



In Loving Memory

Sister Joyce desJardins, SSND

Joyce Marie desJardins was born in New Orleans on December 21, 1929. She was the only child of Eugenia (Diez) and Oscar desJardins. In their uptown New Orleans home, the Spanish and French heritage of both her parents provided a rich, trilingual environment. With ease she would later become fluent in Portuguese and Italian. Travel enriched the desJardins lives. Joyce wrote, “In the summer of my third year, we went by boat to visit my grandfather in Honduras.” For those who knew the petite, graceful Sister Joyce in her vigorous maturity, it is no surprise to learn that she started dancing school at age four.

Birth
December 21, 1929

Baptism
January 26, 1929

Profession
July 29, 1950

Death
April 9, 2014

Burial
Chatawa Cemetery
Chatawa, Mississippi

Religion was promoted in the desJardins home; she attended weekly preschool Bible sessions at the neighboring Presbyterian Church. A highlight of memories she recorded, “About this time I remember some School Sisters of Notre Dame frequently walking by our house on the way to their university studies at Loyola.”

Joyce started first grade with 60 others in her class at St. Mary School in New Orleans where she was taught by SSNDs. The summer after her fourth grade the desJardins family moved to Honduras. She described an unusual experience there, “I attended fifth and sixth grades at the evangelical mission school—a wonderful time in my life for I could ride a horse to school. I’d fill my pockets with sugar cubes then treat my horse.”

In the early 1940s when World War II started, Joyce and her mother were advised to return to the United States. Because Mr. desJardins had dual citizenship and because he was involved in the necessary sugar industry he was required to stay. Joyce and her mother again lived in their house near St. Mary School but, perhaps because of system differences, she had to repeat the sixth grade. Louisiana youth of the 1940s passed from seventh grade into the high school freshman year. Joyce was a freshman, then a sophomore at the Redemptorist parish school.

Joyce was not sure when the quiet promptings to religious life began, but as an assurance she wanted to observe religious life more closely as a boarder at the St. Mary of the Pines Academy in Chatawa, Miss. This she did during enjoyable junior and senior years. “I graduated from St. Mary of Pines in 1947. Then back in New Orleans, with five others—all from Sister Clarea Hotze’s 7th grade class—received the dress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.”

The group travelled to the St. Louis motherhouse where they began their spiritual and academic preparation for life as a religious and a teacher. At reception of the habit and name, Joyce Marie became Novice Mary Joyce. As a novice she enjoyed the spirituality of a contemplative year. Following profession of vows in 1950, Sister Joyce began her ministry as teacher of first grade children in St. Louis and Cape Girardeau, Mo. She also earned a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Spanish and minor in French.

*Precious and blessed is
the death of the faithful
before God... for
they die in union with
their dear Jesus, in the
grace of God, in peace.*

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger
Foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame
Letter 11, September 10, 1831

continued

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**School Sisters
of Notre Dame**
Central Pacific Province

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD
THROUGH EDUCATION

Sisters Joyce and Helene Gerstner were called to be the founders of the first SSND mission in Honduras in 1955. Joyce was in charge of the school for teacher training. The sisters exhibited great generosity—a Joyce characteristic—as they did catechetical work in the villages on their only “free-day”—Sunday. Young women were attracted and entered the congregation during the 15 years Joyce served this mission.

Sister Joyce returned to the United States and for the next 20 years continued her ministry of educating young hearts and minds as she taught languages and religion in secondary schools in Jefferson City, Mo., Teutopolis, Ill., and Redeemer High School in New Orleans. So many of these youth have expressed the thoughts articulated by one former student, “Sister Joyce was the best Spanish teacher. She was my friend, as well as my teacher.”

Two needs for assistance in San Antonio called Joyce there in 1989. The Hispanic community in a parish needed someone with whom they could communicate, and Sister Joyce’s mother now lived there and was in declining health. While caring for her mother and after her death, the focus of Joyce’s ministry again centered on youth.

Joyce’s sensitivity and compassion for others in community made it seem natural that she sensed the needs of a select group of youth whose life choices had brought them to the Bexar County Juvenile Center. *Today’s Catholic*, the Archdiocese of San Antonio newspaper, observed this about her ministry, “As part-time chaplain Sister Joyce sees where she can bring some sense of personal dignity back into their world. To many of them, Sister has become a ‘mother figure,’ a teacher, a spiritual director...someone who can make a difference in what they can become.” Sister Joyce served at the center until 2004.

After 54 years in ministry, her own infirmities called for her retirement from full time ministry to St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Miss. For many of the past years Joyce struggled through a persistent, though not incapacitating infirmity. Now her mobility was severely limited. She continued to be involved in some translating and teaching until weakness precluded most activity. During the last months of her life, she ministered by prayer and presence. Sister Joyce died peacefully in the early morning, April 9, 2014. We rejoice in her new life.

By Sister MarieClare Powell