



Sister Profile

NOVEMBER 2023

Dear Friend,

Have you ever met someone who, when you were in their company, blessed you with the gift of their peaceful presence? In the Peace Prayer of St. Francis, we pray, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." Sister Jeanne Carrigan has brought God's peace and compassion to others throughout her life.

Jeanne was born on February 2, 1946. She was the oldest of seven children of Dorothy and Raymond Carrigan. Her family lived in San Rafael, Calif. Her parents were very devout, and the family prayed the Rosary together every day.

Her mother was raised in New Mexico in a small town best known as the home of Billy the Kid.

When the family went to visit relatives, Jeanne was reminded how her mother would eat her lunch in the old jail cell where Billy had been held.

Her father was a traveling sales-

man along the northern coast of California.

During the spring and summer months, the family enjoyed eating the peaches, cherries, and apricots her father would purchase at the roadside stands.



Jeanne's baby picture and First Communion Day

A real treat was when he would bring home a bag of walnuts. The whole family gathered around the kitchen table to crack them and pick out the nuts. Putting her creative talents to work, Jeanne would use the walnut shells to make little shrines.

She attended San Raphael School, which adjoined San Rafael Mission, founded by Father Junipero Serra, and was taught by Dominican Sisters. The Franciscan friars from Santa Barbara, Calif., visited her home on their way to summer school. Jeanne wanted to be just like them.

Much to her dismay, a friar told Jeanne she could not join them when she asked. Instead, the friar gave her a book containing pictures of various congregations of women religious. Jeanne looked through it, chose four congregations that



Watercolor by Sister Jeanne.



had “cute” habits, and wrote to them.

One of those congregations was the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in St. Francis, Wis. Sister Paulita Scally responded to her letter. She told Jeanne of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi working in Sonoma, Calif., at Hanna Boys’ Center.

In no time, the family went to visit the Sisters and learned about their work with underprivileged and neglected boys. Jeanne was impressed and decided this was the congregation for her.

At age 13, she said goodbye to her family and got on a plane to come to St. Francis Convent. She was met by Sister Rosanne Sanders, who took Jeanne under her wing, making sure she had the proper clothing for the cold Wisconsin winters.

Jeanne had always dreamed of being a Sister. She would make a habit out of a white bed sheet. Often, she would take pieces of cardboard and construct a little hermitage for herself in the backyard. In August 1967, her dream came true! Jeanne was professed and took the name, Sister Carmen.

Being of an Irish and French-Canadian back-



Sister Jeanne works with a preschooler at St. Coletta's of Illinois.



Sister Jeanne extends compassion to a sick child.

ground, entering a German congregation was a real culture shock. The Sisters seemed so tall. They ate strange foods like sauerkraut. She longed to eat her mother’s tacos and beans.

She attended St. Mary’s Academy and found school to be very difficult. It was only later that it was discovered she had dyslexia.

When thinking about ministry, she thought it would be wonderful to be a cook and make beautiful meals for the Sisters. Or perhaps be an architect, since she enjoyed constructing playhouses for her brothers and sisters and the kids in the neighborhood when she was in grade school.

It was during her two-week experience at St. Coletta of Wisconsin in Jefferson, Wis., that she



Friends having fun together.



Sister Jeanne guides a client artist at ArtWorks.

fell in love working with special needs students. In reflecting on this experience, she said, "I knew immediately that was what I wanted to do. I think it's because people with developmental disabilities are just totally honest. They are always themselves. It was like, 'I don't have to worry about being anything but myself either.' I felt so comfortable with them, and so accepted by them."

She enrolled in Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee, Wis. (later known as Cardinal Stritch University) and received her bachelor's degree in special education and art.

For three years at St. Coletta of Wisconsin and six years at St. Coletta's of Illinois, Sister Jeanne brought her gifts of gentleness and compassion, born out of her struggles with dyslexia, to her pre-school students, teaching them to hold a pencil, tie their shoes, and zip their jackets.

In 1978, Sister Jeanne traveled to Albuquerque,

N.M. to begin her masters and her doctoral work in special education with a focus on art therapy at the University of New Mexico.

One of her most memorable experiences during this time was teaching art to Native-American students. The first day of class, she decided she would have her students contract for the grade they wanted to work for. Much to her surprise, each student gave themselves a "C." When asked why no one wanted to work for an "A" or "B," one of the students explained that "they weren't used to seeing who was best. No one is to stand out. We are all one."

Sister Jeanne's peaceful, compassionate presence extended to the children who were dying of cancer at the New Mexico Pediatric Oncology Center in Albuquerque. She recalls how a little five-year-old boy said to her, "I am dying. Am I doing it right?" In her loving way, she assured him that he was. Not only did she journey with him through the dying process, but was there as a support to his parents.

In 1985, Sister Jeanne moved to Tucson, Ariz., with Sister Lauren Moss. There she worked at Casa de los Niños Crisis Shelter, a center for children who had been sexually and physically abused.

In 1988, she went to the department head of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Arizona-Tucson to inquire about the possibility of teaching an evening art course. It just so hap-



Watercolor by Sister Jeanne



l to r: Mary Lou Stevens, Sister Jeanne, Dr. Yumi Shirai



Sister Jeanne's art studio.

pened, he was going over resumes to hire an assistant art teacher. Hearing of Sister Jeanne's background in special education with a focus on art, he told her she was the person he was looking for.

Within a year, she founded Art Works, an outreach program that brings the arts to adults with developmental disabilities. She gathered a community of artists and volunteers from the university and the local community to assist her in teaching art, dance, music, and drama. She was given a small cottage built in 1926 for her office and studio. Today, 30 years later, the program she started continues under those she mentored and has expanded to a "village" of studios.

Drama was one of the fine arts taught at Art Works. One year, students wrote, made the props and posters, as well as performed a 20-minute play entitled, "Silver Spurs." One of the volunteers filmed the play at a western-looking restaurant. Because of Sister Jeanne's contacts, she was able to reserve a movie theater where an evening showing could be held for the community.

On the day of the performance, the actors came in their finest attire and gowns which they had purchased at a thrift store. A "red carpet" welcomed them at the premier of their film. The evening ended with awards given to the performers. The smiles on everyone's faces were priceless. What a wonderful way to celebrate the accomplishments of the client-artists.

With Art Works in good hands in 2011, Sister Jeanne decided to retire. Being true to her Franciscan calling to fulfill an unmet need for people who are marginalized or poor, she got certified as a nail technician. She traveled around Tucson with a tote filled with polishes, files, and creams to bring comfort to those who were homebound,



Sister Jeanne gives ArtWorks client-artist, Monica, a manicure.

homeless, or disabled. She called her free service, "Saving Soles."

In a November 2012 interview with Patty Machlor, a reporter for the *Arizona Daily Star*, Sister Jeanne shared, "I absolutely love what I do. It's so comforting to be able to bring comfort. I've learned so much about their lives and have received all sorts of new vistas into life and how beautiful people are and what they've had to work through in their lives. It's a humbling experience to have them share with me."

Today, Sister Jeanne lives at Juniper Court, a housing complex for seniors on St. Francis Convent grounds. Along with other Sisters who live there, she brings her Franciscan presence to the residents.

Like Sister Jeanne, our Sisters have always responded in loving service to those in need. Today our retired Sisters depend on your generosity to help with their personal and health care needs not covered by Medicare. I want to thank you in advance for your generous response, and be assured our Sisters will remember you and your intentions in their daily prayers.

In the spirit of Francis and Clare,

Sister Mary Kemen, OSF
Sister Mary Kemen



As Franciscan women with a commitment to caring for all of creation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi use environmentally friendly or post-consumer paper and soy ink whenever possible.

