



Sister Donna Lee Ann Gibbs, CSJ

March 16, 1956 ~ August 31, 2023

Born in Fort Gordon, Augusta, Georgia, Donna and her family returned to Los Angeles when she was just three months old. Her father, George L Gibbs, Jr, was in the Army and this necessitated the move. Her mother Marianna Tkach provided a loving, supportive atmosphere for Donna and her seven siblings. As the family expanded, Donna and Georgia were especially close. The Gibbs children were: Georgia, Donna, Eloisa, George, Larry, Marianne, Gary, and Robert. It was a busy Catholic family. Growing up they often played together, and Donna helped raise her younger brothers. Vacations usually took them to Catalina Island or Big Bear, or even to the grandparent's cabin in the high Apple Valley desert. Many weekends were taken up with invitational swim meets where they would compete. Donna was good in breast stroke and relays, but did not enjoy the competition.

Donna had a lifelong love of nature and the outdoors, often going on hikes with siblings or cousins. She taught swimming to infants and small children while attending college. Later in life she deeply loved her dog, Dusty, and found great comfort in his presence.

She may have been one of the most creative people you could meet. She loved art, and learned classical guitar, even forming a trio, called the Earthtones. Her art work included sculpture, painting, tapestry, needlework, even puppets. Donna wrote and illustrated two children books, Seamless Universe, published in 2015, and The Quilter and the Quail in 2018. Her many years of teaching and degree in Child Development, her Master's Degree in Earth literacy and later in Art Therapy helped others to deepen their connection with the universe and to stand in awe and wonderment.

In 2010, when she received her master's degree, it provided an important turning point in her life. It further unlocked her creativity and opened many doors for her to share her passion for ecology and justice.

Donna learned about the CSJs when she picked up a number of pamphlets on religious communities at the LA Religious Education Congress. She wrote to a few communities but was most interested in the Sisters of St. Joseph. As she met more CSJs at workshops and days of prayer, and spent two weeks living with a local community, she became impressed with the uniqueness and diversity of the sisters and their ministries. She discovered a family connection with the CSJ Sisters. Her father had attended Transfiguration School in LA, and her grandmother knew many sisters and Mrs. Doheny.

Choosing to respond to God, she entered Candidacy on August 24, 1985. Donna continued in her religious formation, a Reception Ceremony was held on September 3, 1986, first vows pronounced on August 13, 1988. At the time of first vows she wrote, "I choose to: remain rooted in prayer, respect the dignity of the human person – myself and all others, live in charity and justice, stretch, grow, mature, strive for the fulfillment of my own destiny coupled with that of our community through emptying to make way for the kingdom." On August 1, 1996 Sister Donna pronounced her final vows. At the time of her 25th Jubilee she wrote, "Jubilee is a time for thanking God for the gift of unconditional love, mercy and fidelity that I have depended on through these 25 years."

Her first teaching assignment was to St. Vincent School in Los Angeles, followed by five years in Kennewick Washington. At St. John Chrysostom in Los Angeles, she taught Science in grades K – 8. Donna loved being a teacher. She delighted in teaching children to care for creation. At St. John she planted a garden with the children and shared in their joy as plants and vegetables began to grow.

In 2011, soon after receiving her Earth Literacy degree, Sister Donna put this degree to good use, speaking at Pax Christi LA. The topic was; "Connecting the Dots of Peacemaking: War, Economy, Environment". Sister Simone Campbell, SSS was also a speaker at this powerful workshop at the Doheny Campus.

Donna was filled with creative energy and developed a passion for justice, especially eco-justice and racial justice. She was interested where the two intersected. She brought this concern to discussions at a CSJ book club where they explored the book Race and the Cosmos by Barbara A. Holmes. This profound book used the lens of theology, physics and cosmology to examine issues.

She was a gifted teacher and facilitator. Her patience and desire for the person to understand gave others encouragement and empowerment. Donna had a special connection with the Kakehashi cohort, (the youngest Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet). When the group met in Albany around 2017, Donna led the group in a very creative process about the future of religious life. Because these processes were so unique and so memorable, Donna will forever be present when the Kakehashi group gathers to deepen in relationship with one another and

move forward together into the future. She had many friends from as far away as Japan and Peru, who remember her.

In Los Angeles, when a small group of CSJ sisters gathered to discuss how to address racism, Donna suggested a possible workshop, "Color of Fear". The group went on to present the workshop in Los Angeles and In San Francisco. It received excellent evaluations. This was the beginning of the Anti-racism Working Group. Donna always contributed energy and enthusiasm to the meetings. She played a major role in helping with subsequent workshops and the development of materials for Black Catholic History Month. The day she suddenly went into the hospital, she made sure she had completed her part of a workshop that was being prepared to offer to the community. In the hospital she gave instructions as to where to find the completed materials in her house.

One of Donna's last ministries was at OPICA, providing art therapy for persons with dementia. The Executive Director visited Donna in the hospital to thank her for her contributions to the lives of her clients.

Donna was also a member of the Sisters of the Earth. A beautiful tribute was sent out to members, in part it said, "Donna served the network so faithfully for many years. Donna had a generous, joyful and humble way." She presented one of her videos at their gathering in New York. She wrote books and developed videos for ecology education, sharing them with the Sisters of the Earth group.

A transformation took place as Donna realized all is gift, and we are in the benevolent hands of a gracious and generous God. Donna's shorthand for this reality was F-R-O-G, meaning: fully rely on God. This reliance on God became very evident in her life, especially as she faced terminal illness.

Knowing and accepting she was loved, liberated her. In little and big ways, and in the process of fully embracing life, she was gifted with great peace and profound joy. Even as she realized her terminal illness was rapidly progressing, she insisted on keeping appointments with her art therapy clients.

Donna leaves a great legacy in her art and writing, and her many relationships. Her simple yet profound spirituality can be easily grasped and practiced. She found beauty everywhere, in nature, music, art, word, drama, and especially in the beauty of the human spirit. Her own spirit brought a contemplative awareness and nonjudgmental openness of mind. She lived with a grateful heart and easily found and received beauty.

~ Sister Frances Baker

