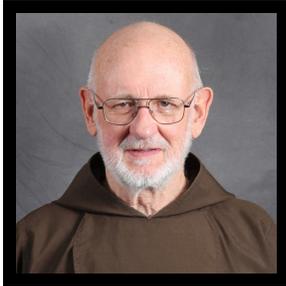


# Necrology

Loran Miller  
1937 - 2015



*(Introduction and conclusion by Ron Smith)*

*Loran Miller, named Donald by baptism, was born on May 18, 1937. He entered St Lawrence Seminary, Mt. Calvary, in September 1951. Four years later he was invested in the Capuchin Order. He took his perpetual vows on September 1, 1959 at the Capuchin Seminary of St. Mary in Crown Point, Indiana. Four years later he completed his studies in theology at the Capuchin Seminary of St. Anthony's in Marathon, WI. He was ordained on May 16, 1964, at St. Mary's parish church in Marathon, as was customary in those days. This necrology was written by Loran himself. As his classmate of many*

*years, I am writing this short introduction and a conclusion.*

*Loran was his own person in many ways; he had a lot of interests and liked working with his hands on various projects while in the seminary and also later in life. He was talented. He could be counted on to assist others; he was generous in sharing his talents. His was a strong personality and he moved forward with whatever he decided he wanted to do, e.g., making his own coffin, writing his necrology and the homily for his funeral mass. Loran enjoyed life and people. Many of us were amazed at his energy, especially when he was fighting cancer for 13 years. Here is Loran's necrology, in his own words.*

Knowing how difficult it is going to be to find someone to write my necrology, the choice was easy for me. I will do my own and get it right and hopefully avoid some of the nonsense that might arise with someone else doing it.

Who would suspect that Donny Joe would become a Capuchin friar and priest? He was the first born and spoiled rotten. That's my sense anyway. Childhood was delightful because there were so many adults doting on me during that part of my life. Memories of aunts and uncles, grandmas and grandpas fill those early days. Mother was only sixteen when I was born; Dad was a few years older. Three girls followed me and took up much of their time. Donny Joe got picked up by the extended family and suffered little because of it. The Irish-German mixture would make for a strong character, strong family ties, and a wonderful support system. All that came into play when, after five children in a row, dad abandoned us. I was eight years old. Without knowing it, I became the "man" of the family. Watching over the girls would be a daily chore. Growing up happened really fast.

During those years without Dad, the extended family became really important. Welfare helped to keep us afloat, and everyone had to chip in to make it work. And work it did. Being poor

meant that we had all we needed and very little of what we wanted. But, so what? It just didn't seem to matter.

Raised in Madison, Wisconsin in St. Bernard Parish, education was provided by the Dominican Sisters. The eight years of primary schooling were all in Catholic schools. As eighth grade was coming to a close, Sr. Juliana and Sr. Ann Regis focused on getting someone to choose the seminary as their next step. They picked on Don Miller. After shocking Mother, and with the financial help of Aunt Kathryn, preparations were made and the four years at Mt. Calvary and St. Lawrence Seminary began.

If anything can be said for sure about those four years, one word would summarize the experience: enjoyable; and fruitful would be the second. Learning had not been much of a priority those first eight years, but the next four were different. Learning how and what to read under the direction of Vianney Thibedeau opened up new worlds. Getting picked or selected for the seminary choir was a joy. And discovering talents was like watering seeds buried in the ground waiting to sprout. Football, tennis, handball, cross country runs, basketball and swimming; sports and sportsmanship now became a part of life. And there was other exciting stuff. What a good time we had!

During the summer months there was work on construction sites. What an education that was. Growing up during that phase meant learning how to curse and swear. You couldn't help it being surrounded by construction workers. But more importantly was learning how to work and getting paid for it. The building up and the tearing down would stay with me for the rest of my life, along with the presence of Uncle Jim and Aunt Issy and their kids. What a full life!

Graduation was on the horizon and there was talk of "what next?" The Capuchins were always an inspiration for all the students and eventually the future talk would include them and a religious vocation. What or who determined the decision to choose the Capuchins? The answer is complicated, of course. Peer pressure figured in. The idea had "adventure" written all over it. And getting out of the house and escape from three younger sisters was appealing. And besides, "it won't hurt to give it a try."

Getting into the swing of things seemed to be easy. The trip to Detroit and discovering "the monastery" was like walking into another world. Elmer Stoffell was good for us. He was an old hand at this business of handling novices. Nothing seemed to faze him. We had a great time. The trip to Huntington and further studies, in philosophy this time, opened up more worlds. We had some tough times, but for the most part the days were full of discovery and comradery. Our's was the senior class to occupy Crown Point. That phase of this journey could fill numerous pages, at least a chapter or two, of a book. They will remain fond memories. It was at Crown Point, down in a make-shift chapel, that we made our perpetual profession, while looking forward to the day when we could escape Indiana summers and begin the last phase of studies of theology at Marathon.

The pronoun "we" and "our" is used purposely. The sense of community among the students was palpable. We liked being with one another. And to a certain point even the faculty seemed at times, although not always, to be with us. The "brothers" were off limits. We just didn't pay much attention to that restriction. We realized even then that we were *all* "brothers!" And we lived accordingly and joyfully. The memories of Marathon were golden and holy memories. To sum it up, the four years at Marathon were a blessing. Ordination in May 1964 was the sign that Camelot had ended and "5<sup>th</sup> Year" would soon begin. We moved into St. Francis in Milwaukee with more studies but less intensity, and were given an introduction to ministry. The formal studies were less intense, but the Capuchin community was not. The residents at St Francis, along with the newly ordained, included the Mission Band, the provincial minister, Gerard Hesse, and the parish staff made up of Matthew Gottschalk, Wilbert Lanser and Pius Cotter. The nightly gathering in the kitchen was explosive at times, especially when Fr. Groppi would stop by. Our education to the realities of life was just beginning. This 5<sup>th</sup> Year was a good year, which would end with a shock. At "graduation," in a private conference with the provincial minister, we would be given our first assignment. I was going to the Nicaraguan mission.

Some interest in the missions had always been in my life. Or maybe it was just a disinterest in the common and the ordinary. The missions, I thought, would open up new worlds. That was exciting for me.

During the years of formation, especially during the clericate, but even at Calvary in the high school years, there were opportunities for getting involved in the missions, doing something for the missions, and getting to know something about the missions and the missionaries. I remember saving pennies for pagan babies and then sorting stamps for the missions. The arrival of visiting missionaries was always a treat, something different. They opened windows into an intriguing and mysterious world. When the opportunity came to participate in the Byzantine liturgy with Hermes or Cuthbert, well, of course, why not? And then to study Russian, visualizing the possibility of one day being part of a team to invade the ruins of the Soviet Union and re-establish the church. Wow, what a dream! And we would do all that in a modern way: we would learn how to operate ham radio.

The years of formation were coming to an end. We were told to forget Russia. Our mission was Nicaragua: that or nothing. 5<sup>th</sup> Year was a taste of what was to come. We were finally getting into ministry and wondering what our first assignment would be. What a surprise when three of our ordination class were chosen to minister in Nicaragua: Hugh Heinzen, Joe Wolf and myself. I don't remember being consulted. The interview with the provincial minister was it. "You are going to Nicaragua. Get ready. Take a six weeks' course in Spanish and off you go." And off we went into wonderland, wondering what was going to happen next. Saying goodbye to everyone was like a blur. Were we ready? Hell, no! We did not have the slightest idea of what we were getting into.

Getting off the plane in Managua was the first shock. The heat was like a slap in the face. And what a contrast. Leaving Miami terminal and arriving at Las Mercedes was like getting dumped

into another world. And no one spoke a recognizable word, except for Niles Kauffman. He was there to meet us. What a God-send, a raft in this boundless sea. Our lifesaver, and we hung on for dear life. Our stay at San Antonio, a Catalan Spanish Capuchin friary in Managua for a couple of days brought something new almost every hour on the hour. One memorable event was that first walk through downtown Managua. Busy, busy streets, lots of people, reading and translating signs along the way — our first practical lesson in Nicaraguan Spanish. And then the greeting "Buena ' dia '! Com - et- ta Uted ?" What was that? OK...the three had landed. What's the plan? John Langfeld, of the St. Mary Province, was the superior regular at the time. His program was jokingly called "the Georgetown program." Our initial stay in Nicaragua would be for three years. So the first three years of the young missionaries' experience would be lived in three different settings. So, I was sent to Siuna for the "mines" experience. Joe Wolf was sent to Bluefields for the "city" experience. Hugh Heinzen was sent to Tipilma with Franklin Eichorst for the "jungle" experience. We each would minister for one year at each place and then rotate. Seemed like a good idea. It almost worked.

A word of gratitude. Casimir Walsh was pastor and my mentor for the introduction to missionary life in Nicaragua. He was understanding and patient beyond the call of duty, a good pastor and a fine friar. We got along just fine. From the beginning he had me reading Spanish for him. I could speak very little Spanish, I was just simply afraid to open my mouth. Little by little it began to sink in. The parish was huge; Greg Smutko was part of the parochial team. He was in charge of La Luz. The Maryknoll Sisters ran the school and clinic. They were a wonderful group of women. And they took me under their wings and got me started. The parish had a large farm and livestock, plus two movie theaters, and was also involved in an agricultural co-op. Add to all that a multitude of chapels in the jungle and chapels along the road to Alamicamba. It was a very busy place. And the experience was vast. Besides being out on mission trips in the jungle, the chapels on the road and Sunday services in town, we had movie theaters to run, plus a grade school and high school. Talk about immersion, I got a taste of about everything. Speaking of "tasting," I have to recall two events that took place in the Siuna parish. Shortly after I arrived, the town of Siuna was celebrating First Communion. After the ceremony we gathered together for a breakfast of *nicatamales*. They stayed in my stomach for days. And then my first "Gritaria" was celebrated at Puerto Isabel. I got so sick drinking chicha I wanted to die! The year ended and the rotation took me to Bluefields.

From the mining town of Siuna to the big city of Bluefields — what a change and what a contrast. Bluefields is on the bay, connected to Managua via Rama and the Rio Escondido. The market was fabulous, dirty and always busy. Many cultures intermingled. The Mestizo, the Miskito, the Criollo, the Rama and the Chinese all managed to live together in relative peace. My ministry was in the Cathedral Parish. Camillus Doerfler was the pastor, David Belongea was in the chancery and Glenn Gessner was in charge of the rivers. Cukra Hill and San Martin were also included. Pius X Seminary was part of the city ministry. Salvator Schlaefer, Ambrose Simon and Bob Spader were stationed there. We were also in charge of the Bluff and Corn Island. Good Lord...busy, busy, busy!

Well, if the plan was to give us young missionaries different experiences, then the plan seemed to be working, at least for me. Besides the busy weekends, there were catechism classes, visits to the hospital and the sick, and pastoral meetings of all kinds. The Sisters of the Divine Shepherd ran schools, the hospital and a clinic. The Christian Brothers also ran the high school and other pastoral ministries. It seemed that there was always something to do. And what do I remember about that year?

It rained a lot, like almost every day. Nothing ever dried out. Mold was a part of daily living. But you could get used to it; at night, when the meetings were done, a walk around town was great fun; malaria struck me down while in Bluefields. Bad news.

But through it all I survived and seemed to enjoy the experience. Camillus Doerfler was a true "father" to me. He was devoted to the people, especially San Martin. On occasion I would celebrate Mass in English at San Martin with the Creoles. Otherwise everything was in Spanish. The end of my second year. It was getting easier.

The next phase of the "Georgetown Plan" — the third — year was to be experienced in the jungle with Franklin Eichhorst. My classmates, Joe Wolf and Hugh Heinzen had already had their time with Frank. Now it was my turn. But the stories, the experiences of Joe and Hugh, had filtered down and became part of our shared salvation history. What I heard gave me pause to reconsider and eventually refuse to comply. The regular superior was not surprised, absolved me from the third step and sent me back to Siuna. The pastor, Casimir Walsh, was going back East to have a hip replaced and Wilfred Biberstein was to be in charge. He wanted someone there who had some knowledge of the place. I was it. So the third year was a repeat of the first, but quite a bit different. What fun we had.

Wilfred was retired and wanted to be considered as such. The Sunday masses were his responsibility, the rest of the pastoral duties were mine and Gregory Smutko's. The day began with daily mass and ended when we closed down the movie theater at about 9 or 10 pm. In between time, during our free time, the mission trips had to be made, the books kept up to date, the payroll met each week, plus instructions, fix marriages and baptisms, plus attending to office calls or just visiting with the *campesinos* who came in to purchase necessities and then stop in to visit with the padre. Add to that, time set aside to study Spanish and Miskito. Gregory, who had been transferred to the Rio Coco, suggested that I join him in Waspam. With the initial three years coming to an end, what next? I requested a transfer to Waspam after returning from vacation. And it happened. Returning to Nicaragua in 1968, I was assigned to work with the Miskito Indians on the Rio Coco. No revelation or dream would have prepared me for what was to come. Great differences existed between the mines and Bluefields. Experience had taught me that, but the Rio Coco was another story from another world.

Before I left for the States a deal was made. I would come back to Nicaragua but under the condition that I would be transferred to Rio Coco to work with the Miskito Indians. Greg Smutko had asked me to come and work with him, and that in itself appealed to me. I admired

Greg and I knew it would be an adventure. And it was. We were known as "the Peanuts Gang." I was Linus and my blanket was my boat. When things would get dicey in Waspam, a trip would be planned and off I would go. The gang consisted of Greg, myself and Niles Kaufmann, plus Don Richardson, Phillip Casper and Vidal Banezek who was in charge of the program for the catechists. And we can't forget dear Gaul Neuman. He helped to keep us sane and in operating condition. We also had the Agnesian Sisters: Ann Jude, Julie, Vivian and Raymond. I think Bertha and Dolores were in Puerto Cabezas with Kenneth. As I remember it, there was a lot going on, much of which is a blur. We had two fine deacons: Amperio and Francisco, who helped in the catechetical center and on mission trips. The many programs dealing with agriculture and health care, plus the catechists and Delegates of the Word kept Waspam hopping with never a dull moment. Many conferences were held, both in Waspam and in the centers along the river. Training catechists, promoting leadership, agriculture, health care, cooperatives and community building went on constantly. In between we would visit the communities on the river, about 500 miles of river and maybe thirty different settlements. We traveled in a dugout canoe, 20 feet long, three feet wide, powered by a 33hp Johnson outboard motor. One trip up river, beginning at Waspam, would take three drums of gas, 150 gallons, and then the following trip down river would take another three drums. We serviced our own motors and replaced worn parts so that we could run them for about 3000 miles before they would be replaced. Being a missionary on the Rio Coco was a very expensive proposition and most satisfying. The people were great. They were wonderful.

A whole other chapter could be written of our connection with Puerto Lempira in Honduras. Several times a year we would make the trip, across the border, visiting communities as we traveled along, and spend several days at Puerto Lempira. Eventually we were able to establish a more permanent presence there and stabilize the church.

The years on the Rio Coco were wonderful and exciting for many reasons, the foremost being the pastoral approach or direction we took. Mainly through the guidance of Greg, we pushed for the formation of a lay church, dedicated to human promotion and the betterment of the whole society, truly leaven in the dough. And we worked our butts off. To sum up my experience of those five years on the Rio Coco, we had formed a real community, with a unique and unified vision, ready to spend ourselves for the common good, priests, sisters and laity with one mind and heart. Ultimately, I believe this is what "church" is all about.

During a vicariate assembly, around 1972, the question of San Pio X Seminary entered into the conversation. Should it remain open? Sal Schlaefter loved the place and wanted it to remain open. But we needed a new director. I offered myself. Ambrose Simon remained on board but finally August Seubert and I became co-directors and Ambrose left for greener pastures. If the truth were to be told, they were the best years of my missionary experience in Nicaragua. They were the most difficult, too. But the outstanding accomplishment for me during that time was the beginning of Mini-IPLA. (Instituto Pastoral Latino America). After the school year, the pastoral agents of the vicariate gathered, clerical and lay, for one week of study, prayer and

play. And I think it was there, at that time, that the vicariate began to become a community, a family and the true church. To this day that gathering and spirit remains.

In the year 1977 I decided to leave Nicaragua and come back home for several reasons. When I began to have and feel stronger ties to the Nicaraguan people than my own, that made me wonder. I think I was "going native." Also, the shooting war was in full swing and I had an invitation to participate in a "*comunidad de base*" experience with Jim Keilman at Pine Bluff, near Madison, Wisconsin. It all added up to moving on and re-evaluating.

I did have the opportunity to re-visit Nicaragua a couple of times after 1977, one of which was the ordination of Raphael Dixon, a young man from the Rio Coco, whom I had baptized around 1970. A very satisfying experience, to say the least. A seed had been planted. Remotely speaking, I had contributed. The years spent in Nicaragua had not been in vain, so I thought. The fact is, I got back a hundred-fold for what I had given. I have been blessed.

The year 1977 was a difficult year, coming back home, leaving the mission, adjusting to state-side living, settling down at Pine Bluff with Jim Keilman, Barb and Joan, and trying to figure out what would be next. The winters were especially difficult. As it happened, the first winter back was spent in Florida with family and the second in Arizona with Phil Casper and Bill Frigo. I tried for a third but the provincial had other plans. The need for a friar to help out in Canada at St. Philip Neri Parish arose, and I was drifting about, not doing much of anything. The year 1979 was spent learning about Canadian culture and living in Toronto.

1978 found me in Saginaw Michigan. The need was for a Spanish speaking friar to replace Kevin Heagerty who had been serving the parish. Mark James Pesch was to remain as pastor. For three years we worked well together. St. Joe's in Saginaw, and the wonderful people there, would always find a special place in my mind and heart.

1982 was a chapter year and plans were made for another requested change. Kieran Hickey had invited me to come to Monte Alverno and try out the retreat ministry. I agreed to move to Appleton and become part of the team. It was a trial by fire. Ron Rieder was part of the team, planning to remain until I was broken in. However, the council asked him to move to Huntington, Indiana and he agreed. The maintenance man and his wife, who was cooking at the time, decided to move on also. Retreats were to begin in a week. I became a giver of retreats and in charge of maintenance overnight. By the grace of God I survived. And as always, the years at Monte Alverno were good years, memorable years. As with previous experiences and ministries, I learned a lot and continued to grow spiritually.

At the end of that period Mel Hermanns was transferred to Monte Alverno. He eventually took over maintenance and preaching and I moved on. Permission was given to move in with Bob Udulutsch who was living in Kaukauna as pastor. The rectory was spacious and it was getting crowded at Monte Alverno.

1992 seems to be about the time that I became a member of the Provincial Council. Dan Fox was provincial minister, Perry McDonald was the vicar, and Dan Crosby, John Scherer and me rounded out the council, and for three years I was inflicted with meetings. If it were not for the brothers, these would have been very difficult years. But we seemed to fit and we made a go of it. The days and dates are mixed up and unsure but time was spent at Marathon with Ken Reinhart and Jerry Kafer. I was the one who carried the news to Ken that he was to leave Marathon and Jerry would replace him. Jerry eventually left Marathon and Dan Crosby replaced him. We could find no one to replace Simeon Keogh at St. Fidelis Friary so I took his place. 1995 seems to be about the year that the journey into senior care began. How did I get into situations like this? The next six years prepared me for getting old. And finally, I got the news that my mortality was on the line.

When the provincial minister calls it usually means bad news. I had been asked by Bill Hugo to think about the possibility of a transfer to San Damiano in Madison. Ed Hagman wanted out, which left Rupert Dorn all alone. I was not interested. Obviously that didn't hold much water and I got my marching orders. In preparation for the move I signed up for a physical to be given by my primary care doctor in Appleton. That was when the cancerous kidney was found and then removed in 2001 at Mayo. After a short recuperation period the transfer took place. I was now in Madison. Rupert and I lived in the big house on Monona Drive. Ed Hagman moved out while Leo Petrimoulx moved in shortly after, then Gus Cops, then Lester Bach and finally Bill Frigo. And so the house was filled once again. Since no one showed interest, the office of local minister remained with me. We seemed to get along, even though our personalities were very different. The year 2010 brought another setback. The cancer had moved to the spine. So, with that new development I was put on an experimental drug which did its job for two years. In 2013 the scans found more cancer. I figured it was about time to get my casket from Calvary and bring it down to Madison.

In summary, I have no regrets. The journey was great and enjoyable. What made it so enjoyable and exciting was a combination of things and people. My family was always supporting along with the Capuchin community. I have no complaints there. And some wonderful friends gathered along the way have contributed greatly to a good life and wonderful journey. Now I am kind of excited to find out what's next.

*Loran fought the good fight for many years, both his physical fight against cancer and also in trying to lead a good Capuchin life, always conscious of the needs of those who had less. He was a wonder when it came to collecting items for the Nicaraguan Mission. God called him home on February 5, 2015. He was very ready to meet the Lord.*

*Loran, in my experience, was an honest man. He could be a little blunt at times. He told me he sometimes spoke too soon in public settings and did not get across the point he was trying to make. In my experience he was a dedicated priest and a faithful Capuchin friar, who had many stories of faith experiences to share. We pray for his blessed life in the heart of God full of peace, truth, love and mercy.*