

Necrology

Rita Petrie, Affiliate

1943 – 2020)



Rita Petrie was the daughter of Frank and Catherine Mand. She was born on September 21, 1943. Rita had three brothers and two sisters, one of whom was Paula Mand, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes. Rita went to St. Peter School in St. Peter, Wisconsin and then graduated from St. Mary's Springs Academy. Rita married Melvin Petrie on March 3, 1962. Together, Melvin and Rita raised three children; Sharon, Mark and Annette. Rita worked during the early years of her marriage at Grandcare Nursing Home, National Exchange Bank, and the Villa Loretto Nursing Home.

In 1970, Rita began what would turn out to be 36 years of working in the food service department at St. Lawrence Seminary. Rita was for many of those years the baker at St. Lawrence. As Capuchins, we strive to pay our employees a just wage for the work that they do. Many of our employees come to see their work as a ministry. Rita was certainly grateful that St. Lawrence provided her and Melvin, who worked in the maintenance department, with dependable and good paying jobs with which they could support their family. Rita can also be counted among those who understood that her labors on "The Hill" were more than a job. They were a ministry. It mattered to Rita that she was cooking and baking for boys who were away from home. At our reunions, my classmates from the Class of 1976 still talk about the cinnamon rolls that Rita baked for us every Thursday as having come pretty close to heaven, especially on a cold winter morning.

In 1997, Rita's beloved husband Melvin was diagnosed as having amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig's disease. Throughout Melvin's four and one half year struggle with this devastating illness, Rita was at his side helping him as his body slowly stopped functioning. They made many trips to Madison to consult doctors in the hope of finding ways to treat Melvin's ALS. Melvin died on March 29, 2002 at the age of 61 with Rita at his side.

After Melvin's death, Rita enjoyed time with her grandchildren and then her great-grandchildren. Rita retired from her work at St. Lawrence Seminary in 2004. During her years at St. Lawrence, Rita worked under numerous food service directors – religious sisters, Capuchin friars and laymen. To say that they brought with them a wide variety of management styles and commitment to the job would be an understatement! Eventually, Rita became the food service director herself. After Rita retired, she did not stop working and, being the people person that she was, enjoyed working as a bartender for many years. From time to time Rita would make trips to the casinos and enjoyed being with friends on the golf course. Rita's family testifies to her cooking skills, especially the many good soups that she made from scratch. Rita was very proud that on March 19, 2012 she was made an affiliate of the Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order. Rita loved the friars and loved being with the friars, and occasionally having a Brandy Old Fashion or Manhattan with them.

Rita Petrie died peacefully on August 24, 2020. Upon hearing that Rita Petrie had passed away, many St. Lawrence Seminary alumni posted fond memories of her and the care she brought to her work. These comments spanned three decades and came from the heart.

Rita raised all of us she was like a second mom - Worked with her as my work study was in the cafeteria. She was a joy to work with....bless her heart....Prayers to the family.... - Rest well you did so much more than just feed us - When Rita was in charge of the kitchen, I always enjoyed working there.....See had such a beautiful personality and was so kind. - Eternal life grant unto your servant, Lord, who faithfully provided generations of seminarians "our daily bread." - I remember being a member of the food committee my Junior/Senior years. She wanted to hear our observations, recommendations, and concerns. She truly cared what we thought and made changes to make us happier. A magnificent woman. - Great lady! Huge heart! - RIP Rita always took care of us. - Loved fresh bread day - A pillar of the Hill!

These and many other comments are from Black, White, Latino, and Asian alumni of St. Lawrence. Truly, Rita fed all nations. We can pray that Rita Petrie is now dining at that unending banquet with that "great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue" in the Kingdom of God. Rita is buried beside her beloved husband in Holy Cross Cemetery in Mt. Calvary on the side of the "Hill of Happiness" where both labored for so many years.

~ Gary Wegner