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Catching Health with Diane Atwood

Sister Maureen Wallace

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Diane

Welcome to another episode of Conversations About Aging, a Catching Health podcast. I'm Diane Atwood and I'm traveling around my home state of Maine interviewing people 60 and above about their lives and what it's like to be growing older. My guest today is Sister Maureen Wallace, who is a Sister of Mercy in Portland, Maine. We were introduced by a mutual friend, Sister Ellen Turner. Ellen and Maureen went to high school together and both joined the order of the Sisters of Mercy right after graduation.

Thank you Sister Maureen for agreeing to be interviewed. You're welcome. Yeah, you just kind of did a side eye there. What made you decide you're going to do this with me?

Sister Maureen: Sister Ellen. She mentioned it. Said that she was looking for a few people, so I said, oh, alright. I usually try to accommodate her.

Diane: Thank you, Sister Ellen. She said that you write all the obituaries for all of the Sisters?

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Sister Maureen: I do write them all. Lately I've written most of them.

Diane: How old are you?

Sister Maureen: 76.

Diane: And how did you happen to get the job of writing obituaries?

Sister Maureen: I've been doing it for years and years. When I was on the team, I used to kind of do some then when I became the life and ministry coordinator. I used to do them for the Sisters and I was there eight years so you know we were having an average of maybe eight sisters die some years eight, some only four and you know, because we're an aging community. So, I just wanted them to be right. That's the way I am and I wanted it to project who they were throughout their life not just at the end. So I just started writing them. But I always liked to write. I write for Deering Pavilion. Once a month I do an interview and I write one of them, whoever they ask me to write up, I do that for the newsletter.

Diane: So you go and you interview the person, one of the residents or just the Sisters who live there?

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Sister Maureen: No, no, the residents, any of them. Sister Carol is the resident coordinator there or manager I guess it is, and she lives with me. So she asked me one day because she knows I write the obituaries, so.

Diane: Sister Carol LaChance? Yes. Well, I know her because my cousin lived there for a while. I keep bumping into the Sisters of Mercy everywhere I go, because they played an important role in my life ever since I was a student at St. Joseph's College in the late 70s.

Sister Maureen: Yes, yes, I was there. Were you teaching there? No, I was on the Indian reservation for 31 years. And when I finished I guess I wasn't around here. I was at the reservation at that time. I was at the college in the 60s. And then I went to Fairfield to teach for a year and a half or so. And then I went to Peter Dana Point that's Indian Township. I was only there for a year and a half and they sent me to Pleasant Point. And that's where I lived out my 31 years in Maine Indian Ed.

Diane: And now you're here in Portland, Maine.

Sister Maureen: Now I'm here in Portland, Maine. I was elected to the team back in 1999.

Diane: What do you mean by the team?

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Sister Maureen: It's our governance team, who would, there were four or five of us who governed the Sisters in Maine, you know, for life or their work, ministries, for any anything that would, a Sister may need. A religious governance, you know, to do with canon law, that kind of work.

Diane: And is there still an office? Is it Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Did I get that right?

Sister Maureen: Yes, that's right. And then that's where I went first that on Riverside Street. We went to the Mother House and I found that little building and I was the life and ministry administrator. We used to call ourselves llama, the llamas. There were five of us in the different northeast areas. And I was there for eight years. Okay. And then I retired. We just have two terms. You know, like the government? Two terms. Term limits. Right, we have limits. So from there, I took a couple months off in the summer but I couldn't stand it. So then, they told us to take a year but I couldn't, so then I went to Riverton School, and at Riverton, I went back to what I originally did when I left college, was to teach first grade. Oh, my. And so I'm teaching first grade reading now for six years.

Diane: And that's where you just came from?

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Sister Maureen: Right. It's more like a remedial, kids that really need a little boost to get them moving. We have a lot of ESL kids over there. I would say 60% is ESL. We have 500 kids over there from preschool to five fifth grade.

Diane: So I guess it's fair to say there's no retirement for you in sight.

Sister Maureen: No, no, not I hope not because I won't retire well.

Diane: Well, I need to go back to the beginning. Where were you born and raised?

Sister Maureen: I was born in Quincy, Massachusetts, but only because my aunt lived there. My mother and my aunt were both from Ireland and my aunt settled in Boston and my mother got married and came to Portland. And my aunt never thought that Portland had good doctors because she thought it was so far out of everything, so she insisted that my mother come and have the baby, and that was that was me in Boston, so I went to Quincy Massachusetts Hospital. And then my father was on the railroad and he was here and, of course, once we could move, my mother could move, she came back here and we lived on Massachusetts Avenue in St. Patrick's Parish in Portland.

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Diane: Know it well, and were you an only child?

Sister Maureen: No, I had a brother. Was he born in Quincy? He was born in Quincy, too, yeah. He was a year and a half younger than I was. Yeah.

Diane: And it's fair to say that you grew up in a pretty Catholic family?

Sister Maureen: Oh, yes. I went to St. Patrick's School, Cathedral High School, St. Joseph's College, and Fordham University. All Catholic.

Diane: Where along the line as you were growing up, did you realize or decide that you wanted to be a nun?

Sister Maureen: Well, I kind of in grammar school, we always had different Sisters and there was one that was lovely in third and fourth grade. We had double grades, and Sister Mary Francis, and I always wanted to be like her. Then that went out of my head when I had a few others and I went to Cathedral and we had Sister Joseph Mary and Sister Brendan, those two I was close to and, but I didn't really want to be a nun. I was thinking of being a medical secretary because I took business and for some reason it just came to me and this is going to sound kind of strange but I would pray not to be a nun. But I was kind of religious you know, I listened attentively in religion class and I went to Mass a lot, said the rosary lot but my family

catching

DIANE
ATWOOD

health

would take us to church a lot, you know, for Novenas or, not just on Sunday. So, anyway, Sister Brendan one day said, are you going to be, are you going in the convent? And I said, oh, I don't know if I'll go this year, maybe some year. She said if you don't get in after high school you'll never go because she probably knew me better than I knew me. So I went.

Diane: You said you prayed sometimes not to.

Sister Maureen: Not to be a nun, so must have been pretty strong. But I was a kid, you know, I was in high school so I didn't really, you know, realize I think that it was my vocation evidently.

Diane: But your peers, your friends, were you the only one in your crowd?

Sister Maureen: No. Sister Ellen was in my class and Margaret Coyne. And she became a nun, too? And she became a nun. And Judy Fairweather. She left but she has since died. So there was a, and Mary Miller, she was a year ahead of me. She's here. So there were four or five of us, five or six, maybe.

Diane: And we're talking about back in the 50s or early 60s? 61, 1961. And you graduated from Cathedral High School? Right. We graduated in June and we entered in September. What was it like to enter?

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Sister Maureen: Well, we came over. Actually, it was in this building. We came over here and they called it the Postulate. It meant our first year of introduction, you know, into religious life. And we had Sister Mary Anthony was in charge and she would start gradually teaching a group of high school kids really what religious life was all about. So I'm sure we gave her a hard time at times when we were supposed to be quiet. We weren't quiet. I mean, some of them were, but I wasn't too good about it. And so gradually, she would teach us the different rules, so to speak. We have a book, the Constitutions, I guess is what, or the rule and each time, we'd learn about the vows poverty, chastity, obedience, and the care of the poor, sick, and uneducated and what we were working towards in a few years and we'd be here nine months. And at the end of nine months, if you haven't gone home, you had the freedom to go home if you wanted, it if it wasn't for you. And we wore special dresses to the floor, practically. White dresses? No, black and thin veils. And so, anyway, if it wasn't for you, you could leave and then if you wanted to stay, we went to what we call the Novitiate. So we had a ceremony called Reception, and I remember my poor mother. All she did was cry.

Diane: Did she want you to be a nun?

catching

DIANE
ATWOOD

health

Sister Maureen: No, she didn't want to be a nun because in Ireland they were very strict in the convent and my mother said all you do is wash floors and sew all day. And I said, well, I don't even know how to wash a floor and I certainly can't sew. So, my mother thought, well, she'll be home. I won't last long. She kept my room the same. So sad. My father was pretty good, but my father used to sneak out here to visit me all the time and they'd say, you're not supposed to have company but go ahead, 10-15 minutes. But they were really good about letting my father, my mother would say she's gonna get in trouble every time you sneak out there.

Diane: Sounds anything but what your mom had conjured up. Right. Right. I have to stop you for a second because you when you said here, so you we are now in is it St. Catherine's?

Sister Maureen: Yes, and this was what we had for our, we called it our Postulate. And during that time, because we didn't have these apartments, you know, we had big rooms for our gathering spaces. We had some classrooms where we started to learn different, even college classes were taught to us, too, and they would transfer it up to St. Joe's, you know. Up to St. Joseph's College? Yeah, it was Sisters that taught on that level.

Diane: Why didn't you move into the convent, which was out on Stevens Avenue?

catching

DIANE
ATWOOD

health

Sister Maureen: That's where we went the second year. Okay, so for the first year. The first year we were here, isolated from the big convent because we had to learn the ropes, so to speak.

Diane: And anywhere in that year at any time, did you think oh, my gosh, what have I done? I want to get out of here or did it just strengthen your resolve?

Sister Maureen: No, I'd say I don't know if I'm going to stay or not. Every month, probably. I don't know if I'll stay, oh, I'll give it another month, see how I do. So that's what happened every month. Then it was time to make the decision to go across the yard to the Motherhouse. And that was what we call Canonical year. That was a strict year. You could only visit your family or they visited you, I mean, four times during that year.

Diane: And that year, you lived in the convent, in the big convent?

Sister Maureen: Right. And by the way, when you entered the convent in those days, in '61 you could not visit your family. Why? Part of the way they did things the rule was just strict. And your family could visit you, every month they could visit you and they'd come out and we'd have a picnic once a year with them and that kind of thing. See, it was all new to us. We

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DIANE
ATWOOD

health

didn't realize probably what the family was going through, what our parents were going through, mine in particular, were going through it.

Diane: And is that something that you learned later or when you did get to see your parents did they vocalize how they were feeling?

Sister Maureen: Oh yes, my father used to think this was a jail and the first Christmas he gave me black and white mittens.

Diane: You had a good sense of humor, you and your family.

Sister Maureen: Yeah, they did. So anyway, back to the, so it was time to decide whether you were gonna go to the Canonical year, which was your Reception and Reception Day meant that your family came, you walked down the aisle and in the big chapel over there and you had on your black outfit from Postulant year. And halfway through, you left and you went back out in a big room there and you changed into the white veil, the heavier veil and I think it was a white, no, excuse me, it was a black dress with the white veil, but out there, they cut your hair. Oh, did you go in with long hair? Ah, yeah, well, pretty long. Shoulder length, probably it was. And that was a sign of worldliness, I guess, that you are not going to be so much worldly and so when we came back in, excuse me, we had on the coif. See, we didn't have that all on before.

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Diane: 18:23 And that's that closed piece that goes right over your head?

Sister Maureen: Yeah, so you only see your face. And then, they call this a guimpe. It was the round thing in front, front of you, and on the habit, and we had the belt and the rosary beads? My mother burst out crying during chapel, yeah.

Diane: Did she want you to get married and have grandchildren and all of that?

Sister Maureen: And she didn't want me to be so far away and I said, well, what if I married somebody in the service, and I was across the ocean somewhere? And then I'd say to her, well you left your mother. You were in Ireland, so. I know.

Diane: Did she ever come around? My mother? Yeah, did she ever come to terms with it?

Sister Maureen: Yeah, once we could go home and once it was, yeah, I think she came to terms with it. She was alright, yeah.

Diane: And did your dad take you back to black and white [mittens]?

catching

DIANE
ATWOOD

health

Sister Maureen: I wore them. No, they were all right. My father was kind of proud, proud of that. My brother was a policeman and a detective and I was the nun. And he said, gee, if I had had more children, I might have had a doctor or. They got married late in life, see. The Irish fathers and men took care of their mothers a lot.

Diane: So your dad, was he much older than your mother?

Sister Maureen: No, my mother was older, too. My mother was 38 and my father was 42. So they were older and my mother's the one that wanted to be the nun.

Diane: Oh, you mean she wanted to be a nun when she was younger?

Sister Maureen: She always thought, when she came out here. She always was thinking, you know, maybe I'll be a because she worked in the priests' rectories, you know, she was religious and she always thought, well, maybe she'd get the call. She said I never heard the call. I was what kind of a call were you waiting for? They called it the call in those days. Anyway, so I went to the Novitiate and that's when we learned, we had all the theology studies and a lot on the rule and the Constitution and life as a Sister. And it was more cloistered than the year before and we didn't do

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

studies that year from the college. It was all religious or theology and we had Sister, Mother Austin, she was a little more strict but I loved her, she was lovely. She looked strict but she really wasn't that strict and so she tried to teach us how to be religious, you know, not run up the stairs.

Diane: Teach you how to be religious, you know, you might think that. Religious decorum I'd say. Ok, religious decorum as opposed to be religious, because isn't being religious sort of part of the call or how you've been living your life?

Sister Maureen: Oh, yeah, and both, I'd say both, you know, you want to deepen your prayer life and we prayed more that second year. And you know, like with the habit on you wouldn't go jumping up over the stairs, running up the stairs real fast like I was and we'd get told about it if we did things that you know, weren't in keeping, I suppose, with being ladylike.

Diane: So that lasted for a whole year that existence and then that's when you?

Sister Maureen: Then we went into our second year of Novitiate they called it. So you had your first year Canonical, second year was more active. So during that second year, we went back to the college and we actually went to the college and took the regular courses, and whatever we

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

were going to be. Most of us were teachers at the time and some of them that were going into nursing. Most of the nurses in those days became nurses before they entered and they went to work at that time.

Diane: I didn't realize so much formal education was expected. When you went to St. Joe's that's what you were getting?

Sister Maureen: Yes, oh yeah, and most of us went to college. There were just very few that would not go to college, they might do something else.

Diane: So did you have an aptitude toward being an educator or did you have choices of fields that you'd like to go into?

Sister Mauren: We didn't have a lot of choice in those days. You kind of were trained to be teachers because of all the parochial schools that we staffed and so the only other one would be if you were going to Mercy Hospital in the office like for business or something that might be another choice. I used to be at Mercy Hospital in my senior year I was there from April to just till August. I was a stenographer in those days for Sister Mary Mercy. And I remember thinking when I entered I'm not letting on that I was ever there because I didn't want to do that. So no one ever said anything, so I love teaching. I always loved to teach. I even used to do it, you know,

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

when I was a kid, I had a little school so to speak, with the neighborhood kids, yeah.

Diane: So you went to St. Joseph's College then and graduated, you have an undergraduate degree from there?

Sister Maureen: Yes, yes. in education and then from there, I went to Fairfield. Fairfield, Maine. To teach? To teach, yeah. And at what point in this continuum, did you actually take your vows? Well, that's true. After Novitiate, after our second year in Novitiate, we could take our first vows. Now that's when that second year, in first year, too, they kind of watch and see and you talk to the person in charge and see if that's for you. And if you don't know it, they'll help you discern it. You discern whether you should stay or not. So we had some leave, because we had quite a few. I want to say we probably had 12 at the time. And, you know, one by one, a few of them would leave. And then what you did was take first vows, which meant you took them for maybe, I think it was three years. So during that three years when you were what we call juniors. We were in what we called the Juniorate, we came back here. To St. Catherine's? Yes, and our rooms were upstairs, and that's when we, most of us were all out though during the day because we were at school or we were still at the college or teaching. So, or nursing, at the time. And we would have some religious studies at night theology or something like that at night. And then we also

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

had to study, you know, at night, so it was kind of like that kind of a thing for about three years. It's a lot of work. Yes, yes. And then, at the end of three years now, you might be still out teaching during those three years, but you were still discerning.

Diane: Okay, so when you were at Fairfield teaching, and you were living up there, right or did you still live down here and have to commute?

Sister Maureen: No, we, I went up. I lived here for a little bit and all summers and vacations. And then we, no, I moved up there and I taught, but the one in charge here would go and make sure she checked in with us and visit and all that kinda thing. They didn't want to just leave you off on your own. No, no, no. And before that, I forgot this part, I did my practice teaching at Sacred Heart .

Diane: And that's down on Mellen Street. Yes, yes. I did it in first grade. Well, so what year would that would have been in the mid 60s? Right, right. Yeah. You may have had some of my brothers and sisters actually. Oh, really? Huh.

Sister Maureen: I never taught on my own there and that's when after that's when I went to Fairfield. What grade did you have up there? In Fairfield? I had first and second combined. First year teaching.

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Diane: It was fun though. I mean. It was fun. An adorable age.

Sister Maureen: And we had about 44, I remember that number. And I'm sure I didn't know what I was doing. but I did have fun and I loved it. And I was there 'til, then we had a meeting. I remember this. Mother Evangelist said, if anyone has a desire to go to any of the Indian reservations, to drop her a line, so I thought, maybe I'll do that, in my fervor. So I wrote to her and sure enough, in a year and a half I was on my way to Indian Township.

Sister Maureen: So you were there for just a year though, did you tell me? Just a year and a half because in those days, we were assigned places and one of the Sisters left from somewhere and then the ripple effect you know, they have to look to see who they can move. So there were three of us there, I think. Yeah, they were three of us, so they decided to take somebody from Township, send them to Pleasant Point, because somebody from Pleasant Point left. Okay. So I ended up at Pleasant Point and loved it there. So I was there until 1995. Wow. No, 1999.

Diane: That's a long time. Yeah. But you also went to Fordham. So where? In between. In between how?

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Sister Maureen: Summers. During the summers, Ellen and I would go to Fordham. She called me up one day and she said, you know, I think I'm going to go to get my masters and I said, oh, yeah, where you going and she said, Fordham. I said, oh, New York, oh, I think I'll go, too. She says well you've got to get permission from I think it was Mother Dennis at the time. So I called her up to see if I could go, too, she said, well, yeah, maybe Sister Ellen shouldn't be down there alone in New York, so Sister Ellen's cousin, Margaret Gargin, she was a Sister of Franciscan Missionary of Mary and they were on 45th Street. They had an orphanage at the time, she was in charge, and they were starting that transfer of sending the kids to foster homes and so they had extra rooms. It was a big convent, and so she and I went there, used to live there during the summers and go to Fordham in Lincoln Center. We went to Lincoln Center, and Sister Ellen went into, let's see, she was in. I was in, I'll do me first, I can remember that. Learning disabilities and Ellen was in behavior. So it was just starting learning disabilities to be deciphered and what kids needed and everything. So that really helped me.

I loved it, loved it. And I love New York. And they had something free on the weekends on every corner. So I'd say to Ellen, come on Ellen, let's go out. She'd say it's 10 o'clock. I said I know but the show's starting down the street and all the other nuns would be in bed. So we'd go down on the elevator and we each had a key so we could do that. And then there was a

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

place called Rosie O'Grady's and they had all the Irish music and I don't drink but I used to go over and I'd get ginger ale. And I don't know what the others got but I had ginger ale and we'd write on the napkins any of our favorite songs and a dollar and you sent it over to them they'd play all the Irish songs, what you wanted. It was great. We had a good time.

Diane: I'm thinking the average non-Catholic person, I'm thinking the average person had no idea about the fun you have.

Sister Maureen: I know. I didn't tell everybody.

Diane: Maybe now. Yeah, yeah. How long did it take you to get your masters?

Sister Maureen: I think it was four summers.

Diane: And then you headed back to Maine. And were you both on the same reservation?

Sister Maureen: We were a few years but then she went to Peter Dana Point and I stayed at Pleasant Point. Which is in Princeton, is it? Mine was in Perry, I was in Perry and she was in Princeton.

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Diane: So you were there for 31 years?

Sister Maureen: 31 years. It would really be 31 total, in Maine Indian Ed. So it would be what 30, 29 and a half at Pleasant Point, and one and a half at Indian Township. But 31 on Maine Indian Ed.

Diane: Were you teaching the first and second graders?

Sister Maureen: Yes, first and second double grades.

Diane: Did you live right on the reservation?

Sister Maureen: Yes, we had a convent there, right in back of that where the church, the church was out front and the convent was attached to it out back.

Diane: And how many of you were there? There were four of us at the time. And were you the only teachers or were there other teachers? Three teachers and we had a cook. All from the Sisters of Mercy?

Sister Maureen: Yes, yes. She used to, you know, get our dinners and then clean, but then that petered out, so we ended up with only three of us most of the time.

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Diane: And did you provide most of the education?

Sister Maureen: Yes, yes. We had one lay teacher, I remember, and he was the first one that was hired, because before that, it was always Sisters. He was there with us in the old school, and then when the government came in and decided that they recognized them in the Indian Land Claims and all that and we were going to get a new school. So let me see, that's when the lay teachers started to come in because we didn't have enough Sisters to staff more than three grades and they branched out into like five rooms.

Diane: So they did get a new school?

Sister Maureen: They did. They had, actually, Sister Ellen and I were the first ones in the new school. I had first and second and she had third and fourth. So we moved over there with our 30 some kids. And it was well, it was like a palace compared to what we were moving from. Yeah.

Diane: So the Sisters of Mercy lived and taught on how many different reservations in the state. The three. All three of them? The three in the state. Indian Township, Indian Island, and Pleasant Point. And what's the presence there now?

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Sister Maureen: Sadly, there's no presence on Indian Island or on Pleasant Point. Sister Carol is still at Indian Township. She just retired from teaching but she's present as far as pastoral goes. Okay. Yeah, and teaching our religion and visitations and things like that.

Diane: When you taught did you get paid? By any entity?

Sister Maureen: We got paid as social workers, like a stipend pay, I think until about the 60s and then we got paid, they recognized us more as teachers so we did get paid, now I don't know if we got full pay, can't remember that part because it all went to the Motherhouse. We didn't, we don't get our own checks.

Diane: You get just a stipend to live on?

Sister Maureen: Yeah, and then when we got into the government, we got better pay.

Diane: After the land claim settlement? Right, right. So now we're going to speed forward, because you were there for 31 years total and back in the late 90s, you left the reservation, and you've done other things since then,

catching

DIANE
ATWOOD

health

but suddenly here you are. How's life different for you now that you're in your late 70s?

Sister Maureen: Well, slowing down. In my head, it's the same, it's very strange. I was always a little, I was always active and I am probably a little hyper. Sister Ellen says that my dog is just like me. And I always was interested in doing things. I wasn't one to sit around. Now, I'm a little more one to sit around. I like to read or have some quiet and that's probably not like me as much as before. Because I used to say, well, no wonder these Sisters get up early and they pray. This is when I was first starting out. They're praying and they're not having any trouble and I'm exhausted. I'm exhausted and I'm trying to pray and this part's funny, too. I'm going back. When I was in Fairfield, there were about five of us Sisters there and we'd go to Mass. I mean, we'd go to meditation, like 5:15 we'd have to be in Chapel because we had to go to school and pray and then Mass and all. So anyway, I'd go in chapel and I'd fall asleep every time. So they finally says, well, you better go to the doctor. Must be something going on. So I'd go to the doctor down the street there. So he said, well, tell me about what happens. So I told him we have to get up at quarter of five and rush because you know, the night before you get showered and all that. So anyway, he says, and then what do you do? I said, we go in and we pray for at least a half hour to an hour. He said, well, there's nothing wrong with you, it's the rest of them. So I came home and told them that. Anything

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

change? Not much. But I used to tease them and say, well, it's hard to be a Gemini and an extrovert compared to the introverts. And I look at our community in general and you know, we have more introverts than we have extroverts. And when you look around and, you know how quiet some people are, and, and here I am, talk, talk talk.

Diane: Well, everybody needs people like you. You just made me think about how back when you became a nun, there were lots of young women becoming nuns. Yeah. Are there any young women becoming nuns these days?

Sister Maureen: Well, there are in the northeast, see, we're now all in the northeast together, the governance so to speak is northeast. And throughout the northeast, there are young people that are entering. Now, we're soon gonna be one as far as the whole United States and a few of the places connected with us like Belize and you know, like that, anyway, and there's about 12, I think at the moment, and they they all come together in one place like it was, I think it might be St. Louis now used to be San Antonio. So it's different places and they trained, you know, to be Sisters of Mercy in the modern day era.

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Diane: That's right. You don't have to wear anything anymore. No, we just wear regular clothes now. And what is your connection to a religious life other than what you decide to do on a day to day basis?

Sister Maureen: Well, it's, truthfully, it would be you're the way you were, so to speak, brought up in religious life, you know, like Mass, office, we say the office, but a lot of it is private. So, you don't really answer to anybody? Well, we still have our administrator. What I used to do on Riverside Street, the place you saw. We have an administrator there, Sister Mary Morey, and she doesn't call up and say did you say your prayers today, but she provides things to get together for community. Because some people are living alone and we encourage them to have somebody, one or two people they connect with, especially if they didn't feel well as something. But we get together and, like the book club we're in, some of us have book clubs, some of us, you know, go out for recreation, might go to a movie together.

Diane: Go to Irish pubs? No no, I don't go to the Irish pubs, there aren't enough around here. I just came from Ireland, though in October. Oh, that's wonderful. That's wonderful. So there are a lot of different communities or places where clusters of nuns are now living?

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The Convent house, the Motherhouse on Stevens Avenue is no longer a convent. That's right. But it's been made into apartments and there are several nuns who live there.

Sister Maureen: That's right. And then we also have down on Capisic Street, we have our retirement, well, it's really not retirement. I would say it's more assisted living and there are 16 sisters that live there. And a lot of us go down there and visit them or stay for lunch with them. So you know you, you still are connected.

Diane: Do you ever feel lonely?

Sister Maureen: No, I really don't, and I thank God I loved, I do love it, I've had a wonderful life. I really have. I've traveled. When I was on the reservation I used to travel two or three times a year, because I was principal, to Florida or New Mexico, anywhere where they were Indian clusters of different tribes, because we always had meetings. I even went to Hawaii and to Alaska. You know, so I probably wouldn't have done that if I wasn't in the convent. It's like a gift. I mean, I really saw the United States. And do you still get to do some traveling? Not much. I did go to Ireland, because my cousin just got married at 45 and before that, five years ago, I was there before for his brother who was also 45 at the time. You said the Irish get married later, yeah, and we had a wonderful time. Yeah, I have an

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older cousin, my age there, too, and his wife, so I was glad to see them. I have five different families I keep in contact with over there. Over there? Yeah.

Diane: As you reflect back on your life, is there anything you would change?

Sister Maureen: You know, I probably wouldn't because I love kids and we got when I was at Pleasant Point, we got to have a foster child for six months, which because of our circumstances, you know, moving around, well, most people moved around, I didn't move very far. But we weren't able to, you know, keep her, but we took her until we could find a family that would keep her because she had been in and out of so many foster homes. So I always thought that was a real blessing. And when she got married, oh, quite a while ago now, she called me and asked me to do the reading at Mass I think it was the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass. And then we saw her not too many years ago, we met and met her kids and, and keep in contact with her on Facebook. So you know, that's a blessing, I think that we wouldn't have had and also I used to do, we used to do a lot with domestic violence and we would have women stay with us, and when people go away for alcoholic treatment, we used to take the kids. So, you know, I had a lot of rich, I call them rich experiences. And when I was on the reservation I used to always feel when you walk out that front door you

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meet the gospel. You really do. It makes me sad. Ellen's just like this because we liked it so much. It really was a wonderful experience. But it was an exhausting experience, too, because it was constant, you know,

Diane: But you really gave back, didn't you?

Sister Maureen: I tried. I tried. You can only do what you can do.

Diane: And you're still doing it by wanting to teach at Riverton.

Sister Maureen: I love it over there. I love Riverton. There's a lot of different nationalities and that's why I see richness in that. You know, we have a lot of Muslim kids, we have Asian kids, you know, all different tribes from Africa and they all have their own little customs and, you know, and I'm, I'm amazed at them. Some of them have come from terrible war-torn countries and the kids pick up the English so fast, you know, and they try so hard and I love it when little kids are going hand in hand down the hall, and they never see color, you know. I don't know what happens, but they never see color when they're that age.

Diane: When you reach this ripe old age of seventy-six, you've learned a few lessons in your life. Right? So we need some pearls of wisdom that you might pass on to people of all ages.

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Sister Maureen: Yeah. Well, you know, as I've gotten older, I learned that some people are just not in a box. Some people color outside the lines and if you if we could only watch and listen and see the diversity in them, no matter what color could be, Caucasian, can be anybody. Because I think we need those kind of people that aren't like me, let's say. There's a richness and and even though I'm not like that most of the time, I may be a little outside the box sometimes, but I think that it's what makes everybody different and difference isn't bad. That's what one of the lessons we need in society today I feel. Difference is not bad. Difference is good.

Diane: Do you think about what the future holds for you and also for the world?

Sister Maureen: Yeah, I feel bad right now about the world because I think there's so much violence. I think there's violence, you pick up the paper, in Maine there's violence, somebody died, domestic violence, there's children, look at the children that are in those cages down there on the border, and so violent. I guess we're just living in a society of violence right now. Words are violent, you know, it's sad, it's very sad and sometimes all you can do is pray. I'm not sure. I was just gonna say that you used to have to get up a quarter of five and pray for an hour, you must be on your knees all the time lately. I'm on the other end, right, praying. At least I can pick my time now.

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Diane: So about you and your future? How do you see your future? Have you decided what you want to happen to you if you say, run into those inevitable problems?

Sister Maureen: Right. You know, I try not to give it a lot of thought because it could be discouraging I'm afraid, but no, I'm just gonna go with the flow. That's about all you can do. I think. You don't have control of that and I'm just hoping that when the day comes that I'm not able to do what I can do now that I can do it gracefully and that I think that I feel that I have I've had a real good life. So I can't be, you know, ranting and raving about the future. We all have to go at some point. And I just hope like I say, I can go gracefully and not linger too long. Not much pain. Wake up dead. Right, but you know, you don't want to die while you're living. That's how I feel. So every day we should be living and not thinking of dying because it's gonna come long enough.

Diane: One question that I often ask people is what makes it a good day for you? So on a regular basis, what makes it a good day for you?

Sister Maureen: You know, I don't want to sound like I'm some saint, but every day is a good day. You know, if you're breathing, you're up and moving, and when you hear of so many people that are so sick, and I thank

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God that I'm not. It's a good thing. It's good and every day is different, you know, and I think it's up to me to make the day good.

Diane: 1:00:35 And there's never been a moment that you've ever regretted that you became a nun? No, really. I do have to ask you, have you written your own obituary?

Sister Maureen: No, no, but I always ask someone when I'm doing, I'm over there at Deering Pavilion when I'm interviewing. I always say to them, what do you want your legacy to be? And I thought about that one day about me and I said, you know, the only thing I think I'd want my legacy to be is that I was kind. Because I think that's one of the most important virtues and have compassion and mercy.

Diane: I think you've got that covered. Thank you.

You've been listening to *Conversations About Aging*, a Catching Health Podcast. I'm Diane Atwood and I've been talking with Sister Maureen Wallace, a Sister of Mercy from Portland, Maine.

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