

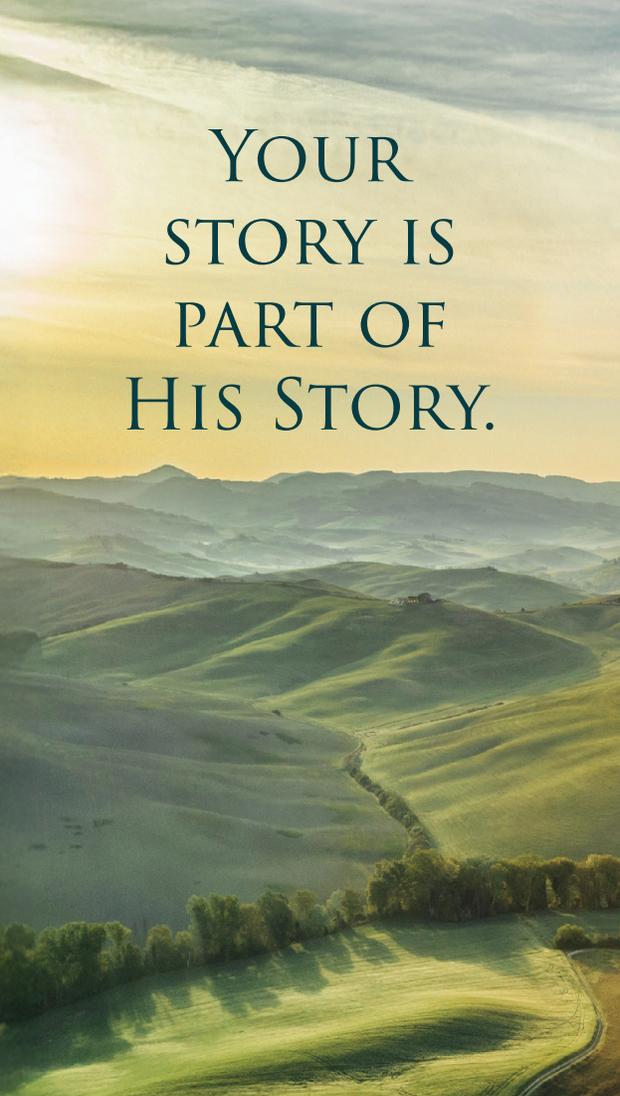
# IMPRINT

A PUBLICATION OF THE SISTERS OF LIFE / SPRING 2025 ISSUE

What's your story?



# YOUR STORY IS PART OF HIS STORY.



## Your life is not casual or meaningless.

We can sometimes feel, in this frenetic, work-driven world, that our lives only matter if we are productive, and that we are only worth noticing if we do something great. But the truth is, you are God's choice. You have been created by Him out of sheer love, not to *do* something for Him, but to *be* with Him. You are not an accident. You are not cheap.

## Every detail of your life is important

**to Him.** There is power in knowing your own irreplaceable story — a story that no one else can live for you — and knowing how your story is wound up in salvation history. We are part of the great epic of God's love; history itself is the love story of God pursuing His people. Your story makes sense within His story; your love is profoundly meaningful. Nothing about you is wasted when it is held in the hands of Jesus. "There is nothing in your past that is not part of His loving plan for your future," a wise priest once told us. May you know and stand firm in the truth of your goodness. Know of our prayers for you.

In Christ, Our Life, and Mary,  
Our Mother,

*Mother Mary Concepta, SV*  
Mother Mary Concepta, SV



# YOUR STORY I



by Sr. Maria Frassati, SV

**Your story is essential.** Our stories — the joys, struggles, victories, and defeats — matter. And, in the cosmic lens of grace, they matter not just to us, but to every person that ever lived. As human persons made in the image of God and called to communion with Him and with each other, no one lives in a vacuum. Because God has united Himself with each of us, even the hidden things are part of His story of salvation. Our love and our choices are powerful, and our life is a gift for others.

**Our stories can become a source of grace for the world.** Patron saints are a great example of this. During the Cristero War of the 1920s in Mexico, a persecution broke out against the Catholic Church. Blessed Miguel Pro, S.J., worked undercover as a priest, wearing various disguises — as a car mechanic and a police

officer, to name a few — and brought the sacraments to the faithful who were prohibited from attending Mass. He was arrested and sentenced to death, without a trial and under false charges. He was then shot while facing his executioners with a crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other. Authorities meticulously captured his execution in photographs, hoping to spread fear among Catholics.

**It was one of the biggest backfires in history.** Blessed Miguel's witness strengthened and encouraged his fellow soldiers by his faith, and they continued to courageously fight for the faith. In the book of Revelation, the accuser, who binds us in fear and discouragement at our own story, is conquered "by the blood of the Lamb and by the testimonies of His saints" (Rev 12:10-12). The stories of God's grace working through them brought

You have a place. You belong.



by Sr. Maris Stella, SV

**We have a deep, aching need to understand how we belong and that there is a cohesive plan for our lives.** I want to know that my life is not just a series of disconnected events, and that, in fact, there is a larger narrative. I want to know that I am part of a plan and that I have a place. I want to know that I belong and that nothing is an accident. I want to know that even my suffering has meaning.

**The truth is, you have always been part of God's plan.** You are already part of a love story and already have a place in salvation history that has a course: creation, fall, promise, prophecy, the cross, and redemption. You live on the earth that God created and gave structure to, and you are intentionally willed here. Christ, the source and summit of salvation history, provides the world with the true Face of God, Who answers life's deepest questions.

**Only the passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ offers our hearts the infinite meaning they demand.** The Paschal Mystery allows us to decipher all the events of our lives in the light of the God Who understands what it is to be human, what it is to have a broken heart, what it is to love, and suffer, and die.

**God sees the entirety of your life in a single glance.** Salvation history is *your* story; it belongs to you. For it is ultimately one story, lived out in billions of different ways.

**Our individual story is part of a communal story;** we are part of something far greater than ourselves. We have a home and a family in the Church. The Scriptures lead us to this truth and fill us with hope because, despite failure, sin, and tragedy, God is victorious; He leads His people to eternal life. The Church holds out to us a true story in which we can meet God Himself, know His love for us, and respond to His invitation to enter into His epic tale.

“Nothing in my life is an accident. Everything down to the smallest details, has been marked out for me in the plan of Divine Providence and has a completely coherent meaning in God's all-seeing eyes.” -St. Edith Stein

# S ESSENTIAL.

strength and healing to their friends.

**The hearts of the saints are especially moved by those places where they themselves suffered and saw the Lord victorious.** Now united with God in heaven, they're eager to intercede for us who face the similar battles. Wrestling with anger? Call on St. Frances de Sales, a bishop best known for his gentleness who secretly struggled with fury. Struggling to pray? Draw strength from the story of St. Teresa of Avila, a nun who often lamented that she spent more time looking at the clock than looking at Our Lord in the tabernacle. She experienced a conversion to deep prayer at age 39, years after she entered the convent.

**Your witness is irreplaceable.** You don't need to share your story on a stage for it to make an impact. You being your true self in Jesus is radiant. And even a simple

choice of love, the raising of a prayer, or a short conversation can change someone's life.

**Your story can spark faith in hearts.**

“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses,” said Pope St. Paul VI. Though the word “martyr” in Greek means “witness,” there are different kinds of martyrdom, which are all powerful witnesses of God's grace. Sharing what God has done for us disposes others to be more receptive in faith, able to receive new graces themselves.

**Take some time to pray about your story:** *Where have you seen God work? What is He about? Is there someone in your life who needs to hear this? And trust that when He calls you to share, He will give you the words to speak.*



# Finding my voice



## Kaley's Story\*

\* named changed for anonymity

*Kaley is a professional singer who walked with our Sisters in a journey of healing after abortion.*

As a child, I had a very busy mind, and a big imagination. I was fairly introverted, and I suffered from a lot of depression and anxiety. My parents didn't have the skills or the knowledge to be able to cope with me; they themselves had grown up in a family where love wasn't demonstrative. I really craved more. I had a huge hole in my heart, and my mom and dad — despite trying, I think — didn't know how to fill that hole.

I had three lifelines as a kid; one of them I wasn't even aware of: Jesus. He was there the whole time. I didn't know it then, but looking back, I can recognize particular events like being in Mass, and hearing and seeing things, and feeling comforted. My other lifeline was my grandmother — 'Grams.' She was a woman of great faith. She absolutely adored Jesus. She had a good sense of me and taught me I was valued as a person. I spent a lot of summers with her. It was magical, actually. We used to play in the saltwater and make gingerbread. At night, we would go to the porch and put sugar on lettuce and eat it, and she would tell me stories. She also loved music; I can remember even at the age of five sitting at the piano with her and singing hymns at the top of our lungs. She was part of instilling my love of music, which was my third lifeline. I was very self-conscious about my voice, but it was a way to get approval, and I was good at it. My parents supported me, and I progressed in music school. But that hole in my heart was still there.

When I went to college, I met a fellow musician who saw and appreciated me, and for the first time in my life I felt like that hole was filled. I became pregnant, but I was filled with a lot of fear that I would disappoint my family again. It was just another proof to me that I would not be good enough if I went home. My mother once said to me, "If you ever get pregnant, please do not come home." So, the message was really clear that, "You are not welcome, and you are not okay if this happens". So, the abortion wasn't about the baby; it happened because of my fear of not being loved, of being rejected. I think the abortion really reinforced the self-hatred I had and the belief that I wasn't worthy. And now I had just added insult to injury and taken the life of my child. I really did not want to live.

I messed up so many times, but now I really understand what His mercy is like.

A few years later, I met my husband and fell in love quickly. I got pregnant again and the same attitude happened again. "I can't... I'm not good enough." And so I made the same decision again. After that, I threw my life into my health leadership career, doing my Master's at the same time. I worked probably 70- 80 hours a week, for a number of years. There was a lot of numbing. I completely let my music life go — I didn't want anything to do with it.

Twenty years later, my marriage ended. I was left to sit and face my own stuff — it was a very dark time. But that's what led me to Jesus. My mother had come for Christmas. I didn't go to Mass regularly, but I would always go with my mom. I said to her "I'm just going to get up and light a candle for Dad and for Grams." And so I did, and I prayed, and then I came back and sat down. And I cannot explain — it still blows my mind — I cannot explain the feeling of peace that came over me. It was a wash of peace and love, like I have never felt in my life. I get teary when I talk about it. And I heard the words, "I am here."

I hadn't been to confession in 35 years. I went into the confessional, knelt down, and burst into tears. I told the priest that I had had two abortions in my life, that I was filled with so much grief, and that I was so sorry. It was almost like after all these years of it being shoved away, it was all apparent and psychologically there, in front of me, unexpectedly; that's when my healing started. And Father was wonderful. He was so compassionate.

I felt that hole in my heart being filled when I left that confessional. My life is completely different now. It was only after that that I began to sing again. A Sister said to me one day, "Why don't you just sing for the Lord?" That was a huge shift for me. I did my first recording, and there was this loose, beautiful sound. I was in the recording studio with Jesus — He was right in front of me — and it was like I was back with my grandmother singing at the top of my lungs. To me it didn't matter if I was on key or not; I was just praying with Him, and singing for Him — and I really mean that. And so the anxiety left, and it allowed my voice to come forward and to be free. And that has never left me, that freedom.

And for the first time in my life, I feel loved. You can't make stuff like this up — these graces! God has brought me healing, and love, and life. I have been so blessed that I messed up so many times, but now really understand — deeply understand — what His mercy is like.



LET  
Jesus  
TELL YOU  
YOUR STORY:  
HEALING OF  
MEMORIES

by Sr. Isabel Fiat Karolina, SV and Sr. Mary Grace, SV

**There may be parts of our story we'd rather not look at** — places we'd rather forget or cover over, or places we can't get away from, that keep us up at night or never seem to pass away. Jesus wants to receive and mend our hearts, especially when they are hurting and wounded. He longs for our permission to let Him into the memories of our lives and heal the narrative. Jesus has the power to rescue us from the captivity of our past, transform our crosses into places of life, and console our sorrows with His tender love. Our lives are not meaningless. They are part of the tapestry of salvation history, and nothing — past, present, or future — is out of His reach.

**In the Gospels, Jesus often asks the sick and suffering what He can do for them: “What is it you desire?” (cf. Mk 10:51); “Do you want to be healed?” (Jn 5:6).** He turns to us with the same gentle invitation. Dr. Mary Healy, a Scripture scholar, says, “Jesus alone is able to reach into the depths of the person’s memory and bring wholeness and freedom.” Letting Christ into our story changes everything. As we engage in a journey of healing, the Holy Spirit consoles, comes to our aid, and makes all things new. God never treats us like a project to be fixed, but rather a beloved child to be loved.

**In prayer, we can let Jesus tell us the whole story.** When a difficult memory comes up, whether little or big, we can turn to Christ without solving it or dealing with it on our own. God is always present, and He was mysteriously present in that difficult memory. Healing is about letting Christ tell us our story. We can lift our pain to Christ, tell Him about it, and ask Him to help us, save us, bring His love, and reveal more. He may answer in a moment, answer at another time or place, or allow some things to remain a mystery until heaven. But the turn of our hearts to Christ gives Him permission to move in our lives. As memories arise, we can ask for the grace to see them from God’s vantage point — to see as He sees.

**It’s important that we never go alone.** Healing is ultimately about restoring communion, which is why it’s essential that we allow the Lord to lead. It can be helpful to share our experience of prayer and memories with a spiritual director or a close friend who has knowledge in navigating the deeper things of the heart. We may need to set aside time to give our heart the space and reverence it needs to pray and reflect.

**We can ask Jesus anything.** We can, at times, hold back our hearts in fear they will be hurt, misunderstood, or unheard. Jesus isn’t afraid of our hearts; He loves us and never forsakes us. Be not afraid! While wounds can carry deep emotions and strong thoughts, they don’t have the final say in your story. Jesus meets us where we are, no matter how dark it may seem. God can lift every burden.

**God speaks in the silence.** God can speak a quiet word directly into your heart, or remind you of a Scripture passage that brings peace, or make His quiet presence known to you and remind you of truth, such as “I am with you” (Is 41:10), “I will never forsake you” (Heb 13:5), or “take heart” (Mt 14:27). Ultimately, the Lord desires our healing so that we might be freer to love and be loved. Let Jesus enter your story and reveal the whole story, and it will become His story of love.

## RESOURCES

*Choosing Forgiveness: Unleash the Power of God’s Grace*, by Fr. Thomas Berg & Dr. Timothy Lock

John Paul II Healing Center - [jpiihealingcenter.org](http://jpiihealingcenter.org)

Resilient Catholics Community - [soulsandhearts.com](http://soulsandhearts.com)

# FREEDOM TO Love



An interview with Mari-Carmen and Dan  
by Sr. Zélie Maria Louis, SV

*Mari-Carmen and Dan are good friends of our community, Coworkers of Life and regular volunteers at our crisis pregnancy mission in NYC.*

### Can you tell us about yourselves and how you met?

**Dan:** I was baptized Catholic but wasn't very religious. My first wife passed away from cancer. After that, I had no plans to engage a new relationship. Eventually I decided I wanted to go socialize and started attending dance classes. That's how I met Mari-Carmen. After six years we were civilly married.

**Mari-Carmen:** Then we met the Sisters because a family friend from my hometown of Seville, Spain, joined the Sisters, so we visited her regularly. Sister knew we were married civilly and mentioned annulment. I didn't want to talk about it at all. I thought, "The Lord knows what I went through in my divorce! If this nun tries to evangelize me, I'm not coming back!" Then we became her surrogate family and kept visiting her at all her different assignments. We loved being with the Sisters. When we volunteered, the Sisters would say, "Mari-Carmen! Adoration is going on; do you want to pray?" I told them, "Listen, I didn't come here to pray. I came here to work!" I felt like prayer was a waste of time. I thought God was upset with me, so I was upset with Him.

### How did things change when Dan was diagnosed with cancer?

**Dan:** That was a significant turning point for us. I was playing basketball and softball at the time, but I had back pain. I was diagnosed with stage 4 prostate cancer. I was surprised, but I didn't feel concerned. I just said, "Okay, it's a different fight. I know what this fight is about. I'll do what I need to do."

**Mari-Carmen:** The next day, we were supposed to go volunteer with the Sisters, but I woke up devastated. I didn't want to go to the convent. But I thought, "I'll tell the Sisters, and they can pray." It was already an open door to the Holy Spirit.

**Dan:** We prayed with the Sisters, and I felt a lot of peace. It kind of turned my sight, my direction, to God in the midst of everything.

### What happened next?

**Mari-Carmen:** We were the only ones in our group of friends who didn't go to Mass on Sundays. Sr. Maria Cristina had made our friend Gabby promise to take us to Mass the next day, Sunday. I was in a dark place, thinking, "God, are you going to take such a wonderful man from me?" I thought he would be dead in six months. I was upset with God; I had even started dabbling in the New Age. I was trying to get out of going to Church, so I had the idea of going to what I thought was a tourist site — the Divine Mercy Shrine, in Stockbridge, Massachusetts — where we could walk outside. Our friends agreed to take us there for Mass and sightseeing.

**Dan:** When we arrived at the shrine, we met a Brother who worked there who told us it was special day and that Mass was later that afternoon. I told him about my cancer diagnosis, and his face lit up. He said, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute! We are looking for somebody for a miracle! And you can be that miracle! We need a miracle for Blessed Casimir Wyszynski to become a saint."

This gave us a lot of hope, so we arranged for Masses to be said for my healing. In conversation, the Brother found out that Mari-Carmen was divorced and that our marriage was not blessed in the Catholic

We just  
wanted to be  
in grace with  
the Lord,  
whatever it  
took.

Church. The Brother said, very dramatically, “Oh, no. It’s going to be very hard for a miracle.”

**Mari-Carmen:** When I heard that, it felt it like a dart in my heart. I said, “Goodness, not only is he going to die, but I am going to keep him from God because of this!” So I said, “Dan, we have to have an annulment. Are you okay with that?” And he said, “Yeah.” The Brother said, “Okay, but do you have a guest room?” “Yes.” So we learned what we had to do (to live as brother and sister) until the annulment was granted.

**Dan:** After that I went to confession and talked to the priest for nearly an hour. It was a very emotional time. After that experience, we were different people. We just wanted to be in grace with the Lord, whatever it took.

**Mari-Carmen:** I wanted to go to confession in Spanish, but no priest around was fluent, so I eventually made an appointment at our parish. The day I went, a priest was visiting from Barcelona! I told him my whole life story, and he heard my confession. It was so wonderful. The Lord sent me a priest from the same city where I was baptized! I received Communion the next day.

### How did you persevere in the decision to live chastely until your annulment was granted?

**Dan:** Once we understood this was what God wanted of us, that changed our whole perspective.

**Mari-Carmen:** I wanted to do whatever I could to help Dan, including spiritually. We knew it was a spiritual battle. During Dan’s chemo, the only day he felt bad and had a fever was the day we started the paperwork for the annulment. The priest asked us if we wanted to reschedule, but we realized what was happening and said, “No. We are doing this now.”

### What has happened since then?

**Mari-Carmen:** A few years ago we met a priest who told us about Encounter Ministries. We got involved and felt the Lord preparing us for ministry, but Dan was still working full time. I kept asking God to make a way for Dan to be more involved. Soon after that, his company downsized and gave him the perfect severance package.

**Dan:** I saw my oncologist a few weeks ago because my numbers had been steadily climbing. I had been prayed over before the Blessed Sacrament and felt that I was healed. Mari-Carmen read my chart and the scan of every organ said, “No active cancer”. That is my current state!

### What advice would you give to anyone in a similar situation as yours?

**Dan:** I thank the Lord for His healing, but the greatest gift I have received is the gift of faith. It’s more powerful than anything else. God guided us back to the Church when we were lost.

**Mari-Carmen:** The way I define sin is like if you have glasses with a smudge: you can’t see the light. If you are in sin, that sin prevents you from getting closer to God. For us, our sacrifices are nothing compared to the gift of embracing God’s love. We learned to put Him in the center of our lives. We have a degree of intimacy with God that we would have never had.



*Mari-Carmen and Dan received the sacrament of marriage in May 2022.*

# Praying Your Story

by Sr. Maria Frassati, SV

## There’s no story like yours.



Through prayer, we discover that our story is an essential part of the tapestry of grace the Father is writing throughout history. When we link our experiences to those of others who have fought similar battles, we become empowered and ennobled to embrace our struggles. The shadows of our stories are cast out by the light of Christ when we see where the mysteries of His life become incarnate again through us, His mystical body.

## The Psalms give words to the ache of our hearts.

In the Psalms, you’ll find every emotional reality the human heart can possibly experience. The story of human suffering is echoed throughout time as we witness King David surrounded by his enemies, sorrowful and wasting away with tears, but still making proclamations of praise in anticipation of deliverance. The Psalms teach us how to be before God — in our wonder and in our aching. We learn how to honestly “pour out our hearts before Him” (Ps 62:8) in faith. King David foreshadows the story of the Eternal King, Jesus, Who entered into human history, and Who Himself prayed these Psalms. When we pray them, we share His intimacy with the Father and step into in His bold filial trust.



## The rosary helps make sense of our experiences.

St. John Paul II says that through the rosary, “The Christian community enters into contact with the memories and the contemplative gaze of Mary.”



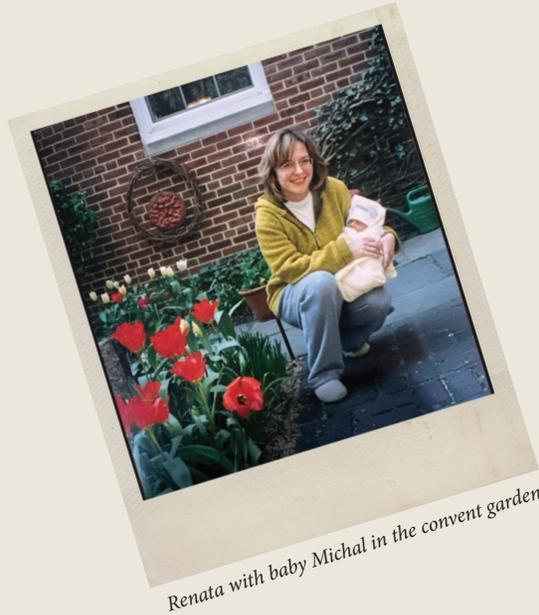
In pondering the memories of Mary, we enter the story of her Son, Jesus. Here, we’re invited to bring our own stories to the table, and ask for Mary’s contemplative heart to see God’s work in it. *What mystery is Christ living in you right now? Are you feeling the poverty of having no wine at Cana or struggling to give God your ‘fiat’ at your own Annunciation?* Each mystery is a springboard into prayer where we draw strength from the incarnational presence of Jesus.

Since our Holy Respite mission first opened its doors to pregnant women in 1998, it has been a place that hundreds of courageous moms and new babies have called “home.” From doctor’s appointments to birthday parties, from walks in the park to trimming the Christmas tree, Sisters welcome each pregnant guest into a loving family and journey with her as she courageously embraces her maternity. “What then will this child be?” (Lk 1:66) is the question on each of our hearts as we gaze upon the precious newborns. We are blessed to keep in touch over the years and welcome them back to visit their first home. Three of the babies born in our convent — now young adults — each share their unique story. They make us proud!

# Where

## Michal

“All glory to God. I can’t complain. Life has



**Born:** 2000

**Currently Resides:** Staten Island, NY

**Significance of Name:** My name means gift from God. In my mother’s words, I was her gift from God and the best thing that happened in her life.

**School Activities:** Swim team, lacrosse, saxophone in jazz band (traveled to Japan to perform)

**Current Hobbies:** Rebuilding and riding motorcycles

**College:** I graduated from Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA in 2023.

**Major:** Construction Management. It took a leap of faith since it was only the second year as an official major at Drexel, but I fell in love with it. I could be a safety supervisor and lead a job site — a combo of science and working with people. That’s the best part — hearing people’s stories, working with them to create a final product.

**Current Employment:** Elevator installation in NYC — a niche part of Construction Management

**Memories of the Sisters:** I remember running around during the holidays as a kid with Mom chasing me around the convent. If it weren’t for the Sisters, we wouldn’t have been able to have that leg up, especially my mom, as a single mother and an immigrant.

**Words of Wisdom:** Always trust in God’s plan for you in life. The present may always be hard, but with prayer He’ll always send the right support you need in your life, the same way He sent the Sisters to me and my mother.

“My mom wanted me to connect with God even before I was born.”

**Born:** 2006

**Currently Resides:** Stamford, CT

**Significance of Name:** My mom wanted to connect me with God even before I was born. It’s stronger to take a name from the Bible. I take pride in my name.

**School Activities:** Cross country and basketball

**Current Hobbies:** Going to the gym

**College:** University of Connecticut, Stamford

**Major:** Nursing. My mom had cancer and, that being a factor in my life, I felt like something in the medical field could be good for me. I like to learn about the human body and how intricate it is and enjoyed dissections in high school biology. My goal is to become a nurse in order to build a family that’s financially stable.

**Current Employment:** Crate & Barrel

**Memories of the Sisters:** I grew up with the Sisters. I remember celebrating birthdays and holidays with the Sisters, playing ping pong and then going outside to make s’mores at the campfire. I liked that a lot. The Sisters are the backbone of my life. Because of the help the Sisters gave my mom, I can go to college.

**Words of Wisdom:** Anyone who has hardships in life, you’ve got to keep pushing forward. The harder you try, the more you’ll get out of life in the end.

# M



# Where are they now?

by Sr. Fidelity Grace, SV

...s been great.”



Michal walking his mom down the aisle for her wedding.

## Vasilija

**Born:** 2006

**Hometown after Holy Respite:** Las Vegas, NV

**Significance of Name:** I was named after St. Vasilije (Basil) the Wonderworker. When I was a kid, I wanted to be named Rose because people mispronounced my name. My mom assured me that it was the right name for me, unique and unforgettable, just like I am (as she was always saying). Eventually I grew to absolutely love my baptized name and with pride and joy remember who I am named after.

**Languages Spoken:** English, Serbian, Croatian; learning ASL, Chinese-Mandarin, Greek

**High School Activities:** Taekwondo, Ice Skating, Volleyball, Cheerleading, Basketball, Greek Folk Dancing. *She won the pageantry title of USA Teen 2022, based not on makeup and dresses but on volunteer work, including the creation of a time management curriculum that Nevada school boards adopted. Advised not to bring up her faith lest judges score her poorly, Vasilija said: “Absolutely not. My message is to be truthful to myself, and God is the main thing in my life.”*

**Current Education:** I am working hard to graduate from United States Military Academy Preparatory School in West Point, New York, in May, 2025, and to be accepted into the United States Military Academy, West Point, this year.

**Memories of the Sisters:** I have been endlessly loved by God, my mom and the Sisters of Life....I’m sure it gave me a jump start in my faith life, hearing [the Sisters’] prayers before and after I was born....I have been raised solely by my mom who taught me and showed me how much God loves all of us. She fearlessly fought for my well-being and for my future, which I am gracefully and joyfully embracing. Against all the statistics and misconceptions surrounding single parent households, with the strength of my mom and God’s love, I was able to grow up exposed to various environments that made me stronger, fierce, and adamant to never negotiate my moral values.

**Words of Wisdom:** [Regarding the term “broken family”]: Without God’s presence in our lives and our commitment to God, we are truly broken. We are all God’s beloved children and should never doubt God’s love and His plan for us.



“My mom prayed for a job here in America and said her first paycheck would be given to the Church. My first job was doing IT at City Hall, and my first paycheck I sent to the Sisters of Life.”

-Vasilija



## oses



# WHEN MY STORY DOESN'T MAKE SENSE

By Sr. Lumen Gloriam, SV

**“It is precisely through the wounds of Christ that we are able to see....**In rising again, the Lord did not remove suffering and evil from the world, but He defeated them at their root. He opposed the arrogance of evil with the omnipotence of His Love. He has shown us, therefore, that the way of peace and joy is Love.” -Pope Benedict XVI, 19th World Day of the Sick

It isn't until we finish a book or a movie that we see the big picture — we see how everything makes sense in light of the end of the story. But what do we do when we're in the middle of our own story? When things seem unclear, painful, or confusing?

At the Cross, the disciples of Jesus could not understand how His suffering and death was part of God's plan to save us, to redeem all of mankind. But the tomb was not the end of the story, and it's not the end of ours, either.

**We are an Easter people, and we are made for the Resurrection.** Your wounds, united with Jesus' wounds, can become a place where His glory can shine through. Even when our story doesn't make sense to us,

or when our wounds seem like the end of the story, we can allow God's love to enter our lives and bring us into His own.

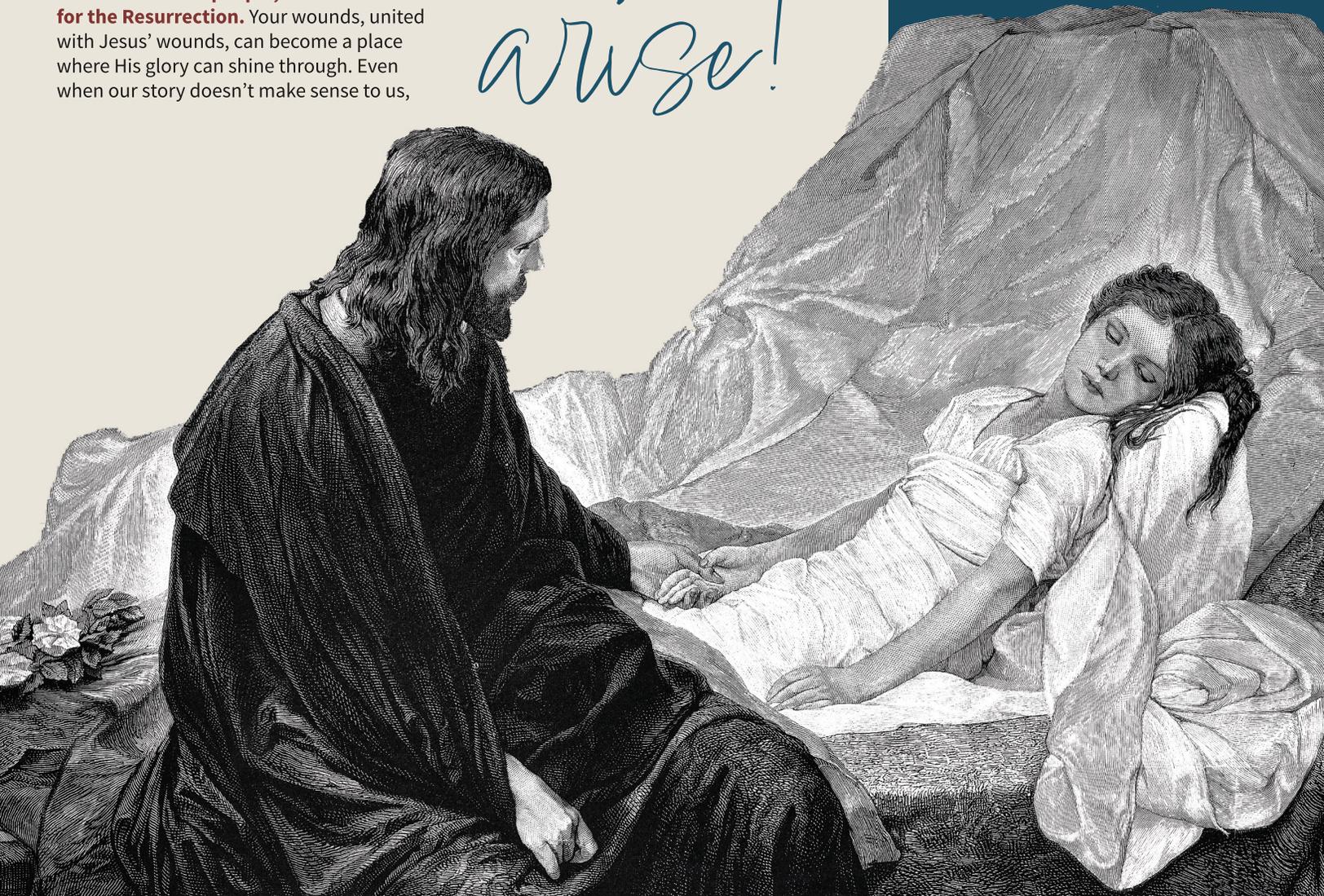
**Even when our lives look like a mess, God doesn't distance Himself from us.**

Letting Him be with us changes everything. When Christ comes to us in our suffering, our wounds can become a meeting place with God and our suffering can become life-giving. It doesn't mean that everything will be easy or that we are never hurt again. But it does mean that where God is, new life and hope are possible.

*Little girl,  
I say to you,  
arise!*

“Eternal God, in Whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us, and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments, we might not despair, nor become despondent, but with great confidence, submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is love and mercy itself.”

-Closing prayer from the Divine Mercy Chaplet



# CONVICTED BY *mercy*

## The Story of Frank A. Simmonds

*An interview with Rita A. Simmonds by Sr. Isabel Fiat Karolina, SV*

### **Frank Antonio Simmonds was born into a loving Catholic family on Long Island.**

When he was a teenager, his mother passed away, and Frank turned from God to drugs to numb the pain. Even as he lived through homelessness and incarceration, there was still, deep within him, a longing for God. During one of the lowest times of his life, Jesus pierced through the pain and reached out for Frank in a way he could receive.

Frank's wife, Rita, recounts the cold night in November of 1998, when Frank, barefoot and desperate, planned to rob the next passerby. He realized the man walking towards him was a priest, and he decided to let him walk on as long as he didn't say anything. After walking past him and reaching the next corner, Father turned around and said, "Young man, if you think God is going to come and lie in the gutter with you, He won't. You know why? Because He's holy. But I tell you one thing: if you call Him, He'll reach in and pull you out."

**That night was a turning point for Frank Simmonds,** but the testimony of his life bears witness to the reality that God does not only reach in and redirect, He remains with us always and (as Frank loved to say) when we reach conversion we realize in that moment that Christ was there the whole time. He became certain of this and said, "Every soul is precious. When God created us it was out of love. We have a freedom that no other animal, nothing else in this world has, and that's to realize that our strength and the love that we show one another came from an original source: Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

**Frank's story is one of love and mercy.** He was able to get clean, in no small part because of the love of his future wife, Rita. They began a beautiful life together, but less than ten years into their marriage, Frank was diagnosed with cancer.

He had always shared his story of conversion, and when he began to suffer deeply due to his health he continued to share the story of God's love in his life, as it unfolded. He said, "I don't carry the Cross; the Cross carries me." Rita explained that Frank knew what it was to suffer deeply without Christ and that there was a stark difference in his experience of suffering with Him. She told us, "He discovered the meaning of suffering: it was an invitation from Christ to share in what He had already suffered. Suffering is not an end in itself, but a

sign of the love Christ has for us. It enables us to be united to Christ and to participate in His redemptive suffering."

Having known the sorrows of addiction and all that came with it, Frank discovered in his illness an entirely new experience of the Cross. In his first of several YouTube videos, Frank said, "The meaning of my suffering is a freedom I had never experienced before. It is the ability to freely open my heart and to ask God to give meaning to the pain — a pain I am sure we all have to endure in our lives."

### **With his deep wisdom and strength, Frank held nothing back once he discovered the truth.**

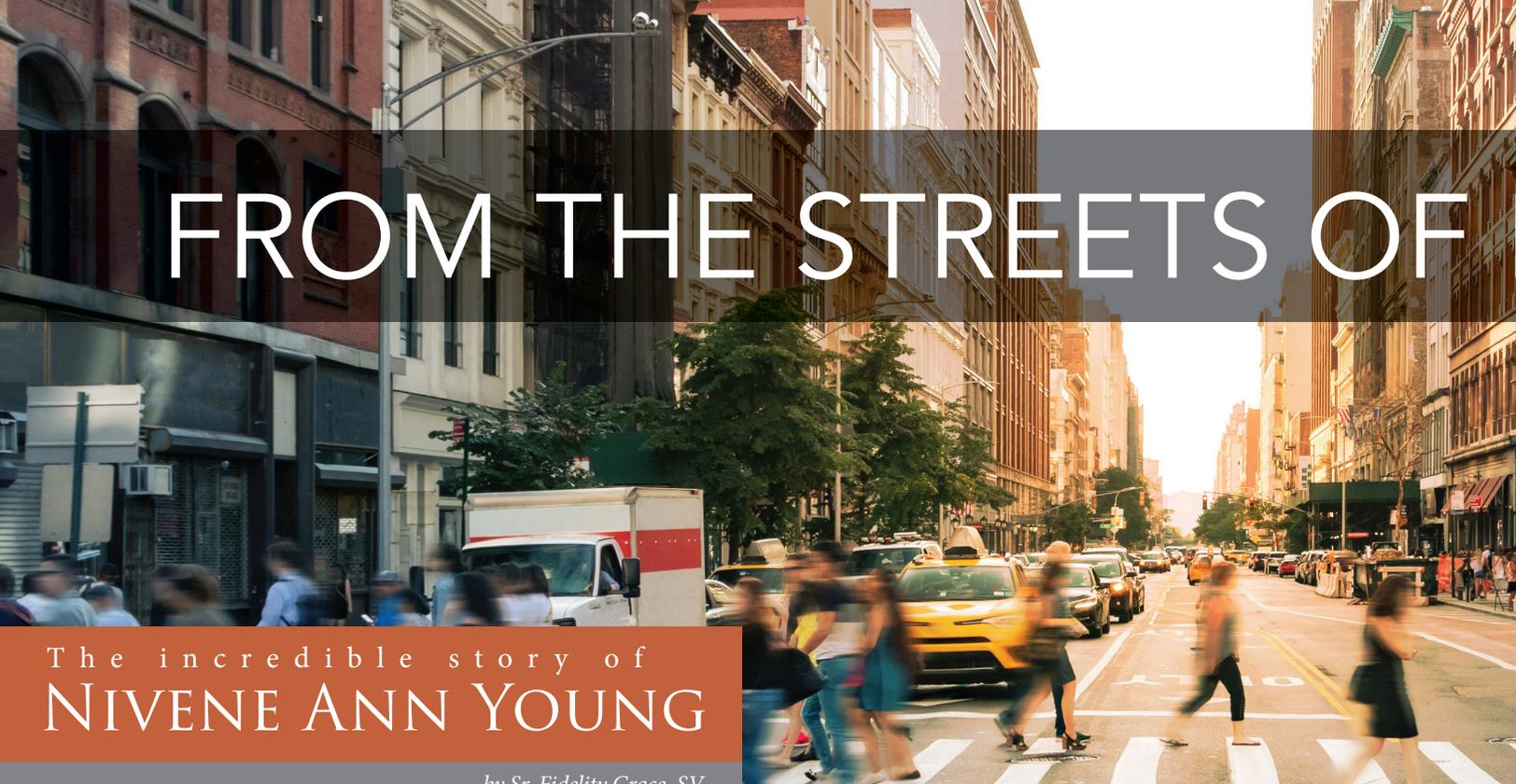
Convicted of God's love and mercy, he believed it was his mission to share it with the world. "He knew he couldn't make up for God's love. He just relied on God's mercy. That's all there is to it. There is no limit to how much we can change. Frank became more abandoned and open everyday," Rita shared. Frank's final months were marked by a striking openness to love and relationship. While at Calvary Hospital, Frank would frequently call nurses and others into his room to thank them and remind them how much they are loved by God! The night before he entered into eternal life, despite his exhaustion, all he wanted to do was talk to his friends.

### **Frank and Rita's story is one not defined by suffering, but by the love, mercy, freedom, and openness of union with Jesus.**

Rita reflected, "I often wondered... 'Where did this great grace come from?'. After Frank passed away I happened to learn that Emmitt Till [a black man killed in Chicago, in part sparking the great Civil Rights movement] died on August 28, 1955. That is the exact date Frank was baptized in the Catholic Church. I didn't wonder anymore — no innocent suffering is wasted." May our own lives be convicted by this Love.

*Rita A. Simmonds is a Catholic poet and author. Her book Convicted by Mercy shares the story of her husband Frank. She lives with her two sons in Rochester, NY.*





# FROM THE STREETS OF

## The incredible story of NIVENE ANN YOUNG

by Sr. Fidelity Grace, SV

*Nivene Ann Young was a good friend of our founder and our community.*

Anthony stepped off the snowy sidewalk and sauntered into the Church of the Holy Innocents in Manhattan's Garment District. Feeling utterly lost after the death of his father and struggling in his work, he lit a candle and offered up a desperate plea to his dad for help. And then Nivene bumped into him.

"We talked, I walked her home, and we became friends. She opened my eyes to see, my ears to hear, and my heart to forgive. She was concerned about my salvation, and I went back to confession after a very long time. Nivene was the best thing that ever happened to me." And countless others have similar stories. Once Nivene came into your life, you never forgot her, and she didn't forget you either.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1956, Nivene Ann Young and her siblings enjoyed a childhood filled with sunny beach picnics. Family gatherings were plentiful, and cousins often chose friendly "Ann" (as she was known by her family) to be the flower girl in their weddings. Enrolled in Catholic school from a young age, Nivene received her sacraments and grew up walking to Mass.

In 1963, Nivene's mother moved to the USA to study photography. After several years living with their aunt, the children followed their mother to New York where they were shocked to encounter the frigid East Coast winters. It was also distressing for Nivene to learn of abuse and neglect in a NY facility for persons with intellectual disabilities. Concern for this injustice may have prompted her to begin volunteering with the Jewish Guild for the Blind.

Then as a senior in high school, Nivene started experiencing vision problems, but she didn't call attention to it. Then one night, a major fever caused her to be hospitalized. Within 24 hours, brain swelling was discovered, radiation treatment given, a benign tumor found and removed, an optic nerve severed, and her sight was gone.

The shock of this tragedy caused deep sadness and confusion, until a conversation with a visiting priest in the hospital laid out for Nivene two alternatives: make the best of your situation or spend your life in

When asked  
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"Simply  
marvelous."

despair. Choosing the former, she moved forward with new resolve and allowed faith to be her guiding light in life.

Now Nivene returned to the Guild for the Blind, not as a volunteer, but to seek assistance herself. Learning such accommodations as folding bills differently to distinguish them in her wallet, Nivene gained independence. "God will provide," became her mantra. And provide He did. Nothing was a deterrent for Nivene, and it was hard to say no to her when she asked for something.

Before computers were widespread, Nivene got a Bachelor's degree in Special Education, relying heavily on people reading to her and recording textbooks. Nivene's natural empathy for those with physical or mental vulnerabilities made her an excellent teacher. While some teachers would think twice about working with certain challenging kids, Nivene was always calm and accepting of every child. Her inability to judge by appearances allowed her to focus on the person before her. People were tickled when she remembered them and addressed them by name after hearing the unique sound of their voice. She also taught catechism classes and ESL to immigrants at her parish, always providing students courage to face their own difficulties.

Ever the evangelist, Nivene enjoyed walking alone so new people could offer her help, and she could tell them about Jesus. When one passerby noticed Nivene crossing an icy street to enter a church, she was inspired to return to Mass with her husband. Nivene's free time was spent making and distributing rosaries and sandwiches on the subway. If she heard about a special Mass or prayer vigil taking place somewhere in NYC, Nivene would find a way there. If she learned of a problem someone had, she wouldn't rest until it was settled — whether a person needed a home, a sick friend needed visiting, or someone needed company on a holiday — Nivene was there.

Nivene's signature smile was constant and "complaint" wasn't part of her vocabulary. In fact, Nivene never felt "handicapped" until 2010 when a craniotomy caused her to lose her balance and orientation. Then in 2016, a malignant brain tumor left her wheelchair-bound. Now after decades of living on her own, she needed 24-hour care. Yet her deep faith in God's



# NEW YORK

## pro-life hero MSGR. PHILIP REILLY

by Sr. Maria Frassati, SV

*Msgr. Reilly was a friend of our community.*

When he recruited people to come pray with him outside of abortion clinics, he would say, “The pay’s not much, but the benefits are out of this world.” Msgr. Reilly lived his spiritual fatherhood fully as a priest chaplain, school principal, and Latin teacher for almost 30 years in New York. He wasn’t afraid of reaching out — he invited war veterans to join him on door-to-door evangelization efforts in the neighborhood, required school athletes to attend Sunday Mass, and dared high schoolers to do the Virginia reel at a square dance. But his mission of fatherhood had only just begun.

After the Supreme Court decision of *Roe vs. Wade* and the legalization of abortion in all 50 states, Monsignor witnessed the violent responses to the legislation: abortion clinics were fire-bombed by protestors, and abortionists were physically attacked all over the country. Monsignor knew violence wasn’t the answer. As he prayed in front of the Blessed Sacrament, he felt the Lord call him to create an organization to witness in front of abortion clinics in a prayerful, non-confrontational way. And on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary in 1989, *Helpers of God’s Precious Infants* was born.

The *Helpers’* way of witnessing, at the time, was novel. The day began with Mass, followed by Eucharistic Adoration. Monsignor was convinced, “We cannot overcome this by any human effort. We start with the Eucharist.” While the priest and congregation began the Rosary, many processed to the abortion clinic, holding walkie talkies to keep the prayer pace while others stayed and interceded. Counselors would talk to women at a small distance from the clinic to allow the area in front of the clinic to have reverential silence. Of course, the atmosphere wasn’t always silent: the *Helpers* were often met with vehement protestors, armed with trumpets and drums to drown out the prayer. Monsignor responded by rooting his team in the mysteries of Christ’s life, especially His suffering on the cross at Calvary.

Monsignor’s persevering love was fruitful. He spoke to mothers, encouraged them in their capacity for love, and offered them practical assistance. It was common that women would angrily swear at him as they entered the clinic, but they would come out asking for his help. He also helped change the minds of many abortionists themselves. Due to the presence of the *Helpers*, businesses that shared buildings with abortion clinics often moved, causing property owners not to renew the clinics’ leases. And abortion clinics themselves moved, which often meant they lost clients.

Towards the end of his life, he battled skin cancer — most likely contracted from countless hours praying outside of abortion clinics. He gave his very body for the most vulnerable as his nose began to deteriorate and his strength weakened. His passion for life knew no end: while bedridden, he contacted our Sisters at the Visitation Mission in New York, eager to intentionally offer his suffering for a woman vulnerable to abortion. By the time he died at 90 years old in 2024, there were 40 *Helpers of God’s Precious Infants* chapters in the United States alone, and chapters on five continents.

### To learn more about Msgr. Reilly:

[prolifehero.com](http://prolifehero.com)

[youtube.com/user/HelpersNY](https://youtube.com/user/HelpersNY)

[aletea.org/2024/12/04/rip-priest-took-different-approach-to-pro-life-work](https://aletea.org/2024/12/04/rip-priest-took-different-approach-to-pro-life-work)

Pro-Life Champion, by Frederick W. Marks



love for her remained her anchor. Her daily exercises became a simple reminder of this truth: (Inhale) Jesus is with me. (Exhale) He gives me life. After three hours of intense chemo, Nivene would return home and call a friend to pray the Rosary. When asked how she was doing, she always respond, “Simply marvelous.”

Lest discouragement set in as the cancer progressed, her aide Vivian recommended a song to lift the spirits; “God will make a way!” was one of their favorites. In her final days of hospice care, God literally made a way to her, when Mass was celebrated right in her apartment. Friends who prayed the daily Rosary with Nivene would often observe her looking upward with a grin and a giggle. Likely this beloved daughter of God, though blind, had a greater capacity to see than many of us. Her eyes radiated the light of Him Whom she will behold in an eternal face-to-face, since her passing on November 15, 2024. May her memory and prayers inspire us to see more deeply the person before us.



Nivene Young with Cardinal O'Connor



# Learning I didn't have to earn God's love

*My journey from MIT to the convent*

*by Sr. Lumen Gloriam, SV*

*Sr. Lumen Gloriam, SV and Abby & Ryan Brisnehan, and their baby Pia Lumen. Ryan and Abby work for FOCUS and are good friends of our community.*

Growing up in rural Nebraska, I was surrounded from the very beginning by goodness and simplicity. Life had a straight-forwardness about it, everything had its place: faith, family, friends, school, and sports. Though we didn't often talk about God outside of Mass on Sundays, my parents instilled in me a conviction that God existed, that everything I could wonder at and delight in spoke of Him and bore His fingerprints.

For much of my childhood, I only let God into the fringes of my life — I had yet to discover in Him the friend and Father He is. At best, He was the Master, and I could be His servant. To be His servant wasn't a bad thing in my heart, since I had encountered God as good already. But coupled with the demands of being a child at school, I began to live my life as though I had prove through what I did that I was good and worthy of love.

Even after wrestling with the meaning of my life and discovering that my purpose was to be loved and to love in return, my daily life remained a work of earning my worth. No matter what I was doing, I had to be the best or I wasn't worth loving.

College was no different. I wanted to know that I was worth something, and my academic success was where I experienced that — so I aimed for the stars and landed at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), studying engineering. I distinctly remember an encounter with an MIT alumnus before arriving on campus. He told me, "Don't worry. You'll be worth double what you pay for tuition when you graduate!" My heart sank and cried out, "Is that really it? Am I just worth an amount of money to the world?" The dollar amount on my worth was dissatisfying. My faith, which had been steadily growing during high school through a good group of Christian friends, had been teaching me something different: that Jesus loved me so much that He was willing to die on a cross for me.

These two realities played tug-of-war in me: the air I breathed at MIT spoke the old word: that I had to earn my worth. The new and growing desire to live my Catholic faith spoke a different and compelling word:

He loved me  
because I  
existed, and I  
existed because  
He loved me.

that I was loved before I'd done anything, even after what seemed like failures in my life. In the end, it was the encounter with joy that won me over: the other Catholic students who knew God and loved Him could smile even on the hard days. They were in my classes, going through the same things as me, but they were joyful.

I soon found that, for the Catholic students, the source of their joy was a living relationship with God. They didn't define themselves by how well they did on their homework or exams; instead, they had placed their worth in God's unconditional love. During my sophomore year, the FOCUS missionaries on campus began a time of daily Eucharistic Adoration in the small campus chapel each morning. Never having been to Adoration before, I decided to try it out. It was there, as I learned how to pray for the first time, that I discovered that love had always been awaiting me. And in the silence, I experienced an invitation from the Lord: "Will you give Me all your love?" I didn't hear any audible words, but I knew He had spoken to my heart and was inviting me to consider being espoused to Him forever.

Not knowing what that looked like practically, I went to one of the missionaries. After we talked, she sat me down and called the Sisters of Life with me. It was a new chapter in my life, one that made sense of all that had come before it. Encountering the Charism of Life, this vision which sees the goodness of every person, I experienced the reality that I didn't have to earn my worth or earn God's love. He loved me because I existed, and I existed because He loved me — I could live simply as a human being, and not a human doing. Over the next six years, through my time in college and then as a Catholic missionary myself, God's invitation to give Him all my love pursued and filled my heart.

I entered our community in 2016 and professed my final vows in 2024, and God has never stopped inviting me every day to "give Him all my love." And the greatest of news is that, as He expands my heart and I become more myself, there's always more to give and to receive.

# YOU HAVE A STORY: Tips on sharing it

**From the beginning of the world, God thought of you.** He knew who you would be, what you would look like, what your laugh would sound like, where you would live, and the people you would meet along the way. At the moment of your conception, He created you and your story began.

**Your story is constantly unfolding;** it is unique, irreplaceable, and important. Your life and your love matters. Without you, we would be missing a revelation of a facet of the Father's heart. That's why sharing our stories can be so powerful: they give us a glimpse of the majesty of God and the beauty He is creating in us through every circumstance and encounter.

**In our world — and especially on social media — we often find two extremes:** either the expectation that we share every detail of our story with others, or that we don't share anything in order to protect ourselves. In the end, neither of these will satisfy the human heart, because you are made for right relationship. "Vulnerability without boundaries is victimization, and boundaries without vulnerability is isolation," writes psychologist Margaret Vasquez. We are neither made to be used nor isolated from others, and so both vulnerability and proper boundaries can help us to share our stories in freedom.

**Every part of your story is sacred.** Every part of your story belongs to the heart of Jesus. As we pray through our stories, one question we can ask is: "Do I feel called to share my story?" If so, then: "Jesus, what have You done in my life that You want me to share with others?" In the Scriptures, Jesus invites some people to "go and tell what God has done for [them]" (Mk 5:19); with others, He asks them to keep His healing hidden (see Mk 1:44; Mk 5:43; Mk 7:36). As we discern what we may share, we can consider: "Is Jesus inviting me to share this part of my story? Or is this place of my heart and my story just between me and Jesus?" We can share our stories in a powerful way without sharing all the details of our wounds, exposing the places that Jesus is still healing, or delving into details that will only spark unnecessary curiosity.

**God doesn't give us our story in order to use it,** so neither do we want to use ourselves or our story, even for the good end of evangelizing others. God may call us to witness at different times, but it is for the glory of God and our own good first, before it is for others. Testimony is always an invitation from Christ, not a condition of relationship with Him. It is an overflow of the encounter with God's love that impels us to tell the Good News that we've seen in our own lives first. Jesus never forces us or presses us to share; He is gentle with our hearts and reverent to our freedom. Your story, whether spoken or not, matters. Staying in the story of Jesus alive in your real life now is the greatest proclamation you can utter.



## THE DANGER OF COMPARISON

by Sr. Zélie Maria Louis, SV and Sr. Marie Veritas, SV

**What if my story doesn't seem as good, exciting, or beautiful as another's?** We can sometimes be tempted to question our worth, goodness and loveliness when we perceive that someone else might be better at something than we are. On the flip side, we can also be tempted to place ourselves above others, to gain a sense of security or worth. But ultimately, comparison leaves us discouraged and empty. Why? Because it distracts us from the gift of our lives and makes us vulnerable to the lie that our worth is found outside of us.

**Now, even St. Thérèse of Lisieux was tempted to compare herself with others.** But, musing on the variety of flowers, she noticed how the "splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not take away from the perfume of the violet or the simplicity of the daisy." In fact, without such diversity, "spring would lose its loveliness." **The truth is, no one else is a threat to my worth.**

**You reveal God in a way no one else can.** Archbishop Luis María Martínez writes that each person is called to "seek to learn in what way God wants [him or her] to reproduce His Son." Through the Holy Spirit, each soul is infused with a particular spiritual attraction that corresponds to the mystery of Jesus one is called to live. To seek this out is one of life's great adventures, and to be faithful to it is the sanctifying work of grace. **God does not want you to be someone else.**

**We see this in the saints:** Peter, who compared himself to John even as he walked on the seashore with the risen Lord (see *John 21:21*), was called to be the rock upon which the Church was built. Meanwhile, John was called to contemplation, and his faithfulness to the Spirit's lead allowed him to author the Gospel of John, bringing us to contemplate the divinity of Christ.

Far from being a strained attempt to create one's own story, we as Christians are rather called to discovery: to ask and seek God and find how He has uniquely created my heart. Become a saint by being truly yourself.



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“Christ brought you into being because He loves you for you. Not for your talents, not for your potential, not for any money you may have, not for your educational experience.

He loves you for you.”

-JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR  
*Founder of the Sisters of Life*



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