

Memento for Sister M. Julien, CSC

(Marie Alphonsa Wilke)

January 12, 1918—October 6, 2018

These memories were shared by Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, at the funeral on October 11, 2018.

Marie Alphonsa Wilke, daughter of Dutch-born parents Cornelius Wilke and Johanna Van Helden, called herself “a child of Mary” when applying to enter the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1935. Her pastor, however, designated her as “good timber for any community she may wish to join.” As the youngest of 14 children, she had to be strong. By the time Marie Alphonsa entered the Congregation, there were only six living children. Her mother was 53 and a widow. Marie’s father had died four years earlier. Marie fretted about possibly being turned away on her entrance date, September 8, 1935, unable to pay her expenses until their family home was sold. An older sibling by 17 years, Sister M. Alphonso (Cornelia Wilke), was already a professed Sister of the Holy Cross (died 1983).

Marie did enter the Congregation. As Sister Julien, she became the ever-present music teacher in several Midwest Catholic elementary and secondary schools from 1938 to 1971. Alumnae of St. Mary’s Academy, South Bend, Indiana, may remember their school song that she arranged in 1953, as well as the variety of beautiful music to which she introduced them. Recently, former students Maureen O’Malley, who is a Holy Cross Associate, and Sister Judy Murphy expressed the significant impact Sister Julien has had in their lives, both musically and spiritually.

Sister Julien was an accomplished pianist, organist, music educator, pastoral musician, and musical and spiritual mentor to many over the years. She wrote a high school musical and staged it to earn her Master of Music Education from the University of Notre Dame in 1964.

In 2016 Terry Sherman, a former high school student from Bishop Noll Institute in Hammond, Indiana, who describes himself as an actor-musician, wrote:

“Sister Julien, ...I am writing you after all these years to tell you something I should have told you a long time ago: when I was a

student at Bishop Noll you changed my life... . What changed my life most was the opportunity to comprehend music on an entirely different level when you decided to offer a special course about music appreciation... . Sister Julien, your class is the only formal training in music theory to which I have ever been exposed...you provided me with the basic music tools to carry out certain aspects of my career (in theater and music). Mostly I want to thank you because I have been able to make a living doing something I genuinely and passionately love doing.”

Sister Julien appears to have had a unique gift of making lifelong friends. These included students she mentored, seminarians she inspired and encouraged, family members who fondly remember wonderful times with Sister. They experienced life’s simple joys with Julien: going on short trips and having family gatherings at someone’s home; feeding the birds and shooing the squirrels away; praying the rosary and walking through the cemetery to visit Sister Alphonso’s grave. Most recently, in 2013, more than 40 relatives gathered to celebrate Sister Julien’s 75th anniversary of vows. At her death, phone calls were made to several friends who have kept track of Sister Julien for 30 or more years. Citing just one example, David Thiel met Sister Julien and Sister St. Bridget (Bromeling) in 1988 in Medjugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina, to visit the shrine in honor of the Blessed Mother, and had kept in touch with them.

Sister Julien hit the high note of her music ministry as director of Liturgy at the Church of Our Lady of Loretto, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1971-1983. She composed the “Mass in Honor of Our Lady of Loretto” in 1975 hoping that her opus would be used in churches far beyond the motherhouse. Today we celebrate Sister Julien’s life here in the Church of Loretto, its interior walls adorned with mosaic panels dedicated to Our Lady.

From 1985 to 1996 Sister Julien ministered at Our Lady of Holy Cross Convent, South Bend. She was next assigned to Saint Mary’s College as sacristan and campus minister until 2003. Sister then lived at Saint Mary’s Convent offering her service to the community as her health allowed.

Sister Julien’s legacy may well be her “Song of the Virgin Mary.” In 1979 Sister composed several renditions of the biblical canticle, now known affectionately as “Sister Julien’s Magnificat.” The canticle traditionally closes

the vespers service. “Rejoice, my soul, give glory to the Lord, my being finds its joy in God, my savior. He looked with love upon my littleness, and from all ages people call me blessed.” The melody is haunting, expressing beautifully the closing of the day in gratitude. “He who is God, the Lord, the Holy One, has wrought in me the wonders of his mercy.” Sister Julien died as the oldest sister in the Congregation according to religious rank, no longer Mary’s child, but a woman who had experienced 100 years of God’s mercy.

Sister Julien gave the memento for her sister Cornelia, Sister Alphonso. As Sister Julien prayed then, we pray today: “May Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and the Holy Spirit on whom she depended throughout her life, be her joy at this time and for all eternity.”

Through Sister Julien, may God grant blessings to her family and her community whom she loved dearly.