

Pipe Woman, a nun, tells story of mission school in prose and poetry

"That's My Baby" by Sister M. Giswalda Kramer, the story of St. Paul's Mission School on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation at Hays, has been published. It was printed by the Chinook Opinion. The nun, whose Indian name is Pipe Woman, has told of the school and related activities through the years in poetry and prose.

The author was born in Milwaukee, Wis., in 1903. Her father was a staunch admirer of the American Indian and passed that feeling on to his daughter. After religious training was at St. Joseph Convent in Milwaukee, she was received into the order as a



Sister Giswalda

School Sister of St. Francis and given the name of Sister Mary Giswalda.

Sister Giswalda was trained to be a teacher and taught in Nebraska, Colorado, Illinois, Wisconsin and Montana. She calls Montana her adopted state and the Indians, her people.

"My baby? Yes That's my baby! For her I gave the best years of my life and for her I'll die," she has said of the mission school. In 1936 Mother Stanislaus had called Sister Giswalda and announced, "We are taking over a new Indian mission in the West, St. Paul's, and I am putting you in charge." Sister Giswalda was thunderstruck; all she could say was,

"Yes Mother." She was 33 and had not been a superior before.

Sister Giswalda and three other nuns, with a trunk full of warm underwear, shawls, sweaters, overshoes, mittens and a big box lunch, set out as for an expedition to the North Pole. They took two Boston ferns, which soon died, and a crown of thorns, which weathered many years. Father Balfe, who met them at the railway station, said later, "All I could see at first was ferns."

In the spring of 1937 the Diocese of Great Falls held a Eucharistic Congress in which the upper grades in all the schools were to participate, which the Fort Belknap group did with flying colors. While in Great Falls, the sisters determined to give the children as much firsthand experience as possible. One of the places they visited was the Croxford Mortuary.

Through Sister Giswalda's many years of service at the mission school, ties have become strong. She has lived life with the people. She knows them and, good or bad, she loves them all. She served their needs at the mission as administrator before Father McMeel came. She served as Eucharistic minister in the absence of a priest, even celebrating what she called "a hybrid mass" on Sunday. She has taken the Eucharist to the sick and shut-ins on a First Friday and has gone as far as the agency to conduct Rosary services for a deceased former student upon request.

Sister Giswalda even assumed the role of basketball coach, when no certified person was available, so her students could play conference games.