

Oral history interview with Sister Norene Wu, 5/14/08

Today is May 14 and this is an interview with Sister Norene Wu.

01 Family Background

Sister Norene, where and when were you born?

Uh, I was born in Chia-yi, C-h-i-a-y-i, Taiwan, in [19]'57.

Do you have siblings?

Yes, I have, uh, an older sister — three years older — and, uh, I have, uh, two brothers. So, uh, one is two years younger and the other is four years younger.

But actually, uh, I had another sister, a younger sister, who was, uh, two years younger, but she died when she was, maybe, I really don't know when she died because it was such a tragedy that nobody really wanted to talk about it. Um, I know from what I heard was she was maybe just a year old or maybe less than that. Anyway she had some kind of either cold or something and my mom, my mom at that time she was a nurse, and my mom brought her to a clinic. Somehow they gave her either [the] wrong medicine or the injection and she died. Then my mom sort of, uh, blamed herself for not taking care of her own daughter. So I think that was something that we never heard about what happened later because it was just so painful for my mom.

And, but I notice because we all had this family record and I noticed there was a name there, and she was there, her name was there. And I, I remember one time I asked, “Who is this person? How come I never saw her?” And my mom just went away. She left the room. And my parents [Kun-jung and Jean (Chen) Wu] say, “Oh, that was your younger sister. She died.” And that was it. Nobody wanted to talk more. But later I learned from my aunt and also from my sister at that time because she was older, she

remembered what happened. So, that's how I know. So after I, I was supposed to have two sisters and two brothers. But now I only have one sister and two brothers.

Tell me about your parents. Are they still living?

Yeah, they are still living. Uh, my dad is 80 years old and my mom is, uh, 77. They are, uh, they are in Taiwan. They live in the south, the south part, the southern part of Taiwan. And I, um, I visit them once a year because I've been in this country for nine years. [Sister Norene had allergies that were affecting her during this interview.] So I try to, uh, you know, visit them regularly. And I call them every Saturday, every Saturday morning, was our time. I have to chat with them and I had to make sure I talk with them [with same length of the time. (Inserted by Sister Norene during editing process.)] Otherwise my dad will say, "What's wrong?" [Laughter] So it was, it was fun. But, um, I didn't call them for a month, last month, when I was really intense and working on my dissertation. [At the time of the interview, Sister Norene was finishing up her doctoral dissertation at Indiana State University. She lived in Beech Grove, Indiana. A year before she worked as a pre-doctoral intern at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis Counseling and Psychological Services. After the internship, Sister Norene stayed in Beech Grove to work on her dissertation.] I couldn't call them. So, uh, I asked my brother — my youngest brother is in China — and, uh, he, he visited my parents sometimes. You know, he goes back to Taiwan. So, I asked him to see if he could spend more time with my parents whenever he could. And he did. And also my sister, she tried to, she tried to visit my parents like every other week. Yeah. So they were very helpful.

What did your parents do for a living when you were growing up?

Um, my mom was a nurse, uh, before I was, I don't know, maybe three years old. I think it was right, I think probably right after my younger sister died and that was [the] time she quit her job. Uh, I, people told me it, she, it was too hard for her to take care of her two children, but I think part of that was that it was too painful for her to go back to be a nurse. Uh, so, she didn't, she was a housewife for most of the time. However, she did have some, um, she had a retail store, uh, for a while. So, uh, we, we helped her out. Sometimes, you know, we sold candies and helped things out in the retail store. And, of course, we ate much of the stuff she sold! [Laughter] So, it was fun.

Um, my dad has been working, uh, for, for our government [since] he was, uh, in the government position, more like a higher position, ... not very high, but a pretty, uh, pretty important position. And, uh, I remember when, when I was a teenager, that was a time [when] my dad was very, very busy. It was [during the] elections. We, we couldn't see my father for several months because he was always traveling with the campaign stuff, helping those, uh, political stuff. So, I really don't like pol..., uh, pol..., pol..., politics, uh, at all because that was such a bad experience that you miss your dad so much and then sometimes you could see dad for maybe [a] few minutes and then he, he was gone again. So, and, so he, that was his job. He was always, uh, doing something ... anything with, uh, uh, government stuff.

Uh, and then he retired because he, after he, even [when] he was still in the high school, he was recruited by the government to work for them. So he started working for the government when he was still very young. [Sister Norene later added that her father's career was interrupted for a few years because of the war. She wasn't sure if the war she was referring to was World War II.] So he retired when he was 55. He already served at

that, uh, office for like 30 years. So he retired but he was still young so he got another job and it [was] still government-related. So he was, uh, county, uh, a secretary to the county mayor, uh, for another 10 something years, I think. And then he retired. Yeah, 10 years. When he retired at age 65 and guess what? He got a third employment [laughter]. That was actually the best one. He really love[d] it. Um, he was the coordinator for the, uh, government retirees' activities. So that was [the] first time that he was doing his job at the same time he was traveling with all these retirees because he would, he would, uh, arrange different, uh, activities — like sightseeing. Sometimes they even went to other countries. So he got, he got the opportunity to go to different places. And my mom went with him several times until, uh, she got very sick that she couldn't travel, uh. But that was the job my dad loved very much and he just retired last, uh, two months ago. Yeah, at the end of March. I was the one forcing him to say, "Stay home. You don't need to go out." And he was, "Now what? I have nothing to do, anything." [Laughter] Yeah. So that's my dad, uh.

And my mom [was] always, uh, home when we got home. She, she cleaned the house, she cooked for us and, uh, and also actually, um, she had her little, you know, very tiny, uh, retail store that she sold more like a, like a general store here, but not that big because I remember there were candy, candy jars everywhere. And actually we just scooped out and then we have [some candy] ourselves. [Laughter] Uh, so, she sold those things for a while and it was, you know, it really, just try to kill time and really didn't help too much. And also, she got so busy she said, "I really don't need this." So she, she quit. Uh, but most of the time she stayed home and, uh, um, she would help us with our homework, help especially when we were in elementary school. Yeah.

So, that's my mom and she's [an] excellent cook. She tried to help me with cooking. She didn't succeed. [Laughter] She was, I think she was very, uh, demanding of all the steps. You know, it was, "Do this first and then this." And I am so intuitive I don't care. I just put things in my, you know, the way I want it. So, it makes her very, uh, anxious and makes me very anxious, too. So finally two of us couldn't get into the kitchen together so she cook and I cook. But then I learned how to cook when I was in the novitiate. [Laughter] Yes.

So ... I talk about why my mom couldn't travel with my dad was because her, [clears throat] she had, she has diabetes for maybe 10 some years. And it got worse maybe five years ago. Uh, but she was losing her sight. She right, no, her left eye, you know, her left side is completely blind. [Clears throat] She couldn't see anything from her left side. But it was also difficult for her to travel with my dad with diabetes because when they were traveling there's, there was no way she could control what she could eat and when she could eat. So finally she decided that she was not going. So that was part of the reason she didn't go. Um-huh, yeah.

02 Role of Religion as a Child

Tell me about the role of religion in your family as you were growing up.

Well, that is an interesting part because, uh, I was not a Catholic. I actually I am still the only Catholic in my family. Um, [clears throat] but, we, our, my entire family, uh, believe in Buddha. We are Buddhists. And when I grew up, actually when we talk about family, my family is very unique, uh, you know, compared with the Americans because I grew up in a three-generation house. But when I told you about my family, [that] family was my nuclear family. But my dad has 10 siblings. My mom has 10

siblings. So we had this huge family. And when I grew up my, my, actually my, uh, our house is right behind my dad's office and it's, uh, uh, the, the other side of, uh, you know, there's a park and behind the park is the botanical garden. Our house is on this side, very close to the botanical garden. My grandparents, that's my, my dad's parents, they live on the outside of the park. So, but it only took us like 10 minutes to take, you know, we, we could take the shortcut through the botanical garden and into the park and to my grandparent's house.

I remember like, uh, every month, twice a month, we had to get together at, uh, grandparent's house, uh, for some kind of a ritual thing. And that was part of the Buddhist ritual. Uh, and also I went with my grandmom to, uh, temples whenever there was a feast day or something. So I went. ... And that, that kind of practice actually for me, I had no clue what kind of religion we were. I just knew we believe in God and I was always, since I, I was a child, we were always told God was there, God was watching us. So, my mom always said, you know, no matter what you did, you don't ever tell me, but, you know, God knows everything. There's no way you can, you can do something without being known, especially God is watching you, but also God is protecting you. Just know you need to be, you know, an honest person and, uh, you need to be respectful. So, I don't, I didn't have any special, uh, thing about God but I just feel that God is there and God is a protector and God is everywhere, yeah.

03 Introduction to Catholicism

So how were you introduced to Catholicism?

Uh, I actually I, I learned about, uh, [the] Christian faith when I was very, very young. But I didn't have any connections with like a formal introduction to the Christian

faith until I was in college. And my major was Western languages and literature. And, uh, of course that was my major and one of the courses, the required courses, was Bible as Literature. So a major that, in that department we had to, you know, that was that department's, uh, requirement that every teacher in that department had to teach in, in English. So [clears throat] that way we could learn English well. Except, of course, the Chinese literature, Chinese philosophy, Chinese history, those courses were taught in Chinese, but other, uh, Western literature or like, um, composition, conversation, everything was in English.

So anyway, uh, Sister Celeste Tsai was my teacher. And I remember specifically there was a word, now I know what that was, but at that time I just felt what is that? And I tried to look it up in my dictionary and I couldn't find the word. And it was Deuteronomy. I still remember it. [Laughter] What is that? And she comes in to talk and talk and I was totally lost and I thought whatever. Uh, I also, there were so many concept[s] that I couldn't grasp when I tried to, to analyze that literature style without knowing who, what that was talking about. So I was really, really frustrated with that, that class. And finally I felt if I don't go to her I'm going to fail the class. And so I, I just went to, uh, went to see [Sister] Celeste and I said, "You know, I really couldn't follow you. First, it's English. I, it's hard for me to understand that. Second, it's the Bible. I'm not a Christian. I have no clue about those Bible stories and it doesn't, you know, ring a bell. I cannot analyze the literature style until I know the story." And she said, "Yeah, I know, I went through that." She was a convert. So she said, "You know, I can help you, uh, now I just, we need to set, uh, an appointment so I can go through some of the stories,

give you some idea. And then you go back and read those stories and then you can do the analysis, like analyze the literature.” So, that’s how I started.

Then, uh, later, she said, “Maybe, uh, you might be interested in joining us. There’s a group of students, uh, who come for they’re, they’re, um, attending this religious instruction class or more, more like a discussion group. Uh, they come to the convent, uh, once, once a week. If you are interested in knowing more about, uh, Christian faith, you are more than welcome to join them.” I said, “I don’t want to be a Christian.” She said, “Well, but you, if you want to learn something that might be a good way for you to, to, you know, to expose yourself to [the] Christian faith and you don’t have, have to be baptized.” So I said, “Sure, I’ll come over and see what that is all about.”

Because actually my, uh, two of my aunts, my mom’s younger sisters, they were converted to Christian[ity]. They, they were Christians. They became Christians when I was, uh, probably a teenager. But I didn’t like the way they shared their faith. It was so dominant. This is the only way. Unless you believe in Christ, you are going to hell. And I felt, no, you are going to hell, not me. [Laughter] I just felt very offended at, at them like that. But the way [Sister] Celeste approached me was more gentle and more like an inviting not pushing. And also at that time, I had a classmate, she, she is a Protestant. My two aunts they are Presbyterians and they are still very pushy so I try to [laughter] avoid them. Uh, anyway, I had, uh, that classmate, she, uh, she was very, very gentle and she always appeared to be very happy and peaceful. So actually I was really inspired by her, uh, you know, her faith through her actions. She always used to say, “I do this because I’m a Christian and I, I, I felt this is God, what God wants me to do.” And she never

pushed anybody to do anything. She just shared. And that was the way I felt very, very attracted to. So, um, that was one of the things that attracted me to, [I] started to feel, “OK, I want to learn more about this Christian faith.”

Um, also actually the, the, way, way before that was when I was, uh, maybe a freshman in college, I — by the way I went to, uh, Providence University — so, for the, I think it was the very first month when I was in college, uh, one of my roommates was going to a Christian gathering and she said there was a professor from another university who was going to, uh, witness his faith. And she said, “Let’s go see what he is going to talk about.” And that was actually the first one really attracted me to [the] Christian faith was the story he shared that was the Lost Sheep. And he shared, he used that passage to talk about his life, how he, you know, uh, as a Christian sees that they, that he did so many strange things, tried to do the opposite way God asked him to do and then he said he was totally lost until one day God found him and brought him back. And he shared that story about, you know, why, uh, the shepherd had to carry this, uh, little sheep on the shoulder because we, we all lov..., God loves because we couldn’t see and God will carry us and bring us up so we can see further and hopefully we won’t be lost again. And that was a very beautiful story and very personal, you know. So I was really, really, uh, attracted to that.

So with all those reasons when [Sister] Celeste said, “Would you like to come?” although I was trying to say, “No, I don’t want to be a Christian,” but I really felt very interested in knowing more about [the] Christian faith. So that’s how I started to learn about, uh, Cath..., Catholicism. And there were four [Sister Norene silently counts] people in that, in that discussion group and I was — no five, including me five — I was

the only person that what, who decided to be baptized as a Catholic when we were seniors [laughter]. And so I was the last one [to] join them, and I was the first one and also the only one [to] be baptized.

04 Baptism

How old were you when you were baptized?

I, I was 21 going to be 22. Uhhmmm. That was my senior year.

Tell what that baptism was like for you.

It was very, very beautiful because at that, uh, another classmate, she, she, uh, she received instruction from another sister. Two of, two of us were baptized on the same day that was on Easter Sunday of 1975. [Sister Norene clarified during the editing process that the date should be 1979.]. I felt like I was in the troughs, the level of the heaven or something. I felt I was floating [laughter] for the entire time. And that was the first, uh, the first time I received the Holy Communion. And it was very, very, very, uh, I don't know. I cried, I cried for the entire time.

And, but I was smiling and, uh, people could see how happy I was because actually before the baptism I had, I had been going to, uh, Mass every day, every early morning. Um, and I was the only non-Catholic among all those Catholics. So I was there when they went up to receive the Holy Communion and I was in my seat, praying. Uh, and that, uh, there was a sister who was in charge of the, uh, dormitory — I, I, I lived in a dormitory for almost four years. So anyway, uh, she was the one [who] told me that, you know, it, it's difficult for a non-Catholic to participate in a Catholic Mass because you feel excluded since you cannot receive the Holy Communion. But you know, you can always, uh, invite Jesus to come to you because you cannot go to him to receive him, but

he, he will come. Just invite him in and he will be in your heart. And that's what I remembered. And so I really didn't feel that excluded, uh, during that, that period of time that I went to Mass every day without receiving Holy, the Holy Communion.

But that was when I was baptized. That day I cried because I waited and waited for such a long time and now, yes. So, that was, was beautiful and, uh, that, you know, that, that they took several pictures of [the] two of us together. And people kept on saying like my face glowed, so happy. And the other one [person] was happy but mine [face] was [allergy problems, laughter, pause], mine was, mine was like, uh, the, the, the, picture, one of the picture[s] really look like one of those saints, I think was a, I don't know which one, she was like this, and I was like this. [Sister Norene puts her hands together as if in prayer.] You are really in that trance or something [laughter]. Yeah. So that was wonderful. I, I don't really remember the details. I just remember that I was very, very happy. I was like being embraced by God — that, that kind of experience, uh-huh.

05 Family's Reaction to Her Baptism

What was your family's reaction to your decision to be baptized in the Catholic faith?

My, my dad, uh, my dad, uh, was not really happy about that, but he never said anything in front of me. But he would complain and complain and complain to my mom and my mom would say, "You know, I'm not going to tell her. You tell her. I'm not going to tell her," you know. Uh, but the funny thing was my dad, he worked for the government but he really, what he really wanted to do for his life was to be a lawyer. And he never got it. So, I remember when I was a child, he was studying on his own [to] study

law and he wanted to be a lawyer and to become a lawyer one day. So he, he always [was] studying all those different laws and one of those things was our constitution. But first, the very first, uh, — what do you call it? — item or whatever is more like, uh, American's Constitution, like we have the right, we have [the] right to the freedom to [of] religion, to speech and those things. And my dad said, "This, this is why this country is a great country because we allow freedom, uh, you know, people freedom [free] to express themselves in whatever way they, they, they feel comfortable. And we respect that."

So when I told my dad that I wanted to become a Catholic he would say, "Well, why would you like to be a Catholic? You know, there's no need for you to be a Catholic. You, you have been going to these instructions, and then that is fine. You don't have to be a Catholic."

I said, "But I want to be a Catholic because I feel comfortable to be a Catholic. It doesn't mean, uh, Buddhism is not good. I just feel more comfortable with, uh, Catholics, uh, the way they, they, they express faith." Especially I told my parents about the ritual thing, the symbolic things in Mass. Uh, you know, I, I studied literature so symbol, those, uh, meaning, symbolic meanings or rituals were something that really attracted me to, to, uh, [the] Catholic faith, especially the liturgies.

So I talked to him about those things and it was out there. And then he think about that [interruption by loud speaker]. He never say yes. And I, I know one thing I told him I said, "You know, remember, since I was a child what you taught me was, this is a great country [interruption by loud speaker] and, and we always respect [interruption by loud speaker] we, we respect, uh, our people's decision. This is a freedom and we're thinking about the religion, remember that?"

And my dad said, "I know you'll come back to me." [Laughter] But I think that, that really reminded him of I, I was not a child anymore. I was not a child. I was an adult. I already, you know, uh, I was 21 years old, um, so he couldn't really say no. It was out of my respect that I wanted him to feel OK. So I really didn't wait for him. I just went ahead and told a priest that I wanted to be baptized on the Easter Sunday. But I still hoped that he could say something and he did. Um, I, I, I, I sent an invitation card to my parents and let them to know this is the day, this is the place, I will be baptized. I was baptized at school. They didn't come, but, uh, that was, that was Sunday and I received a letter from my dad, I don't remember [if] it was a Friday or a Saturday but I know it was before my baptism. My dad sent a letter and says, uh, "We felt you, you make the right choice. You look so happy and maybe, uh, we shouldn't say no. So, you have my blessing," you know. So it was beautiful and [pretends to cry]. So, I, I went to tell the priest immediate[ly], I said, you know, "My, my, my, there's no problem." Because the priest was really concerned. Uh, there was, uh, there was, uh, a student, uh, who wanted to be baptized and at the last minute the parents say no and it was so, uh, so hard for, for that whole situation. So he, the priest was really concerned. So when I told him that he was like "Whew! OK! Good." [Laughter] Yeah.

But, you know, my, my parents always felt like being betrayed at that time, um, and my, I remember my dad, one of his reaction[s] was like, "How am I going to tell all, all my brothers and sisters that my daughter is going to be a Catholic?" And I felt [said], "Well, just tell them I love it, cause [there's] nothing wrong with whatever your, your, our faith or our religion. It just feel[s] more comfortable with, you know, Catholic faith." So, I think [that] was OK and actually later, uh, they also, it was a struggle for them, too,

to say yes for me to be a Catholic nun. But years later, uh, they came to the United States and they visited the sisters here. They really love the sisters. And also, uh, the sisters in Taiwan, whenever we had, uh, um, any feast days or anything, they invited my parents to come. And they did, they went and they really enjoyed all those activities. So, now they just feel if they have one more daughter they would encourage that daughter to be a Sister of Providence [laughter], yeah. So, they changed, they changed, uh-huh.

06 Connection to the Congregation

Was Sister Celeste your first, uh, contact with the Sisters of Providence?

Um, let me think. So, I think so, I think so, uh, because Sister Celeste, you know, uh, that, that, uh, when I was in college at that time it was not Providence University it was Providence College. At that time every class, every freshman class would be assigned, uh, we, uh, uh, like a class counselor or some faculty to, to be our academic advisor. [Sister] Celeste was not assigned to us. There was another man and he was very, very nice to us, but he, uh, later, some how, I don't know, oh, yeah, he, he is a Catholic and always, uh, mentioned about the sisters and later, I think it was our sophomore year, [Sister] Celeste was assigned to us our, uh, academic advisor. And we, we really liked him and we hated to change academic advisor every year because we love the first one. And then the second year we had to adjust to a new one. So during our class meeting we decided that we are going to initiate that, we are not going to change to another, uh, advisor. We want to have the same person through the entire, uh, college years. So [Sister] Celeste became our first, for me, was first SP contact person and she was there for the three years. Uh-hum, yeah.

07 Journey to Becoming a Sister of Providence

So tell me about that journey to becoming a Sister of Providence.

It was actually started even earlier. Um, I was still receiving instructions and some how I just felt strange. I didn't know what that was. I just felt something was unusual and I couldn't describe it. But I knew whenever I, I prayed or I was in the church or reading the Bible, I just felt some kind of a peacefulness that I could, I hadn't, uh, experienced any where else. And that was, that kind of peacefulness, that I just felt something I wanted to do more. And, um, one thing I think of was, um, I don't remember exactly how it happened, but I remember, uh, I was in the chapel and, you know like, that Mass was very, was my first one that I just felt like very close to God to the point that I felt like I could hear God's voice. Although I really didn't, but that was [a] very, you know, very vivid experience. I felt like the Gospel was speaking to me. Not, just, I was not just reading the words. It's like it was a life message for me. So, I don't remember which one, but it was a series of messages that really touched me was like, uh, God is love, you know, like, uh, God's love was, is so good that even, God would even, uh, die for a friend, and also, uh, take your, take your cross and follow me, uh, leave everything behind, don't look back, just follow me. So, those were, every time I read those words I felt like those words were like, were spoken to me and directed to me. It was very, uh, unique, but also [a] very new experience. I never had that kind of experience before. So part of me was very scared, part of me was very touched and part of me wanted to go away and never want to deal with those strange feelings again.

But I, I, I remember during that two or three months I just continued to feel that way and also, uh, sometimes I, I was in tears because I was so touched by those words.

And finally, uh, a priest noticed that I was in tears almost every day during Mass so finally he after Mass he asked if I would like to talk about some of the things I was experiencing. And I did, I talked with him. I said, “This is what happened and I’m scared.” And he said, “Well, you know, if you want, uh, I can, I can talk with you and so we can sort things through, but also you, uh, you can continue to pray and I would encourage you to talk with some of the sisters to see what their life is like and then that might give you some ideas, because right now we really don’t know what that is. But I feel God is calling you to do something. And I, I don’t know.” So he, he was very, very, you know, frank with me. And so I said, “OK.” And I went to see him, uh, that was, I think the first semester of my senior year. So I continued to, uh, to see him for like maybe four months, uh, before, before my, uh, baptism.

And when I, that day I was baptized, I already decided I wanted to be a sister. Uh, and I felt very peaceful, uh, about my decision. But when I told [Sister] Eleanor Mary Buckley [died 1990], she was the department chair, she was a Sister of Providence, she, she actually was very nice. Uh, any way I told her, uh, like a few days later, I told her because they told me she was the also the superior of that [laughter], uh, region. So I told her I wanted to be a Sister of Providence because I talked to different congregations and I liked the Sisters of Providence. And she was really happy about all this. She said, “No, no, you, you cannot be a sister now, uh, because we don’t take the newly baptized, uh, person who just, who was just baptized. You surely are encouraged to wait for three years.” And I thought, “Three years? Are you kidding me? I might change my mind, you know?” [Laughter] But I, I felt OK, um, that might be good for me to think about it

because who knows, uh, maybe it's not, God is not leading me to be a sister, it may be something else.

But I knew I wanted to be something that I could be a messenger of God's love and that was something I really wanted to do. I didn't care what kind of form that is, but I just wanted to be able to spread that Good News that God is love. And why I said that was because, you know, I grew up in a big family and I never, I took everything for granted until I received, uh, the instructions — it's more like equivalent to the, equivalent to the RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults] here [in the United States]. I started to realize how blessed I was and I took everything for granted. I never say [said] thank you to my parents, to my grandparents for the care, for the, everything they did for me. And that was the first time I felt, "Wow. Why [did] nobody ever remind me of, told me that I need to say thank you or show my gratitude?" I just feel like they owe me something. It's like whatever they did for me was their duty, their obligation. But I felt no, it was out of love they did all those things for me and also for my brothers and sisters. So, I, I, I started to, uh, express my gratitude toward my parents and my grandparents. They were very touched because they just felt it was their obligation to care for their children or their younger ones. They never expected, uh, anything from us. So, they were like, "Oh, no, we didn't do anything, we just, you know, [laughter] yeah." So that was kind of a love I, I experienced and I felt, you know, probably I, I'm not the only person. I am sure many, many people, they just took everything for granted. And I need to be that messenger to remind people of that, no, they don't have the obligation. It's out of love and we need to be grateful. And also there's a God that is doing the same thing and we

never realize that is the, you know, that's the situation we are in, yeah. So that, that is really something I really wanted to do. Uh, and then, um. ...

08 Life Prior to Entering the Congregation

What did you do during those three years before you could enter?

Well, I couldn't be, uh, the Sisters of Providence right away. And, uh, since I wanted to be a Sister of Providence and so, usually, uh, I could apply for, to be the assistant in the, uh, department. So after the graduation I could be hired as an assistant. They didn't want me to be there because they wanted me to out, to be out of, uh, the campus so I could see another side of the world before I, uh, really wanted to be a Sister of Providence. [Clears throat.] So that forced me to try to look for [a] job outside and that was [something unintelligible] because my, my, my aunts, uh, two of my aunts, they had their own, uh, companies in, in Taipei. And they asked if I would like to go to Taipei and work for them because with my, uh, my English I could help them with the international, uh, trade. And I did for like three months or so. And I didn't like to be in Taipei. So, I, I told my, my parents that I would prefer to find a job in the south area.

So, they, they tried to see what else, uh, was available at that time. And through my uncle I learned that there was an, an opening in the, uh, shoes company, more like a sports shoes company. And they do exports. So they export their, their, uh, products to all over the world. And they were looking for someone who, who was, uh, fluent in English. And so I applied and I got the job. And I was there, uh, for three years — no, two years, two years. And I was like, I started as a, uh, a clerk, just trying to transcribe, uh, translate all the documents into Chinese and Chinese to English. But within three months they promoted me to be the head of that department. So I was at that position for almost two

years. That was job, my job was always, uh, you know, supervise, uh, five women under me and see what we did with the shipment, with the, with the, uh, contract and then communicate with the, uh, buyers, you know, in, in other countries. And also when they, when they came to visit our factory I had to be with them and show them around. So that was my job.

So then what did you do after that?

Well, after that I got tired because I was so busy with my job. I even didn't have time to read the Bible. I even didn't have time to go to Mass because usually those buyers, they would come during weekends. And my job was to be with them, translate for them and, and my boss [clears throat]. So, I even didn't go to Mass. And the Bible, you know, I never opened for almost like the first, I know, the first six months I still tried to read the Bible whenever I could. Later I even didn't open the Bible [coughs]. And I became so preoccupied with money, benefits. And I just felt like I lost myself. I lost the one, uh, the peacefulness I, I, I experienced, you know, two years ago when I was baptized. And also I felt I was, became so un-Christian. I just felt this is not right. There's nothing in my life that shows that I'm a Christian. And this is not right.

So I, I told, I told [Sister] Celeste that I, I want to quit my job because I really, I still felt the call — although I didn't go to church I still felt the call. And, uh, [Sister] Celeste said, "Well, just pray about it and see what God wants you to do." So I started to pray again and, and I remember I, I met, uh, a — I forgot the word — more like an agreement with God, you know? I told God, "If you still want me to be a sister, you have to let me know. You have to let me know to the point that I cannot deny it because, you know, I can interpret things in, in many ways. So unless there is a very clear sign I, I

won't know that you want me to be a sister." And, and it was very interesting because I started to pray almost like every day — just briefly as I quieted myself and then I said, "I want to, to be open and just show me, just show me what you want me to do and I really want to, uh, have an opportunity to go back to my faith that I don't, I don't have to be preoccupied with all the benefits for myself and for my department and also for the company."

Um, so, there was, I, that was Dec..., December probably 19, probably 1980 or also, yeah, 1980 because I graduated in [19]'79. And 1980 or [19]'81, '81, 1981 I, I went to Taipei for a business, uh, meeting to meet with, uh, one of the buyers from Sweden. And after the meeting I went back to, uh, my company, went back to my office. And also my, my company provided, uh, an apartment for me so actually I had my own apartment. I went, when I finished all my, you know, documentation, some... somehow I just felt I wanted to go home. And it was really not my personality. I was very free. If I wanted to go somewhere I never had a second thought about homesickness — and never had this homesickness in my life. But then I just felt that I wanted to home to be with my parents and I didn't know why. So I told, uh, the manager, I said, "I think I'm going home." He said, "No." I said, "Yeah." He said, "But first it's late. Second it's raining. How are you going to go home?" I said, "Well, I have my mopeds. [Moped — Sister Norene said mopeds, which the transcriber has changed to moped in each instance.] I can go home with my moped." He said, "Maybe not if you are so tired, it's not safe for you to, you know, to go home now." And I felt well, I really wanted to go home. I don't know why but I just felt I, I needed to go home.

And so I, I, I left, uh, I left my office and some how that manager had like a sense like something was not, not right and he, actually, he is a good friend of my, one of my uncles. So he called my uncle and he said, “You know, Norene just left the office and some how I feel it’s, it’s not right. If he, if something happens someone needs to know, and I want you to know this is the time she left the office. If she doesn’t get home within an hour” — because it took me about an hour to get home — “if she doesn’t get home within an hour you might want to call her parents, you know, let them know. You call her parents and let them know that maybe they need to look for her somewhere on the road because it’s raining. I really don’t feel it’s a good, good decision.”

And I didn’t know, he, he made that phone call for me. But anyway that day was a turning point for me. As soon as I got on my moped and somehow I felt I was going to die that day. And it was [a] very, very scary, uh, experience because you have a sense that this is the last day of your life and you didn’t know where the message was coming from. And I was on the moped and, and that feeling, you know, like a message was, became so strong to the point I felt I was frozen, like I couldn’t do anything. I could just hold the, the, the two handles. And I couldn’t do much about, you know, uh, controlling the speed. I was actually, I think 20 minutes away from my parents’ house and it was a very busy, uh, Saturday afternoon — late, late evening. And the traffic was terrible. There were like, you know, trucks and trucks and also in between lanes there was like some people driving their mopeds. And I was like, uh, “You people are crazy!” And also, at that time I, I didn’t wear my glasses because of the rain and without my glasses I really couldn’t see much [laughter], you know? I was trying to squint. At that time I was like, “My goodness, I’m speeding and I need to slow down.” I couldn’t. It’s somehow my, my

hands would not coopera..., cooperating with me. And I was really scared that I, I couldn't control my body.

And the most scary part was I saw there was a semi-truck with all those, uh, um, building materials, like steels [steel — Sister Norene refers to this as steels. The transcriber has changed these entries to steel.] and sticking out without any sign. You know, usually you put a red sign there. There was nothing there. And also when I saw all those [that] steel they were going to penetrate me. And I thought, “Oh, my goodness, I, I cannot die this way.” And so I tried to, uh, pass that semi-truck — not really, you know like a pickup truck, not so much [semi], but a pickup truck. I tried to pass that one from the left side, but there was, uh, a truck passing on the left side. I couldn't. So I tried to went [go] to the shoulder. But then another, another person just cut through that. So I had to come back to the left and just, you know, with my speed I lost control. And I think when I was trying to do this, someone couldn't figure out where I was going and so hit me from behind. My, I was flipping in the air and I, I was, you know, turning like — I even don't how many times I was turning. And I, I was screaming and screaming. And I just went, “Oh, my God. That is why I had that message that I was going to die.” At that moment I heard my voice scream out loud and say, “God save me!” And all of sudden I heard all those crumpling [sounds]. [Laughter] Something, uh, broken and cracked and all of sudden I was, I landed on the, right in the middle of the road. And, you know those, uh, uh, two-way roads with also the, the, the, uh, shoulders. I was right in the middle still on my moped and the front wheel was, uh, in the front [laughter]. I was right in the middle and I still felt, you know, that the traffic went on. Nobody stopped. I felt they couldn't see me. Oh, my goodness, they couldn't see me. And I was looking at the lights.

Of course they couldn't see me. The lights were broken. There was no light. But at least the left, left signal was still functioning. So I kept, try, try to hold it so it could blink. And I was there for awhile and I, I, the moment — it was like my life was just like a flashback, went through. I was, uh, 24 years old and I sort of like saw my entire life, went through in front of me like I was seeing a movie of me. And I, I felt, oh, my goodness, I could have died [a] few minutes ago and there could have been a funeral for me. But what would people say about me? The only thing they could say about me was, “She died young.” And I don't want that [to] happen. When I die, I don't want people to say, “Oh, she died young. Oh, she, it was a pity that, uh, you know, she, she dies dadada.” I want them to remember me as someone who had contributed something to others' life [lives] — make a difference in others' life [lives].

How injured were you?

I didn't know. I was there. I couldn't feel anything. So I just prayed. I said, “God, if, if you, if this is a sign that is terrible. But if this is the sign you are telling me you want me to be a sister, first you need to stop the traffic. I cannot find anybody to help me with this kind of traffic.” And guess what? As soon as [I] stopped praying there was no car, nothing at all. It was so quiet. I was the only person on the road. I felt, oh, this is funny. “No, at least someone, OK? I said no traffic, but you need to send someone [laughter] to help me because I don't know can I get up or not?” I couldn't feel anything.

Then, yes I heard another car. It was a taxi. And the taxi driver got out and he said, “What happened? Are you OK?” I said, “I don't know what happened, but I somehow I cannot get up.” So he came over and, and helped me up. And we went to the side of the road, the shoulder, and he asked me to move, uh, my hands, my. ... I was fine.

And he said, “Are you sure?” I said, “Well, I’m moving. I don’t feel any pain except my right foot” — the, the inside of the foot — because, you know, in Taiwan in December you still wear sandals because it’s not cold at all. It’s probably sometimes chilly, but not cold at all. So I had my sandals on and the sandal the, the, the, you know, the strap was caught by the, by the pedal. And also next to the pedal is the engine and it was burned. That is the only thing I had. And it was painful. That was the only thing I felt oh, eek! And I could see the blisters were popping up.

And, and, he, he couldn’t see any scratches from my hand, not even on my face, or anything, nothing. He went, “Oh, my goodness.” And actually before that when I was lying on the floor waiting for, on the ground, waiting for people to rescue me, I prayed to God, I said, “Well, you know what? Maybe this is your sign and I feel this is really a miracle because how could I get through all this heavy traffic and landed [land] right in the middle of the road without being hit by any cars or trucks?” So I said, “This must be a miracle, but I’m not sure. So from now till I get home, if I can hear three different people saying this is a miracle, then I know for sure this is the sign and I will become a sister, for sure.”

So, that taxi driver was the first one saying, “Oh, my goodness, this is a miracle. I have been driving on this, uh, road for” — I think he was saying like 20-some years — “I never, I’ve never seen something like this” because my, my moped was, the front part was really deformed. The wheel was multi-shaped [laughter] and I just, you know [laughter]. So, he said, “You know what? This is really a miracle. And I usually I don’t do this, but I’m going to give you a free ride. No matter where you are, I’ll, I’ll take you home without any charge.” And I said, “How about my moped?” And he said, “Oh,

forget it. Nobody wants it. It's totally ruined." I said, "No, it's not. If I can have someone fix the front tire and change, the, the, the front part of the moped, it's still OK. And also, there is, you know, I, I got that from my, from my first month's salary, I'm not going to give it up." [Laughter] And he said, "You know, there is no way I can carry that moped in my taxi. If you cannot, uh, give up that moped, I am not going to give you the free ride." I said, "I cannot give up my [laughter]."

So he said, "Well, I know there's a, there's a, a, a store probably less than a mile from here. If you can go there maybe they can figure out some, some way to, to help you." I said, "No, I can't because first my right hand, I mean right foot was really, you know, hurting." And so I said, "I can't, I cannot go like this." He said, "OK, let me, let me go to them and see if they would like to come over, but it's raining and it's late, I don't know if they would like to come." So, I sat there, waited and waited and nobody came. So I decided, OK, you know what? I'm going to try. So I jumped for about a mile with that broken moped [laughter] and I found that, that, that shop. Uh, and that shop owner came over and says, "Oh, my goodness, you must be that crazy lady that, uh, [the] taxi driver was talking about." I said, "Yeah, I'm sort of crazy but this is my first moped. I'm not going to give it away." And I said, I said, "I need you to see if you can fix it and I'll wait because I want to go home." He said, "I'll, I'll see, yeah." Uh, so he, he, he fixed, uh, he, he, he fixed, uh, the, the moped for me but at the same time he asked his wife to help me, uh, you know, check to make sure that I was all right. So his wife was, uh, squeezing my hand and tried to see if [there were] any broken bones. They didn't find anything. So she said, "You know, no, I didn't see anything." And he, he was, he was the second one to say, "Oh, my goodness, this is really a miracle." I thought, "Oh, pfft,

second one. Are you serious?” So, he fixed the moped for me and I didn’t have enough money to pay him. He said, “Don’t worry about that, you know, this is really a miracle. I don’t care. Uh, if you have money, bring it back, on, uh, you know, on your way to work. If not, no problem.” I didn’t have it — I, I even didn’t have any cash with me. So I just went home without giving him anything.

And I got home, my mom was [had] already sent out so many cousins out to look for me [laughter] and, and she told me she said, “What happened?” And she was crying. I said, “Well, I had an accident. Period [laughter].” And so on. She said, “No, what happened?” So I told her and my mom as a nurse, she like [said], “OK, get into the bathtub. Let me see what is going on. Maybe we need to get you to the hospital for an X-ray or anything.” I said, “If you can find any bruises or scratches then maybe we’ll go to the, uh, hospital. Otherwise I don’t think so.” And my mom did examine me and she cried. She said, “We really need to thank God and thank all our ancestors to protect you and, you know, this is really a miracle that it happened this way.” And I look at her, I say, “God’s will is fulfilled!” He said, she said, “What?” So I told her and she cried. She said, “No, I don’t want to hear that.” I said, “Mom, it’s true. I am trying to tell you — I told you three years, uh, two years ago — and now it happened, you know, in such a dramatic way. I, I think I’m going to be a sister.”

So, uh, that was [the] time I started to, you know, started to tell my boss that I, I will quit my job pretty soon and I want to become a sister. But they, they won’t to [won’t] let me go. And so actually I didn’t really make the final decision until like early April the following year, uh, because I went to, probably that was the Come and See Weekend [A weekend for young women to learn more about the Congregation and to

help them discern if becoming a sister is for them.] for the sisters there. I was not sure, but I remember I went for a retreat, uh, to be with the sisters. And during the retreat I felt strongly again that connectedness with God. And so I felt I need[ed] to make a decision because it was so obvious. I couldn't deny it and I cannot deny it now.

So I told [Sister] Celeste I, I said, "I really want to, to quit my job and I, I think it might be good for me to find a job in that area" — in [the] Taichung area — that's where the sisters were because that way I could really interact with the sisters, and also, uh, I could really see if that was the life, uh, for me. So I told her, uh, I, I was going to quit my job and I did. Um, and then, uh, later, after that retreat — like a week later — [Sister] Celeste called me and says [said], "Norene, I don't know, uh, would you be interested in, uh, you know, working in the library because one of our librarians, uh, quit her job and she's going to go to the United States and we have a position here if you. ..." I said I was not trained to be a librarian. And she said, "We can train you [laughter], you know." So I felt OK, fine. So I did. And I, I worked at the library for almost a year and also I tried to be with the sisters and I felt that was the right decision. So I started my application process.

09 Entrance into the Congregation

When did you enter the Congregation and where did you enter the Congregation?

If I remember correctly I think it's [19]'82, '82. [Sister Norene entered the Congregation Sept. 1, 1982.] And I, uh, entered novitiate in Taiwan and the novitiate at that time was in Taishan. Yeah, we had a novitiate house in Taishan.

10 First Vows

Tell me what, when, um. ... [Pause] What date did you take first vows?

Aug. 16, 18, 19 — ooo, 18 I was not born yet [laughter] — 1985? Yeah, three years, uh, yeah.

When you took those first vows, did you take those also in Taiwan?

Yes, that was another story [laughter] because my parents they, you know, my family they are not Catholics and I wanted them to be there. The only way I could get them was to have the celebration with the vow ceremony at my home parish. Our, my, my parents' house at that time, uh, was like five minutes of walking distance — we are talking about walking distance, five minutes. So if I could profess my first vows there, there's, there was no excuse for them for not coming because of distance. So I asked, uh, Sister Donna Marie, Donna Marie Fu, she was our, uh, superior at that time. I said, “[Sister] Donna [Marie], is it OK for me to take my first vows, uh, in Chia-yi, my hometown?” So she checked and she said, “Yeah.”

And then also I checked, uh, we checked with the bishop of Chia-yi and he was really, really happy. He said, “Oh, we never have a sister coming home to take her first vows.” So, it was a huge, huge celebration for the parishioners because that was the first time they had a sister, uh, taking the first vows at the ho..., parish. So they felt very honored, uh, and of course, sure enough, everybody was present for my family [laughter] because they had to be there. It was, you know, so close to our home. So they were there and actually the parishioners knew that, uh, none of my family members was a Catholic. So really, they really tried very hard to make it so festive to the point my fam..., my parents felt like they married their daughter to the Church. It was beautiful because they

decorated the church in August with the flower, flowers I wanted that was actual only available in early May. Somehow they made it happen that the roses with this, uh, very pale pink color and the entire church was that color, it was that theme. And my parents just felt so honored and so grateful to the entire church because the entire church was like helping my parents [to] understand what every step of the liturgy was. So after that, they just felt, they had no regrets. It was wonderful. Yeah. So.

11 View of the Vows

Tell me about when you took your first vows and those vows are chastity, obedience and poverty. What were your views of those vows in 1982...

[198]5.

...excuse me, [19]85. And how has that, how have those views changed to today?

At that time my, my view of the vows were more like external things, behavior things, obedient, you know, uh, obedient to your supervisor, obedient to God's will through your supervi..., uh, your, uh, superiors. Uh, try not to do something stupid, you know [laughter].

And, and [the] vow of, uh, chastity was not to interact with — not really interact — more like don't, uh, engage in, uh, intimate interactions with, uh, the opposite sex or other females. Just try to be as separate, single as possible. Uh, that, that's the behavior thing.

And for the [vow of] poverty was, you know, I don't spend much money. Uh. I need to be careful about how I spend my money, uh, ask permission if I need to spend a

lot for some reasons then I need to have the permission. That was how I understand, understand that. When I fulfilled those things I felt, “Whew, I’m perfect.”

But it has been 25 years and it, it has changed, especially recently I, I felt it was so different from what I understood 25 years ago. For me, nobody really, now I, I live alone. Nobody can see do I live an obedient or, uh, I live chaste, chaste, chaste life or not? How much money I spend? As long as I spend within the budget nobody said anything. But it’s me — it’s from the inside of me — to see why, what’s the purpose of taking these vows. What, what, what do they mean to me and also what do they mean to the, the entire world that I am preaching is God’s love. So for me, um, [the] vow is for me now is my, uh, my profound expression through my, my thoughts, through my actions, through my entire being to be with God and be open to God. And when I need to make decisions I listen to God and I, I discuss with people who might be affected and also with my friends so we can really see things from different, uh, aspects and then really know what is good, uh, good decision if that is really a, a way that I’m doing what I am supposed to do with the gifts I receive from God. So that is my vow of obedience, um, let go of my opinions and really listen to others, being open. But it doesn’t mean I don’t have my own opinions. So I have to discern between mine and others what, what is a, a, a better way — the message really for me. So that is my vow of obedience.

And also [the vow of] chastity is how I use this love energy. Do I love people? Do I love myself enough? Do I love others? If not, it’s not chastity. I’m just selfish. So chastity is single-minded to channel my love and energy for God’s people. So, I don’t involve with or commit with a single person, but I’m committed to the God’s people,

whoever God sends to my way, either through counseling, uh, or teaching. Those are, um, the, the people I commit to.

Um, [clears throat] and for the [vow of] poverty is how I use the resource[s] of the world because I can use anything I want. But how will that really help me to be a good person? How will that help me, help me to help others? And how will that help me to be aware of what blessings I have and what, what sufferings people have when they don't have all the luxury I have? So that is my [vow of] poverty. I need to be really aware of where I am. And so that, that is my, my, my understanding of the three vows and how I, uh, practice my three vows now which is very different from what I [laughter], I, I understand, I understood 25 years ago.

12 First Ministries

Your first ministries, they were in Taiwan, correct?

Yes.

And what were those first ministries?

Actually, uh, my first one was, uh, I was the campus minister, uh, at Providence College. I was there for three years. And that was, it was very, very, I like, I liked it very much. But later it became challenging for me because more and more students when they knew me they liked to talk with me more about some of those things they talked about was something I felt it was beyond my training. I didn't have any training for counseling. I didn't have any training for therapy. But I felt like I was doing something I was not supposed to do and also it was not comfortable with doing those. So later I just felt I need to stop. And that was the time I decide[d] to come to the United States to study for pastoral counseling.

Is that the first time you'd been to the United States?

Hmmmmm, no.

13 First Visit to the United States

How, how many times had you been to the United States prior to this?

The first, the first time I came to the United States was 1988. Um, there was a Providence Symposium at the Woods at that time. [Sister] Nancy Nolan was the general superior [She was general superior from 1986 to 1996.] and she said, "Well, [Sister] Norene, why don't you come over and, uh, you know, be part of the symposium and maybe you can represent Taiwan?" I felt, OK, we'll see. And so I came. It was great. That was the first time I, uh, I had the opportunity to interact with so many sisters from all over the world, from Indonesia, the U.K. Uh-huh.

And that was the first time you were ever here to, at the Woods, correct?

Uh-huh.

What was that impression like for you?

It was wonderful. Uh, especially, you know, when I was in the novitiate I was a novice, uh. Sister [Rose] Michele Boudreau [died 2004], yeah, Boudreau, she was, she was my community history teacher and it was great that when, when she taught that, uh, community history, especially, uh, Mother Theodore, when, when they, you know, when [the] six of the them [Saint Mother Theodore Guerin and her five companion-sisters arrived at the Woods in October 1840.] arrived in the United States, arrived in, at the Woods. So she was, she had so many pictures of the Woods. And she would lay them out at this huge table. And so they would say, OK, they arrived and this is where they landed, but that building was not there. And then this is where they walked through, but the

bridge was not there. And so [laughter] she was showing me all these, you know. And then she said, “This is Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. That is where our motherhouse is.”

So I had these pictures, you know, in, in my head, but when I got here. [Sister] Nancy Nolan had promised that she would pick me up because she was in Taiwan when I was a novice and then she was elected the, the general superior. And she said, “You know, when you come to the United States, I will meet you at the airport so you won’t feel like you are meeting strangers.” So she did and she, she, uh, picked me up at the airport and she brought me back to the Woods. And it was, I remember when we, uh, we stopped at the, you know, Saint Mary’s Road and the [State Highway] 150 and the sign there, she said, “See that sign?” And I cried because it was the first time I saw that. I waited for it — long time actually. And I thought, “Oh, my God!” And, uh, that was [a] very touching moment. And then, uh, then she continue to drove, you know, continues to drive and then, uh, and then we went through the main gate and she started looking and she said, “This is where all the sisters, when they came home, they went through this.” I went, “Aye-yeah-yeah.” Yeah. It was, I remember those moments and then, and then when I saw Le Fer [Hall] then I saw the, uh, uh, Woodland Inn [a residence for sisters]. I felt, “Oh, my goodness! I saw these buildings!” So every place we went, she would tell me, “See that is St. Anne [Shell] Chapel, this is Owens [Hall].” And I just felt, oh, my God. And we, we passed the, the cemetery. And she said, “That is our cemetery there.” I said, “Wow!” So it was, it was, a tremendous, you know, experience.

And then she, I remember, I think, uh, I had a room in Le Fer because — no, not Le Fer, oh, yeah, right — because many, actually many sisters came to that, uh, symposium. So we were there and they had a room there for me and they put all those

dif..., uh, like a welcoming signs there. And those were the people I saw through pictures. They were all the, in the initial formation group. And all of a sudden they [were] all there. I thought, oh, my goodness! It was wonderful. It was a wonderful moment. Yeah. It's like, uh, I feel so connected. And actually I told one of the sisters, "I, I feel this is the, the first time I feel so grounded and rooted and there's such, uh, strong connections like I'm coming home, you know?" I was not born here. I don't, had never been here. But somehow I just felt like this is home. Yeah. So that was a wonderful, wonderful moment. Yeah.

14 University Experience in the United States

**When you came here to go to school at Loyola [College in Maryland]—
correct? —**

Loyola, uh-huh.

— what was that like for you to come and go to an American university?

Uh, I don't know. I just felt I had to do it. So I did that. But, um, I think I came when, when I was, uh, well, I really wanted to come that year just because I wanted to be part of the, uh, ses..., sesquicentennial celebration as part of my final vows [Sister Norene professed final vows July 12, 1990, the same year the Congregation celebrated its 150th anniversary.]. I already planned ahead of time when I took my first vows. And the second year the general superior [Sister Anne Doherty, general superior 1981-1986] visited us and I, I was telling her, uh, about renew..., renewing my vows and then she said, "Oh, well, then maybe you can. So the earliest time you can take your vows will be, um, 1991. And, oh, too bad you'll, you'll miss our sesquicentennial because that is, you know, that will be a huge celebration for all the sisters, [undistinguishable words]." I felt,

one year? What's the difference? So I asked her, "Could that be possible that I can take my final vows, uh, that year?" She said, "If you are ready." I said, "I was ready five years ago [laughter]!" She said, "No, now let's, you know, just go through the process and see how the Holy Spirit is leading you. But yes, I wouldn't say no. Uh, it's a possibility." That's how it came. And so it was my preference.

So going to Loyola to study for the, uh, my master's program I was not even feeling that was even something big. It's just something I need to do. But it was an interesting experience because growing up in Taiwan, uh, we tried to be very respectful and polite. And here, I hate to say, that Americans are very aggressive. During the class discussion, nobody, nobody wait for anybody. And even before a person finished [laughter] whatever he or she was going to say, the other person just cut in. And I was like oh, my gosh, when can I say something I want to say? And then also, my English was not that good. I had to compose a good sentence before I could say it. But when I finally got my sentence, you know, ready, they already moved to the second one. So I was very, very frustrated. And one time I just couldn't stand it. So right in, in the middle of the discussion, I remember when I watched a basketball game when they need to have a break they do this, [Sister Norene makes a time-out sign with her hands.] so I was like [She continues to make the time-out sign and laughs.]. I said, "Stop!" And then everybody just really stopped. They never, they never knew, you know, first I never said anything. I was there very quiet. They didn't know I was so frustrated. So I just do this [time-out sign] and I said, "It's my turn!" And they said, "OK." I said, "I cannot say a word with everyone, everyone was through cutting everyone's, everyone's, uh, message. I need to process and also I need to find the right word before I can express it. And you

are not helping me.” And they all felt, “Oh, I’m so sorry.” [Laughter] So, so finally they had, uh, we had this agreement. They would, they said they couldn’t change, but we let them know whenever I need to, to talk and they would wait for me. And so I did. That was what I did for three years. I always say things so I could have time to think and then tell them, you know, and then some of them would help me to, you know, find the right words. And it was great. [Laughter] Yeah.

15 Return to Taiwan

So after you finished your master’s degree you went back to Taiwan, correct?

Uh-huh. Yeah.

Tell me a little bit about, uh, returning. How was that for you? Tell me a little bit about your ministries.

Mmmm-hmm. It was not easy. I, actually after I had been in this country for three years I was really concerned about re-entering my culture because I knew I had cha..., I, I, I had changed through those three years. Um, and I was not sure how to really interact with the sisters and I even didn’t know how much they had changed and I, I felt maybe I, this is where I am, you know, and then they still have that image about me of three years ago. And same thing with me. They probably was [were] there and then I was, I thought they were here, so I thought oh, my goodness, this is really interesting. How am I going to interact with them and adjust to all these changes and, and feel all right? And also I was appointed to be the, uh, postulant director — formation director actually, as a formation director — and I just felt I’m not sure I can do this. I was trained to be a counselor, not a formation director. What am I going to do? But, you know, at that time

obedience was something you, you do whatever you are supposed to do. So that's how I understand my obedience [laughter]. So I felt, OK, I'll do it.

But it was really hard and, uh, I remember before I went back to Taiwan I had a dream. And that dream was I was looking for a painting for my house. And I went to an art gallery to look for the painting that would fit my house. I couldn't find any paintings in that ga... art gallery because they were all those oil paintings with huge frames with heavy, heavy, uh, colors and layers and layers and layers of oil paint. And I just felt, no, this isn't, this is not the, the picture. It doesn't fit my, my house. My house is more like Chinese style. It's strange. But it's not real Chinese style so I really don't know what I should look for. And so I, so I felt maybe I can try some Chinese or Asian paintings. So I, I went to the next section that was called Asian art. And I went there. I saw many beautiful paintings with, uh, water color that is, they were Chinese style. I loved them. But when I approached them they were not real paintings. They were print on, uh, plastic, uh, things. So it was like very cheap, like you can get for a dollar. And I felt, uh-huh, no, no, not, not, not for my house. So I felt what's wrong with this gallery? You know, nothing quite fit mine and why do they have these cheap, uh, Chinese paintings? So I was really disappointed.

And then at that time the owner of that, um, that gallery, she looked like a Native American, an old woman with white hair, and, uh, I, I just felt it's like a wise woman. And she came to me, she said, "It looks like you couldn't find any paintings that you were looking for." I said, "That's right." So I told her I had this house, I described my house. And I said, "I, I was looking for a painting, but, you know, those paintings were so hu..., like huge and bulky and heavy. That doesn't fit my house. And this side was like

very cheap and I couldn't stand them." So she took me to another section and that section has some kind of, uh, um, paintings that was a combination of, uh, Western art, but with the Chinese [cultural expression (added by Sister Norene during editing process)]. And they were smaller and very, uh, beautiful, delicate. And she said, "How about these?" I said, "I don't know." She said, "How about at least, you know, bring [take] one home and see how it feels, uh, you know? Just put it in your house and see how it look[s] like. If you don't like it and then bring it home [take it back] and we will do something about it." So she just said, "You know, stay with these for awhile and if you still don't like it, then probably this is not the one for you."

And then I woke up and I felt that is really a strange dream. So I talked with my, uh, spiritual director and, uh, our conclusion was that is me. I have changed. I was not, because my house was not, uh, Asian style, but sort of a combination of Asian and Western style[s]. And I knew exactly that Western style doesn't fit me, but I couldn't go back to the one or something I had before. That was not right for me even if they look like Asian [it] was not me, doesn't fit me anymore. So, I still couldn't figure out what I want or what I need to be, but that wise woman provided it. That wise woman is the Holy Spirit, but also the wise woman inside of me that say[s], uh, do whatever you can and go with the flow to see how can you integrate the Western and the Eastern together. And the time will, will tell you. You will know the right one. Right now, maybe nothing fits. But you will know when the time comes. So that was a peace of mind I brought with me when I went back to Taiwan.

16 Appreciating Eastern and Western Cultures

What do you most appreciate about Western culture. And conversely what do you most appreciate about the Eastern culture?

I think the most, uh, part about Western culture is the assertiveness. That is, uh, that is very different from our culture. Uh, assertive was, was ... when I grew up, especially with women, we were told to be considerate, not assertive. And our opinions need to be, uh, con..., need to show our consideration of others first. But in this, this country I learned everyone is, is a person and everyone's opinions need to be respected. And everyone has the right to speak for herself or himself and it's OK. Even [if] I don't agree with you, [it] doesn't mean your opinion is not right. I just don't agree with you. And that is the part I really appreciated a lot because that shows the respectfulness of, uh, that you make, that you make of each, each individual.

Um, and I think the other, the other thing about Western culture is, uh, the freedom, really freedom of, uh, self-expression. You know, uh, I grew up in a, grew up in a culture that self doesn't really exist. It's the community — the communal, uh, goodness is good and you need to sacrifice for the communal goodness. And it's good. It's just different. But I like to have a combination that we learn when [we] need to, a personal opinion need[s] to be, uh, you know, valued more than communal ones. We need to make that decision. There's no certain rule that we always have to go with one or the other. That is how I learned.

But, uh, I think one of the things I, I feel about later actually was, uh, through my research this time talking with those, uh, women working at the women's shelters. [At the time of this interview, Sister Norene was completing her dissertation at Indiana State

University.] I, I noticed that part of my, the things that attract me to be a religious woman was I couldn't stand all the men's dominance, especially in my country, we listen. Uh, and I, I felt I didn't have a voice. Uh, although I was, you know, they love me dearly but I had to be the little girl or the docile one otherwise, you know, it's, I, I probably won't receive that, that love or care from my grandparents or my parents at that time. Although my parents changed later because when I was in college I started to, well, actually, when I was in, uh, a teenager I started to let them know I had my own opinion and this is right [laughter], you know. So I was quite revolutionary in my family. They just learned to say, "Your sister never was like this. What happened to you? What did you eat? What did you ..." you know? I said, "I don't know. This is how I feel and this is right [laughter]."

So, but I, this time when I did the research it helped me to really see a part I never really did notice, but it was there. Part of that that attract[ed] me to be a sister was in the community in the, in the, uh, com..., religious community, everyone is equal. And there's no man. I don't have to listen to them. And we make the decision together. And we decide our future together. We don't have to lower our voice so that men's voice can be heard. And I just re..., I remember that part when I was in college — that was the part that really attracted me to the Western culture because women started to, uh, you know, express their voice strongly. Yeah.

17 Challenges

So do you sometimes have problems then with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church?

Oh, you are kidding. I, my first experience with the hierarchical Church was, um, I think it was when I was the first year after my first vows, I was a campus minister. And

of course why I chose to be the Sister of Providence I didn't like those habit[s]. And I just felt OK, you have to see from the Chinese culture, those habits just look so funny to me. It's like, which century are you, you know? And it's so strange. So I felt I want to be a sister. I don't want to be a sister with a habit. So I was looking for a congregation that didn't, you know, require their sisters to wear a habit — and Sisters of Providence first. The spirituality was something [that] really attracted me. I was so blessed to be protected by God all my life so that's why I felt this is the right congregation with the spirituality just, I just fit in with the entire thing. But the, the other thing is I don't have to wear that strange habit. I hope those sisters who wear habits won't hear this. But I didn't like it. So I was so happy to, to be, uh, in a community without having to wear this habit. OK.

And that, that was OK if I were in [the] Taipei area. It was more liberal and the bishop there was, he was very open sort of. But the bishop, uh, my, I, my ministry was in Taichung, the Taichung Diocese. The bishop at that time was very, very conservative. Even with the Mary..., Maryknoll Sisters, they didn't have a habit. All the sisters, the Maryknoll Sisters, who, who were in Taiwan or in the Taichung Diocese, they had to have these, uh, what do you call? Bandana? Like, uh, a scarf around their — it was very strange, OK? They had their outfit so moderate [modern] and all of [a] sudden there's something out, it doesn't fit. And it's not just the fashion [laughter] of the time. I just couldn't put these two things together and I just felt those women are strange and they don't know how to dress themselves. I need to teach them, but, you know? [Laughter]

So anyway, I, that year, usually as a campus minister, uh, sometimes we have, uh, we had activities for the youth, especially for the, uh, high school students or junior high school students for the summer camp. And because I was young and, you know, active,

so I was appointed as the coordinator of the entire camp. I was telling each one what to do. And then they told me, “Oh, sister, by the way, did you know it is our tradition that, uh, during the week, probably the last, you know, the second day to the last day it is the, the time we invite the bishop to say Mass for the youth?” I said, “OK. Sure, sure.” So I, I said, “OK, let’s, uh, put this altogether.”

So we had a Mass and the bishop came. It was — I never thought of, uh, you know, wearing the veil or anything. And so the bishop was really happy with all the things going on and he even commented that it was the best liturgy he ever celebrated with the youth, blah, blah. And then he told, he was, uh, telling one of the priests that, you know, that young girl — we need to get her to a religious — she can be a very good sister. And the priest said, “Oh, she’s a sister already. She is a Sister of Providence. She just took her first vow last year.” And the bishop said, “Oh, really? So where is her ministry?” “Providence University.” [Laughter.] He was so shocked!

The next day I got a letter from the bishop saying I have so many sisters in my diocese and they all wear a veil. You are the only person [who] hasn’t done so and I ask you to do this. I felt no. So, I even didn’t care about that. I just throw it away. I mentioned it to Sister Donna Marie [Fu] and also [Sister] Celeste [Tsai] and they said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “I’m not going to wear it. I didn’t take the vows of wearing a habit. Why should I wear it?” And they said, “Are you sure you don’t want to wear it?” I said, “No. Either I leave this community or, you know, do something. I’m not going to, to do that.” I didn’t. I just felt this is my obedience, I don’t care. And later I, I learned that they, they were trying to see maybe could, they should transfer me to another mission like in Taipei so I didn’t have to, you know, deal with all this.

But later, it just went away. I said, you know, "I will avoid him. I will continue. He is not going to ask me to do anything. He, he's not my superior. He is not my boss. He's just a bishop. And I, our sister, our Congregation is not a diocesan, uh, you know, community. I don't care." And the sisters just felt, "OK, just be careful, [laughter] you know." So, yes, I do have a problem with [the] hierarchy, you know. It's like, who do you think you are, a bishop or what? You cannot tell me to do something that my community didn't ask me to do, yeah?

18 Doctorate Completion

Since you've mentioned about your research, will you tell me a little bit about your PhD that you are very close to completing, uh, and your research, what is, what it is all about?

It's about the, uh, caseworkers, uh, their experience[s] and coping strategies. The caseworkers at the women's, uh, shelters, yeah. So the title of my, uh, dissertation is The Experiences and the Coping Among Caseworkers at Women's Shelters.

And when you finish with your dissertation and everything is approved, you'll be returning to Taiwan, correct?

Correct.

Do you know your ministry at this point?

Yes.

OK. And what will that ministry be?

I, I will be teaching at the univ..., uh, Providence University. Uh, I will be the assoc..., an associate professor in this department. Right now it's called, uh, Youth and Child Welfare Department. But I, I know next year they are going to change their names

to include social work. I don't know where social work is going to be in the front or the, you know, but it's a combination of social work and, uh, youth and child welfare... department..., welfare department.

19 Changing Views of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

OK. Tell me a little bit, Sister Norene, about your view of the Trinity and how your view of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit has changed since the time that you were baptized Catholic.

You know, it's, I never could, I never could separate the Trinity. I felt they are one. So if I'm talking to God I'm talking to God the Father, the Mother, God, you know, Jesus, and then, uh, the Holy Spirit. I, I felt that is a Western thing. I don't care. God is God. For me, it never changed. When I was a child, I was told that God is with us, within us, and that is, uh, that image I have about God, um. So it really didn't change that much. But one thing about my relationship with God is changing..., has been changed, um, when I, when I, uh, when I was a little child, and also when I, uh, was baptized and even when I entered the community, God for me was more like, uh, a parent — a loving parent, protector, uh, that, that, that, that kind of image I, it was stronger than other images. Now as I'm older for me God is more like a very intimate companion that still is inside of me, outside of me, coming through me — it never change[s]. But it is my relationship is more like of, I think it's very parallel to my relationship with my parents. They were my parents. They told me what I need to do, so I was like obedient to them and learned. Uh, now my parents and I are more like friends. I, I share with them what I thought. I took care of them. Uh, sometimes I even told them I don't like it. I, you know, my parents would say, "You have become too Americanized [laughter]." But they

learned that, I, I, uh, if I, I have my opinion I will say it and it's not out of, you know, I'm not disrespectful. It's how I see things. And I think that part has become part of my relationship with God is I was not like a little child, try to listen to God. I discuss with God and I listen and I, if I don't agree I, I said, you know, "This is really hard. I can't. I can't. You need to help me." So it's more like an adult, my role. I say, "Yes, yes, God." So.

20 Devotional Items

Are there devotional items that you use?

I use, uh, [the] Bible. I read [the] Bible or more specifically use the Daily Missal as my, my, daily, uh, meditation material. I do read, uh, different, uh, spiritual books, you know, from time to time. Uh, but for me, reading was just an avenue to help me connect with God, uh, a more like a reminder of how I could, uh, communiti..., communicate with God in different ways or some of the things I probably haven't, um, thought about. And those readings really help me to do that. For me, sitting quietly was something that I feel very connected with God. And I think that's part of my Buddhist tra..., tradition, training because I used to just sit, uh, in front of Buddha in the, in the temple when my, my grandma was praying with other adults and they had brought prayer books. I couldn't read. So usually I just sit quietly in the corner and just close my eyes and I felt God was there with me. So that was part of my practice, uh, even [before] I became a Catholic, that is part of my, my practice that I just, uh, set aside for like at least 30 minutes, uh, in the morning so I could quiet myself, center myself and really know why I am doing what I'm doing. Yeah. So, quiet prayers and prayer, Zen. I call it Zen meditation. Uh-hum. Yeah.

21 Favorite Part about Being a Sister of Providence

What's your favorite thing about being a Sister of Providence?

Uh, I think the favorite thing is, um, energy that, that is never, never died down. I said, "I don't know." My mom, my mom was coming here because — I don't remember which year they came — and they saw the sisters in their 80s and 90s and they were so active. And my mom said, "What did they eat [laughter] that they got so much energy?" And I said, "You know, mom, God's food [laughter]." Yeah. But that is, you know, like the sisters always have so much energy. And that is, uh, is a very positive way. It's like the energy, the creativities, I should more say creativity that really, uh, was something [that] attract, attracted me to, uh, to want to be involved with different things because when someone had, presented some creative idea, sometimes even like, "Where did that come from?" But people started to give it a thought and sometimes those thoughts became more like a reality and they started to develop into something else. But sometimes if that, if that was not really practical it would die down and, and that was how we, we started to, you know, change into different things. And I think that was the way we'd listen to God, we work with God.

And the other thing was the love. I, I just felt the Sisters of Providence, um, if everything dies, there's one thing it's not going to go away is the love. The love among the sisters, the care, um, it's just so strong. That is, that is there. Yeah.

22 Favorite Part of Being a Catholic

What's your favorite thing about being a Catholic?

Being a Catholic, um, I think I, I really like the Catholic thing is, uh, the Mass, the liturgy, so many symbolic, uh, gestures that really helps [help] me. I don't like those, you

know, uh, structured or detailed things. I'm more intuitive. So when I, just give me a symbol and I can start meditating and just feel it. And that is part of the liturgy, you know, so many symbols there. Um, and also I think it's the, you know, you, I feel very comfortable to go to any church in the world, knowing what I'm doing — the Mass. Uh, even [if] I don't know the language, I could identify each part and know this is the part for, uh, consecration, this is the part for this, da-da-da-da, you know. So that is part.

23 Challenges with the Catholic Church

Are you going to ask me what I don't like about [the] Catholic Church [laughter]?

Well, sure.

[What] I don't like [about] the church is the hierarchical part. Uh, actually, one, the book I'm reading is, um, I cannot remember the title of the book, but it's about, uh, the feminist, uh, the feminist perspective about the liturgy and the history of the development of the liturgy. And that is a part I, I strongly agree with because I feel those rules about men are, uh, only men can be in the, uh, uh, clergy, but not the, the women. Women are not supposed to be ordained because Jesus never called women to be his, his disciples. But I felt, no, because who collected those [books of the] Bibles [Bible]? Men. They collected the pieces they wanted. And also there were some, uh, documents that were left behind. Actually women were very active, uh, in the first century with the disciples. But those things were not told. And at that time if I look at the history, historical background, what Jesus did was very, very, uh, I call that uh ...

Revolutionary?

... revolutionary. Uh-huh. He was a, he allowed women to follow him. He interacted with women individually which was a no-no at that time. So, if Jesus were, uh,

born today I'm sure we have, he would have women disciples because time has changed. But the hierarchical church never wanted to change that part. Very slow.

And also I don't like the way they interpret, uh, the way they don't allow, uh, like, uh, abortion. I felt I don't, I don't like agree with abortion, but it shouldn't be something as, seen as a sin because each woman has a different circumstance that she is undergoing and we need to see things individually. Although we want to protect the, the baby, the fetus, but also, we also want to see how can we help the, the woman who is suffering. And there should be some way that we can, you know, consider at the same time instead of just one of these without the other. I think it should be both.

And also the Church's view of, uh, homosexuality. It's a homophobia for me. I don't agree with that. I think it has to be changed by the, they just cannot open their eyes to see that part. Yeah.

Sister Norene, is there anything else that you'd like to share? We've gone over a lot of material, but is there something else that you might like to share with me?

I cannot think of anything. Is there anything you haven't asked that I need to tell you [laughter]?

I think we've gone over just about everything.

Oh, OK.

So, thank you very much.

You're very welcome.

I appreciate it.

Interview and transcript completed by Connie McCammon