

# **Sister M. Lorraine, CSC**

(Frances Lorraine Black)

April 12, 1921–February 28, 2022

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Joy O’Grady, CSC, who read them at Sister Lorraine’s funeral on March 7, 2022.**

A quote I read recently said, “Fill your life with adventures, not things. Have stories to tell, not stuff to show.” I thought to myself, this is what Lorraine did.

Faith, family, friends, community are what propelled, nourished, inspired and gave meaning to Lorraine’s long life.

Frances Lorraine Black was born at home in Morris, Illinois, on April 12, 1921.

Lorraine loved telling the story about being named after the Lorain oven in their family kitchen. She said it was there that the family gathered often to be with each other as their mother, Katie, was preparing the supper meal. It was a place of warmth, stories, humor and enjoyment for the whole family. And Lorraine’s arrival into the Black family conjured up all these feelings and more.

Being the youngest of 10, born shortly after her 11-year-old brother George died, Lorraine’s arrival brought much needed joy and healing to the whole family.

While all her siblings and her dear niece, Sister Grace Watson, CSC, died before her, Lorraine stayed in close touch with her many other nieces and nephews, some of whom are here today.

If you ever spent any length of time with Lorraine, you know her conversation would eventually lead to stories about her family. She loved talking about her childhood and family and how much she loved them.

Lorraine's mother was her model of faith, strength, resilience and determination, qualities that Lorraine also wove through her adult life.

Lorraine's father, Frank "Daisy" (named after a winning horse), was her model of generosity, daring, fun and risk taking. She would often recall how after her mother and dad had visited her local community, the sisters would find \$5 bills rolled up and left in the refrigerator for each sister in the house. Fun evidence that "Daisy" had been there.

Another story about her mother: One time Katie allowed Lorraine and her girlfriend to walk downtown to a night movie. But they had to promise to wait for her after the movie so she could accompany them home. During the movie, there was an unexpected ice storm and Katie had to go up a small hill on her hands and knees to get to the theatre. No easy feat, but she never thought twice.

As a religious, whenever Lorraine was complimented or praised for how she handled something, she would always give the credit to one or both of her parents for what they modeled for her.

Having been taught by the Sisters of the Holy Cross and having two sisters, Antonella and Anna, who were Holy Cross sisters (and later her niece, Grace), the idea of being a Holy Cross religious was planted in her heart early on. However, during her senior year in high school, Lorraine's plan for religious life was challenged by a budding relationship with a handsome young man by the name of Sammy. So, after graduation, Lorraine opted to go to business school in Kankakee, Illinois. After about a semester there, she realized the Lord's call to Holy Cross was the stronger path for her. She returned home and packed her bags to join her sisters here at Saint Mary's in November 1939.

Shortly after Lorraine professed first vows, she was sent out to teach. She was barely a few years older than her students and not fully prepared academically but full of faith and energy. As her student, you quickly learned that she would think the best of you and expect the best of you. You knew she was demanding but fair, set high expectations because she believed in you, but gave lots of room and encouragement for individual expression.

One story of many to illustrate this was how she learned to negotiate with the students on their level. She encouraged discipline, curiosity and an eagerness for learning. She told them that when they studied hard, behaved in class (i.e., paid attention) and performed their best, she would let them watch a movie at the end of the week, or she would let the boys sit next to their girlfriends during a study period. They loved it and they behaved.

Following a few years of teaching, Lorraine's organizational, administrative and interpersonal skills became evident to her superiors, and she was assigned to be a principal. For 26 years, Lorraine served as a principal in schools throughout Indiana, Michigan and Illinois. One of her greatest challenges as a principal was to open the new elementary school of Christ the King, here in South Bend, Indiana. Because the building wasn't completed when they opened, the classes started in the basement with a reduced number of students. Today, the school is considered one of the best Catholic schools in South Bend. Many of her students from that first class have kept in touch with her, and a whole group of them came to visit her this past year.

During this same time, Lorraine was also missioned as superior of some of the convents where she lived, often being the youngest sister in the local community. In those pre-Vatican times, superiors had some rather strict, distasteful responsibilities. Another story that gives you an idea of her leadership and creative problem-solving skills is this: One of the responsibilities of the superior in those times was to turn the TV off at 8 o'clock. Not liking this herself but wanting to be obedient to her responsibility as superior and wanting to respect the sisters as adults, Lorraine came up with a solution. She would go to her bedroom before the TV curfew and so if she wasn't there, she couldn't turn off the TV. Problem solved.

After 40 years of ministry in elementary education, Lorraine was asked to serve as regional treasurer for the Midwest Region of the Congregation for two three-year terms. She had no real formal experience in finance though she liked math and was comfortable with

figures. There was one responsibility, however, that the job required and it involved going to the bank every day. The problem was, Lorraine didn't drive so she would have to rely on one of the other sisters to take her when they could. While she appreciated the generosity of the other sisters, it didn't really sit well for her as a sustainable solution. So, she determined she needed to learn to drive, and that she did. She signed herself up for driver training and asked one of our Holy Cross brothers, Brother Walter, to give her extra driving practice. Within the year, she had her license and was driving herself to the bank and around town.

In 1988, Lorraine had completed her ministry as Area treasurer and I was beginning a new private counseling practice here at Saint Bridget's and needed an office assistant. The Holy Spirit, together with our superior, Sister M. Margaret Michael (King), CSC, brought us together, and Lorraine began another new ministry running the CSC Counseling Center office. Besides doing the billing, filing and keeping financial records, Lorraine's job was to greet my clients when they arrived and collect their payments as they left. After a few times of meeting and engaging with Lorraine, I found out that clients would sit and visit another 15 minutes with her after leaving their session with me, sharing laughter and sometimes tears. Many told me over the years how special she became for them and how understanding she was.

Around 2010, I decreased my practice to part time and Lorraine decided that it was time for her to retire from her office responsibilities and begin a full-time ministry of prayer.

Though she grew up in a traditional, pre-Vatican Church and held onto some traditional prayer forms, her spirituality was always deepening and broadening. Virtues of eco-spirituality and the Gospel as our call to justice took on special meaning in her prayer and outlook on life.

Eucharist was central to her faith and life. She loved the Blessed Mother and St. André and entrusted all prayer requests to them. She prayed several rosaries daily, with very special intentions for each one.

Lorraine knew her own mind and what she thought was the right way to do things. You wonderful housekeepers who came to Saint Bridget's twice a month learned from Lorraine, early on, there was a right way to dust, a right way to sweep under furniture, and a right way to mop the floor. If you were Lorraine's card partner, you quickly learned there was a right time to play your cards and a right time to go out. If you were her friend, you learned of her faithfulness, generosity, wisdom, bluntness, her willingness to learn from you, to say I'm sorry, and her unwavering love.

In the last days of her life, she told me: "I want to be remembered as a woman of prayer" and, first and foremost, that is what she was.

Her final ministry was to pray full time for family, friends, those who were ill and suffering, Congregation leadership and concerns of the Congregation, the political conflicts of our world, the lost and the lonely. Her spiritual heart was so big, it is not surprising that in her 100th year, it ran out of energy to beat.

I end with this quote from *Dawn Without Darkness* by Anthony T. Padovano: "Dawn is a time when night and day meet. Sun, moon, stars collaborate to give soft and fragrant light to the world. Dawn is for harmony. It is an hour when many things converge and when everything is just about to begin."

It was dawn on February 28 that Lorraine began to walk her final steps on this earth, and at 10:37 a.m. with the Hail Mary audible on her lips, she quietly, peacefully passed on to begin her eternal life.

Thank you, dear Holy Cross sister, thank you dear aunt, thank you dear friend, for the gift of your example, for the gift of your love, for the gift of the life you shared with us. We love you and bid you farewell with "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."