

VITA of Sister Marilyn Keller



To my Sisters in Community, my family and relatives, my friends, all of whom I treasured and loved during life, and which continues now that my earthly life is completed.

During my lifetime, in particular that portion (27 years to be exact) which I spent at Lourdes Hospital in Paducah, Kentucky, I was dubbed by one ward secretary with the title "motormouth."

Strange...others readily agreed and so that title stuck, and there are those who still have no problem agreeing with the appropriateness of the label!

So, here I am writing my own Vita! The advantage - you the readers can "shut the motor off" whenever you please!

The forming process of the life of Bernice Mae Keller, known in Religious life as Sister Marilyn, began in the year 1930.

Our parents, Martha Amelia (Brown) Keller and Stephen Henry Keller said "hello" to their second daughter on October 21, 1930. I arrived into a family that then consisted of five siblings: Mary Pauline (who died in infancy), Florence Coletta (married Richard Gabele), Carl Francis (married Rosemary Metzger), Urban Stephen, and Norbert Paul (married Edna Hohenbrink). So, I found myself surrounded by three older and then three younger brothers as Steve Charles arrived and then a surprise package of twins, Richard (Dick) and Dale arrived. They were the smallest little bundles I had ever seen!

This all took place in Shelby Settlement, Ohio, which is now known as Bethlehem, Ohio.

I was baptized in Sacred Heart of Jesus Church and given the name Bernice Mae, which was quickly abbreviated to Bernie or "BB" by the younger Keller boys!

The Keller clan, Florence, the six boys and Bernice, were students (from grades 1-8) at Sacred Heart school (a wooden-frame, two-room building), in Bethlehem, where we all became "scholars" under the tutelage of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Toledo, Ohio.

Life on the farm exposes "farm kids" to a variety of work experiences, and so we all (Bernice was no exception) became experts at milking cows, feeding (slopping as we

called it) the pigs and chickens, gathering eggs, raising rabbits (we learned the “facts of life” young!), and even pitching manure (a “scentful” job!). Hard work, yes, but fun was also a part, especially with harvesting of crops, butchering, and threshing. The neighbors came to help and the big special meal was prepared!

Following eighth grade (our class consisted of five boys and five girls), I, along with three other girls in our graduating class, decided we wanted to attend St. Francis Prep School in Tiffin, Ohio. (One of the girls in our class had two aunts in the convent at Tiffin, Sisters Dolores and DeSales Hohenbrink). So, off we went to St. Francis in Tiffin! Imagine the joy and delight that gave our Toledo Notre Dame teachers of eight years!

My senior year was as a Postulant, and I received the habit of the Tiffin Franciscans on August 12, 1948. First Profession of Vows was August 12, 1950. Final Profession of Vows was August 12, 1953.

From 1950-1953, I was a student nurse at St. Vincent Hospital School of Nursing, Toledo, Ohio, and graduated in 1953, after which I taught Physiology for one year at St. Francis High School in Tiffin. I’m not certain how much the students learned, but we had fun! At butchering time, I would obtain and bring “real” specimens to class: heart, lungs, etc., and use these as visual teaching subjects.

My ministries included being a nurse in the Sisters’ Infirmary, Camp Lady of the Lakes and St. Anthony Villa. My nursing skills took me to Lourdes Hospital in Paducah where I served as a nurse and supervisor for 27 years. I served as a member of the Congregational Council for the next eight years, and then I became an employee of St. Francis Home. During my time there I served as the admission coordinator, spiritual care coordinator, and sacristan.

Following my time at St. Francis Home, I served the community by being a Minister of Prayer, Presence, and Service. I returned to St. Francis Home in 2012 as a resident.

While I was serving at St. Anthony Villa, the unexpected diagnosis of cancer of the nasopharynx became a reality, with the attending physicians giving a projected life span of six months to a year!

Daily radiation treatments began and covered a period of several months. I never forgot the concerned, gentle, almost fatherly care of the two radiologists in Toledo, who were truly God’s gift! During the weeks/months of daily radiation (NOT like the modern technology of the present medical world), for each treatment I would be in a separate closed room in which I would climb up steps to the top of the radiation machine for the treatments. I always told the doctors that I felt like a chicken going to roost! Dear Sister Aquinas....many times Sister was my daily companion for the treatments, and, as the radiologists one day examined the sites of the cancer, they remarked in surprise,

“Something more than what we are doing with the radiation treatments is going on here!” Without hesitation, Sister said, “I know what it is - it’s Mother Cabrini! Everyone is praying to her for Sister Marilyn’s cure!” Msgr. Michael Doyle each day would bless my throat and neck areas. In addition, Msgr. had contacted his friend in New York who had been a personal friend of Mother Cabrini and who had a relic of her, and that friend came to Toledo and placed the relic on the areas being treated.

Suffice it to say, a friendship developed between Mother Cabrini and me that lasted my entire lifetime.

This Vita was written by me while on Retreat at Our Lady of the Pines in Fremont, Ohio, on June 6, 2005. Theme of the Retreat: “A Taste of Silence - Contemplation in our Life and Work Area” - a week that was treasured by me and resulted in an ongoing yearning for that “taste of silence,” to experience better my God Who speaks so much more clearly in SILENCE and Who patiently has taught me how to “listen.”

And so I say, with love, that I treasure each of you, my family, my Sisters, my many friends who have made the journey with me. You each have touched, challenged, enriched, supported me...have laughed with and cried with me. You have each made the journey one of being mindful of the One Who shapes and molds life.

In the words of St. Irenaeus

“It is not you that shapes God. It is God who shapes you.

If then you are the work of God, await the Hand of the Artist Who does all things in due season.

Offer God your heart - soft and tractable. Keep the form in which the Artist has fashioned you.

Let your clay be moist, lest you grow hard and lose the imprint of God’s fingers.”

The following conclusion to Sister Marilyn’s Vita was added by the Sisters of St. Francis on September 20, 2020.

Our sister, Marilyn, was welcomed home by Sister Death on Sunday, September 20, 2020 at 5:01 PM. At the time of her death she was serving the congregation as a Minister of Prayer and Presence.

May our sister rest in peace.