last caveat, “Don’t explain.” warrants disavowal with respect to pertaining to Kathryn. To the extent it might relate to justifying personal conduct or action it is totally irrelevant as Kathryn’s was beyond reproach. And, to the extent that it pertains to endeavoring to guide, instruct, enlighten – to teach, it would be directly contrary to Kathryn’s disposition. Yet the iteration is otherwise most apt.

Kathryn was notorious, not only for never speaking ill of anyone personally, but for subtly and charitably squelching such talk by others. Easily the most typical would be her now widely famous (through several generations) expression: “Let’s talk about the robins” As one daughter tells it, “This became a family joke, because every time there was an argument at table, mother would interrupt with this unvarying admonition. Its very sameness was more effective than a different peace-speech each times. We quickly got the message: “Peace, be still!” Another one of the Kirk children elaborates: “‘Let’s talk about the robins.’ She’d say it again, and again. Very firmly! Notice, it’s positive. She didn’t-say, ‘That’s wrong! You’re offending God. She didn’t say that. She said: ‘Here’s the way! Follow it!’” Finally, a grandchild adds, “When Grandma Kirk said, ‘Let’s talk about the robins,’ she was trying to tell her children to love one

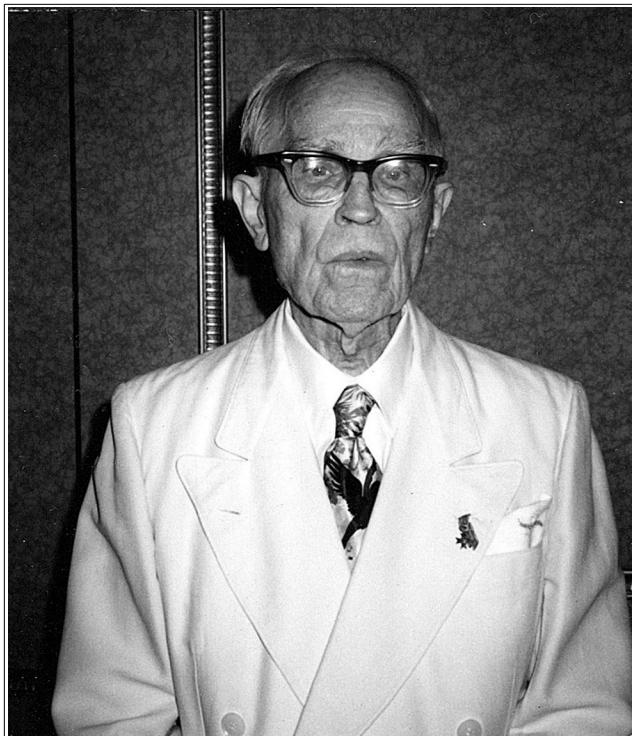
another. My mother remembered this lesson and passed it on to us ... Just like the Kirk children, we kids stopped arguing laughed.” In this practice Kathryn well emulated two of her patron saints. It is said that St. Catherine of Sweden was “never heard to speak an unkind or impatient word,” St. Catherine of Bologna had three rules as a novice mistress: “Speak well of others. Practice constant humility. Do not meddle in the affairs of others.” Those simple rules personify Kathryn. And the beat goes on.

Kathryn was equally renowned for stifling contentious confrontation in general. As one Kirk offspring relates: “Mother always tried to keep peace. She avoided arguing with daddy in our presence and did not like us to argue among ourselves.” A granddaughter recalls one amusing and typical peace-keeping incident: “I don’t think I’ll ever forget what Grandma did (at a certain *dual* birthday party celebration). We were all sitting around the dinner table, fighting about which of the two would blow out the candies, when all of a sudden, Grandma took a deep breath and blew out all the candies herself. She began to laugh as we all looked surprised. Then the whole table filled with people began to roar with laughter, too. This was merely another aspect of Kathryn’s penchant for good order – perhaps one of a teacher’s primary attributes.

Thus, a daughter recalls, “One of the things I remember most about mother was her ability to keep order. We never went anywhere until dishes were done, beds made, etc. A place for everything and everything in its place.” A grandson confirms this: “Her home was immaculate from top to bottom – every room well decorated and clean. I don’t recall ever seeing an untidy area, even in the kitchen.” A priest dinner guest recalls how Harry offered to take the kids to a museum if they could be ready immediately, and the kids sadly replied they had to do the dishes. “Kathryn said, ‘I’ll do the dishes.’ Then I witnessed how Mrs. Kirk. Made short work of that mountain of dishes. As I dried a few, I somehow managed to stay out of her way.” Order and efficiency! A sister-in-law recalls that “Dad always said you could set your watch by her.”

Kathryn’s renown as an organizer extended even to neighbors. One of them tells about a time shortly before Kathryn gave up housekeeping

and moved to Carroll Manor, and she wanted to entertain each of her married daughters and their considerable families one last time. “She carefully chose a menu she could manage comfortably and that was delicious,” the neighbor relates, “and each family had its turn a week apart with the same menu! I learned this ‘trick’ and have modified my menus accordingly.” Again, her efficiency was impressive when she moved. Everything was planned so as to benefit the various families with things they could use, and I even received my share – gardening books – that are still valuable references.



Harry in 1984 at age 95

Allusion has been made earlier to the sense of freedom – freedom granted others that Kathryn’s manner conveyed. Perhaps a better way of explaining this endearing trait might be to state that confrontation was simply not her style. More than that, she never “got in your face” – she

always allowed you your own space. Kahlil Gibran has elaborated this "fruitful ambiance well, thus:

Love one another, but make not: a bond of love;
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.

Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf

Sing and dance together and be joyous,
but let each one of you be alone,
Even as the strings of a lute are alone
though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.
For only the hand of God can contain your hearts.

And stand together yet not too near together;
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

What we're talking about here, basically, is consideration for others – courtesy, etiquette, and politeness. The sum of it is that Kathryn was a lady. For instance, one daughter remembers that, "Daddy naturally desired her to share in his Catholic Evidence Guild work ... (and) though she welcomed the guests he brought home in connection with this activity, she could never bring herself to do street preaching herself. She simply did not feel it 'fitting' for her to do so. A granddaughter tells of a time Kathryn visited her home one Easter: "I picked some jonquils and I remember Grandma holding these flowers so gracefully. Later (my husband) and I had a discussion about what makes a woman a lady. While I don't think we ever determined the specifics of what makes a lady, we agreed that my Grandma was the benchmark of a real lady. Like the old-fashioned word gentlewomen. I saw her as a gentle woman, and I can still picture her in her Easter dress holding those jonquils. A grandson simply says, "Her etiquette impressed me." A neighbor adds, "I especially admired (her) ability to dress so neatly, stylishly, and attractively. When I would compliment her she often said she had bought it at Sears, and I would think that the things certainly didn't reveal such possibilities in the

Catalogs. The answer had to be that the added dimension and appeal were in the *lady herself!*" Yes, Kathryn was always the benchmark of a lady.

At the same time, Kathryn was so much more than a lady. Many women might affect the superficial veneer of a lady, but Kathryn's lady-likeness – as with beauty – was more than skin deep. Kathryn's etiquette, courtesy, and sensitivity to others was heartfelt and sincere, and her very manner conveyed this in unmistakable terms. She was considerate of others because she genuinely loved others. She went out of her way to lavish her time and full attention on you, be you someone of renown or a mere child. One granddaughter fondly recalls, "One time Grandma took me shopping downtown. We had lunch at Woodies and I had a bowl of ice cream for dessert. It was decorated like a clown's face. This was more than 20 years ago, when I must have been only about five." A grandson shares a similar memory: "When I was six to eight years of age, Grandma took on the trolley car to downtown Washington and bought me my first sport coat ... It was a tan corduroy with brown leather buttons. I recall admiring it greatly."

Several grandchildren remember Grandma showing them the Franciscan Monastery and gardens. One says, "I remember going to the monastery with Grandma when I'd visit. We would go early and do the stations in the breezeway, and then after Mass we would walk around the gardens as long as I wanted." As another grandchild says, "She took a very personal interest in everyone. She always had time to ask and listen. She wanted to know how *you* were and what *you* were doing. Her interest in you was genuine." And from another: "Grandpa was the performer – he'd draw all the attention. Grandma was quieter. She'd be the one who asked you about yourself!" And, finally, from a now matured grandchild and parent: "She was a good listener. Her questions indicated a sincere interest in my children, my wife, and myself." Enough said.

So far, however, we have only addressed the external or visible manifestations of our heroine's character. It still remains for us to identify the bedrock key to her unswerving dedication to and perseverance in selfless service to others. Most probably it is to be found in her affection

for a small spiritual guidance booklet authored by a Jesuit named Considine and entitled *Confidence In God*. She made it her own. In any event, there can be no doubt that her fundamental life rule was *to do God's will!* Descartes ventured: "I think, therefore I am." Pascal might be said to have amended this to: "I believe, therefore I am." In the same vein, Kathryn might be said to have concluded: "I am, therefore I accept." Her life reflects total unqualified surrender to the will of God. Interestingly enough, Kathryn died on 21 Aug, the feast day of Pius X. He was renowned for saying, "God will provide." This, too, was Kathryn's ultimate credo, and her life was living proof that indeed the Kingdom of God begins on earth for those who surrender all worldly interests and pursuits in favor of following the will of God with utter resignation to His grace.

Kathryn simply was not a complainer. Come what may, she'd be the last one in the world to exclaim, "Why me?" She simply accepted whatever came. Down in Texas people describe this attitude by the phrase, "You gotta dance with the guy who brung ya." On the Mississippi river boats gamblers might say, "You gotta play the hand that's dealt you." On the golf course the rule is, "You got to play the ball as it lies." Kathryn's life performance would measure up to any of these populist philosophies. She'd eat whatever was set out on her plate. Few of us would deny that, in this day and age when self-indulgence has so largely displaced all sense of duty, such conduct is most uncommon. At the same time, in no way could Kathryn's abandonment to God's will be confused with fatalism – the "Que sera, sera" syndrome. Rather, after the example of St. Francis of Assisi, she sought to change what she could, and accepted what she couldn't. Beyond that and within her sphere of influence, she proved his axiom: "Sanctify yourself, and you will sanctify society!" Certainly she had a sanctifying impact upon everyone with whom she ever came into contact.

This saga abounds with examples of children, grandchildren, house guests, and neighbors who share the same or similar recollections of positive influences she still exerts in their lives. There can be no doubt that

Kathryn's "way" has been and is still being passed on, generation to generation. Thus, a grandson testifies, "I'm certain that I have been influenced in many positive ways that I cannot now even recall by the good example which Grandma gave to us all." A granddaughter underscores that these influences were more major than minor: "My Mom often retold us the lessons she was taught as a child from *her* mother. Although these lessons were often picked up by me through my mother's example, sometimes they were passed on in the form of my mother saying, 'My mother always said ...'" A recurrent theme of the latter was that immortal souls are more important than things, money, or success. For example, our front "lawn" was the joke of the neighborhood. With so many kids in the family it never had a chance. The 'patter of little feet' playing on it managed to crush every blade of grass brave enough to try growing in our yard. In those days of emerging power mowers, manicured lawns, and 'keeping up with the Joneses,' a mud patch in lieu of a lawn was no laughing matter. But, my Mom would shrug it off with a smile and say, 'My mother always said she was raising children and not grass.' This ordering of priorities – people are more important than appearances – has stuck with me into adulthood."

In summing up, then, another famous quote comes to mind: "The whole duty of humanity is summed up in obedience to God's will." What is interesting is that these are not the words of some pope or formally recognized Saint. They are the words of our own George Washington! And, as elaborated previously anent her wedding vows, Kathryn was obedient. St. Catherine of Siena tells us that "the whole of ... faith is founded upon obedience," and that, "patience is the marrow of obedience." In all respects, Kathryn Schindler is worthy of this illustrious patron, and, indeed, in glorious alignment with both past popes and presidents as to obedience to God's will being both the key to serenity in this world and salvation in the next. No small lesson that, and so befitting a teacher-mother-teacher par excellence.

So, example has been given, and an ordered sense of values has been passed down the line. Comparison has been made earlier to

Kathryn's influence spreading ever outward like the ripples from a pebble on a pond. Ripples? That inadequate expression could be grounds for libel! Kathryn S. Kirk made WAVES – waves of grace that continue to surge outward like a massive tidal wave, engulfing all in its path. We dare not even speculate over the still unborn souls on whatever distant shores who may yet experience the cleansing surf of the spirit of her magnificent example. We only know that Kathryn S. Kirk is alive and well, and lives on in her children, grandchildren, and still blossoming great-grandchildren. It seems that as with, "The king is dead. Long live the king!" Good mothers never die.