

**Q. Why did you choose to become a Sister of Providence?**

A. I think it chose me. I was in grade school. When I was in second grade, we went to a new school and Sisters of Providence taught there. I just liked the sisters. I thought they were wonderful women and it just seemed like it was something I wanted to do.

**Q. What made the big impression for you?**

A. I don't know. I was one of those kids who loved school and there they were and that's who was teaching me. Learning was so exciting and they were good teachers. I'd say they were kind, but actually my second-grade teacher wasn't. She was nasty. But my third-grade teacher was. Sometimes we would knit after school. I liked being around them. We always helped out after school.

**Q. You said your vocation chose you. How did you know that?**

A. I can say that now. There was no big vocation story. At the time, it seemed like a natural fit. I was going to be either a nurse or a ballet dancer or a Sister of Providence. It was an era when female children would not have been thinking doctor. Being a ballet dancer, I loved the little tutus, the costumes and things. It seemed glamorous. I also have liked music from the time I was very little. I was enthralled with music. I started music lessons when I went to second grade. With the nurse, it was the helping profession, doing something for others, taking care of people when they were sick. It was an impulse to help others. About becoming a Sister of Providence, I think if I had been at a different grade school, I might have ended up in a different community. It's probably how Providence acts or works. A really great story my father tells is this: When we came home from school the first day, my sister and I, she's a year and a half older, Dad asked us what kind of sisters were at the new school and we very proudly announced that we had the "*Sister of Protestants.*" And, you know what? Over the years, there has been something that seemed like a fore knowledge because I have ended up being in so many ecumenical contexts and doing so many things with various religious traditions I often thought, "See, you knew something even then!"

**Q. What do you value most about the ministry opportunities that you have had?**

A. Oh, my goodness. I have had wonderful opportunities opened for me. I have had a variety of ministry experiences. In my first life, I taught music. After the second year I was out teaching, I was transferred to an all-black inner-city school just as the civil rights movement was taking off. I taught music and, eventually, I started teaching some art, too, because the students weren't getting it any other way. I think, in that particular experience, I may have been the official teacher, the one who was doing music and art, but the people of that parish taught me so much about life and about caring for one

another and about real respect for people. One of the things that I was aware of by the time I left there was that I was really young and naïve when I went there. They were so gentle with me. They never told me what I wasn't ready to hear about how life really was, but they taught me along the way. It was an incredibly enriching experience, just incredible. (St. Bridget, Indianapolis). I was there for five years. I also taught about three years in the public school system. I left St. Bridget when it was merging with another school and I felt like I had done what I could do there. The public school experience (Wayne Township) was an all-new, open-concept school. I was the only teacher who had a room. You had to play music, so I had a music room. That was fun. I enjoyed doing that. I don't know if that was as rich for me as being at St. Bridget. From there, I spent one year kind of in transition before I went back to school to study theology and psychology. It was really interesting. I went back to school because I was doing some consulting work. I was meeting with people in the parish, group process kinds of things, teaching basic skills for communication, that sort of thing. I also did some parent effectiveness training. I was restless and part of that was I knew somehow, intuitively in myself, that theology and psychology and the arts were all about the same thing in the human person. It's about how life is for us as we are living it. I was watching all of these people feel like, "I'll go with what the church says, or I'll go with what psychology says. It was splitting things apart in their lives instead of integrating them. I knew that we didn't have to do that. I knew I was right, but I didn't know why I was right. I had to go back [to school]. I went first to Catholic Theological Union and did a master of arts in theology. Then I went to the University of Chicago and received my doctorate in religion and psychological studies and did training to become a pastoral psychotherapist. I really did end up integrating all three of those. I really loved school. I liked it when I was five and I still like it today. If you said today, "OK, you can go back today," I could get excited about it again. I love learning. CTU was an incredibly rich environment. When I went there to start my master's degree, at that point they were just getting more women students coming. We were the critical mass. There were 10 women. The rest were all young men, seminarians in religious communities. They were doing their seminary training at CTU. Then there was this handful of women getting degrees there. When it was time to look for a position, even though I hadn't quite finished the doctorate yet, I was hired by both CTU and the Center for Religion and Psychotherapy. And so, from there through 1991, I was on the faculty at CTU. That was such a rich environment. Part of what I loved about teaching is that I am always learning more than I'm teaching. Someone will always ask a question I didn't think about. Then, we have to learn together. But at CTU, the people who were on the faculty, they were wonderful human beings, very smart people, very compassionate, deeply spiritual people with terrific senses of humor. There was always a lot of play going on while you were teaching. The students were so wonderful, too, and they were from around the world. I had a class one time that was limited to 16 because it was a practicum in pastoral counseling. There were eight countries of origin, four languages of origin. It was an incredible mix. We were supposed to be doing pastoral counseling. I remember one day, whatever I was saying, we were talking about empathy. We were doing little exercises. Someone gave a response and I said, "That's a good response." One of the students raised his hand and said, "Sister, why is that a good response? Because *you* like it?" He said, "If I said that in my country, I would be beaten up." We stopped right there and said, OK, why was that good response?

We had to step back and learn about what we could say that would be common for human beings across all cultures. Is there anything fundamental and basic? We started making a list. So you could say all people grieve. Why they grieve, how they grieve, what it looks like, what the rules are; none of that is the same. But the grief is there. So, to get to that very basic core, was really a wonderful opportunity. That question broke everything open. I loved that ministry. I absolutely loved being in that environment with people who were wrestling with questions in that way. No one was there because they had to be. Everybody wanted to be there. They were eager to engage around questions that are important. And, the other ministry has been being in leadership for the Congregation and that has been absolutely rich and wonderful too. I love thinking about things. I like solving problems. I like thinking about big pictures and visions kinds of things. It is very important to me that we always stay grounded in our spirituality, clear about why we are here. Honest to God, I love the sisters and I know they love me. It is such a richness and a privilege to walk with other people, whether it was with the students, the counseling center or with the sisters now, to be able to share a journey with someone. It is very moving to know how people struggle and wrestle and take hold and make choices in the midst of some very hard things. When I was working at the counseling center, one of the things that I would often occurred to me is , “Not my goodness, this person is sick or messed up, but I wonder how they manage so well once I’ve heard their story. I am moved by their story, their capacity, the resilience of the human spirit. People are very resilient. It’s really amazing. All of that, it’s fun. Just fun! A few years ago, I was talking with some cousins of mine. They were asking about religious life. One of the things I said to them is, “I cannot imagine something that is a better life, if it’s what you’re called to. It is absolutely the richest, most enlivening, incredible experience. I really cannot imagine a life being richer than this. If people knew that, if they really understood...

**Q. What does it take to really understand?**

A. You have to get past the stereotypes. You meet a person, know a person, see who they are, how they are, how they engage in real life. This person is really, really happy doing something valuable, worthwhile. Sometimes what it takes, if you’re called to it, is getting inside of yourself and experiencing the opening up of your spirit. My world is so much bigger and richer, more varied and more wonderful than I could ever have imagined it would be. Robert Frost was right, once you take the turn in the road, it sets everything else up and then there’s another turn, and another turn.

**Q. Why would a woman today accept life in a religious community as an attractive option?**

A. First, there really is such a thing as vocation. There is a call. It is attractive because it provides an opportunity to come into a fullness of self, to develop your own gifts, skills, talents, in union with others with a sense of purpose and mission. It’s an opportunity to blossom, to become the best one can be. It’s a great life, it really is.

**Q. You have so much enthusiasm and energy after 50 years in community.**

A. I really do have a lot of enthusiasm and energy for this life and work. You know, when I was working in the counseling center, there was one young woman with whom I was working, and I remember sitting there thinking, "She still wants to save the world." And I thought, "You do it, honey!" And you know what, I do too. There's still something alive in me that knows we really do make a difference by how we live our lives. And, we really do make this world better for those who follow us. There is something worth doing with one's life and I can do it here.

**Q. Have you had a defining moment as a Sister of Providence?**

A. There are a number defining moments. One was fairly early on, I was still here at Saint Mary's. I was a young professed. I was finishing my degree work. This was a faith-defining moment or how you have to live your life. Sister Ruth Eileen was teaching our theology class and the Second Vatican Council was in progress. We were getting the documents "hot off the press." She finished teaching. I know exactly where I was sitting in study hall. I was in full habit, to the floor, everything covered. I can see the seat I was in. She left the room and I was sitting there, and this question came to me. I don't remember now what the question was, but what I know is that as soon as the question came up, I thought "Oh, I can't ask that question. If I ask that question, it could take me away from everything I have ever held dear. It will take me away from the community, the church, my family. I remember that thought. Then, almost instantaneously, I thought, "I absolutely have to ask that question. I have to seek the truth, no matter what it costs." That has been a guiding principle, not at a real conscious level, but I can point to different places where I've come up against something and "I think you've got to stay with it, you've got to pursue it." All it has done is take me deeper into life, more fully into relationship with God and others. It's never taken me away from what I have held dear. It's helped me understand more fully. But that was a very clear moment for me. At some point, I think every one of us comes to the question, "Is this really where I'm supposed to be?" There are a lot of other kinds of lives I can live. There are a lot of good men in my life. I like them. I love working with men. I've been in a lot of situations where I was the one woman in a group of men. I remember wrestling one time with the question is this what I really want to do with the whole rest of my life or do I want to do something else? I think I was on retreat. And all of a sudden there was this clear thought that it didn't really matter. I could stay or I could leave. It was a sense that God loves me and God only wants me to be happy in life. All of my relations are here. It's who I am, who I have become. It was a sense of no, this is where you fit, this is where you belong. You could do other things. You could probably make them work. But what would you be reaching for when you have all of this and you are happy here. It's sort of like the grass is always greener. I was in therapy for a long time because of my training to become a therapist. At one point I said I finally figured out what I want. I want it all. It's true. That's human nature. What was really interesting about that is that when I was first starting to do that, I knew I would never do it professionally; it was required. But, if I didn't do it for myself, why bother? I used to sit every morning with the scriptures. And now, I was driving up Lake Shore Drive to be with the analyst and I thought "It's a whole lot easier to sit with the scriptures than it is to sit with Marie McCarthy."

**Q. Sister Marie is ...**

A. Right now she's overweight. Sister Marie is enthusiastic about her life, she is a good piano player, she is a good cook, and she loves life. She is a good synthesizer and has a sense of vision.

**Q. What role does prayer have in your life right now?**

A. It's at the center. It's absolutely central and essential. My prayer has shifted, changed over the years. Now, every morning I take formal time to sit and be quiet, just to be present with God, present with whatever is, trying to open myself, but I also have a sense for the way it permeates the whole day. There is an old, old sappy poem by Cardinal (NAME?) that has a line in it about taking minute vacations. I haven't done this for a while, but I have a kaleidoscope or two in my office. I'll take a minute or two to look through the kaleidoscope, to shift gears to ground myself, to remember what I'm doing, why I'm doing it, who I am, what I am about. Sometimes, if it's real hectic, the flashing red light on the phone is a reminder to remember who I am and why I do what I do.

**Q. How important is community lifestyle for you?**

A. Community is my closest, deepest relationship. Those connections are absolutely critical for me. My sisters have made me who I am, just as I have helped make them who they are. There were a couple of brief periods where I was living alone. It's not good for me to live by myself. I begin to think the world is the way I want it. I don't have to adjust for others. I can get into my own little world way too much. It is very good for me to have the ebb and flow, the ups and down and the joys. I like sharing my life with other people. I like fixing a meal for folks. I enjoy doing the grocery shopping. I enjoy just hanging out. I enjoy all of that, but I really need my own time too. If I fudge on that, my quiet time in the morning, or if I need a little space and don't take it, it's really not pretty. I just get into a bad space and it comes out all over the place.

**Q. Do you have any SP role models?**

A. All kinds of them. Sister Teresa Aloyese Mount. I lived with her for a while. She was always a pioneer. She was always thinking ahead of where things were, always reaching out, moving out. Agnes Arvin has been a role model for me for years; Francis Joan Baker, Bernice Kuper, Mary Pius. Every Sister of Providence who lives her life with integrity is a role model for me and I have to say almost all of them do.

**Q. What impact does Saint Mother Theodore Guerin have on your life?**

A. She started it all. It's her fault that we are here. The way she lived her life, the authenticity of it, the clarity about God's place in life, the whole sense of Providence, and her real reliance on Providence; what an example to follow! She had an open spirit, a real capacity to love everyone as they were. I think, too, when they tell the story about Mother

Theodore and her conflict with the bishop, at the canonization the press really picked that up. I have said this many times. What they never tell is that it was the deepest sorrow of her life. That, for me, is more important. She knew if there was any way around [the conflict] she would have gone around it. She didn't want to be in opposition. She knew from within herself that this was right, this is what she had to do and she would do it, no matter what it cost her. She was the real women's libber. She was at the core of why you stand where you stand, you don't do it just to do it. It was because it was right. It was never about her.

**Q. Has your life turned out as you might have imagined?**

A. Absolutely not. I never could have imagined this life, this rich, this way. I never could have imagined being educated to the level to which I have been educated. I could never have imagined meeting the people I have met along the way. I never could have imagined the travel and the exposure to a much wider world. The biggest thing education gives you is the capacity to ask the right kinds of questions. Being able to engage in ways I can engage, being at peace in ways I can be at peace. I could never have imagined that. Absolutely never.

**Q. What is the most important thing in your life right now?**

A. Living with integrity. Being where I am, doing what I am doing with a kind of fullness and authenticity; not running ahead, not running behind.

**Q. What were you like as a child?**

A. I was a pretty solitary child. I was one of these kids that was too smart. That sounds arrogant, but it really is true. I never fit when I was a kid because I didn't know how to be a kid in some ways. When I started playing piano when I was a kid, I spent a lot of time at the keyboard. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. I was always knowing a little too much. When I was in fifth grade we had a lay teacher and it was most unusual. I would have been thought of as a teacher's pet a lot of times. That didn't make for a lot of friends. One time I was asked to help correct papers. I don't know if it was English or spelling. It was a simple correction sort of thing. What I did was I ended up writing comments on the students papers just like a teacher would have written. "Is this your best work? Could you do better?"

**Q. What is your fondest childhood memory?**

A. We used to go every summer on vacation to Big Cedar Lake in Wisconsin. It had sort of a feel of family-style resort. It wasn't real fancy. People were laughing and playing games, playing cards. All of the adults and kids were playing together in the water. It was just this care-free, lovely time, doing silly, fun things together.

**Q. What might people like to know about your family?**

A. We were pretty ordinary, but I suppose everyone thinks they are pretty ordinary. It was just my sister and myself and Mom and Dad. We lived in a Chicago flat that my grandfather had built. In our household, you would do things spontaneously sometimes. On a Friday, Dad might call and say, "Did you start dinner yet? You want to go out for supper?" It was like a little treat. My mother was just a wonderful, wonderful cook. She always believed it was better to have too much than not enough. It was not unusual for her to call up the neighbors who were friends and say, "I've got a lot of thus and so, do you want to come over for supper tonight?" There was a sense that there was always room for one more. There was always the sense of let's feed the folks.

**Q. Of all the things you learned from your parents, what was the most valuable?**

A. I think it was that sense of acceptance of others. They were always very accepting. If something didn't fit with the way they did it, it was no big deal. There really was an openness and acceptance of others. And, we had the capacity to have fun.

**Q. Do you have a particular philosophy about life you could share?**

A. Live with enthusiasm, energy and honesty.

**Q. What gives you pleasure and satisfaction?**

A. Seeing people blossom. Watching people take hold. I get a lot of pleasure from sorting things, issues, not paper, like devising someplace where we want to go; planning and visioning, helping make it happen.

**Q. What gives you hope?**

A. One of the things that gives me hope is seeing the number of young people who are serious about and committed to making this world better, to real issues like caring about the environment, social justice concerns, the enthusiasm of some of the young women and men that I have experienced.

**Q. When do you feel most alive, or energized?**

A. When someone gets me into a good conversation. That will do it. It can be about any number of things, but if there really is some good give and take and people are working together and it starts to come together and you begin to see how it could work.

**Q. Do you have a favorite vacation place?**

A. By the water. Any water will do; nice little lake that you can get in just to float around and play.

**Q. Do you have any hobbies or interests outside of your ministries? Word gets around that you are a good cook, and you said your mother was a good cook.**

A. I am a good cook. My mother was a splendid cook. I spent a lot of time just hanging out in the kitchen with her. People will say, “Oh, Marie is gourmet cook.” That’s not true. I’m a somewhat fearless cook. I’ll try anything. I remember years ago thinking about what I would do and round steak was fairly reasonably priced at the time and I started thinking, “parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme, I’ll bet they go good together.” And they do. One of the things my mother did for us when we were first going out to teach, one year she gave us the Betty Crocker cookbook which I still have. The other thing is she spent a whole year making dishes she knew we liked, but she didn’t have recipes for. She wrote down what she did so she could give us a recipe box with all of those recipes in it. So, I have those in her handwriting. That’s cool. I just liked being in the kitchen with her.

**Q. Do you have a specialty?**

A. I don’t think I have one. I enjoy doing main dishes. I like to experiment. I have some good salads. I know how to put a meal together fairly quickly and it will be tasty. I’m good with herbs and spices and flavors. I can bake, and I used to make pies more often, but I haven’t made a pie in a while.

**Q. And hobbies?**

A. Any time I can play the piano, it’s good for me. I have a master’s degree in performance. From the time I was in second grade, I loved to play. I love classical music. I love playing it, but I can’t do it now the way I used to. I used to be able to really play. I really enjoy playing sing-along music for folks, any kind of popular tunes, and have people gather around and start singing and having a good time. The only playing I do right now, mostly, is that I play for Liturgies. And I try to do that a couple times a month. It’s a stretch to get the time to practice for that, but I love doing that. When I do it, I really work hard to get myself into a space so that the music is a prayer for the people. It’s not about me. I want it to draw people in a way that singing is a prayer for them. And, I really enjoy reading.

**Q. If you could be granted three wishes, what might they be?**

A. I’d like to see this world be what it’s meant to be. I’d like to see us, we humans, take our proper place in the whole scheme of things and work for good, and that would be enough. Why would you need any others?

**Q. Is there one thing you would like most for people to remember about you?**

A. Someone said once, and it really touched me, “People never feel diminished by you.” I would like that to be true and to be remembered.

**Q. What would you do if you didn’t have to work?**

A. Probably a lot of things I do right now. I would love to have more time to read some of the stuff coming about the new cosmology, theology, just reading, thinking, sharing with others, writing. I'd still love to do some teaching. I'd do stuff with people, stay engaged. I'd like to have some projects to work on, something with some focus that I could help out with. I'd clean my closet more often.

**Q. When you think of God, what is the first thing that comes to mind?**

A. I like the language of Holy Mystery, being held in the hands of love.

**Q. Is there anything you would be doing differently right now if you knew that Jesus would be coming later today?**

A. I'd think less about getting my office cleaned up. Not really, I wouldn't change. Jesus IS coming later today, all day actually. One of the things that has been happening for me recently that is really quite lovely at Mass and at Eucharist is the awareness of the fact that all of the people there in that space, are the Body of Christ. So Jesus IS coming and IS here.

**Q. What do you think about when you get up in the morning?**

A. It depends on the day. If I get up slowly and gracefully, I will think about how I want to live the day or spend the day. A lot of times I get up and my mind is off running with a list of things to do.

**Q. What energizes you spiritually?**

A. The first thing that comes to me is people, nature, good ritual, quiet, good reading, scripture, poetry.

**Q. What is the secret to a good life?**

A. Part of it is being around good people, and being open.

**Q. If you could sit down and right your own story, what would be your focus?**

A. It sounds kind of funny, but whenever I think about my vocation story, it seems very ordinary. There is nothing terribly dramatic here. It's an ordinary story about an ordinary person. What is extraordinary is that I absolutely feel filled with joy.

**Quick connections**

**Q. What do you like best about Saint Mary-of-the-Woods?**

A. The beauty.

**Q. When I am not involved in work or my ministry, you are most likely to see me ...**

A. Reading, sleeping.

**Q. On weekends, I love to ...**

A. Hang out, putz around the house, maybe get out for a long walk.

**Q. I am passionate about ...**

A. Life

**Q. What the world needs now ...**

A. Is love, sweet love. You know it's true.

**Q. What would you like to hear God say when you arrive in heaven?**

A. Welcome home.

**Q. What is your biggest pet peeve?**

A. People who don't change the toilet paper roll.

**Q. What is your least favorite chore?**

A. Raking leaves.

### **Favorites**

Food: Pasta

Flower/plant: Black-eyed Susan

Book: Almost all

Movie: To Kill a Mockingbird

Vacation spot: Any place by water

Recreation: Walking, reading

Hobby: Playing the piano, cooking

Sport: Ping pong

Music/song: I love most classical music

Animal: Dog

Pizza topping: Stuffed spinach pizza

Holiday: Thanksgiving

Author: Barbara Kingsolver

Scripture passage: Glory be to God who is able to accomplish infinitely more than we can ask or even imagine

Dessert: Pecan pie

Time of day: Morning

Season: Autumn

Actor/actress: Meryl Streep

Comic strip: Far Side

Course in school: English, music

Sinner: Mary Magdalen

Least favorite food: Jello

Least favorite course in school: Gym

If I weren't an SP, I'd be... I can't imagine

### **Current information**

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Current ministry: General Officer  
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