

## **Autobiography of Sister Mary Ferdinand Kerkvliet, OSB**

I was born June 18, 1887 on a farm in Haarlemermeer, Holland not far from Amsterdam. I was baptized the following day. Our family consisted of sixteen members, eight boys and eight girls. We were all baptized either on the day of our birth or on the following day by the same priest, "Pastoor Van Smeelen" as we called him.

My father's Christian name was Gerard and my mother's maiden name was Cornelia Van Egmond. They were both staunch Catholics all their lives and were for us a beautiful example of loyalty to God. They were united in matrimony on May 10, 1871 and in the spring of 1911 they were both called to their eternal reward.

My father died on June 2, and my mother followed him on June 14. They are both buried at Rock Rapids, Iowa in St. Mary's Cemetery.

My childhood days were eventful days. At the age of three years I went to live with my older brothers and sisters in the city of Amsterdam. As it was impossible to find employment for all of us on the farm any longer, my father started them in the milk business hoping in this way to provide for them. They controlled a shop where they sold milk. While there I attended a Catholic School, a kindergarten. It was conducted by Sisters but I was sorry that I never learned the name of the Community. What I remember most vividly is the visit of Santa Clause and Rupert. How we were made to sing, and speak, and pray, and the gifts which we received. I remember crossing a bridge on the way home from school and that I was nearly run over by a team of horses while playing in the streets.

When my father found out that this business was turning out to be the moral ruination of the young shop-keepers, the place was sold and we all returned to our country home. Then at the age of five I attended a non-sectarian school not far from home.

My parents greatly concerned about our future welfare then decided to leave Holland and to come to America where they could provide for all of us. They realized that it was impossible to start us all out in life there and before the family dispersed, they set forth bravely leaving their native land and kinsfolk to cross the mighty atlantic. How we children sang of America and how we rejoiced at the thought of the long trip, little realizing the enormous sacrifices our dear parents were making, especially our mother who was leaving an aged father, four sisters and two brothers. My father was the oldest of his family and the only surviving member.

After much preparation, both spiritual and temporal, we left Antwerp in the spring of 1892. We sailed on a steamer belonging to the Red Star Line and after an eventful voyage landed in the harbor of New York. From there we traveled by train to St. Paul, then to Hull, Iowa where Mr. Van der Woulden met us. He was our only friend in America. His family showed us hospitality until we were able to rent a home.

After being in this country for only six weeks, the first death occurred in our family. My youngest brother, Francis, an infant six months old, died and lies buried in Hull, Iowa. We then located at Alford, Iowa where my father had purchased a farm. While there, my mother received a message from Holland stating that her aged father had died. Next our house burned to the ground. The my sister, Catherine, aged twelve died of heart failure. There being no Catholic cemetery in Alford, she was buried in Rock Valley, Iowa. After all these hardships my parents were compelled to give up our home and we were advised by Father McCormick then of Alford, Iowa to rent a place near Larchwood. It was while living on this farm that I had the happiness of receiving my first Holy Communion and of being confirmed on the same day at the age of eleven on Saturday, June 18, 1899. Father McCormick who at that time had charge of both Alford and Larchwood, gave me my first Holy Communion and Archbishop Hennessy confirmed me.

Finally after locating on a farm near Lester, Iowa, times became more prosperous. As there was no Catholic Church here we attended Sunday Mass at both Rock Rapids and Larchwood. Father Cooke had by this time been given charge of the latter parish. It was during our residence at Lester that I had the good fortune of being sent to St. Mary's Academy, Rock Valley, Iowa, where I met our good Sisters. The intervening years I had attended the rural public schools. I was much edified at the simple life of these humble Franciscans. After staying here for almost two years I wrote the country examinations, passed, received a third grade uniform county certificate and was teaching rural school at the age of sixteen.

I taught in the rural schools for three years and during that time I felt strongly the need of a supernatural motive for obedience in the lives of the children. Many a time I thought if I could only tell them to obey for the love of God. During that time a mission was held in our parish by Father Lambert, a Redemptorist Father. It was on that occasion that I decided to enter the Religious state.

With Father Cooke's advice, I entered the convent on Aug. 2, 1906. I was received into the Community on May 13, 1907 with a class of fourteen by Archbishop James J. Deane. On July 31, 1909 I pronounced my first vows. Reverend Father Philip, O.F.M., officiating. Six years later on Aug. 1, 1915 I took my final vows.

I have been stationed at St. Pauls School, Washington, Iowa, at St. Michail's School, Norway, Iowa, at St. John's School Bancroft, Iowa, at St. Mary's School, Waterloo, Iowa, at St. Mary's School, Remsen, Iowa, at St. Christopher's School, Midlothian, Illinois.

I am now stationed at Mount Saint Francis, Dubuque, serving the Lord in the care of the sick and the infirm members of our Community.