



Short Ears, Long Tales

Courte Oreilles Lakes Association

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Sister Felissa—on Lac Courte Oreilles since 1961

By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

On the banks of Little Courte Oreilles Lake sits St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission. The School Sisters of St. Francis from Milwaukee have been working at the Mission for over 100 years, one of them since 1961—Sister Felissa Zander. Her 55 years do not betray her age, which she will not provide to anyone except to say, “Many moons.” Religious life has buoyed her spirit and her person—lithe, lean and few lines on a face remarkably youthful.



The habit picture of Sister Felissa was taken in 1962. Shown are the two lead dancers for school Indian Dancing, Louis Nickence and his sister Betty Nickence. Photo submitted.

Born in Cross Plains, Wisconsin about 20 miles west of Madison, Sister Felissa was a young woman when she entered St. Joseph Convent in Milwaukee. She went to Alverno College in Milwaukee for a Bachelor’s Degree in Education and Music and received her Master’s Degree at Superior.

Living religious life with a career in teaching and music, Sister Felissa said each year in August she receives an “obedience of ministry.”

“My first mission was St. Anthony of Padua School in Milwaukee with 54 fourth graders in my classroom,” she said. “After that I was transferred to St. Michael’s School in Kewaskum, Wisconsin with 30 children in my classroom but three grades to teach, plus church music.”

It was then on to St. Aloys School in Nebraska for two years before she was transferred to Reserve, Wisconsin on the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation, where today she is the principal, full-time teacher of multi-grades, and part-time music teacher for the school and the three cluster parishes of St. Francis Solanus in Reserve, St. Ignatius in New Post and St. Phillip in Stone Lake.

Since the school is non-tuition, there is no funding for a secretary, janitor, and other personnel usually employed at most church/school parishes, so she picks up some of those duties as well, including helping to operate the St. Francis Solanus Souvenir Shop on the grounds, which sells genuine, handmade Ojibwe crafts.



Sister Felissa today as she stands on the waters of Lac Courte Oreilles. Photo submitted.

One of the things that first struck Sister Felissa when she arrived at St. Francis Solanus Mission was the lake.

“I was awed with the beautiful location. When I first saw little Lac Courte Oreilles Lake in our backyard I was more than delighted. I wanted to go for a swim many times that first year, but we Sisters were not allowed to swim at that time,” she said, adding, “However, we had boat rides with the oars—no motor boat then. Many years later we had a motor donated for the boat (and) in the 90s we had a much better boat donated from a very generous couple from Illinois.”

The Sisters also tried their hands at fishing, which was “loads of fun” but not fruitful, she said. She also recalls that in the 60s and 70s during the winter they would use the frozen lake for school recesses.

“The older children would shovel the snow, even when quite deep, making a wonderful skating rink for the children . . .and with a huge donation of skates from a hockey team in Wausau each child had his/her own pair of skates, so the whole school would be out on Lac Courte Oreilles Lake having a blast!,” she said.

Today, especially on hot days, school children are taught their classes out on the banks of the lake, and they are also taught lake rules, safety and prevention of polluting the lakes, said Sister Felissa.

Sister Felissa said she finds the lake usually quite pristine, quiet and soothing with gorgeous sunrises and sunsets. She said the lake has helped them through bad storms with electric outages—even once for four days when they had to run with buckets to get lake water to keep certain things working. “We were mighty grateful for the lake,” she said.

She also points out their gratitude for the “good people who live on these shores,” acknowledging the many benefactors and volunteers of St. Francis Mission, including the people of Victory Heights who provide care of the Chapel; the people of the WISMO Club; Bill and Julie Zimmer who worked to publish a postcard book of the St. Francis Solanus Mission Church windows; and the people who contributed to and the people who published (Tom and Sue Burgess) the book “Tales of Lac Courte Oreilles.” These books are sold in the souvenir shop and people come from near and far to purchase them,” she said.



A recent photo of Sister Felissa pointing to Saint Francis Solanus School. Photo submitted.

Sister Felissa also pointed out that Elmer Corbine Jr., who lives on the shores of Big Lac Courte Oreilles, has been the caretaker for the Lakeshore Fishing Club and the St. Francis Solanus School Bus Driver for the past 47 years. Elmer is a direct descendent of John Baptiste Corbine, a fur trader who brought the missionaries to the Mission back in the 1790s.

“Elmer is retiring this year, 2016, and we congratulate him for his wonderful service and wish him the best in his retirement,” Sister Felissa said.

Sister Felissa has high praise for COLA, saying they are grateful to host the Annual COLA Meeting every June, and supportive of the efforts by COLA to preserve the lake water.

“COLA is always welcome here,” she said.

COLA THANKS LOCAL CRANBERRY GROWERS FOR INSTALLING CLOSED WATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

COLA has been working to resolve the problem of excess phosphorous in LCO and the effect it has had on the lake’s unique cold water fishery.

One source of excess phosphorus is cranberry bogs that require millions of gallons of water throughout the year. The water is pumped into the bogs directly from lakes and other waters on which these operations are located. But that deep water is not needed all the time, so each time a bog is flooded with lake water for frost protection, pest control, or harvesting, the water is returned back to the lake containing phosphorus, nitrogen, and pesticides used in the growing of cranberries.

The solution is a closed system where the water that is drained from the bogs is pumped to a holding basin rather than back into the lake, thereby giving cranberry growers the ability to store and re-use the water they need. Two forward-thinking LCO growers have recently implemented closed systems. Two bogs down and two bogs to go. Progress is being made.

IN THE NEWS

[COLA and LCO Tribe ask Judge to Review DNR Denial on Phosphorus](#)

Sawyer County Record
June 22, 2016

RECENT PRESS RELEASES

[Lake Association and LCO Tribe Proceed with Legal Action to Protect Lac Courte Oreilles](#)

WELCOME TO COLA'S NEW TREASURER, CHRIS BEDWELL

COLA is happy to welcome Chris Bedwell to the Board of Directors as its new Treasurer. Chris has done all the bookkeeping and financials for her own company for the past 14 years and is an advanced user of QuickBooks software. She and her husband purchased their lake home in 2013. We are very fortunate that she has stepped forward. Steve Lillyblad, COLA's previous treasurer, will work with Chris to smooth out the transition. Thank you Chris!

COLA is still recruiting for two other board positions, one focusing on forestry practices and the other on watershed outreach.

SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

We'd like to spread the news of COLA's good people and good works throughout the upper Couderay River watershed. If you have friends or family on nearby lakes who would enjoy Short Ears Long Tales, [let us know](#).

Help COLA by sharing this newsletter with friends

Support COLA by contributing to the [Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation](#).

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join](#).

THE COLA/LCOFI GOLF TOURNAMENT HAS BEEN CANCELLED

ARCHIVED ISSUES OF SHORT EARS, LONG TALES

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COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

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