

Sister Marita Dargis
Wake Reflection
November 9, 2022

On January 25, 1925 at 10:12 p.m., the cries of new birth echoed in the Dargis household. Magdalen was a frail infant, the sixth child born into the family. Her father had died three months before Magdalen's birth. Mrs. Dargis was both mother and father to the six children and raised them by doing odd jobs, and with the kindness and generosity of neighbors. Magdalen's oldest brother and sister also helped support the family as soon as they were old enough to work.

Magdalen grew to be a healthy athletic child. She became the neighborhood tomboy; found every game and sport a challenge. During these years of growing up, neighborhood adults often remarked that she might follow her oldest sister's example and enter the convent. Magdalen's sister, our own Sister Delphine was 11 years Magdalen's senior. She had entered the convent and seemed very happy. Magdalen however, turned away and avoided any talk of convent life: she wanted absolutely no part of it.

In 2004 Sister Marita wrote **her** vocation story: "After graduation from West Mahanoy Township High School, I left home with a group of young women to work in an airplane factory in Bristol, (along the Delaware River outside Philadelphia) Pennsylvania. Being the youngest of the group and not yet 18 years of age, I had to get a working permit. Once in Bristol all new employees in the plant had to undergo a training period. I moved rapidly from one department to another and was put on the job line as a riveter long before my friends. Since I was not yet 18, I was put on the **day** shift. Later, when my companions came to work they were all scheduled for the night shift. This caused a breakdown of the group and new friends were soon made and living conditions changed. I began my work in Bristol in early January 1943. In August of 1944 I visited Sister Delphine in Pittsburgh. There I attended the investing ceremonies of six new novices. The services left little impression on me; in fact, the visit left me with a negative impression, and I returned to Bristol very happy that I had no part of that institution."

Continuing in her autobiography, she wrote: "Shortly afterwards I was approached by the foreman of our department and he told me I was going to be moved, going to 'bump' someone in another department. I told him that I did not want to bump anyone off. Words were coming out of my mouth, unthought of, unpremeditated,

spontaneous. He said that if I quit I will not be able to get another job. I told him I didn't care, I was going to Pittsburgh to continue my education (never had any such thought). This was mid-September, 1944. I waited for my final check, packed my belongings and sent them home with a note and went off to Pittsburgh, still not knowing what I was going to do. Sister Delphine arranged for overnight rooms. After two or three nights, I had a very restless night, a sleepless night, tossing and turning. When I awoke and saw Sister Delphine I said that I wanted to see Mother David. When I met with Mother David, I told her I wanted to enter the community. She asked when. I said 'Now'. She asked if I told my mother. I told her that I did not, so she told me to go home and talk with her. I told my mother. She told me that if things did not work out well I could always come home and talk with her. Once that decision was made there was no doubt in my mind that this was the life and place chosen for me by the All-good God. And so on August 12, 1945 I was invested and received the name Sister Marita, the name I chose to keep for the rest of my life. Deep within I knew that this would be my life – MY CALL. I was at peace.

[As an aside, reflecting on this experience in 1990 Sister Marita wrote a "Prayer of Gratitude for a Call to Life/to Change" which we will pray after this reflection. In it she praises God for all the "calls to change" in her life. Of **this** particular time Marita wrote:

"Be praised my Lord, for the unrest, the struggle and finally the 'yes' to your call to this Franciscan Community; the call to change again."]

Sister Marita continued in her autobiography: "After Profession in August of 1946, I was assigned to teach in Elizabeth, New Jersey. There I spent my first seven years. The rest of my teaching years were spent in schools in and around Pittsburgh with the exception of six years as principal and 7-8 grade teacher in DuBois and four years in Grand Rapids Michigan and one in New Kensington."

In Holy Trinity School in Moon Run, Sister Marita was principal for four years while she was teaching science to grades 7-8. It was there that she was involved in the Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science. Her students excelled in their science projects and she worked tirelessly for the PJAS.

Sister Marita and St. Gabriel parish were blessed for her to be the 8th grade teacher for five years and then principal the following six years. In 1981 Sister Marita received from The Society for Analytical Chemists of Pittsburgh, the Teacher Award in recognition of having the most winners at the PJAS meetings in

chemistry and related fields in the last three years while teaching at St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin.

Certainly her Bachelor of Science in Education received from Mount Mercy (now Carlow) College and Masters Degree from Duquesne University were instrumental in Sister Marita's excellent teaching skills. She also received the National Science Foundation Grants for four summers enabling her to benefit from ongoing science education.

Perhaps it was during her sabbatical at Lourdes College in the late 80s that she wrote this somewhat humorous resume as her Career Summary:

“Realistic, practical and organized. Able to work alone and enjoy a challenge. Two years experience in factory assembly line; completed job training in record time. Forty three years in elementary education as both a classroom teacher and as a principal. Thirteen of the years were spent in teaching Science to junior high students. (She was to continue in education for another ten years.) Administrative duties included the responsibilities of a principal where the enrollment ranged from 150 to over 400 and the faculty ranged between 4 and 23. Set up and organized computer room; moved and organized a science room, planed the storage of and piping in the water supply. She also listed as her personal interests: Mechanical inclinations, e.g. handling of tools, painting; gardening, crafts, art, sewing and cooking.” As well as later Sister Marita wrote the “joy of becoming a Eucharistic minister.”

As she was bringing her teaching and principal days to conclusion, Sister Marita went to serve at St. Peter's parish in Danbury CT from 1997-1999 where she taught English as a second language to a growing immigrant community and visited the sick of the parish.

In 2000 she began as a pastoral visitor in SS Peter and Paul in Elizabeth NJ which she continue for 13 years. Again from her autobiography: “It has been a privilege to return to SS Peter and Paul Parish for the third time during my years in community. It is a pleasure seeing some of the senior members of the parish but I am saddened to see the decline in membership because the young have grown up and moved away for higher education or work. What was once a large Lithuanian Community, filling the Church in standing room only, now is a relatively small community. New Lithuanian immigrants are scattered far and wide. The future of the parish is in the hands of a compassionate, loving God.”

When Sister Marita returned to the Motherhouse in 2013, she was involved in craftwork and making and selling her greeting cards. It was like a real business. But Sister Marita reached the time when more care was needed and in April of 2015 she moved to Presbyterian Senior Care at Westminster Place. Here she continued to receive requests from the residents and staff for her greeting cards. She continued her correspondence and considered all the days there her Ministry of Prayer. Her time at Paramount of Bethel Park was very limited but she seemed happy and was beginning to adjust to her new space and the staff. She even learned the path to the dining room only to fall and then begin the journey back to God.

Magdalen Dargis was born on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul and her life story really is a conversion story, a story of being turned upside down and inside out. Her story is about being open to whatever it was she felt God calling her to do and to be. Sister Marita has had many turns and twists on her life journey but has always sought to immerse herself in what was important for her personal and spiritual growth. She has spent time and effort deepening that experience with the One who had been with her from the beginning and continued to love her until the end.

And so, Marita, we, your sisters, thank you
for your perseverance,
for your desire to keep going and to keep learning,
but most especially
for being open to hear the voice of your God
spoken in the whispers of the wind,
the song of the birds,
the earthquakes of your life,
the beauty of creation
and the silence of your heart.

Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord
And let perpetual light shine upon her.
May she rest in peace,
Amen.

[This reflection was compiled by Sister Peg Markey but actually written by Sister Marita and the anonymous author of her 2019 Jubilee tribute.]