



Sister Mary Giswalda Kramer *The Havre Daily News* DRICK KEENEY

80-year-old nun still active at Fort Belknap

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*The older Indians, most are dead;
the young must speak for them instead.
Most young people do not care,
their Indian way of life to spare.
With them the Indian way is lost,
they will not share, at any cost.
Now, when the good in cultures past
could calm this trouble world at last,
so few are left to spread the word—
to mention it, they think absurd.
I plead with you, dear Indian youth,
preserve the culture of your birth.*

—Sister M. Giswalda Kramer, O.S.F., 1979

Even as a little girl in Wisconsin, Sister M. Giswalda Kramer had a feeling she would devote her life to being a nun. After all, she walked around with a towel hanging from her head, pretending that the impromptu headpiece was a nun's veil.

At the age of 16, in the middle of her junior year in high school, she entered training at the Order of Saint Francis' mother house in Milwaukee.

At the age of 18, she took her vows, and became a nun, the only nun who would come out of her family of four sisters.

"I was a teacher right from the start," Sister Giswalda says today. "I come from a whole family of teachers. The first teacher I ever had was my own aunt."

This Friday, Sister Giswalda celebrates her 80th birthday, and the fact that she's 80 is surprising. She's spry and witty, and extremely light on her feet. Eighty years old she may be, but it's more like she's eighty years young.

"I'm still active and going," she says. "I'm quite proud of that. Most of my

crowd are retired. But the mountain air is especially good. This air is beautifully damp."

It was in 1936 that Sister Giswalda was sent to Montana. Her mother superior, Mother Stanislaus, sent Sister Giswalda and three other nuns to the St. Paul's Mission in Hays.

"It was terribly tough in the beginning," she says. Because of the rigors of taking over the mission, Sister Giswalda was soon given a respite away from the mission. "You can't

think of her — for the Gros Ventres, the pipe is sacred, and it signifies peace.

Sister Giswalda has taught classes from first grade on up in her years at the mission. Now, she teaches only one home economics class per day. The rest of her day is spent in administrative duties.

But, not all has been peaches and cream at the mission. On Dec. 5, 1973, the mission's high school and other buildings burnt to the ground. "It's a

school was devastated, and half the convent was burnt beyond repair.

Despite 1973's fire, a new school and convent were reconstructed.

Her days now are somewhat routine, she says. "I get up at five, and say my prayers," she says. "I take an hour or more for that. I like a lot of time. I go to Mass at seven, and go to the school at quarter to eight and open the building and receive the first children. I turn on the P.A. system and play some good music, some classical music, just to open the children up to it so they know there is that kind of music. They don't need that bing, bing, bing all the time. Then I make phone calls and go around to all the rooms. The mornings go all too fast."

Her afternoons are spent in her office, and she goes home to the convent at about 5 p.m. "I get tired at the end of a school day," she says, "but that's my right."

Sister Giswalda has started several pen pal friendships throughout the country. One pen pal of hers, Walt Goldsworthy of Three Lakes, Wis., started correspondence with her when his son became ill.

"He was very ill," Sister Giswalda says. "We prayed our heads off for him. He got better."

Goldsworthy says, "I have never met the good sister. However, she has been a faithful pen pal for the last five years. I admire her courage, her spirit and her dedication."

Dedication is the word. Sister Giswalda is totally dedicated to the Gros Ventres of the Fort Belknap reservation.

"Montana is my adopted state," Sister Giswalda says, "and the Indians are my people."

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burn your candles at both ends for too long," she says.

After a rest of six years away from the mission, Sister Giswalda returned there, and has remained there ever since.

"I was adopted into the (Gros Ventre-Fort Belknap) tribe," she says. "I've lived my life throughout and with these people."

So she has. The Gros Ventres of the Fort Belknap Reservation obviously respect and love her. They gave her the Indian name of "Pipe Woman," a name that symbolizes how much the Indians

day I'll never forget," Sister Giswalda says.

"At six every morning, I went to the school to turn up the thermostat on every floor. Right after Mass that day, I returned to the school, and didn't smell or see anything. Then I went to the convent to eat breakfast. When I was just about done, the kitchen doorbell rang."

The sisters ran to the schoolgrounds, and Sister Giswalda says the fire was too far gone for anything to be done. Tears were running down her face, she adds. By the time the fire subsided, the