

Georgianna Blaeser, RSCJ  
January 30, 1940-June 1, 2016

Born in Chicago, Illinois, "Georgie" as she was affectionately known, was the daughter of Anthony Blaeser, Sr., and Georgianna Blaeser. She was the youngest child in her family and after they lost their mother at a young age, Georgie's older sister Joan became her virtual mother. The loss of her mother, plus her father's remarriage and Georgie's displacement, left deep holes in her life. She was sent to Lake Forest as a young child to the boarding school and found there a sense of family and mothering that was missing from her home life.

Georgie graduated from Woodlands Academy in Lake Forest, Illinois and after high school attended San Diego College for Women. She entered the Society at Kenwood on June 23, 1960 and made her first vows there under the direction of Mavi Coakley on August 22, 1963. After a year of "black juniorate" at Kenwood, her first assignment was teaching and work in the boarding school at Woodlands Academy from 1964 until she left for probation in Rome, to make her profession on February 3, 1969. While at Woodlands, she also earned a B.A. in English at Duchesne College, Omaha, in 1967. In the years following probation, Georgie served as teacher and school administrator for many years at the following Sacred Heart schools: Woodlands Academy 1975-1982; Duchesne Academy, Omaha, 1969-1974; and Glen Oak School, Cleveland, Ohio 1974-1975. During these years, she earned two master's degrees, a Master of Fine Arts from Northwestern University in 1972, and a Master in Educational Administration from the University of Notre Dame in 1979.

Georgie served one year as Director of Communications for the new United States Province, 1982-1983, and then from 1983 to 1987, she served on the Communications Team for the international Society of the Sacred Heart in Rome. When she returned from Rome, she went to Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart, Miami as campus minister and director of the social justice program, 1987-1993. Beginning in 1993, she served on the United States Provincial Team for six years. After a year of transition, at the age of fifty-nine, she decided to leave the formal classroom for Sprout Creek Farm, where she was to be found for the next sixteen years as education and program director, spearheading numerous programs for children and adults.

Georgie's ministry history was wide and varied. A consummate educator, she had a sense of adventure and was not averse to taking risks! Without the knowledge of what it took to work on a farm, she forged ahead, putting everything she had into the process of learning what needed to be done. The most important thing for Georgie was the process, the experience of trying, and not the product. In this way, her spirit was open, light and true. Georgie had a work ethic that ran parallel to her adventuresome spirit. There was nothing she wouldn't do, from staying up all night waiting for the birth of two lambs, to serving on countless province committees. She did all with the same spirit-filled grace that she brought to every encounter.

She produced the Sprout Creek Farm's yearly calendar, introducing its users to so many of the creatures who made up the Kingdom. Georgie was often seen driving her Gator mini tractor that she thoroughly enjoyed! She was also a photographer and the farm inspired much of her work. She could be seen greeting customers coming into the market or carrying a stack of envelopes for the summer camp children so they could buy their daily ice cream at lunch. As Georgie shared in a presentation she gave at Woodlands Academy in 2012 (excerpted in the Spring 2012 issue of *Heart Magazine*), photography taught her to see what is actually there without judgement. The canvas of the natural world "shouted out to me, 'We are looking at you. Don't miss out, because each moment is the only one you have to take in the truth of what it means that we see you. Notice us and worlds will open to you.'" Georgie described Sprout Creek Farm as "magic with light," an "inspiring place where people learn to grow and shrink a little at the same time." She captivated her audience at Woodlands that day, where the girls loved her.

Georgie is best described by her sisters and friends by how she made them feel and her sense of humanity. She listened, she cared, and she loved. Georgie mentored many students and young adults over the years, including many of her religious and lay colleagues, all of whom were drawn to her strength, sense of humor and humility. In a talk that she gave at Carrollton for an annual celebration of the special

relationship between mothers and daughters, she speaks of the vision of Saint Madeleine Sophie for young women of her time and the challenges that we still face in living up to that vision. Georgie talks about the “we” and “they,” and how a lack of compassion can turn to judgement as we can exhibit the same objectionable behavior we see so easily in someone else. In her humble self-effacing manner, Georgie recognized how precious and fragile life is and how this day is all that is given to us. She was truly present to this life, its joys and its sorrows.

For the past three years, Georgie had been battling lung cancer, again setting her mind to what needed to be done and living life to the fullest. She loved to cook, serving up gourmet meals right up to a week or two before her death. She wanted to nurture the land, the child, the animal, the belly, her eye, her love of literature and writing with the wonders of creation. Georgie’s last year of life was characterized by the beginnings of deep diminishment in lack of mobility, difficulty breathing, and more frequent episodes of pneumonia, heart failure, and the advancement of her cancer. Simultaneously, in her downward trajectory, there were brief parentheses in which her indomitable spirit rallied. In March she began to cook again. These episodes were a delight to her and to all. On oxygen at all times and cooking with flame, she created an element of risk, a hallmark of her life to the end! She ended her brief cooking chapter on April 30<sup>th</sup>, going into the hospital the next day with a blockage in the femoral artery. After a week of tests and dire prognoses, she returned to Wingate nursing care facility, never to return home to the farm again. On May 25<sup>th</sup> she celebrated the Feast of Saint Madeleine Sophie with her community, Irma Dillard, and Fran de la Chapelle at Wingate. Georgie went into surgery on May 27<sup>th</sup>. There were complications and a large blood clot migrated to her lung, already compromised by cancer. Members of her family arrived just after surgery and visited with her in the hospital for a few days.

Georgie’s final journey home took place on June 1, 2016, when, fully conscious to the end, she surrendered the pain and the suffering of her battle with lung cancer. She had been blessed with many visits from her brother Jim, his wife, and her niece. In her final hours she was held close by her sisters, Meg Causey and Margo Morris. Fr. Mark Connell administered the Sacrament of the Sick. In her last hour, Georgie spoke clearly with those present and on the phone with her friends, including Barbara Dawson.

At Georgie’s request, the Memorial Mass was delayed until after the summer camps had concluded. The Memorial Liturgy was held on September 24. Many RSCJ and the Sprout Creek Farm staff were involved in all aspects of the liturgical celebration and receptions and in planning for the arrival of more than one hundred people from all walks of life. Irma Dillard produced a powerful DVD encompassing the whole of Georgie’s life with pictures of childhood and family, illustrative of her work as RSCJ in many places throughout the United States, the world, and on the farm itself. The text used was excerpted from the talk Georgie delivered at Woodlands in 2012, and with some exceptions, her own pictures were used to show how she viewed the world and valued relationship. A longtime Franciscan friend, Joe Cavoto, OFM celebrated the liturgy with Fr. Mark Connell, Headmaster of San Miguel Academy. Georgie’s niece, Georgie Westerdahl delivered the eulogy, a historical, tender, and humanizing tribute to her beloved aunt. Bunny Flick, cheese makers Colin McGrath and Melissa Boscarino, and Isabel Singleterry, Director of Communications for Carrollton School, provided heartfelt and humorous vignettes. On September 26<sup>th</sup> a burial ceremony was held at the Kenwood Cemetery, attended by about thirty RSCJ. An exquisitely presented Farm to Table meal was served by Michael Allen, chef at Abba House – a truly thoughtful and edible tribute to Georgie. Educator, mentor, friend, administrator, photographer, cook, Georgie Blaeser was a creative force for the Society of the Sacred Heart.