

BIOGRAPHY

As soon as possible after the death of the RSCJ, please send to the secretariat a biographical account giving the chief facts of the person's life. One or two pages are usually sufficient.

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Dorothy McMichael, RSCJ

April 2, 1926-May 14, 2002

Dorothy Joan McMichael was born in Philadelphia on April 2, 1926. Her parents, John L. McMichael and Hazel Switzer, had two children, Dot and Robert. Dot was baptized in the Catholic Church on August 14, 1947, and entered the Society of the Sacred Heart exactly two years later, August 14, 1949. Mother Marie Louise Schroen was her mistress of novices and Mother Elisabeth Zurstrassen was her mistress probation; she was professed in July 1957.

She shared later in community the struggle it was for her to recognize and respond to her spiritual search and journey. Her father, in particular, was not content with her decision to become a Catholic and to enter the Society of the Sacred Heart. After long years of separation, the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council allowed her to be with her family again and provided healing of their relationship. Her close relationship with her brother Robert and his family brought much joy to her.

Dot's nephews and niece shared her values of simplicity and love of the earth. They often traveled together discovering the beauty of the West and of the Everglades. The last family visits in early February were full of loving compassion and showed the deep love of her sister-in-law Pat and her children for Dot.

Dot's early life was marked by strong discipline and an orientation to higher studies and the arts. She attended Lower Merion High School in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, and then received the degree of Bachelor of Music from the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music. Her area of applied music was the violin. The study of the physical sciences developed in Dot a keen sense of the rhythm of life and of being in tune with the earth. In the early 1970's studying at State University of New York at Buffalo for her Masters degree strengthened Dot's interest and expertise in natural science, specifically, plant physiology.

Dot was a woman of such varied color and brilliance. One friend described her as "sunshine." Her capable intellect allowed her to learn French, Spanish and Hebrew. She could read and write these languages and in 1984 was able to teach Hebrew to a Jewish student at Doane Stuart School. Her love of learning meant that she pursued and took classes in viola, classical guitar, the recorder and flute. She had been organist and pianist at our convents in Greenwich and Rochester. In Albany, Dot sang alto in the choir at St. Vincent's and at St James' Churches. All the while teaching in our academies in Detroit, Greenwich, Rochester, Buffalo and Albany, Dot studied art in Woodstock, New York, Russell Sage in Troy, and SUNY Buffalo. She was skilled in watercolor, china painting, acrylics, Chinese brush painting and figure drawing. Never without wide interests Dot studied archeology and field ecology and joined the ornithological clubs in the places where she lived. All this she did in the summers while being employed full time. Her last work with Oonah Ryan at Neighborhood Artisans allowed her to share her artistic talents, as she taught china painting on tile, fabric painting and acrylic painting on wood. With Oonah she organized sewing projects, one of

which involved preparing materials for 200 students to produce more than twenty quilts in one day. The quilts were then given to the homeless and others in need connected with Neighborhood Artisans.

Dot's interest in Native American culture developed when she went on the six week American Experience program with Sue Rogers and Network of Sacred Heart Schools students in the summer of 1972; it was intensified as she worked with Native Americans in Detroit. In 1973 and '74 Dot volunteered with migrant workers in Michigan. All of these activities accompanied her thirty-year work in education as surveillante of the lower school, teacher of religion, English, math and science for students from the first grade through middle school as well as teaching biology and physics in the high school at Nottingham, Buffalo. The numbers of environmental scientific and musical associations in which she was an active member are too numerous to mention. It was in Buffalo, where she was charged with overseeing the grounds of the convent, that her love for gardening flourished. Wherever Dot lived there was a garden, and she would be sure that there was an extraordinary collection of the ordinary and rare.

Nothing in Dot's life was ordinary. She brought sunshine to everything she touched. Her personality was as varied as her interests. She never let the sun go down without sorting out any difficulties of the day. Any harsh moments were like a passing storm with thunder and lightning and were almost refreshing for all involved. Dot's humor and laughter were always shared. There was never a lack of clarity and honesty; that was the refreshing part.

Dot flourished in Jerusalem in 1974 when she lived with an Orthodox family for five weeks while she visited the holy sites as well as places of historic and scenic interest. Her auto trip to Ireland with RSCJ was a highlight. How she loved the barrenness of the Aran Islands! Her spiritual search meant she also studied various religions, western as well as Zen Buddhism, spirituality culturally different from her own.

When Dot arrived at Kenwood, she was told by the neurosurgeon that she had eight to ten weeks to live; he spoke frankly of daily diminishment. One book she used throughout the last weeks of her life was *Here So Close But I Didn't Know*, by Tomihiko Hoshino. One quotation she shared:

Next to my cheek
Was placed a flower.
Thus I kept watching it.
And so, smaller than the flower
Did I feel.

As Dot weakened, the aides made sure that the linens on Dot's bed were flowered: flowered sheets and pillowcases all placed with such tender care. Each day someone in the community would bring her a flower from the spring garden: forsythia, dandelion, daffodil, lily, tulip, hyacinth, lilac, poppy and roses. Her RSCJ sisters sat with her as women of few words and loving presence. She told the nurses and aides as well as her family members and RSCJ that she was *at peace, at home and was loved*.

At the end of one of her last visits Oonah Ryan asked: "Dot what do you really want?" Dot replied, "Jesus!" Not one to respond in pious phrases, she said what she meant: just so, her wish was granted on May 14, 2002.