

Russ and Pam Roeber

Childhoods

Russ and Pam Roeber were both born in South Dakota. Pam was a “city girl” because she was born in Rapid City. Russ grew up as an only child on a farm. The closest town, Miller, population about 1100, was 25 miles away so it was a big outing to go to church on Sunday. Russ’ folks separated when he was young. He and his mom lived with his uncle on a farm. Although he was young, he remembers driving a tractor, mowing, baling and stacking hay and bales.

He attended a one room school house for grades 1-7 and Kindergarten, moving to town when in 8th grade. Russ stated that there were several large families in the grade schools, having eight to ten kids in the school at any one time. The teacher worked with the students during the time allotted with the grade while everyone else did homework.

Russ’ mom was a homemaker until there was a big explosion fire in the gas station/repair shop. There were multiple injuries and the local hospital called for help from anyone having medical experience. His mom, who had been trained as a nurse but was not currently practicing, helped. She then continued working as a nurse.

Pam’s dad was a traveling coffee salesman and then bought a local bakery in Rapid City. Her mom was a homemaker. She has two older sisters. She attended a Catholic school for first and second grade. There were 68 kids in one class and two kids shared a desk. Her parents thought the school was too crowded so Pam attended the public school starting in third grade.

Pam lived 35 miles from Mount Rushmore and described it as impressive. Her dad remembered when they started carving into the stone and when they collected donations. When Pam was a junior in high school, they had a YMCA fundraiser and got pledges for walking to Mount Rushmore. The kids cut through fields and then got rides back. Everyone had blisters the next day. Some kids couldn’t make it but Pam did.

Both Russ and Pam remember lots of snow. They remember big snow banks caused by the blowing, drifting snow. Russ described blizzards that closed the road for weeks. People just stayed home. School

was infrequently closed because the teacher lived with the families on a rotating basis. Russ walked to school even when there was snow over the road. It wasn't passable until the county came out with a big snowblower. This could take two to three weeks. School got cancelled once when the temperature was -33 degrees.

Pam lived in the city so the roads got treated. Schools didn't close unless there was six inches or more of snow.

Marriage

Russ attended South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. He lived with a widow while there and helped her around the house. Russ was in his last year of college when he and Pam met in Rapid City as half of a double, blind date. They met in October and got married that following August 1970 at our Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Rapid City. Russ had started working at Monsanto in Saint Louis during June 1970 and took a week off without pay for their wedding. They got married on a Wednesday.

Russ was not Catholic; he was Lutheran. To get married, they had to have their Catholic parents or extremely close Catholic friend sign paperwork in the presence of a priest. They had to agree to raise the children Catholic. It used to be stricter when a Catholic married a non-Catholic. Pam's parents were married in the rectory because her mother was not Catholic.

Russ did no marriage preparation back then but Pam met with a priest. They had both a priest and Lutheran minister presiding at their wedding.

Moving Around the Country

Russ and Pam moved around the country because of his job and the military. At Monsanto, he did process design with polymers, plastics, and resins. He later did process engineering with polyesters in Decatur, Alabama, keeping the operation running. Later, he switched to Plant Engineering, working particularly with utilities.

This was during the Vietnam War in 1971. Russ went through ROTC in college and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Corp of Engineer in August 1970. He attended Officer Basic Training at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia in 1971. Being near the end of the war, there were an excessive number of officers and

the officers had a choice. The first option was to stay in the Army and go an extra year. The second choice was to leave active service but complete ten years of reserve duty. Russ chose this option and had to do summer camp in the reserves. He was one day short of becoming classified a veteran; he was discharged from the military in 1982 as a Captain.

When he returned to Monsanto in St. Louis from the military, they were short of work so Russ transferred to a job in Decatur, Alabama. They ended up living there for 2 ½ years. They had their first house there. There weren't many Catholics; most people were Southern Baptist. Russ and Pam stated that there were many colloquialisms. They were jokingly called Yankees and reminded that they had grown up north of the Mason Dixon line, the dividing line in the Civil War. Pam said she developed a slight southern accent while living there.

Russ and Pam chuckled that the people in Alabama called it snow when there was heavy frost on the window.

Pam was asked to cantor while there. She had no formal education past high school. She ended up teaching music at the school for fourth through eighth graders. They put on school musicals. They also got involved with a young couples' group which started then. Russ went to inquiry class.

They then moved to Cincinnati, where their daughter, Lauri, was born. They took her to Alabama to have the priest there baptize her. They had become very good friends with the pastor while living there.

They moved to Saint Charles in June 1975. It was slightly closer to South Dakota and Russ returned to his previous work location with Monsanto.

Monsanto split off a portion of the company in 1995 which was called Solutia. Russ worked for them for five years later before being released. After that, he did engineering consulting for Anheuser Busch, Nestle Purina, and Ameren UE.

Saint Peter Parishioners

When they moved to Saint Charles in 1975, it had about 20,000 people. Many people still considered it a country town. There were just little towns like Saint Peters, O'Fallon, and Wentzville, with nothing in between them. There was one interstate bridge and they still had the Rock Road bridge.

Saint Cletus was just starting but it was housed across from Duchesne High School. St. Cletus did not have a school at that point. Pam stated, "It didn't take long for me to determine that St. Peter was where I was going to church."

Their second daughter, Staci, was born in 1978 and was baptized at Saint Peter. Both girls attended Saint Peter School for Kindergarten through eighth grade and received Confession, First Communion, and Confirmation here. They had large grades divided into generally two classrooms. It was a very vibrant school. Lauri was also married at St. Peter Church in 1999.

The nuns taught and lived here so Lauri and Staci had lots of exposure to the sisters. It was a good experience. Pam stated, "They had the legendary Miss Boerding and many other good teachers that definitely impacted them in many, many good ways over the years." Both girls attended Incarnate Word Academy High School.

Russ and Pam did much volunteering with the school. Pam worked in the cafeteria supervising lunch and also the playground. She ran off copies on the mimeograph machine and drove car pools. She helped with the big craft fair held every year in the parish center. She was on the school board for two terms.

Russ and Pam both volunteered with the parish picnics, which were big fund raisers for the school. There were carnival rides, game booths, and food.

Russ and Pam volunteered with other school parents to paint the school two different times. It was in the summer and there was no air conditioning. Russ described it as "really hard but fun."

Russ got heavily involved volunteering with sports. He had played in every sport in high school. He played football in college for four years and ran track for one year. Russ also volunteered at the school even though he wasn't Catholic. Staci got involved in soccer at a young age and Russ helped. He helped start volleyball at Saint Peter and was the volleyball coordinator for many years. Russ stated, "It was a pretty successful program." He coached volleyball and basketball for both daughters. He refereed CYC basketball in the old Saint Peter High School gymnasium on the second floor. It was the only thing that was functional in the high school building. (Students also did performances in the gym.) He also helped Barb Martin start the track program at St. Peter grade school. He refereed volleyball and basketball for many years for the state of Missouri. He was part of the St. Peter Athletic Association where he was also the church softball coordinator for a number of years besides coaching a team.

Parish Center

The parish center was built during this time. There was a proposal to build it where the parking lot currently is. It would be connected to the school so the kids wouldn't have to walk over to it.

Pam had an interesting story about the fish fries. She and Betty Elmendorf were working next to each other on exercise equipment. Betty asked Pam, "Do you think a fish fry would work at Saint Peter?" Pam stated, "I think so." Ralph and Betty took off with it. It was relatively well attended. At that time, they didn't have the nice fry stations that they have now. The fish had to be prepared well in advance.

Ralph and Betty were coordinators for the parish center. They let CYC volleyball and basketball games be played there on Saturday as long as they were finished by 2:00 so it could be used for the many wedding receptions held in the parish center. The school parents had to sweep the floors and set up the tables for the receptions. Keep in mind that Russ wasn't Catholic but did all this volunteering for the Catholic schools.

Russ Becoming Catholic

Father Bromschwig was very interested why Russ wasn't Catholic. He attended Mass with Pam and volunteered at the school. The reason was because Russ' mom was Lutheran and was resistant to Catholics. This was not an uncommon attitude back then between Protestants and Catholics. Russ didn't want to upset his mom.

Father Peet did home visits. He visited Pam when Russ was out of town. He asked Pam, "Why does Russ not come up for Communion?" Pam replied, "Because he's not Catholic, Father." She thought he was going to fall out of his chair.

Joe Niggemeier recommended Russ for the Knight of Columbus. On two occasions, the individual would go to Russ' house and talk about the Knights. After they talked, Russ would ask if he had to be Catholic to be in the Knights. They were extremely surprised that he wasn't Catholic. Russ did eventually join the Knights after he became Catholic. Pam was very happy because her dad had been a Knight for over 60 years and it's a great organization.

In 2003, Russ went to RCIA. He didn't tell Pam until the night before. Pam was pleasantly surprised. He hadn't even told any family members he was going through RCIA until several weeks before he was received into the Catholic church. (His son-in-law later also became Catholic.)

Russ stated, "It was the right time." The only thing keeping him from becoming Catholic was that his mom didn't like Catholics. There was no other reason. Russ spent so much time at church and other activities.

Russ had his Rite of Election in 2004. He showed his certificate. He described it as a very special day and couldn't even put it into words. His family was very surprised but happy. Bishop Naumann was the celebrant.

As a side note, Bishop Naumann confirmed their youngest grandson in Kansas City. The grandson wore a Cardinals' tie for Confirmation. Bishop Naumann is a big Cardinals' fan so everyone enjoyed it.

Russ said, "I no longer felt like an outsider anymore. I didn't have to remain in the pew. I could participate."

Volunteer Work

Russ got recruited as an usher right after he became Catholic. Les Huster "rolled him in." Most people don't know everything that ushers do. They have many responsibilities besides collecting the offering and finding people to carry up the gifts. They usher people in the chapel to Communion.

They are trained in AED and CPR. They keep an eye on people at church because there have been many medical situations and they have to know what to do. If 911 is called, they have to flag the EMT down in the road and meet them at the handicapped door. They have to have someone keep the handicapped door open so the EMT's can quickly get to the person.

Ushers have to de-escalate situations. This includes homeless people and threatening people. Ushers tidy up after Mass. They pick up garbage and straighten the books. They also clean up spills and caution parents not to have their kids play with candles.

Russ is captain of the 5:00 ushers and he has to schedule them. Russ has been ushering since 2004. Chris Bolduc is head of the ushers.

Russ is also a money counter for the weekend collection.

Pam is in charge of the Linen Ladies that do the linens each week to keep a fresh supply of purificators and things used at Communion time for Masses. This is done once a week but the ladies work in teams and do this on a rotating basis. The Altar Angels clean the church, dust the radiators and pews, and clean windows that they can reach.

They empty the Holy Water receptacles. The Holy Water is emptied in the left side of the sink in the priests' sacristy; the water goes straight into the dirt of the basement. The Holy Water receptacles are washed and dried and put back with blessed water.

Pam periodically washes and irons the altar cloths for the Sacrifice Altar, high altar, two side altars, and chapel. Barb Musterman used to do this and other ladies did the ironing. For Easter, Christmas, and special Feast Days, Pam puts out fancier cloths. The Sodality often buys the linens for the altar.

Russ and Pam take care of the flowers in church. They coordinate the decoration of the church for Christmas and Easter and other special occasions. Russ and Pam have been doing this for many years since they took it over from Betty and Jim Sullentrop.

Pam has been involved with the Sodality. They serve funeral luncheons with the food that the family brings in. They set tables and make them look nice, and they clean up after the luncheon.

Many of the servers in the carry out line for the fish fries are in the Sodality. Russ and Pam have done delivery of dinners for numerous years to independent living facilities.

The big event for the Sodality is the Rummage Sale every August, which Pam has helped with. It keeps getting bigger and bigger and generating more and more funds. The money goes into the parish. They give scholarships to high school students. They have purchased new linens and vestments for the clergy. They purchased new chairs for the parish center.

Pam has been involved with the choirs for many years and Russ joined later. She has been in the Adult Choir periodically and in the Resurrection Choir since it started in the late 1980's. She did another stint of cantoring, which she had done in Alabama. Pam stated, "I love to sing praise to the Lord."

Pam initially was first a substitute Extraordinary Minister when she wasn't in the choir. She then served on the schedule. She sometimes brings Communion up to the Resurrection Choir and occasionally for the regular choir. She stated, "I feel very touched anytime I do that. It's such a great honor to be able to share the Precious Blood and Body of Christ with other people."

Pam and Russ have both been involved with the Liturgy Committee.

Russ and Pam do many other "behind the scenes" volunteering. At the end of every week, they take out the old bulletins and put in the new bulletins. They make sure the candles are filled on the altar. Saint Peter previously used wax candles but now they use liquid candles, which are easier. They make sure everything looks good in the church and on the altars. The administrative assistants could do this but it's one less thing they have to do.

Pam got nominated as the Saint Peter Parish Catholic Woman of the Year by Deacon Larry in 2022. There was a ceremony at which Archbishop Rozanski presented a certificate, which she showed. There was a luncheon. Her family attended the event.

Both Russ and Pam commented that many of these volunteers are elderly and we need younger people to help. Sometimes people just need an invitation.

Meaning of the Church to Them

Pam and Russ have no blood relatives close by. One daughter is in Kansas City and the other daughter is in Texas. Their daughters have continued the faith with their own children; Russ and Pam are blessed to have two grandsons attending Catholic high school. One grandson attends Creighton University in Nebraska.

Because they have no relatives nearby, friends have definitely become like family. Pam stated, "That's one of the great blessings of getting involved, getting to know people, and doing things and really feeling that bond that you do worship in the same location with people with the same beliefs. It's very powerful." They've become great friends with the parents at the school and with church members.

Pam described Saint Peter as a "church family. It holds a special place in our hearts."