

A Lifetime in Education

Sharing Resources

by Fr. Robert
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“Where’s Elizabeth?” comes the question in a laugh. Elizabeth—she likes to be called Liz—Schmidt is recounting how her parents momentarily lost track of her as her family was boarding a ship from their German homeland to the United States just before the First World War.

“They found me, then got my brother Henry in tow and the journey began,” she said. There is always a twinkle in Liz’s eye and often pleasant laughter behind the voice. And there’s something about the voice, something one wouldn’t expect from a woman who has taught in Chicago’s public schools for many years.

The journey that began in Hamburg and included a brief stay in New York ended in Texas. It’s a Texas accent that Liz has after all these years. She attended St. Edward Grade School and High School for Girls in Dallas.

“It was during the early years at St. Edward’s that my father, Gustave, who was a Lutheran at the time, helped me with my Baltimore Catechism lessons,” Liz said, adding with a chuckle, “That formidable series of books must have made an impression on him, headstrong as he was, because he later came into the Church.”

Gustave Schmidt had trained in Germany to be an actor, and studied under some of the “greats” in Berlin, according to Liz. But that talent wasn’t in much demand in the Texas of the Roaring Twenties and Depression 30s. Fortunately he also possessed marvelous mechanical skills, which, along with some sales ability, he parlayed over the years into a successful tool-making business that he later moved to Chicago.

Liz herself wanted to be a teacher, so after graduation from St. Edward’s, she went to study teaching at Our Lady of Victory in Fort Worth. She graduated with a bachelor’s

degree, and continued her studies in California at Dominican College, and Catholic University in San Rafael.

She went on to teach in California Catholic grammar schools for five years: for the first two years in Hollister; then three years in Porterville.

Next, it was back to Texas. Liz taught for 20 years in Catholic grade schools in Dallas. Some of the summers were spent studying at St. Louis University, where she met her first Jesuits. Here she received a master’s degree in education.

After teaching for 25 years, long enough for many teachers to give serious thoughts to retirement, Liz Schmidt was about to launch another 25-year teaching career—this time in Chicago.

“Father died in 1953, leaving my mother to live alone in Chicago,” she explained. “I had tried teaching in Canada for a brief period, but didn’t care for it. So I came down to Chicago and lived with my mother until she died in 1981.”

Liz began her second career in teaching in Chicago grade schools at Burr. As she did before, she “upgraded” her skills, this time with course work at Loyola University. And she became familiar with more Jesuits. While at Burr she taught night school downtown for people on public assistance. Her second assignment was a four-year stint at Jirka school in the Pilsen neighborhood.

The third and longest of her assignments was Liz’s 19 years at McCutcheon School in the Uptown area, where she served successively as classroom teacher, librarian and assistant principal. It was in the latter position, as teacher-in-charge that she administered and taught a reading program for teach-



Liz Schmidt devoted her life to teaching youth. Along the way she got to know Jesuits and embarked on a career of sharing her resources with Jesuit ministries.

ers. Nevertheless, her favorite project was helping children with discipline and study problems.

“These kids needed a little extra help,” Liz was convinced. “So I had my office—which was quite large to begin with—equipped to seat a half-dozen of these maladjusted little citizens. We’d make conversation, do some informal reading lessons, and play games.

“It had a marvelous effect on the children. It might be the only time in the history of Chicago’s public schools that a child liked being sent to the assistant principal’s office.”

Liz retired in 1984.

“At that point in my life I began to real-

“I began to realize more than before the responsibility I had for the resources inherited from my parents and what I had acquired during my own career.”

ize more than before the responsibility I had for the resources inherited from my parents and what I had acquired during my own career,” she recalled. “I wanted to put those resources where I knew they would do the most good.

“So, I got in touch with a very good friend of mine over at St. Ignatius Parish—Father Bill Verbryke—and he introduced me to Father John Costello.”

Liz, Fr. Costello and the Chicago Province’s attorney for estate planning worked out a strategy that included a gift annuity based on the sale of some real estate holdings. Proceeds from the sale of the property now form the cornerstone of an endowment program being developed for the new Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. Located in the heavily Mexican-American neighborhood of Pilsen, the school is expected to provide innovative educational opportunities for the children of immigrant people in that area.

Liz’s generosity is a direct result of her familiarity and friendship with numerous Jesuits over the years. A Jesuit partnership with Liz Schmidt is possible because of her dedication to youth. It is also possible because of her warmth and openness and willingness to share her resources.

“It’s thrilling for me to know that my life’s work and resources will continue in the education of Chicago’s youth,” Liz Schmidt said, adding, “I taught in Pilsen.”



The Chicago Province gratefully acknowledges the deceased donors listed below who remembered the Jesuits in their wills. Many Jesuit ministries and programs have benefitted as a result of their generosity.

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