



## Answering the Master's Call

*Vocation Stories*

# Our Lady Secretly Watched Over Me

By Sr. Marites of Stella Maris, OCD

The earliest memory I have is being in the arms of my father after an incident in which I almost died. I was just learning to walk, and nobody noticed me as I found a large double-pointed u-shaped nail which was used to lock one of the windows. I swallowed the nail and it stuck in my throat. Within moments, I turned blue and was running out of breath. Everybody panicked! With much courage my father took the nail from my throat using his fingers. Blood was coming out of my mouth, nose and ears.

All my life, I wondered why God did not take me then, when as a little child the surety of Heaven already belonged to me. But God created me not just to save my own life but to bring as many souls as I could into the Father's eternal bosom.

My six siblings and I were born and raised in a very small, remote, undeveloped area in the Philippines. My parents were Catholic, but never really practiced it. As a little girl I would peep through the window to watch people walking towards the little church for Mass. Oh, how I wished my family would do the same!

The first time I saw a religious sister was when I was about six or seven years old. While visiting my oldest sister, Emmaline, who was in college, I saw a sister with a group of little children following her. Though I could not remember what the sister looked like, she deeply touched my heart and inspired in me the desire to be like her when I grew up.

When I was in the 5th grade, Emmaline married a Filipino-American and moved to the United States. She became a citizen and helped my parents to get their immigrant visas while the rest of the children were left in the Philippines. Being the youngest, I was my mother's shadow and it was very painful for me to be away from her. But this was also the period when I strongly felt Our Lady's presence in my life, leading me gently to the Heart of Her Son. I also understood that my parents had to leave to give us a better future, that it was part of God's loving plan.

I was in college when I first heard about the cloistered life. One of my classmates told me that no one ever saw them. They never left the monastery. "What a mysterious life," I thought to myself. "Why



would anyone want to be in prison like that?"

After I finished college, I went to an all-girl Catholic boarding house while I prepared for the Certified Public Accountant exams. Daily Mass, Rosary, and bible study were just steps away, but I was only a Sunday Catholic and did not take advantage of these opportunities. My mind was caught up with studies and plans of immigrating to America. Because the faith was not practiced at home, the seed planted was not watered. The little poor plant grew very, very slowly.





To help pay for my education, my mother had a cleaning job at McDonalds. Unfortunately, I did not pass the CPA exam. However, this was the beginning of my “gradual conversion.” My mother’s sacrifices were not in vain. One day, a young lady asked if I would like to pray the *Angelus* with her in the chapel. I nodded. Then, there was silence. She asked, “Would you like me to lead it?” I nodded again. Deep within, I was so embarrassed. I was twenty and did not know my prayers.

I realized that the seed of faith planted in my heart would only grow if I watered it. Our Lord had been giving me all these opportunities to grow in love for Him and there I was engrossed with my studies and my plans. I began to make visits to the chapel and joined the sisters and the girls in praying the Rosary.

Leaving my own country was not difficult for me because of my desire to find what I was searching for. The much-awaited immigration papers were finally approved. In America, I had all the things I needed and wanted. But deep within there was a feeling of emptiness.

Being a cantor in my parish helped me to go to Mass more often than just on Sundays. Instead of watching TV, I read sacred Scripture and prayed in the solitude of my room. It was during a silent retreat, sponsored by an active Carmelite community in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, that the Lord made known to me for what my heart was longing for, I longed for Him! I was looking afar but He was within. It was there that my love for the Blessed Virgin Mary was reawakened. With all my heart I loved Her and desired to be like her!

Growing up in a family where we did not practice Catholicism con-

cerned me greatly. There was a feeling of unworthiness for such a sublime “Call.” The Sisters explained to me that the nine years of formation would be like being in the womb of Holy Mother Church where I would receive nourishment to grow into a good Catholic Christian. It would also be a time of preparation for religious consecration... to be a Bride of Christ in the Order of Our Lady... CARMEL!

On February 11, 1997 the Carmelite sisters lovingly received me as a postulant. I closed my eyes and jumped, trusting that the Lord Jesus would be there to catch me. He asked for my heart. Empty and cold as it was, I gave it to Him.

I was not sure how my parents would take this surprising news. But my father told everyone that he was so proud of his youngest child. I was his gift to God and the Church!

During my initial formation, I learned more about the cloistered life, that mysterious thought which I pondered within my heart while in college. The desire of belonging entirely to God in silence, solitude and prayer attracted me. It would be difficult to be far from my family and the sisters but there would only be peace if I did the will of God.

One day, I saw a poor little bird trapped inside of a greenhouse. I tried to help it, but the poor bird was scared and kept flapping its wings to go through the glass. Finally, it no longer had the strength to move, and let itself be captured.

It is only when we allow ourselves to be captured by the Divine Hands that we can truly be free to sing the most beautiful hymns to win hearts for Jesus. This is the vocation

*For more information visit:  
[HolyCrossCarmel.com](http://HolyCrossCarmel.com)*



of a cloistered Carmelite. She allows herself to be captured. The soul is set apart from the world to be with the Beloved. To human eyes she is a prisoner. But she is freer than anyone else...freely loving the Lord and above all letting herself be loved by Him. No one knows she exists, but she is probably one of the reasons why the world still exists, for she unceasingly offers prayers and sacrifices. As she silently journeys towards heaven, she lovingly embraces the world and pleads to God for mercy. Her life is like that of the Blessed Virgin hidden, simple and poor. She possesses Him who is the Eternal All.

By Our Lady’s gentle guidance, I have been at the Carmel of the Holy Cross, Iron Mountain, Michigan as a solemn professed cloistered Carmelite nun since October 1, 2005.

And whatever happened to the little bird? When it let itself be captured, its heart was beating violently out of fear. I held it in my hands until it calmed down. I kissed its little forehead and set it free. It again found some strength to fly away to rest on a tree. There, on top of the highest branch it sang the sweetest hymn of thanksgiving. 🕯

