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Remember Ethel Gintoft with gratitude

Heidi Schlumpf | Jun. 30, 2009 NCR Today

I grew up reading the Milwaukee archdiocesan newspaper. The Catholic Herald shared the living room coffee table with the Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel--two separate papers back then. As an avid reader, I devoured any and all printed matter in the house, even the paper that contained a list of movies my parents wouldn't allow me to see.

When it came time for me to apply for my first journalism job, the name Ethel Gintoft [1] rang a bell from all those years of reading her byline. It was to her that I sent my resume, and her signature was on the rejection letter. Later, when I met her at a Catholic Press Association convention and joked that she had the chance to hire me and didn't, she claimed that if she'd had an opening, she probably would have.

I worked in non-religious journalism for four years before joining the Catholic press. When I did, it was in part because of the high caliber and independence of the archdiocesan newspaper I grew up reading--and in part because of women like Gintoft. At a time when women were still struggling for respect in newsrooms, she was suceeding in one owned by the male-dominated Catholic Church. She was a top-notch journalist, but one motivated by her faith. If she could do it, maybe I could too.

Her obituary in the *Catholic Herald* [2]says she interviewed many of the "Catholic greats," men and women who dedicated their lives to serving the church and making a difference in the world. I'd put Ethel Gintoft in that category too. The newest generation of Catholic women journalists may not even realize they have the Ethel Gintofts to thank for their opportunities. I do. Thanks, Ethel.

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