

# **Sister Loretta Marie, CSC**

(Elizabeth “Betty” Jean Valdes)

March 21, 1931–June 7, 2021

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Catherine Osimo, CSC, with contributions from other sisters who shared memories. They were read by Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, at Sister Loretta Marie’s funeral on June 15, 2021.**

Sister Loretta Marie, Elizabeth Jean Valdes, was fondly known by her family as Betty Jean. Throughout her life she was a valiant woman, bearing deafness with dignity. She was always friendly and engaging, although it was difficult to participate when she could not always hear the persons with whom she conversed. Sister Loretta Marie remained an active and interested participant in community gatherings.

She liked to read and kept up with what was happening around her in her family, the community and the world. Her many friends kept in contact as well as cousins, who loved her dearly. Before the lock down from the pandemic, her friend Mary Morois, with service dog Roxy, came to see her while at Saint Mary’s. Sister Loretta loved those visits. Surely, she felt secure in her association with someone who truly understood. Her cousin Marci called frequently, keeping her posted on the family and her beloved Texas.

Betty Jean Valdes was described as “a beautiful girl in every way, charming in manner and deeply religious,” according to the recommendation letter from the pastor of St. Mary’s Church in Austin, Texas. She was elected “Miss St. Mary’s” at high school graduation because she represented the ideals of her alma mater. She was a recent convert though she had lived as a Catholic for some time, having been practically raised by the Sisters of the Holy Cross at St. Mary’s Academy in Austin since elementary school. Sister M. Lucy (Abell), CSC,

the principal and superior, vouched for Betty Jean as “blessed with a strong faith” and a good candidate for entrance into the novitiate of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Upon reception of the holy habit on February 2, 1949, the young woman became known as Sister Loretta Marie, a name in honor of the Blessed Mother as Our Lady of Loretto, a name she always bore with grace and dignity.

Hattie Marie Bardmess Valdes was Betty Jean’s mother, who gave birth to her in Fort Worth, Texas, March 21, 1931. Mozy Valdes adopted his wife’s daughter. Both Hattie and Mozy ran separate businesses in Austin and both were able to provide for Betty Jean’s education and care even after their divorce. Betty Jean was not the first child to be raised by Holy Cross sisters at their academies, which were schools for boarders as well as day students. Sister Lucy continued as a strong influence on Sister Loretta Marie until Sister Lucy’s untimely death in 1964.

From 1951 to 1962, Sister Loretta Marie taught in Catholic elementary schools in New York, Virginia and Maryland. Her hearing impairment moved her out of the classroom into medical records administration at Holy Cross hospitals in Silver Spring, Maryland; Anderson, Indiana; and Columbus, Ohio. One of the most significant decisions of Sister Loretta Marie’s life was to leave hospital and Congregation-sponsored ministries. She enrolled at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., to pursue a master’s in counseling of the hearing impaired, “which in turn enabled me to accept my own deafness after avoiding it for 30 years.” She earned her degree in 1983 and thereafter was a counselor, advocate and coordinator at the Shiloh Senior Center for the Hearing Impaired at the historic Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., for 13 years. From its beginnings, Shiloh had been “the vanguard of uplifting the quality of life for Blacks in the District, such as the teaching of reading and writing to adults during the times of Emancipation.” Sister Loretta Marie brought her skills in the medical-legal field of hospital ministry with her to the Shiloh Senior Center for the Hearing Impaired as well as her sign language skills in an activist church moving from social welfare to social change, from direct service to

community empowerment. From 1996 to 2015, her ministry was entirely in Washington, D.C., working with Deafpride and Deaf-REACH. Sister retired to the motherhouse at Saint Mary's in 2015, devoted to a ministry of prayer.

The last two years proved challenging for Sister Loretta Marie, but during her last two weeks she had the prayers of the Congregation around the world. As Sister Joan Marie Steadman, Area coordinator, expressed, "The peaceful presence of her Holy Cross sisters was a comfort as Loretta Marie made her final journey to the arms of our loving and compassionate God." She died peacefully on a rainy afternoon, June 7. Her friend Mary wrote, "Last night, there was a huge rainbow and a beautiful sunset. I thought, 'It's barely been a day and Loretta's working miracles already.'"

Sister Loretta Marie kept a memorial card with a picture of her beloved Sister Lucy, in full habit, sitting by a lily pond. On the reverse side is a poem attributed to Sister Lucy with her signature. The poem is based on Philippians 4:8 and titled "Whatsoever Things Are Lovely."

*Whatsoever things are lovely,  
Lord of all loveliness,  
Let their eyes see...  
Your majesty in mountains, in the sea,  
In storms that shake the earth;  
Your constancy in changeless stars;  
Your simplicity in a field flower  
Or in the clear eyes of a child.*

*Whatsoever things are lovely,  
Lord of all loveliness,  
Let their lives hold...  
A faith that finds in the dull things of time*

*The burning beauty of eternity;  
A hope that penetrates the clouds of fear  
To gaze upon the brightness of Your Face;  
And a love that encompasses the whole world  
As a small child clasps a treasured toy to its heart.*

Sister Loretta Marie now enjoys the burning beauty of eternity with God and all her loved ones.