

WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC
FROM FEAR TO LOVE
BY
MARTI ARMSTRONG



Why I Am Still a Catholic

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Edited by Ronda Chervin

Designed by James Kent Ridley

Published by Goodbooks Media

Printed in the U.S.A.

ISBN-13: 978-1544784731

ISBN-10: 1544784732



goodbook
GOODBOOKS MEDIA
3833 AVENUE
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS, 78411
goodbooksmedia.com

About the
WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC
Series of Booklets

by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D., Editor

(Dr. Ronda is a Professor of Philosophy,
a Catholic writer, a Presenter on Catholic
TV and Radio and a Dedicated Widow)

In the year 2016 I read somewhere that 60% of Catholics have left the Church or only attend occasionally!

I was shocked! Myself a convert from an atheist but Jewish background, Jesus, manifested and coming to me, in the Catholic Church is the greatest joy in my life...from time into eternity!

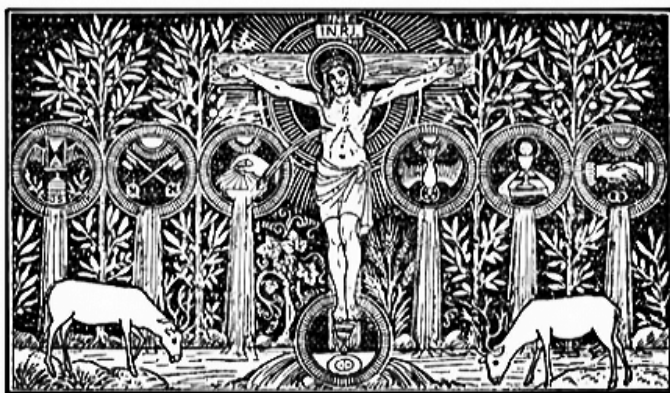
How could it be that so many Catholics have lost faith in a church that offers so much?

I believe it was the Holy Spirit that suggested to me a remedy.

Suppose the parish racks had little booklets written by strong believers, such as myself, describing why we are still Catholics in spite of many of the same experiences which have alienated other Catholics! Such a series of booklets could attract wavering Catholics or be given by strong Catholics to family and friends who have left us. In this way our series was born.

So, now I address all wavering Catholics, and all those who have left the Catholic faith, and beg you to give us one more chance. Could it hurt to say a little prayer, such as this?

Jesus, if you are really the Son of God, and you want me to receive fullness of grace through the Word and Sacraments in the Catholic Church, open me to the witness of the writers of these booklets. As they tell me why they are still Catholics, please tell me why I should still be a Catholic!



The Seven Sacraments

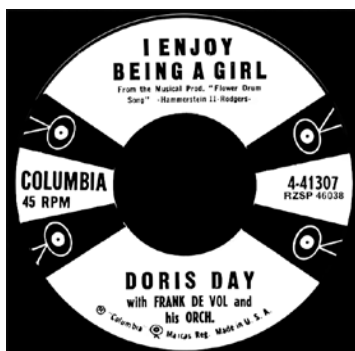


In her voyage across the ocean of this world, the Church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life's different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship but to keep her on her course.

Saint Boniface



I am a Dedicated Widow and mother of four grown children, with eleven grandchildren. I have an MS in Pastoral Counseling, have enjoyed the counseling experience, and relish visits with my children and grandchildren, as well as co-leading a bereavement group at my parish church and tutoring students in English as a Second Language at Holy Apostles Seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut.



I ENJOY BEING A GIRL

from *Flower Drum Song*

Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II
Music by Richard Rodgers

Moderato
Sfzmf

I'm a girl, and by me that's on - ly

great! I am proud that my sil - hou - ette is

curv - y. That I walk with a sweet and girl - ish

f7 **ahn**

“Why are you still a Catholic?”

My first reaction to this question was: “Why not?” I have been experiencing such ongoing gratitude and deep joy, acknowledging my Catholic identity.

From the earliest days of my childhood, my primary identity was that of being a girl. I reveled in wearing pretty dresses: indeed, my reward for good behavior in the mornings, when we wore the mandatory morning overalls, and after naptime, was the privilege of wearing the frock of my choice after my nap, for the remainder of the day. In fact, if I awakened my little sister and became noisy and rowdy in the middle of the night, I would be punished, and a voice would come from my mother saying: “All right now, overalls today!”. That was an effective punishment and a good deterrent! I cherished my dolls, dressing them prettily too. Even when I played cowboys with the boys, I liked



bringing my dollies in the makeshift covered wagon! From then on, through womanhood, I could say with the Broadway song: “I Enjoy Being a Girl!”

Baptized a Catholic in infancy, I believed in the primacy of my Faith, but from the age of 17, my Catholic identity has been profoundly more significant to me than even my “enjoying being a girl”.

As a child, fashions, food, and fun best described the positive aspects of my life. By the time I was a first grader, friends, fads and fitting-in were added to the theme.

However, on the negative side, fear was the theme that threatened and motivated me to do good and avoid evil. Before I was four-years-old, we would say our night prayers together every night. We knew the primacy of our Creator.



My grandfathers, one an Irish Catholic, and the other a Methodist and Mason, both warned us about the devil. Reward and punishment and



a huge dose of fear permeated my religious consciousness.

I remember being afraid of Santa Claus, but always relieved that he brought a generous assortment of gifts I had wanted, plus other great surprises as well! These great treasures appeared, even if I had not been so good! “He sees you



when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows when you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake!" Somehow, that threatening identity of Santa Claus was reassigned to my image of God. It was a punishing God, indeed probably, an angry God! Death, the end of the world and Judgement Day were great concerns!



When I was three-years-old, my father went away to World War II, and I knew that many of our men were dying in that war. For my mother and me and my brother and sister, fear was a dominant

feeling, the fear of losing our Daddy! From the day that he left for the War, each night, our main prayer petition was: “Take care of our Daddy”. Soon, our Mom added to our night prayer, “and take care of all of us.”

As I fused my religious beliefs with fear and stern obligation, fun, fads, fashion, and friends were my means to distract myself from the negatives, the fears. This was a fact, unless the fearful interrupted the fun. Once, when I was five, we were with our baby sitter, and I looked up and saw clouds in the

form of letters in the sky. With extreme dread, I just knew that it was the end of the world! My baby sitter



explained that it was only an airplane writing in the sky. Gratitude and relief colored that event!

On Sundays, our mother or grandmother would take us to Mass. I would watch the grownups and older children go up to Communion. I thought that the Hosts were made of cotton, and as a result, naturally, I was in no hurry to receive Holy Communion! Also, I recall that we usually sat too far away from the front of the church and the altar,

so that I could not see anything but the backs of people. As a result, my most positive experiences were playing with my grandmother's very pretty rosary, lent to me for the duration of the Mass. It was always a pleasure to get home to a pancake breakfast, and later, to visit our relatives for dinner.

My father returned safely home from the War on my sixth birthday. To this day, I can still re-experience that joy when I think about it! The fear of losing him was erased! I have felt such gratitude, especially for that moment in time, hindsight, one of the most euphoric moments in my life. A delightful addition, for my birthday, he gave me my first umbrella, a red Scotch plaid one with a Scotty dog handle!



Shortly after his home-coming, it became very evident that our Dad had become very strict, very stern, sometimes downright severe. Soon enough, we children would threaten one another during an altercation with the mantra: "I'm telling Daddy!". Also, during this time, our parents' Catholic Faith had become more robust, more intense, very serious. Could their gratitude for Dad's safe homecoming and their reunion have played a part? Perhaps. They were really a unit as a couple, and in their

parenting, and their greater active involvement with the Catholic Faith.

Soon, in our family dynamic and our plans for our future, grown-up lives, my brother decided he wanted to become a priest, and my sister wanted to become a nun. I wanted to become a medical doctor, and whatever I became, I wanted to be a self-made success. Though I did believe what the Church taught, I derived an intense fear-filled connection, hence a lack of enthusiasm for most religious subject matter. I paid attention, rarely with boredom, sometimes with fascination, often with terror, to lessons about our faith. However, I actually enjoyed reading and learning about the lives of the Saints

Most of my playmates were not Catholic. However, when I was in first grade, two older



second-grade boys on our street received their First Communion. I was impressed.... It seemed like such a grown-up rite of passage. Meanwhile, I came to learn that the hosts were made, not with cotton, but bread, and I also realized that if I were to make my First Communion, I would

fit in with the older children, that people would then know that I was seven-years-old, even though I was small for my age.

Autumn of my second grade year, First Communion classes were held every Wednesday after public school where I went. Our first catechetics teacher was our wonderful pastor. However, soon some Sisters from a neighboring parish came and replaced him. Their stern attitude and general lack of warmth often soured me against Sisters and nuns in general, until I met the Religious of the Sacred Heart in high school. During this time, I believed everything I was taught. I have, since childhood, been able to separate the message from the messenger. A personality trait does not necessarily convey the truth! It may make the idea more or less attractive, but truth is truth.

For example, if one of us buys cookies and they taste delicious, but we find out that the baker is obnoxious or hateful, if the cookies are made right, who cares who baked them? How much more does this apply to ultimate truth? In this case, the “cookie bakers” represent, well or poorly, their Maker, who is absolute Truth! I took their advice and kept their counsel too for years. My Methodist, Masonic grandfather’s teaching me to fear the devil was a prequel to the Sisters’ enlargement of this theme! Fear of hell was the

principal motivator of my faith walk!

Preparing for the count-down for my First Holy Communion, my mother bought me a beautiful dotted-swiss white dress and white veil. The day beforehand, we First Communicants made our First Confessions. In those days, before receiving Communion, we had to fast from midnight from everything, even water. When we arrived at the church before Mass for our First Communion, the Sister reminded us sternly: “Not a drop of water! Not a crumb of bread!” We absolutely knew that this was a solemn occasion, and indeed anytime we would receive Communion, it would always be a solemn occasion. We were taught some prayers to say before and after receiving, and to pray for our families too. Hence, from that time on, for years, at each reception of Communion, I would say the memorized prayers and then: “God bless my mother, my father, my sister, and my brother”.

Also, on this memorable day, we were enrolled in the Brown Scapular of Mount Carmel, to which I will refer later on. Our family went out for a picnic supper that evening, and the pastor joined us for the occasion as well,



adding to the wonder of that day.

Because so much seemed to ride on the idea of “either/or”, reception of both Confession and Communion appeared to be occasions of either grace or grave sin. I was under the impression, that if we deliberately withheld a sin from the priest, we were sinning mortally, therefore, endangering our eternal salvation. I thought that this meant we were obliged to tell everything, even the seemingly least offensive sins. It was a no-brainer to me that avoiding Confession altogether was the simplest solution. My parents insisted that we go to Confession every two weeks. As a result, I would go almost every week, so that I would feel free not to be obliged to go the following week!

During the 1940's, the Eucharistic fast obligation was to fast from all food and drink, even water, from midnight. On one occasion, I drank some water before Mass, but when it came time to receive Communion, I decided to receive the Sacrament unworthily rather than appearing to be younger than I was, like my little sister. In the interest of human respect, I went up to the rail. I was afraid to mention this in Confession, thereby concealing this sin each time. One night, as my mother was tucking me in at bedtime, I asked her if the priest would come out and spank a penitent, if that penitent mentioned receiving Communion

after breaking the fast. My mother calmly said that the priest could not come out and spank that penitent. Soon afterward, as my mother put me in bed another night, I asked her if a priest would call a penitent's parents if that penitent confessed drinking water and receiving Communion anyway. Hmmm! I think Mom figured out what I had done! My mother immediately gave me a wise and very firm instruction about the Seal of the Confessional, the priest's obligation never to reveal our sins, that his own eternal salvation would be imperiled! Mom handled this situation so well, and I was so renewed the next Confession and with a larger penance than I had previously received, and a much larger dose of peace! This was a great learning experience for me, thanks to my mother's instruction.

Another time I went to Confession, told my list of sins, and decided to lie and create a sin I had not committed, telling the priest that I had eaten meat on Friday (which was always forbidden under pain of serious sin, except on Holy Days, during the 1940's). The priest asked me if I did this on purpose, and I lied again, and said "Yes." At that time, I must have been motivated by boredom or curiosity. I figured that, at least I was not hiding a sin; I was just making one up!

This has also been a blessed occasion of inspired

instruction, what we have learned in the process of receiving this sacrament! For example, soon after I made my first confession, I discovered a toy cup that belonged to another girl who lived near my grandparents. Up to this time in my life, I discovered that stealing was an efficient method for owning someone else's coveted toy! I decided to steal this cup, confess the sin of stealing in confession, and then, absolved and freed from the sin, I would still have this terrific toy! When I went to confession and finished confessing my sins, including that of stealing, the priest asked me, "What did you steal?" I answered, "A cup." He asked me how much I thought that cup was worth. I answered, "About 35 cents." This was in the time period of the mid-nineteen-forties, and 35 cents could probably buy then what would cost at least \$3.50 now!

The priest told me, that if I wanted absolution, I needed to promise to return the stolen item, if I could, and if I could not, then I would need to give the owner the 35 cents. I promised to return the stolen item, and I was given absolution. Soon afterward, we were having dinner at my grandparents' home. At one point, I excused myself from the table, slipped out of the yard, surreptitiously put the girl's toy cup on the steps of her house, and quietly came back to the dinner

table. This was another valuable lesson in life, a new peace and freedom for me, and a genuine experience of what true justice is! The Seventh Commandment, “Thou shalt not steal,” commands us to let go of our selfish whims and choose justice for our fellow men, and indeed for ourselves, if we want to live and experience the peace of God.

During most of my elementary school years, I experienced boredom in the classroom, and as a result, I managed to get into a lot of trouble for acting out, clowning around, or holding conversations with other classmates during class. It reached a point where my parents’ greater concern was about my conduct marks, rather than my other marks, on my report cards. I would also be scolded because they insisted that I was very intelligent and not using the talents God gave me. Naturally, these occasions were probably additions to my guilt trips.

Unfortunately, it was in the confessional that I encountered one or two priests who were inordinately severe, and who greatly increased my fear of hell. In retrospect, though I knew I was forgiven by our Lord, I felt tormented by His representative! Much damage was done, even after I had outgrown my classroom antics. In fact, because I began to take my sins and imperfections too seriously, I was teased for being

too strict with myself. Hindsight, I received more affirmation by peers, when I misbehaved, than when I became too conscientious. It was an ironic situation.

Our own pastor was a good, kind confessor, with much common sense as well. When we lost him



from his promotion to another city and parish, we were given a new pastor whose countenance appeared stern or crabby. I was just beginning high school. Soon after this new priest arrived, I

entered his confessional with much trepidation. I heard the most compassionate voice behind the screen of that dark confessional. This priest exhibited profound gentleness and understanding. In retrospect, I felt the love of Christ from that priest! In this first Confession with him, he asked me, “Do you love God?” Because I knew that I could not lie in Confession, I answered him in the negative. Then he asked me, “Do you WANT to love God?” I answered in the affirmative, and Father said to me, “Then you DO love God!” He explained to me that love of God is in the will, not in the emotions. What a powerful new beginning!

Indeed, I still remember this dear priest as a genuine, loving father figure in my life.

The infinite mercy of our Lord Jesus is so powerfully exhibited in the institution of this Sacrament: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (Jn. 20: 23) There have been times in my life when this Sacrament was very necessary, bringing absolution and deep healing. There is also grace and healing...for me and for each of us... from Confession, even if it is only for less serious sins and faults.

Do I enjoy the process of going to Confession? Only in the past tense! Actually, I like to HAVE GONE to Confession! Leaving the confessional can be a euphoric experience! On a more superficial but comparable level, going to the dentist may be necessary but painful, but it is such a relief to leave the dentist AFTER that tooth has been fixed!

One thing I have noticed time and again, how powerful this Sacrament has been in other lives as well. Family members and acquaintances have told me about their great and rejuvenating experiences, going to Confession after years of being away. For example, one person started a conversation with, “Guess where I just went!” He was euphoric, answering: “To Confession!”. As a result, he began

to frequent the Sacrament of Confession and encouraged others to go back to Confession too. Indeed, I, as well as others, have also experienced, besides forgiveness, emotional and even physical healings in this Sacrament!

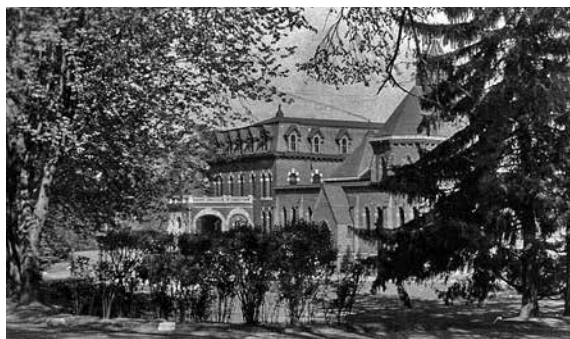
My high school years were my first experiences in Catholic schools. I had good marks, and I decided that I wanted to go to an academically-excellent Catholic college, become successful in whatever business I chose, and in a wonderful romance, marry that right Catholic man and raise a large Catholic family, AFTER proving that I could do well in some worldly endeavor. Most of my new friends were Catholic, and we all tended to agree on basic issues of faith and morals. Boyfriends tended to be Catholic, and this made dates less stressful too, because when I, or any of my friends, laid down the law about demanding respect from our dates, the boys got the message!

At this stage of my growth as a Catholic, I went to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, only to save my soul. I preferred to be distracted from religious subjects. Distractions were much more desirable than thinking about my soul and eternity. Because my own personal faith had a theme of obligation and fear, I looked for systems of security. For example, I made the Nine Fridays in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, because He had promised

to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, that for those who received Holy Communion on the First Friday of the month for nine consecutive months, their souls would be saved.

Enter the remarkably drastic change in my education! Involvement in a successful academic life, playing the cello in our small orchestra, a delightful group of friends, my then-existing story-book romance, and even being a junior varsity cheerleader, all spelled a measure of contentment for me.

One day that summer, my parents gave me a new option. My dad popped a question to me: “How would you like to go to Kenwood?” I shocked myself, and probably my parents, by immediately answering, “Yes!” Kenwood was a boarding school, known also as the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Albany, New York. I knew instinctively that a Kenwood diploma would be the best means of getting into the college of my choice. The Kenwood



faculty members were the Religious of the Sacred Heart, who were renowned educators of girls and young women. I just visualized a ticket to more academic and worldly success, while practicing my Catholic Faith as well! So, I began my junior and senior years at Kenwood, and I acknowledge that these two years became the most powerful, influential, indeed, miraculous, years of my formal education!

The Religious of the Sacred Heart were not only brilliant and gifted teachers, but they were warm, caring, maternal women, endowed with a very natural attitude. They had many interests. Life at Kenwood was a mixture of enjoyable fellow students from all over the United States, and from other countries as well. The school motto was: “Noblesse Oblige”. The basic rendition was: The



more you are given, the more is expected of you. My worldly bias expected worldly success. However, “Noblesse Oblige” had an eternal message. The Gospel story of the Ten Talents better applied to this motto!

The school was more demanding academically, and more new rules were part of the game. We were required to participate in field hockey,

basketball, tennis, or other athletic activities after classes every day. Daily Mass and other devotions were required in the chapel. There were probably more than one hundred religious, consisting of professed religious, novices, and postulants, in the chapel every morning. I recall one religious with a beautiful face, who had been a Powers model. I admired her, yet was somewhat annoyed, that she would give up so much of this world's goods and choose such an restrained vocation for her life.

These remarkable, highly-educated women, in full habit, would run back and forth on the field-hockey field and basketball courts, whistles in their mouths, refereeing our games. In their disciplined, semi-cloistered vocations, they radiated a true



inner freedom and joy. They also exhibited genuine interest in our individual lives. For example, each of us students could share with some of them our latest romantic attachments, or who would be our partners at a given dance, and therefore, we sensed their interest and enthusiasm about the social/romantic lives of each of us students as well. They

were great teachers, and they were remarkably interested and caring listeners as well!

February 12th of my Junior year was a profound new beginning! On that morning, we attended Mass in which some postulants in the Society of the Sacred Heart, mostly college grads, who had been wearing typical skirts and sweaters, that day, instead, wore white wedding gowns and lacey white bridal veils as brides of Christ. At one point, during the ceremony, the postulants left the chapel, and after a while, returned while wearing new habits like the other religious, but with the white veil of the novice. I was amazed! How someone could give up all of her material goods, her freedom, her chances at romance and marriage, and give herself so totally to her Maker, fascinated me. It was as if I might say: “It’s not my thing, but I acknowledge that this is profoundly beautiful!” In fact, it was a hauntingly beautiful experience for me all day.

After our afternoon gym class, we were expected to maintain our usual mandatory silence in the dorm, while we were changing our clothes before going to study hall, and then to dinner. I was ready to go to study hall before everyone else, but we were expected to wait in our little rooms before the scheduled study-hall time. I was bored and antsy. Consequently, I approached the religious in charge of the dorm at that time. I complained

to her that I was bored, that I would like to go to study hall early. Mother responded that if I were bored, I could go to the chapel. She then said: “I think our Lord wants something from you.”

Following Mother’s suggestion, I proceeded to the choir loft of the chapel. In that late-afternoon peace and solitude, I looked at the tabernacle and asked: “What do You want?” To this day, I cannot articulate the feeling, the sense, that permeated from that tabernacle! A Presence and profound peace! I just knew Whose Presence it was! My sense of the most wonderful attraction, being so accepted and loved! There may have been some of the “drama queen” piece to this teenager too! Beyond any previous notion of affirmation, acceptance, or romance! Really, beyond words! Life would never be the same! I do not think I exaggerate if I call it a taste of Heaven! I left the chapel a profoundly mystified, wonder-filled, and a changed person!

From this moment on at school, while we girls were enjoying our gab fests after dinner each evening, I would often quietly leave and sneak off to the chapel to be in that wonderful, Divine Presence. To this day, I have been blessed often by this wonderful gift, this amazing, ongoing invitation to this Eucharistic Presence!



It has been the Eucharist, Our Lord's Presence in the Eucharist, that has been the most prevailing element that keeps me Catholic! I have believed in my Catholic Faith even when I did not appreciate the Eucharist, but the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist is where He has grasped me!

At times in my teen and pre-teen years, I would struggle with doubts about my Catholic Faith. I was helped tremendously by teachings in theology, especially in high school, that intellectually explained the truths, dispelling my doubts. These teachings were confirmed even more so, later on in college.

This head knowledge helped me remain a Catholic. With or without my preferences or feelings, I just knew that the Catholic Church has had the fullness of the truth from the time Our Lord Jesus established it! Also, my sense of history, since the birth of Christ, leaves no sensible option as to the one true Church, except the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, I know, as a Christian, that Jesus is God, that God is Truth, and therefore,

He established His Church and promised that “The gates of Hell will not prevail against it.” He did not say: “The gates of hell will not militate against it., and I recognized, even as a secondary school student, I recognized that, if Jesus Christ is truly God, His Catholic Church is the only true Church with the fullness of faith, that He has established. However, the experiences from the



Holy Mother Church

Eucharist, in the tabernacle, the monstrance, and in reception in Holy Communion, have been the heart knowledge, as well as head knowledge, for me! My main response to this whole phenomenon is tremendous gratitude, and hopefully growing love, to my Maker!

During this time period of this newness of life for me, and not only my attitude, but even my academic achievements increased. One or more

of the teachers approached me, and said that they noticed a profound change in me. My reaction to these encounters was silence or maybe an “Uh-huh” or an “Oh”. I did share this blessing with the Mistress General (what the Principal was called in these schools), and my English Mistress (analogous to home room teacher). These two women were both encouraging and constructive. As I look back, they were really my first spiritual directors! How blessed I was to have these women as Our Lord’s instruments! I even entertained the idea that I might have a vocation to the religious life. My English Mistress would listen to my questions and new ideas and inspirations, and sometimes she would hand me a holy card with words to answer my question of that moment.

One question I found myself asking Mother was: “Is there a difference between fun and happiness?” Here, Mother was able to re-affirm the message of what our Lord does in our lives, the depth of His gifts, especially the Gift of Himself, to each of us! Mother also introduced me to the poetry of Francis Thompson. “The Hound of Heaven” has articulated this to me, even to this day! In “An Arab Love Song”, also by Thompson, Mother suggested the image of Our Lord’s “red pavilion of my heart” as the sight of the tabernacle with red covering as in the Mass of a martyr.

*The hunched camels of the night
Trouble the bright
And silver waters of the moon.
The Maiden of the Morn will soon
Through Heaven stray and sing,
Star gathering.*

*Now while the dark about our loves is strewn,
Light of my dark, blood of my heart, O come!
And night will catch her breath up, and be dumb.*

*Leave thy father, leave thy mother
And thy brother;
Leave the black tents of thy tribe apart!
Am I not thy father and thy brother,
And thy mother?
And thou--what needest with thy tribe's black tents
Who hast the red pavilion of my heart?*

Mother also gave our class her definition of love, saying: “Love is the placing at the feet of your beloved all that you have, all that you are, and all that you could be”. This Catholic, myself, is still very inspired, yet challenged, by this quote to this day! I have fallen short as wife, mother, and dedicated widow, but it is a very real challenge for me.

One question that is often asked of many of us, from several sources, is: “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?” Prior to my transformation, I might have answered, Yes,

because that indeed we did accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior at the Sacrament of Baptism. After all, infants have been baptized since the earliest days of the Church! “And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family”. (Luke 15:18) However, since that wonderful February afternoon, I have experienced a personal dynamic in my walk with our Lord, something I could never have envisioned beforehand. He reached out to me, but even now, I have been able to experience that marvelous reach!

As that junior year was coming to an end, though I looked forward to summer vacation, being home with family and friends, enjoying sun, the lake, the party and dating scene, I recognized the oncoming void, being home but a half mile from our parish church. I approached my English mistress, recognizing the change in me from the previous summer to the upcoming one. I very frankly asked Mother: “How can I stay in the State of Grace this summer?” Mother answered: “Go to Mass!” I asked if she meant every day, and she answered in the affirmative.

I was aware that my parents attended Mass every day, but at age 17, I was not enthused about going with them. But I decided to go to Mass anyway, at least a few days during the week. I

walked, or rode my bicycle, or even rode with my parents. If I was taking the bus to my part-time summer job, and the hours were convenient with my schedule, I would go to a week-day Mass before taking the bus to work. As a result, with the exception of several years, when I was too busy fitting into a more worldly, compromised life style, to this day, I really have a felt need to be at daily Mass. I believe that it is a grace, and I also have observed that several other persons, especially those who have advanced in years like me, enjoy this same grace, the calling to go to daily Mass. At our older ages, also as parents, grandparents, and people who are concerned about the needs in our lives and the lives of our family and friends and associates, and in this present society, we can pray, intercede, where our muscles and systems lack former strength. As a youngster, I once heard that one Mass is worth more than all of the prayers the world has said or ever will say, till the end of the world. When I have heard the explanation of the Mass as: "The Unbloody Sacrifice of Our Lord," it makes all the more sense!

In my college years at Newton College of the Sacred Heart, my faith, chiefly intellectually, was enhanced by great courses in theology and philosophy. During this time, I found myself determined to have lots of fun, plenty of dates with

a variety of boys in other colleges in the general Boston area. I enjoyed the learning, the college life, the parties, college weekends, including a good share of alcoholic beverages as well! I enjoyed fitting-in, the whole party scene. Fitting in, compromising, or could we call it: “How to be cool while attempting sanctity”?

I knew that if I were to eventually embrace the religious life, I wanted to get everything in, to experience many worldly happenings, to be sure, and to know that I got them out of my system. Sensible? Perhaps, to some degree! Or a lame excuse to have some extra fun? One of the religious, also the head of the philosophy department, called me into her office more than once. For example, she heard from a student that I was “getting higher, and faster than [I] realized” at parties.

The summer after my freshman year, I slowed down, enjoyed a summer romance with a nice young man from our parish. I had no trouble ending summer romances when school began. During this time, I chose dating boys who were fun, and usually good dancers, but who respected me and Catholic morality. In fact, if the boy was anti-Catholic or not Catholic, I chose to accompany him on fewer dates, because in the back of my mind, I knew that if I were to fall in love and eventually marry, I wanted to have a Catholic husband. For

me, a mutual sharing of the Catholic Faith was the deepest and most important bond in marriage and parenting. So, common sense urged me to go out with young Catholic men, and therefore be attracted only to those men, who shared my Faith. I knew a girl who made it clear that she wanted to meet and marry someone who was very wealthy. I advised her, in my thinking at that time, that if she truly wanted to marry a very wealthy man, then to use the same thinking in dating wealthy young men. She did, and he was!

The summer after my sophomore year was a new unexpected chapter in my life. I still tried to attend Mass a few times a week, enjoyed being with family and friends again, as well as the dating and party scene. One evening in June, I had the opportunity to have a conversation with Fred. He had just graduated from college. I had known who he was, and his reputation as an athlete, former high school basketball player, an expert skier, and his expertise in tennis when we met. We really hit it off! Not only was Fred a good athlete, but he was a great dancer. We both loved classical music, and Fred really brought Beethoven into my life/our life! We would go to Tanglewood in Lenox on Friday and Saturday evenings during the summer, sit on the lawn, and listen to the Boston Symphony Orchestra.



For the first time, I realized that this summer romance must not close when the school year began! Life without Fred would be unthinkable! I was out with Fred when this occurred to me, and I began to weep silently. He told me he wanted to take me to a special place to comfort me. I was quite amazed when we pulled up to his parish church (which, at that time, was open all night). We sat in the back pew before the tabernacle. A quiet, peaceful, wordless event!

That autumn, Fred began his assignment at officers' training school in Pensacola, Florida. With his degree accomplished, he was then able to begin his career to become a Naval pilot, so that he could fly jet planes on missions. Though he was far from Boston, and I missed him immensely, I

knew that he was beginning his dream career. Letters between us were a comfort during his absence. Plans changed, however. Within the first month of officers' training, Fred sent me a letter stating that he had a serious asthma attack, caused by allergens in the atmosphere in Pensacola. He was devastated, because asthma after a certain age automatically meant that he would be classified as 4-F. I was sad for him, but very happy to have him back home and not at risk during wartime.

After his discharge from the Navy, he actually began work in the Boston area and did not live far from my college campus. His workplace had a new item, a computer, and that computer was integral in his job. At this very moment, I am writing this booklet on my laptop, the largest of my three means of internet, larger than my tablet or my cell phone. However, at that time, Fred brought me to



see his office to show me the computer. That one computer was huge, and it spanned a complete

area, from room to room, about the size of a ranch house!

We decided to be married the following summer, the August between my junior and senior year. Once we made this decision, I went to see the Mistress General at Kenwood, my secondary school alma mater. I shared with Mother that I had fallen in love with Fred, and that we planned to be married the following summer. Mother was very supportive of our upcoming marriage. She also believed that, since Fred was living in Boston, and we were seeing each other every evening, that the early marriage was a prudent idea. When I told her about Fred's deep disappointment upon leaving the Navy, she said that she believed that God knew that I needed my husband home, that I would not have fared well with a husband out at sea for months at a time. Mother was very aware of my personal limitations. She saw Divine Providence in this.

Fred and I were married the August before my senior year, on my husband's birthday. I was able to commute to school as a day hop, while we lived in our apartment in Boston. Our first child, Mark, was born on graduation day, the first class baby in the history of the school!

During the years of our marriage, we were

blessed with four wonderful children, Mark, Greg, Terri Marie, and Michael, and we moved a few times with job transfers and promotions, following my husband's career as a mathematician, statistician. My own personal and spiritual struggles had to do with compromise. There were social happenings such as dances, cocktail parties, and often, there were uncomfortable moments, where our values did not mesh with those who were our companions, nor theirs with ours.

While attempting to raise our children as good Catholics, yet attempting to join in with "the world", I chose to read best-sellers and fit into a society of less-challenging ideals, as well as more fashionable interests. In fact, while I was "fitting in", deep within, spiritually, I was losing out! At the same time, on the positive side, I became involved in the civil rights movement. Human rights were worth a very good fight!

Shortly after Terri was born, Fred and I were watching the news on television, when we suddenly learned that the New York State Legislature had passed a law permitting abortion-on-demand for mothers, up to the 24th week of pregnancy. I was stunned, devastated! I could not imagine the people that we knew accepting such a law! Within a very short time, however, we discovered the tragic extent to which several of our acquaintances

embraced this law. I became bitter, felt helpless, even chose to terminate friendships.

My resentment poured over into my family life, my spiritual life. In my resentment and bitterness, temporarily avoiding the Sacraments was part of the situation. I felt betrayed by the very liberals I had always trusted! How could the same people, who had fought for human rights with me, espouse abortion?

I began to do some serious research. Soon, groups were sprouting up, right-to-life groups. It was in and through these groups, that we became educated about, and brought the pro-life message to our churches, schools and parent organizations, and in the cultural and political sphere as well. It was in the pro-life movement that we met persons with the greatest depth of religious, political, ethical, and social convictions. The families were warm, happy, and serious where they have needed to be serious. Hindsight, it was like stepping into another special place in heaven!

I began to recognize the great relevance that the Divine Law, as well as common sense, has in the political sphere. I acknowledged that we needed to maintain...or recover... local, state, and national laws based on Divine Wisdom, based on the Ten Commandments. I also recognized that the new,

trending concept of feminism was growing, and used to promote the abortion agenda, and more often than not, a lack of love and respect for our men and boys, as well as a type of “equality” for us and our children that could become a new threat. I would look at my baby daughter and shudder at the idea of her becoming “equal” enough to be drafted in the military, against her will.



As expected, a few years later, New York State had a referendum offered to us voters in 1975; this would determine if a state Equal Rights Amendment would become law. Again, several groups were established for those of us opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment, as well as those in favor of it. One group who worked in tandem with us was called “The Four W’s”. That title stood for: “Women Who Want to be Women”. In fact, in our work to prevent the state Equal Rights Amendment, we were able to educate women and men, young and old, about true freedom and

equality. We heard from news polls, that the Equal Rights Amendment referendum would pass that November.



The combination of assiduous team work and prayer led to the Equal Rights Amendment dying that Election Day by a two to one margin of votes! This movement of ours was probably, along with fellow Catholics, a more ecumenical endeavor than some of our other efforts to save the morality of our country and our children and our children's children.

During this time, in the '70's, several of our friends and acquaintances made Marriage Encounters. What turned Fred and me against Marriage Encounter was the over-zealous and almost aggressive attitudes of our friends in this new crusade. Fred would hear about Marriage Encounter at work, and I would hear about it from other moms, pro-lifers, and friends. We were told that Marriage Encounter was for good marriages to become even better marriages. The more we

heard, the more we rolled our eyes and shook our heads.

However, probably the result of some prayers for us, we finally caved, and we decided that, at least if we make the Marriage Encounter weekend, people would stop annoying us. We were indeed brought closer to each other, as a result of that weekend. Moreover, Fred and I were better able to share with each other our individual faith and religious experiences. A deeper intimacy between us! As a result, it helped us to be better as Catholic parents as well.

One day, I received a phone call from a good friend. She asked me if I would go over to her house on a particular day and time. I asked her what this was about. She answered, “To pray!” I was puzzled. She then told me about an article she had read about meeting weekly with a group of people, saying the rosary, during which time, any personal intentions are mentioned, shared, and brought to this group prayer. Our “Rosary Group” is about to become 40 years old! We have been meeting in one another’s homes weekly, and sometimes in our parish church, before the Blessed Sacrament.

The membership ebbs and flows, because of new members, guests, the loss of members to their moving away, and also, in their deaths. Once

when my daughter was in elementary school, she and I were speaking about friends and cliques, and leaders of groups. I mentioned my rosary group to her, and that there were no leaders, because Our Blessed Mother was the leader of the group. In our sharing, we members have become and remained close, and we have had some great answers to prayer as well! People have asked us to pray for their intentions, and they have sometimes



joined us in prayer during difficult times. After we say the rosary we enjoy a lunch together, and we are eager daughters of the Mother who loves each of us and our loved ones so much!

Spiritual direction has been a powerful help for me in my walk as a Catholic. A good spiritual director is like a powerful compass in our walk with God. A regular confessor often can be a help for this. I can see how God works through these men, and by following their guidance, trusting and obeying their suggestions we can reach deeper peace in our lives. I thank God for the priests He

has sent me, and for how wonderfully He has spoken through them.



Talitha koum

Physical healings have played an experiential part in my Catholic belief. We tend to think of the Bible and the lives of the Saints as the only sources of this phenomenon. However, miracles and healings happen even when we neither notice or acknowledge them.

When I was five, I was bitten by a dog. My nose was so damaged that the doctor suggested to my mother that I would need plastic surgery. Indeed, my mother told me that we would probably be going to Baltimore to a plastic surgeon. I envisioned some strange doctor putting plastic on my nose. It sounded creepy! I never went to any plastic surgeon, because the nose healed so well, that to this day, I have a slight, almost unnoticeable white scar on my nose. My mother let me know that it was her prayers, and the prayers of others, that led to that healing.

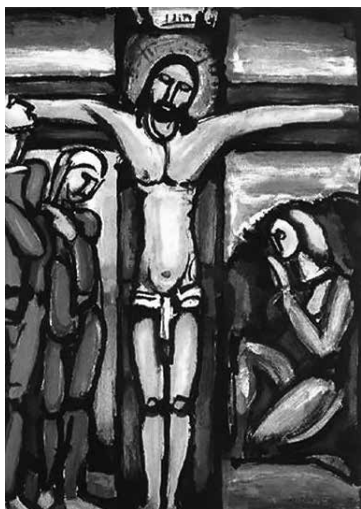
Several months later, we children had the measles. As a result, though the measles became

a thing of the past, I had a drooping eye, a very serious, noticeable drooping eye! My mother took me to the eye doctor who informed her that I would be this way for the remainder of my life. Prayers again, unknown to me, and the drooping eye became a normal eye.

When I was around ten, my grandmother from Maine had exploratory surgery in Boston. Because we lived in western Massachusetts, after her surgery, she came to stay with us until she recovered, after which, she was scheduled to have another operation. Naturally, there were prayers for my grandmother's health during this time. When she returned to Boston for further surgery, when the surgeon made an incision, the object that needed to be removed had disappeared! The doctor admitted that there was no reasonable explanation for her cure! My mother told me about this cure years later.

In my adult years, I had a nodule in my vocal cord for months, and that nodule disappeared after I made a Novena to the Infant of Prague, and one to St. Therese, the Little Flower. Another time, in a colonoscopy, an entire redundant colon, previously observed in an x-ray, had also disappeared. I can only say that, that day before the colonoscopy, I had prayed to Our Lady of Guadalupe and other saints, because of my fear

of the redundancy and its potential threat. When I later reported to my primary care doctor about the disappearing redundant colon, he asked me if I had a few moments to hear his story. This doctor also had a lively Catholic faith. He proceeded to tell me about his brother's instantaneous, miraculous cure, after prayers from his mother and other family members. I believe that we each experience many healings from God, spiritual, emotional, physical healings, that sometimes we are unaware of, or become aware possibly years later. Awareness and gratitude are huge components in the healing process.



Mary, the Mother of our Lord Jesus, and our Mother, has played a wonderful part in my life. Sometimes, I believe that, with Mary, I have been one of the unaware and ungrateful children! I have this idea that after we die, we will be astonished at the role Mary has played in each of our lives! When Jesus was on the Cross, He said to Mary: “Behold your son.”, and to John, “Behold your Mother.” Our Lord gave Mary to John, and to

each of us, as our Mother.

My parents and elementary school teachers expressed their frustration with me, because I was considered to be intelligent, but preferred not to pay attention, cooperate, or use my God-given talents in the class room. One year, a girl named Linda sat across the aisle from me. Linda was an A-plus student. I soon recognized that if I looked at her paper during our weekly tests, I could get the right answers without being caught. One day, my conscience and better judgment got the best of me. I confided to my mother that I had been cheating in school. My mother remained calm and suggested that Our Lady Mary and I become partners. I went to a public school which was across the street from our parish church. Shortly after my conversation with my mother, after school, I crossed the street, crept into the church, walked up to Our Lady's statue, and winked at her. From seeing cowboy movies, I decided that two "pardners" might make a pact with a wink!

Another time, my mother and I had a disagreement. In my frustration, I said to her: "You do not understand me!" Mom answered: "You have a Mother who does!". What a legacy! What inspiration! Thank you, both Mothers!

Another story of Marian graces. On the

afternoon of our First Communion day, we First Communicants were enrolled in the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. I was so pleased to be wearing my pretty white dotted-Swiss dress and white veil once again that day. Vanity, in my pretty dress and feeling grown-up, ruled! A priest, probably a Carmelite, enrolled us and placed the blessed brown scapulars with brown strings and brown tabs on our shoulders. I was quietly disappointed, because the scapular appeared to spoil the appearance of my dainty dress. When I arrived home, the dress was put away, and I wore casual clothes to wear to our picnic supper. I obediently wore the scapular, but did not like its appearance. When I went to bed that night, I was relieved that my mother told me that I would still be wearing the scapular, even if I kept it hanging on my bed post. I could tell that she did not like the idea of wearing the brown scapular! My idea of being fashionable was rescued! About two years later, I was at summer camp, and during our swimming session, I noticed one girl from my First Communion class wearing her now-faded scapular over her shoulders, on her bathing suit. I immediately tried to tell her that she did not need to wear that scapular. I respected Maureen anyway, and she was not a timid person. In fact, with the kind of indignation expressed by

a respected leader, or even a bully, she raised her voice, and said: "The Blessed Mother promised she would protect me when I wear this!" I was put in my place! And I have never forgotten this conversation.

More about the Scapular. When I was in junior high school, I began to take my Faith more



seriously. That almost negative faith was caused by the fire-and-brimstone rules taught to us in catechism class.

Fear reigned over my beliefs and conscience.

Confession was an especially daunting experience. During

this time, I found some helpful articles about the Our Lady and the Brown Scapular.

The story about St. Simon Stock and Our Lady

of Mount Carmel was very encouraging. This information led me to believe that, if I were to die wearing the Brown Scapular, my soul would be saved. That was good enough for me! My father had some brown scapulars, and I began to wear the

scapular hidden under my clothes. I was afraid of being ridiculed by my Catholic and non-Catholic peers, if they knew that I wore the Brown Scapular. Sometimes, I was guilty of presumption, making wrong choices and figuring that I would not lose my soul, because I was protected by wearing the scapular. Conveniently, because my scapular was a clandestine garment, modesty was especially necessary. Here, I figured that my Blessed Mother was protecting me because of my tactics, and in spite of my tactics!

Because I did not share my scapular usage to my friends, when Fred and I were married, I discontinued wearing the Brown Scapular altogether! Several years later, when we lived near Philadelphia, we left the children with grandparents and re-visited Boston, our old stomping ground. We had a good visit, but I had been suffering from stress and anxiety. I remembered that, when I was in college, we had enjoyed a guest lecturer who was a Catholic psychiatrist in Boston, and a Jewish convert. I even recalled the devotion in his voice when he prayed the “Hail Mary” before our class. I called this psychiatrist, and he scheduled a time for us to meet. I was very impressed, when I walked into his elegant waiting room and also saw some beautiful religious statues. During our session, the doctor listened with a profound expression

in his eyes. I talked and talked, and he listened and listened. At the completion of this session, I was able to breathe a sigh of relief. The doctor was supportive but not alarmed. He gave me some simple suggestions, and then reached into a filing cabinet to get something. A prescription? A reference? He handed me the object. It was a Brown Scapular of Mount Carmel!

During our early experience in the pro-life movement, we met an amazing couple and their large and happy family. I brought my children over to spend time with them at their home. Each family member was unabashedly wearing a Brown Scapular! Even the toddler was wearing a tiny Brown Scapular! This family was very creative and resourceful, and yes, counter-cultural! The father was an engineer at IBM, and the mother, Gina, who came from Mexico, was a stay-at-home mom like me. These children went to public school, but what they learned at home really enriched their education! They were taught their Catholic catechism at home, and they really knew their Faith! Following their example, I followed suit and began to teach our children catechism at home. Remarkably, years later, when one of our sons changed from public school to parochial school in seventh grade, the Sister who taught him religion said that he knew his Faith better than the other

students. Before we left their house to come home, each member of our family was given a Brown Scapular. These were the best kind of party favors!

Our children had mixed reactions to the scapulars. One son wore his everywhere. Now, I choose to wear my scapular, always! It is Our Lady's garment, and I liken wearing the Brown Scapular to playing "dress-ups", wearing my Mother's garment.

In my life, I have had such a marvelous sense of belonging to our Lord through the many instances mentioned here. There have been many blessings, also, some disappointments. My husband Fred was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease, and I believe that in his sickness and death, I, as well as others who knew and loved him, were inspired by his experience and the reality of a happy death.



I believe that God is in the midst of each moment, even when it may not seem obvious to this not-always-wise human instrument. As the result of marvelous spiritual direction and discernment, I chose to become a dedicated widow a few years ago, and made a promise before the tabernacle, in the presence of a priest and a group of friends, that I would be a Bride of our Lord, that I would renounce marriage to anyone else in this life. It is difficult to explain the peace and joy that have continuously accompanied this promise. I thank God of Truth and Love for these adventures with which He has accompanied me. I thank Him, the Lord Jesus, for founding and maintaining His beloved One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church for me and for my loved ones, and for each of us, with the fullness of the Truth.

