

SR Mary R (Realino) Lynch, BVM
Submitted to the Iowa Department for the Blind
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I am Sister Realino Lynch and in your records as SR Mary R Lynch 1050 Carmel Drive, Dubuque, Iowa 52003 I have inherited the Kingston eyes ascribed to my diminishments and my mother's side of the family, the Kingstons. I have a remarkable number of visually impaired aunts and uncles. And, looking back on it now from what we know of macular degeneration that is what it seems to have been, without having known the name for it. I was reading the paper to my mother when I was ten years old because she could no longer read that fine print.

I had a Masters Degree in Science which permitted me to teach physics, chemistry, and biology and be the Science Department in the summer Catholic Schools or take either the physical science or biological science assignment in the larger Catholic High Schools. I thought I had fairly good sight until I was 53. Then, I began noticing that I needed more light for correcting students' papers, reading their handwriting, and averaging their marks which became increasingly challenging.

Finally, in 1975, when I was 55, I received the diagnosis of macular degeneration which progressed exactly as the doctor said, slowly. I had plenty of time to get used to it. No pain. I would finally, on St. Patrick's Day of 1983, having read and signed the documents provided by the ophthalmologist, went to the Braille Institute and sought the talking books. My consultant was very approving and assured me that I was certainly deserving of this service; asked me what the first book I would like was and I had no idea. "Ah, ah, Murder in the White House." "Good choice," she said, "Good choice." "By Margaret Trumann. And, what machine would you like?" I was more familiar with the record player. So, she obtained a record of "Murder in the White House" and a record player and she took me by the elbow and said "Where will your party meet you?" "Oh," said I, "I drove."

“You drove,” said she. Well, I continued driving until June of that year and decided then that it was time for my sake and anyone else’s that I stop driving.

Through the ensuing 27 years, I have enjoyed the talking books as a source of enjoyment and recreation. Fiction that I thought I could never enjoy again came back into my life for information, comfort, and a means of pulling me out of occasional bouts of depression which seemed to accompany the aging process. The only shortcoming of the talking books through the library of Congress is the minimal collection of spiritual reading. But, as a religious woman, I am well supplied with that by my retirement facility here in the tape library we have in our administrative center. The talking books have enabled me to enjoy adult, senior citizens classes. One in particular was “Reading for Enjoyment.” I could receive almost every title of the books that we chose to read for enjoyment. I could receive them through the Des Moines Iowa Department for the Blind Library.

Recently, when both writing and reading have receded from my life, I am in a Literary Class and we are reading Oedipus Rex in parts, and, I am the audience. I listen. But, then it occurred to me, I could probably get Oedipus Rex on tape. So, a simple call (which the aide dialed for me) and an inquiry to the Iowa Department for the Blind, and, I have the text, so to speak for our class. Oedipus Rex is an old recording. It is on two sides of the tape and operates at the faster speed but it is beautifully read. So, I am extremely grateful. Talking Books have been a very integral part of my life. I am now into digital books which is so much easier to manage that type of recorder. I am now 90 years old and struggling to stay connected. Also, I am sure that talking books have been instrumental in keeping my mind somewhat sharp.

Now perhaps that is all you need to hear from me. But the communication you sent did indicate that you would be interested in some of my life story, my background, etc. So, I was born on a farm in Rock Valley, Iowa....a little town way up in

the North West corner, 25 miles down from Minnesota and 15 miles in from South Dakota. My father died when I was eight. My mother moved my brother and me into town. Even when we lived on the farm, my father took my brother and me to town for Catholic Education every week day. But, when he became too ill to take us in, we went to the little country school on the corner of our property. My mother died when I was eleven. I lived in the homes of various relatives eventually working for my room and board in Sioux City, IA with distant cousins.

Then in 1938, I entered the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, otherwise known as the BVMs, a religious order with its Motherhouse in Dubuque, Iowa. And, I was trained as a science teacher. I taught in California for 40 years and in Lincoln, NE and Council Bluffs, IA...the latter for 3 and the former for 7 years. Then because of the eyesight, I retired to this facility, the Motherhouse, in Dubuque. Since reading was the only impairment, I had good health, lots of energy and was quite active and involved in the Motherhouse when the ravages of age began to work on me. And the distances were too great for me to cover, so I chose to go to the skilled care. I had been in independent living and for some brief time in assisted care; and eventually into skilled care in the infirmary of our retirement center. I have totally enjoyed my life as a religious woman and as a science teacher.