

## Sister Virginia Marie Waudby

February 3, 1921 - June 2, 2011



Tuesday, 2 June 2011, before dawn on the Feast of the Ascension, Sister Virginia Marie Waudby ended a long and beautiful journey. She began her life in Pittsburgh on February 3, 1921, the second child and first daughter of Horace E. And Margaret Sullivan Waudby. They named their daughter, Grace Margaret. The Waudby's had four children, Harry, Dorothy (Dot), Ruth (Rudy) and our Sister Virginia Marie, whom they called Gay.

She was a child of the depression and the family moved frequently as she was growing up. She attended and graduated from Saint John the Baptist High School in Lawrenceville. She was "a girl from Saint John's High School" who entered the

Sisters of Charity on September 8, 1939.

She became one of Sister Theodosia's novices. Appropriately, her last night at Caritas Christi was spent in the Theodosia parlor.

I think the community was not sure about what to do with Sister Virginia Marie. She was smart, very smart, she was physically strong and she had a willing spirit. But she was very shy and retiring. Initially, she studied home economics at Seton Hill. She learned sewing and design, but she never got beyond the chemistry of food. Cooking was not in her repertoire.

During the Second World War, Duquesne University began an accelerated 36 month program in the School of Pharmacy. She was admitted to the program and graduated in 1949 at the top of her class. She was inducted into Rho Chi, the pharmacy honor society and received the coveted Muldoon prize in chemistry. Later, she completed a degree in medical technology at Carlow College. Over the years, she was missioned to each of the Sisters of Charity's hospitals, working as a medical technologist and/or a pharmacist at Providence Hospital in Beaver Falls, Jeannette District Memorial Hospital in Jeannette and Pittsburgh Hospital. No matter where she was sent, she was always the pharmacist of record at Roselia Foundling. In 1980, she came to the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Washington, D.C. She retired on All Saints Day, 1996. She was 76.

Who was she as a person? What did she do along the way of her journey? She was a lover of languages and cultures. She would drive anywhere, anytime, under any weather conditions. She had an intuitive sense of direction which no G.P.S. system can match. She never lost her way. Like Elizabeth Ann Seton, she was a citizen of the world. With her hospital buddies, Sister Mary Jean Flaherty, Sister Joan Conway and Sister Rosemary Donley, she traveled across Europe on a train to 13 cities in 14 countries. Over the years, she also visited Iceland, Korea, Ireland, Great Britain, Rome, Sicily, Canada and Puerto Rico using the frequent flyer miles accumulated by Sister Mary Jean and Sister Rosemary. She accompanied her mother and sisters to Hawaii and England. She loved the common life. She was thrilled when her name was pulled for the Sister of Charity's lottery. She and the other lucky sisters were privileged to be in Saint Peter's Basilica for the canonization of Mother Seton.

She was an avid gardener of vegetables and flowers. This spring, some of her transplanted tulips and flags bloomed in West Mifflin. She grew her plants from seeds, cultivating them lovingly without pesticides or chemicals. She relied on a home made compost, filled with leaves and Sister Camillus' saved coffee grounds, egg shells and orange peels. She compounded the ingredients as if she were mixing a prescribed lotion or cream. She loved animals and had a Doctor Doolittle-like ability to communicate with them, especially with Jeremiah, an orange cat.

Her family was her treasure. She was very proud of her nieces and nephews. She would say the names of the 11 Smith kids (Kathy, Janet, Cindy, Patty, Diane, Greg, Tom, Megan, Maria, PJ and Tony) as if she were reciting the litany of the saints. Her adult nickname came from Virginia Marie Maier, one of Dot's daughters' trying to say her name, Gina Mia.

She loved to read and she was a collector of stamps, coins and maps.

She was never jealous or mean spirited. She was one of the "company of hospital sisters." Sister Mary Jean has been her friend since 1948. I lived with her for 45 years. Sister Mary Jean and I never heard her say an unkind remark about another person. She had the beautiful innocence of a child and an amazing sense of wonder. She was generous and helpful. She was easily pleased. The marshmallow chickens and other candy treats that Sister Bernadine lovingly provided each evening and the card games and the arguments about the rules with Sister Marie Clare delighted her. Several years ago, when Sister Mary Jean and I were complaining about moving and closing the house in Washington, she said, "If I could figure out where they keep the car keys, I could drive down after dinner and help you." She meant it.

The sisters in the community know that I have been describing the virtues which our Founders said should characterize the life of a Sister of Charity. Sister Virginia Marie was humble. She never flaunted her intelligence or called attention to her many gifts and talents. She lived a very simple, almost frugal life, as her generosity to others spilled over. She loved deeply and saw the ever present God in her sisters, her family, her patients, her co-workers, her friends, in her garden and in her pets. She saw Him in the nursing staff in Elizabeth Seton Hall who welcomed her back home yesterday.

The Jesuits tell a story of the death of Aloysius Gonzaga. No one thought much about the passing of a young seminarian until miracles began to happen at his grave site. I believe that our unassuming Sister Virginia Marie is in heaven. While it is not in her nature to be noticed, please do not underestimate her closeness to God and her love for each of us.

The saints are always present. Smith kids, Aunt Gay is still close to you. Gina is more committed to the mission of the Sisters of Charity and to us, her sisters, than she was the day that she left Sister Theodosia's novitiate.

But she is changed, transformed and we should not hold on to her. Gina is free now - - no more arthritis, no more short term memory loss. She sees the world with a panoramic vision unknown even to the *National Geographic*. Time and space no longer contain her. (Jane, she knows where the car keys are.) She is with God and we are richer and more joyful because we knew her.

Bon Voyage Gina, revel in the trumpets that sounded in the Ascension, celebrate and rejoice with the angels.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection*  
*~Sister Rosemary Donley*  
*June 4, 2011*