

Sister Rose Mack: A Life Filled with Transitions and Surprises

Early tragedy shaped the course of Sister's life

Sister Rose Mack's remarkable life story, told in the Spring 2025 issue of the School Sisters of St. Francis's *Alive* magazine, includes 90 years as a religious sister, the longest tenure in her congregation's history. You can read the full article on our website's Publication page: <https://www.sssf.org/SSSF/Media-Room/Publications.htm>

Sister Rose was born on December 7, 1917, to John Sebastian Mack and Marceline (Yonner) Mack. Her family had a large farm in Saskatchewan, Canada, and with five brothers and two sisters, there was always something to do and explore.

Along with all the fun and adventure, Rose had her share of responsibilities. One of her main chores was caring for the chickens and collecting their eggs.

Sadly, when Rose was six years old, her mother passed away from pneumonia. She and her siblings were separated to live with relatives. Rose went to live nearby with an uncle and his wife.

After Rose completing fourth grade, one of Rose's aunts traveled to Canada and brought her to live with her family in Dane, Wisconsin, near Madison. Reflecting on that transition, Sister Rose recalled, "I thought I was going to a faraway, foreign country because I was only in the fourth grade. I didn't realize that Canada was right next to the United States." Rose was the only one of her siblings who moved to the United States.

In Dane, Rose attended St. Michael Catholic School, where she was taught by the School Sisters of St. Francis. She met Sister Zita, a teacher whose kindness and compassion inspired her. Sister Zita became a role model for Rose, planting the seed for her own calling to religious life.

Two of Rose's aunts were Notre Dame sisters, and when she lived with her Uncle John, he often told her, "You're going to be a sister one day." Rose would immediately dismiss the idea. Everything changed, though, when Rose met Sister Zita.

"I was drawn to Sister Zita because she was a wonderful person," Sister Rose said. "The Spirit came to me, and that's how I became a sister."

Years later, Sister Rose and the sisters in the community were in for a surprise that stemmed from her childhood years. It was during her time as a homemaker at St. Joseph Convent in Wilmette, Illinois. As the presidential election drew near, the sisters at the Motherhouse in Milwaukee made a very unexpected discovery: Sister Rose was not a United States citizen!

“They were all shocked and surprised – nobody knew,” Sister Rose said. She had been living in the United States as a Canadian citizen for more than two decades. After much discussion and paperwork, Sister Rose finally applied for her U.S. citizenship. She traveled to Ashland, Wisconsin, to take her citizenship test and Sister Rose finally and officially became a United States citizen on November 28, 1948.