Columns
Spirituality



A photograph taken by Sr. Joan Sauro of ships at sea (Courtesy of Joan Sauro)



by Joan Sauro

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In the beginning, religious life was laid out in black and white. I spent many of my early days with a camera, taking pictures to develop back home in a photographer's dark room. Not that the strange clothes we wore and the man-made rules we followed didn't veer toward darkness, as well.

Even so, I spent hours outside with a camera, photographing life's simple beauty and developing the negatives in a photographer's darkroom. In my black and white clothes, I was sequestered in a small, empty room in one convent basement after another. In these secret, creative places I turned my dark negatives into black and white positives.

First, I enlarged a negative of a picture I took, made a print, then soaked that print in an acid bath. Finally, I gave it a thorough wash.

Out came a black and a white print like the one you see, ordinary running shoes, still for a moment.



A black and white photo of muddy running shoes taken by Sr. Joan Sauro (Courtesy of Joan Sauro)

In time, off came the black and white clothes, and out went the black and white prints. When I came out of the darkroom, I saw the beauty in people — all colors — and in the natural world. My film changed accordingly. As did my photographs. Now you see day and night at the seashore where I was on retreat.



A photo taken of ocean waves crashing to the shore by Sr. Joan Sauro (Courtesy of Joan Sauro)

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Then came the day when I laid my camera aside and picked up a pen. Now words convey what my heart holds dear. Many religious publications have welcomed my work. Some of these publications now thrive online; others are gone too soon.

Many churches have closed and the conference connected to them as well. Even the bastion we called our Provincial House it's all but empty of residents. Now we find life together in nursing homes, or apartments on city streets, as my companion and I

have done.

Across from us there is an abandoned church turned into a gymnasium. At night, a single, stained glass window shines in the darkness. A golden cross of Christ appears. No figure. Just that golden cross.

It is the presence of love in a dark time. Always, love.