

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

A. Initially, It was not my intent to become a Sister of Providence. I came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for a vocation weekend just to explore the possibility. It didn't take long to fall in love with the beauty of these Woods but that alone is not the thing that drew me back. It was the story and life energy of the women I met here. It was the whole idea that as we come together the energy that each one of us brings becomes a force greater than anything we could accomplish alone. It was that spirit that moved me. I was looking for a greater commitment in my life and I felt I found it here at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Q. Had you known the Sisters of Providence before you entered?

A. No, actually, I did not. I actually met the Sisters of Providence through Sister Jody O'Neil, who was a campus minister at a small junior college in my hometown. We met through a mutual friend. I said to her that I really wanted to do something more, to be involved with the church. She invited me to a weekend in Chicago the Sisters of Providence were sponsoring. There, I met Sister Cathy White. Cathy's story and my story were very similar. Cathy had been a school principal and she owned her own home. But she was a postulant. I asked her, "Aren't postulants usually 19 or 20?" She said, "No, I'm not. I am in my thirties." I was thinking this is so not fair that they would be taking women at 30 years of age. Even though it was a possibility, I was thinking I was way beyond the right age to enter a religious community. I was 35 at the time. That day I also met with Sister Rose Ann Eaton who was the provincial in Chicago at that time and decided to stay in conversation with her for a couple of months. With the initial introduction by Jody, with the life story of Cathy White, discerning with Rose Ann and being open to the grace in my own life, I decided to start the process to enter the Sisters of Providence.

Q. Was there a moment when you knew this is what you wanted to do?

A. After my experience at the vocation weekend, I knew something had changed in my life. Today, the only way I know now that it was the right choice is when I turn around and reflect on my journey and feel the confidence that I made the right decision. I am right where I should be. This is where God has taken me. It doesn't mean that times weren't tough and there weren't struggles. There were.

Q. What do you value most about your ministry opportunities?

A. I have had the opportunity to be a teacher, principal, professor and a gardener. I continue to learn so much about our world through the children and adults I work with whether it is in the classroom or the garden. It is realizing the seeds or ideas that you plant will produce new life.

Q. Why would women today find being a Sister of Providence an attractive life choice?

A. It is all of the positive energy you find in community today. It's taking on social justice issues, whether it is issues around the homeless, women's health rights or building awareness around living more sustainably in the world. Being a Sister of Providence is still viable. Life in community is also changing. It's not stagnant. Your spirit evolves. I think, because of my relationship with Earth, the scriptures

become alive. There are parables around gardens, planting seeds, not knowing how they grow, but having faith that they will grow.

Q. Please finish this sentence. Sister Terri is ...

A. I'm a *life gardener*. I got that from a child. One summer I had the opportunity to be a life guard at a pool. This pool was located in one of our schools. I was working with children with special needs at the time. During a swim time, one little guy yelled out, "Life gardener! Life gardener!" I thought, "Hmmm, what a great title!" Being a teacher and working with young children, I do consider myself a *life gardener*.

Q. What role does prayer have in your life?

A. I like to gather with friends for prayer, whether it's once a month or once a week. I often find myself in private prayer when I am in the garden. My private prayer comes not so much from kneeling at the altar, but from kneeling in the garden. I do read the scriptures of the day but I find I am most reflective and closer to the Creator in the natural world.

Q. How important to you is the community lifestyle that sisters enjoy?

A. We talk about authentic relationships a lot. One of our challenges is community living. It's very important to have relationships in community and to cultivate those relationships in community. When it happens in a living relationship, it's wonderful, but it doesn't have to be part of a daily living situation. For me, even when you struggle in a relationship, you learn a lot about yourself. If you take what you learned to your next relationship then that is beneficial. As you age, there are some things that are just not important any more. Being in community is like being able to accept how different people do the dishes. If you can accept that, you can live with anyone.

Q. How much influence does Saint Mother Theodore Guerin have in your life?

A. Initially, it was her story. I read a story in sixth grade of these woman religious who were coming to America. In this particular story religious sisters were on a ship coming across the ocean. The ship hit a storm and the sisters were being tossed about. The sister who was in charge said to the rest of them not to fear. She said, "We've come too far to die at sea." During the vocation weekend, we went on a tour of the shell chapel. They told us the story about Mother Theodore and her companions praying to St. Ann for safe voyage across the ocean during an awful storm. I didn't really know the Sisters of Providence, but I remember thinking I certainly felt a connection. As I read her journals, I realized Mother Theodore has had a major impact on the world as an educator. I draw on her strength and her story as an educator.

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

A. It's important for me to stay healthy, to stay connected, and to be able to garden.

Q. What were you like as a child?

A. I was the second oldest of five siblings. I was the only girl with four brothers. I was the big sister and often the “little mother” to my two younger brothers who were 11 and 13 years younger than me. I loved to explore the farms of my grandparents and aunts and uncles.

Q. Is there anything else that people might like to know about your family?

A. I am a carpenter’s daughter. My father’s name is Joseph. He and mom had a wonderful partnership. They worked together to build the family, and actually built several houses from the ground up. Two of my brothers, Ron and Steve, are wonderful carpenters. My brother Alan is a professional fishing guide, and Joe has a young family and is a sportsman as well. My grandmother Gantz was a wonderful gardener. She is the one who handed me the garden seed, four o’clocks. I planted them in our backyard. I was fascinated that a little black seed could turn into beautiful bush of red flowers. The whole idea of being a gardener really came from my grandmother’s influence when I was a child of about ten years old.

Q. What is your fondest childhood memory?

A. I think the birth of my younger brothers.

Q. Has there been a particular world event that has made a significant impression upon you?

A. Well, the event of 9/11 because it brought the world right into our towns. It also helped me realize how we are all connected as a world.

Q. Do you have any particular philosophy about life that you could share?

A. As an environmentalist, I take one of many lessons from nature. One in particular is waste = food. In nature, there is no waste. In nature, whatever is waste becomes food for something else. As a species that produces many items, we need to know how to renew or recycle manufactured products. My philosophy is recycle, reuse, reduce, repair, rethink old unsustainable practices, refuse to lose sight of what could be for a healthier Earth, and help to rewrite the story of our relation with Earth.

Q. What gives you your most pleasure or satisfaction?

A. Watching children and my garden grow.

Q. What gives you hope?

A. Children and sunrises.

Q. You have a master’s degree in Earth literacy. What is Earth literacy?

A. Earth literacy is actually the “transformation of consciousness (Brian Swimme).” It is actually, realizing the Earth is not a thing to be used but a sacred community of life to which we belong. Earth literacy is not a degree in geology, nor spirituality, commerce, art, governance, or agriculture but it does encompass all of these elements. Everything is connected. Our commerce is connected to our

agriculture; our agriculture is connected to our health; our health is connected to our spirit; and our spirit is connected to our art. Earth literacy shows us those connections in light of the Earth's life systems: water, soil, and air. "Uniformity is not nature's way. Diversity is nature's way (Vandana Shiva)." We don't do anything in isolation. It's the old comparison as a butterfly flaps its wings in one part of the world the winds are felt in China. When a young child was asked what she thought "Earth Literacy" meant, she replied, "The ability to read the Earth."

Q. Do you have a favorite vacation destination?

A. I am not a big vacation person, but I'd say anywhere along a lake.

Q. Name one thing you most want people to remember about you.

A. That I was a good gardener.

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

A. I've been trying to convince them of that. Gardening.

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

A. A baby's cry. A newborn's cry. It's a voice of new life.

Q. What energizes you spiritually?

A. I love being in community with women and men who come from diverse cultures and backgrounds, but share a common thread. I like being with people who stand up for something that is right in the world, for what is good in the world.

Q. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained one new ability or talent, what would you like for it to be?

A. To be able to speak Spanish fluently.

Quick connections

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

A. I like the American Beech tree at the end of the path near the woods.

Q. When I am not officially at work or involved in ministry, you're most likely to see me ...

A. In the garden.

Q. On weekends, I love to ...

A. Work in the garden.

Q. I am passionate about ...

A. Gardening.

Q. What the world needs now is ...

A. A big garden.

Q. Name one thing most people don't know about you.

A. I am the oldest granddaughter of 57 grandchildren.

Q. Name one thing you miss about being a kid.

A. I miss playing with my cousins.

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

A. Welcome to my Garden! What I don't want God to say is "What were you thinking?"

Q. What is the highlight of your week?

A. Friday night.

Favorites

Flower/plant: Four o'clocks.

Book: Last Child in the Woods by Richard Louv.

Recreation: Bowling.

Hobby: Gardening (Master Gardener; photography, worm farmer).

Music/song: John Denver.

Animal: Cats.

Quote: "If I had influence in the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life."

Author: Pearl S. Buck.

Scripture passage: Seed grows of itself. Mark 4; 26-29.

Dessert: Fresh blackberries and raspberries

Time of day: Morning.

Season: All four, but spring with the arrival of spring flowers.

Actor/actress: Richard Dreyfuss and Tom Hanks.

Comic strip: Non Sequitur.

Childhood activity: Visiting the family farms.

Hero/heroine: Rachel Carson and Vandana Shiva.

If I weren't an SP, I'd be ... a worm farmer.

Other information:

Current ministry: In transition.

Years in Congregation: 25.

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