

'Patients were treated like family'

A longtime nurse is sharing her memories from the hospital that is now OSF Saint Anthony's

Do a web search for "a life well lived," and you might just find Wally Fisher's picture.

The 87 year-old from Jerseyville, Illinois, is adding her voice to those marking 100 years since the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George [came to St. Louis, Missouri](#). The Sisters eventually established what today is [OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center](#) in nearby Alton, Illinois.

Fisher's story

Fisher hails from northern Germany. After eighth grade, her parents said her school days were over, and helping on the family farm would be her profession. But turning 18 afforded her some freedom. Fisher says she met the Sisters, who introduced her to nursing and recruited her to come to America and work at Saint Anthony's.

"I think they thought we would become nuns," Fisher says with a smile.

Instead, it was the start of a long career serving the sick at Saint Anthony's – from 1961 to 1997.

"I couldn't do much," to start, Fisher says, citing a language barrier. "I could answer the [patient call] lights and ask 'Do you want ice water or a bedpan?' That's about it!"

But eventually, Fisher would contribute to many areas, such as psychiatry, pediatrics and surgery. And she saw health care technology evolve around her.

"It was very simple in the early 60s," Fisher says. "We had one antibiotic – penicillin. That seemed to cure everything, from a cold to syphilis. I couldn't believe it!"

Progress continued in 1970 with the addition of the hospital's intensive care unit. The emergency department came in 1983, and the sleep lab opened in 1997.

"Very busy. I liked to be busy," Fisher recalls.

"[Change] happened slowly," she adds. "It didn't happen in a day. It took months or sometimes years."

The Sisters' impact

The contributions from Fisher and all the other Mission Partners (employees) at OSF Saint Anthony's are cherished by the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George, who still are visible in the hospital today.

"[Our employees] share the Mission of the Sisters to serve with the greatest care and love. They really take it to heart," says Sister M. Christine Crowder, who also started at the hospital in the 1960s. "We are really supported by them, and [the Sisters] try to do everything we can to support them.

"With all the growth and advancements, that Mission is still very important and part of our care," she adds. "That's what makes OSF Saint Anthony's what it is today. That Mission and dedication of those first Sisters are still here."

"There was a very warm atmosphere. It was just different from any other institution. Patients were treated like family," Fisher says. "People would come back and bring their kids or grandkids and show them off."