

Memento for Sister Julia Marie (Jacomet), CSC (Teresa Marguerite Jacomet)

March 24, 1930 – July 28, 2019

These memories were lovingly prepared by those who knew Sister Julia Marie, CSC, and shared their reflections. They were written and read by Sister Ann Therese Sinclair, CSC, at the funeral on August 1, 2019.

Sister Julia Marie was born in Toledo, Ohio, March 24, 1930, to her parents, Julia Bernier and Leonard Jacomet. She was baptized Teresa Marguerite. She had an older sister, Eleanor, who was very dear to her.

She met the Sisters of the Holy Cross through her parish priest. Although she was taught by a diocesan religious congregation of Ursuline Sisters in Toledo, she chose Holy Cross because she wanted to be free to go anywhere and not be “hemmed in.”

Teresa entered the community on January 29, 1949. Upon reception of the habit, she was delighted to receive the name Sister Julia Marie, after her dear mother. She made her first profession on February 2, 1952.

Sister Julia received her bachelor’s degree in history at Dunbarton College of Holy Cross, Washington, D.C., and her master’s degree at Loyola University, Baltimore, Maryland, specializing in developmental reading. Sister Julia’s passion for education, particularly reading, led her through 28 years of teaching and serving as principal in schools throughout the East and Midwest. She concluded this phase of her life as principal at Holy Cross School in South Bend. She loved children, and in her passion for reading, introduced teachers and children to innovative methods of teaching reading.

I was privileged to have Sister Julia as my first superior and principal in 1967 at St. Bernard’s School in Riverdale, Maryland. She mentored me through that first year of trying to figure out what to do with 46 wiggly first graders. We became good friends.

For a few summers, Sister Julia volunteered to serve in a mission in a very poor area of New Mexico. These experiences deepened her desire to work directly with the materially poor in her next ministry. At the same time, our mission as Sisters of the Holy Cross further encouraged us to meet the unmet needs of those living in poverty, particularly women and children. Sister Julia

and her longtime friend and companion in ministry, Sister Rita Bray, CSC, heard this call to a new ministry with the rural poor in the Appalachian area of Lancing, Tennessee, in 1980.

Sisters Julia and Rita were welcomed to Lancing with open arms of the bishop and of the brothers of Holy Cross who were already there. Brother Paul Bray, brother of Sister Rita, who lived nearby, became part of the local community of three. During those years other Holy Cross sisters serving in other isolated parts of Appalachia would gather together regularly for prayer, camaraderie, and support. Religious in the area from other communities would join them and they all become an extended community.

Sisters Julia and Rita first moved into a dilapidated farmhouse, which they named Our Lady of the Pines. They lived very simply, embracing the many challenges and hardships with good humor and optimism.

The beauty of their natural surroundings nourished their souls. Deep faith and the support they received from their Holy Cross community strengthened their commitment to this new ministry.

Over time, with the help of Brother Paul (an excellent carpenter) and others, they made their house a home not only for themselves but also for those who became their Appalachian family.

Sister Rita's main ministry was catechetical ministry for three small parishes. She shared with Sister Julia many other aspects of their lives of service.

Sister Julia's ministry became many things for many people. She immersed herself in community outreach on the Cumberland Plateau. Though mountain people sometimes found it hard to welcome outsiders, over time they learned to trust that these sisters had come to share goodness and kindness with them, and they welcomed their gifts. Sister Julia's ministry was very ecumenical as there were few Catholics and no barriers in serving anyone and everyone. The different churches supported each other in a ministry they shared. Sister Julia once commented that she was continually learning every day from the residents with whom she shared life. She continued her passion for education and became director of an alternative school, the Plateau Home School, engaging others in tutoring children who needed extra help with basic reading skills. She believed that education was the way out of poverty.

She drove her old Subaru as a mobile library (which she named Carrier

of Stories for Children) over rutted unpaved roads to reach children eager to read. She established a thrift store, bread basket and a Christmas store which offered non-violent toys, and both she and Sister Rita responded to the many everyday needs that spontaneously emerged. In the end, it was the gentle presence of the sisters which was most appreciated and effective in the lives of the people. Their home was always an open and welcoming space for anyone. Both Sisters Julia and Rita often said that the gifts they received from these beautiful, simple people, who had so little materially, enriched their lives in ways that nothing else could.

As you can imagine, living in such an isolated and rural place there are many stories both serious and humorous. At least twice, cattle from next door wandered into their front yard, ate grass and stayed for days.

Their mountain friends found Sister Julia to be joyous, generous and always available to anyone in need. She had a gentle, listening heart and a deep spirituality. She loved to pray with people and to minister to the sick and dying. She loved cooking and her chicken and dumplings were legendary.

Sister Julia enjoyed traveling to Florida to visit her sister, Eleanor, at holiday time. Eleanor loved Christmas and unexpectedly died on Christmas Day, as Sister Julia was preparing to visit her. This was a deep loss for Sister Julia.

In 2006, with heavy hearts but much gratitude for their years in Appalachia and their many friends there, Sisters Julia and Rita felt it was time to leave their ministry in Tennessee.

After some time, both were asked to continue the ministry started by the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Michigan City, Indiana, at Angela House of Prayer and Retreat, a large convent that was once the home of many of our sisters who, over the years, had taught at St. Mary's School. The sisters became co-directors and provided hospitality for weekend retreats. They cooked, cleaned, made beds and welcomed strangers into their home. Regulars were homeless women and men, who were brought there by a Jesuit sponsored organization to give these guests a day and a night enjoying a clean loving environment, self-respect, Sister Julia's good cooking and the warm loving hospitality of the two sisters. After eight years, health issues brought both Sisters Julia and Rita back to Saint Mary's Convent.

Sister Julia's prayerful, peaceful, gentle presence was her gift to the fifth floor in Saint Mary's Convent these last years. Her presence was gift to all of us as

we celebrate her life and her final journey to God.

What comes to mind for me as I reflect on Sister Julia's life is the refrain of a Shaker hymn: "'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'tis the gift to come down to where we ought to be, And when we find ourselves in the place just right, 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight."

Sister Julia Marie, may you rest in the valley of love and delight for all eternity.