



## Patience Frances Dirkx

April 22, 1938 - January 23, 2026

Patience Frances Dirkx passed away peacefully on January 23, 2026. She was born to Nick and Eudora Dirkx on April 22, 1938 in Gleason, Wisconsin and named after her paternal grandmother, Frances Dirkx.

She was preceded in death by her parents and brothers, Nick, Casey, Dan, Tom; sister, Anne Ashbeck and dear friend, Jack Lewis. She is survived by brothers, Peter (Bonnie), San Diego, California; John (Rose), Okemos, Michigan; Tim (Gail), Madison, Wisconsin; sister, Mary (Al) Justice, Phelps, Wisconsin; sister-in-law, Susie Dirkx, Woodstock, Illinois; and brother-in-law, Nubs Ashbeck, Merrill, Wisconsin.

Patience was in the convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Merrill, Wisconsin from 1954 to 1969. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Medical Technology from Marquette University in 1963, making her the first person in her family to graduate from college. That same year, the first symptoms of ALS (originally misdiagnosed as MS) appeared. After graduation, she set up a lab in a small hospital in southern Illinois, just east of St. Louis. There she was credited for saving a six-year-old boy's life by diagnosing him as a hemophiliac. She subsequently became manager of the laboratory at Holy Cross Hospital in Merrill, Wisconsin. The laboratory was awarded Accreditation by the American Association of Blood Banks. During that time, she also taught chemistry and physics at the local Catholic high

school.

In June 1969 she took a job as a research scientist in the special hematology lab at the Marshfield Clinic, working closely with the three hematologists and assisting with bone marrows. She also taught a 4-credit hematology course to the senior interns and to rotating hematology interns and residents. She authored and co-authored multiple publications while working at the Marshfield clinic and was editor of the laboratory newsletter. She served as chief editor of the hematology section of the national Journal of Medical Technology. In 1972 she was recognized as Wisconsin's medical technologist of the year. In 1973 she was a runner-up for national med tech of the year and was also awarded Marquette University's first med tech of the year award. During this time Patience also enjoyed snowmobiling with her husband, Ron Gatlin, to whom she was married from 1971 to 1981.

In 1983 she retired from medical technology and went back to school at the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology. She went on to obtain her Masters and PhD at the University of Minnesota in counseling psychology. She was awarded an \$8,000 grant from the MS Society of Minnesota, a \$50,000 grant from the Federal Government, as well as a \$10,000 fellowship from the University of Minnesota to fund her research. Upon graduation, she received a postdoctoral fellowship from the Kennedy foundation to cross validate her original research. She worked as coordinator of the communication core at the Institute for Disability Studies, was editor of the newsletter and authored many scientific articles. She also served on the State of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB) for 20 years.

Patience volunteered at the MS Society as a telephone counselor and editor of the Newsletter. Subsequently, she tutored students in statistics, writing papers, understanding chemistry, and developing PowerPoint presentations.

She tutored students from California, Florida, Minnesota and Maine as well as from Morocco, Iran, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Saudi Arabia.

In 2013, after an MRI, she learned there was no evidence that she had MS. Further testing revealed she had a rare form of ALS, and had it for over 60 years, much like Stephen Hawking.

Patience was a loyal Minnesota Twins baseball fan. She was an avid mystery reader and shared books with her longtime friend, Cy Lepak. She was also a very competitive Scrabble player.

After her beloved cat Professor died, she adopted two orange tabbies, Hope and Holley, whom her sister Mary had brought for "a visit."

Patience gathered loved ones in Minneapolis in 2023, while she was still in good health, for a Celebration of Life to share many special memories.

Both Patience and her family were blessed to have a wonderful caregiver in her life for the past four years. Fasia Kiazolu made it possible for Patience to live in her own apartment and was with her constantly for much of her final week. Patience will be dearly missed.

The family is planning a memorial at St. Augustine Church in Harrison, Wisconsin at 11:00 a.m. on May 16th. A fellowship has been set up at the University of Minnesota in Patience's name: <https://bit.ly/dirkxfellowship>