



Sister Mary Williams

May 31, 1930- July 31, 2022

Sister Mary Williams was born in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Pasco, Washington. On the day Mary's mother went into labor, some Sisters of St. Joseph who were friends of hers anxiously waited with her at the hospital for her doctor to arrive. It was the Memorial Day weekend, and he had taken his family for a picnic in a nearby town. At last, just as one of the sister-nurses was preparing to deliver the child, the doctor drove up to the hospital and saved the day.

The Sisters of St. Joseph played another role in Mary's early days. The family was planning a two-week vacation in a remote Idaho cabin in July, and her mother, very attentive to her husband's health, knew he needed the vacation. So the family went ahead with the plan, and brought six-week-old Mary back to the nursery at Lourdes so the sisters could care for her. Reflecting on that, Mary said, "No wonder I had a vocation as a CSJ!"

Mary's mother, Ursula Trainor, came from an Irish family who had traveled from Wisconsin to settle in Rosalia, a little farming town in the Palouse country south of Spokane. Her father, Hill Williams, emigrated with his family from Arkansas to Pullman, Washington, not far from Rosalia. Both teachers, they married in 1922 and settled in Pasco where within a year, her father bought a part-interest in the Pasco Herald, a weekly newspaper. And the family history of journalism and writing began.

Mary was the third child. Her brother, Hill Williams, Jr., was a journalist with a long career at the Seattle Times as science editor. He and his wife Mary Lou had five children. Mary's sister, Jane Williams Pugel, lived in Seattle with her husband Jim and

their nine children. Seattle became Sr. Mary's destination for home visits over the years, enjoying her large and loving family. The cabin at Priest Lake, Idaho, was another home for the family. Mary, her family, and her friends had many happy times there enjoying the primitive beauty of the mountains and the lake.

Mary started her education in the Pasco schools. Longfellow School was only a block away from the house, and she and her sister would come running down the alley for lunch at home each day. But when she was sixteen, she transferred to Marycliff High School, a Catholic boarding school in Spokane. She then spent four years at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota, once again with the Sisters of St. Joseph whom she loved. With their help and encouragement, she and a group of other graduates were awarded Fulbright scholarships to study and travel in Europe for a year. So Mary spent the year after graduation in France, at the University of Poitiers. World War II was a recent memory to the Europeans and they loved Americans, so it was easy to travel and make friends all over western Europe.

After her year in France, Mary came home to Pasco and taught English and French for a year at Pasco High School. But the question of vocation continued to nudge at the back of her mind. Finally, with her family's encouragement, she entered the community. She was received into the Community of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Los Angeles on March 19, 1955, and made her Final Profession on August 6, 1962.

After her first profession, Sister Mary taught English, French and journalism at Bishop Montgomery High School in Torrance, California. During the summers, she began studying for her Masters in English at Stanford University. In 1961, she was missioned to Mount St. Mary's College, teaching on both the Chalon and Doheny campuses. Then, five years later, she began full-time study at Stanford for her Ph.D. in English and American Literature, living happily at St. Albert the Great convent in Palo Alto.

After her return to the Mount in 1971, she taught for many years in the English Department, serving for a long time as chair of the department. Her leadership and organizational skills took her away from teaching at times. She served as Academic Dean from 1974-1978. She took a six-year leave of absence from the college as Provincial Counselor/Regional Superior. In her last years at the Mount, she was Professor of English and Provost of the college.

During her years of teaching, Sister Mary had the opportunity for a sabbatical in England. She studied medieval literature in Oxford University and traveled the British Isles and on the continent. "I was blessed," she wrote, "and tried to share my cultural

and personal growth with my students when I returned to the Mount.” Probably her happiest experiences at the Mount were with her students with whom she formed lasting friendships. When she retired from the college in 2003, friends in the class of 1975 formed the Sister Mary Book Club which continues to meet regularly to talk books and to share updates on their lives and their families, including now their grandchildren.

In 2003, Sister Mary left the Mount and moved to her home town, Pasco, Washington, to share the lives of her Sisters of St. Joseph in the Northwest. She kept busy in retirement, working at Tri-Cities Prep, the new Catholic high school in town, tutoring students and helping to make a start with a school publication. Appointed a second time to the Provincial Council, she acted as regional for the sisters in Pasco, Kennewick, and Lewiston, Idaho. In 2014, she published a book, *All Things New, the History of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Western Province*.

Over the years, she served on various boards of directors, including Mount St. Mary's College, St. Mary's Academy, Our Lady of Peace, and three hospitals—Daniel Freeman, Our Lady of Lourdes, and St. Joseph's in Lewiston.

In 2019, Sister Mary left her beloved city and convent in Pasco to join Holy Family Community at Carondelet Center. In the shadow of Mount St. Mary's University, she delighted in visits and lively conversation with family, friends, and former students. She prayed, read, wrote, and lived well in her retirement years.

Sister Mary was hospitalized at St. John Hospital in Santa Monica due to complications from vascular surgery. She spent her final days aware and peaceful, accepting that God might be calling her home soon. Mary passed over into new life on the feast of St. Ignatius Loyola July 31, 2022 accompanied by sister friends praying at her bedside. May the words of John O'Donahue remind us of Mary's beautiful spirit...

*Your love was like the dawn
Brightening over our lives
Awakening beneath the dark
A further adventure of color...
May you continue to inspire us:
To enter each day with a generous heart,
To serve the call of courage and love
Until we see your beautiful face again*

*In that land where there is no more separation,
Where all tears will be wiped from our mind,
And where we will never lose you again.*

~ Sister Loraine Polacci and Sister Mary Williams