SISTER ELIZABETH MARIE FOSTER
1907-1988

If feature writers of newspapers had discovered the Searles story, the headline would probably have read: FOUR CHILDREN SEPARATED IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THEIR YOUNG LIVES KEPT "THE FAMILY TIES" DESPITE TOUGH OBSTACLES.

As told by Sister Elizabeth Marie, however, it is a story of inborn love given to children by parents who died too young, too soon. Annette Riley and Archie Searles, of Irish and English descent respectively, were born in the Mount Pleasant farmlands of Michigan. Their children were born on their farm in St. Louis, Michigan, a twin town of Alma and near Mount Pleasant. Laura, known to us as Sister Elizabeth Marie, was born October 9, 1907, following her brother Leo, and preceding Sylvia and Lloyd into the family. She was baptized, as were the other children, in Sacred Heart Church, Mount Pleasant.

> *I was six years old when my father died. He had taken me to the barn with him, and then remembered to send me for the milk pails. As I was returning, I saw him trying to get to our house. He fell. I remember crossing the creek, and screaming for help. That was the beginning of his fatal stroke. He was only 35 years old when he died.*

The stroke was activated, it was believed, by a wound in the head he had incurred while fixing the well not long before that tragic evening. Lloyd was born only a short time before their father's death.

> *Our mother had to sell the farm, and move to Mount Pleasant with us children. We lived in my uncle's farmhouse. He, my father's brother, owned two houses, one across the street from the other. We lived in the second house. Leo and I went to Sacred Heart School. I was in fourth grade when I left there.*

She spoke of a brave, loving mother, who was taken from them by typhoid fever four years after their father died. She was only 36 at the time.

> *Before my mother died, my grandparents and our pastor, Father T. J. O'Connor, aware of her delicate health, it seems, arranged for my living with Mr. and Mrs. Foster. I remember stealing out at night, and running home to see my mother and sister and brothers. We would meet at mother's bedside. I was then about 10 years old.*

In many places in those years, it was the custom for the priest of the parish to look after the children of deceased parents. In consultation with the grandparents, Father O'Connor placed each child with families of their acquaintance who would be willing to educate them and bring them up in their Catholic Faith, at least until adulthood.

The Fosters, with whom Laura had been living almost a year, insisted that she take their name since both parents were deceased–though, as she learned later, she was never adopted. Lloyd, who was only four years old, was taken by the Carroll family, and legally adopted. He, the only one of the Searles children living today, gives testimony of

a wholesome childhood and boyhood that prepared him for his own gracious marriage and family life. Sylvia and Leo seem to have had a happier life than did Laura.

In her case, Mrs. Foster, who was young and inexperienced, regarded her as a domestic servant. The theory that orphans who experience unhappiness in foster-home living are often unable to give love and trust to others failed in Laura's case. She did not lose the love left in legacy from her parents. Notwithstanding the "drudgery" that dominated her growing-up years, she kept a positive attitude–thankful for a home and education, even though she knew that she paid an unreasonable price for it. (Besides, she was not penniless. When her mother sold the home, she put money in trust for each child.)

> *Mr. Foster was in the real estate business. We moved to Detroit, and I attended St. Theresa School in fifth grade. My teachers were Adrian Dominican sisters. When we moved again, I went to Blessed Sacrament School. The Immaculate Heart Sisters taught me there. At Visitation High School, the Adrian Dominican Sisters were my teachers again.*

Mrs. Foster's need for maid service took a toll on Laura's scholastic and social life. She remembered with gratitude her understanding teachers. Among those mentioned in an interview were Sisters Paschal (Sydnor), Edmund (Harrison), Coelina (Murphy), Agnita (Grace Reuter) and Marie Camilla Connery. From the first sight of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters in first grade at Mount Pleasant, she wanted to be one. In her senior year at Visitation, she sought counsel from Father John Linsky and her teachers. They opened the way, and prepared her for the novitiate in Adrian.

Mr. and Mrs. Foster not only opposed the idea, but attempted to stand in her way. Laura was then in her 20th year. Her "hidden life" had been strong. Amiable, but firm, she said goodbye as a grateful friend, and remained a faithful one through sickness and death. Their relationship became one of kinship.

Laura became known as Sister Elizabeth Marie on December 29, 1927, and professed her vows August 6, 1929. From the beginning, "religious life was good for me," she said. She was always happy–even when the superioress was not her choice. In her first assignment, she was blessed with Sister Eugenia Dwyer for her superioress (St. Patrick, Joliet). A beneficial beginning was continued at Bishop Quarter School for Boys. "My life was very special there, with Sister Bernard (Ullrich) our superioress and Sisters Hortense (Ballard), Anita (Zauner), Beatrice Ann (Freiburger) and Marie Harold (Assenmacher)."

Her assignment to St. Joseph, Wyandotte, Michigan, was most gratifying in the sense that, for the first time since 1918, she was brought in touch with her sister Sylvia, who had moved to Detroit with her husband and two children.
Another advantage in the Wyandotte assignment was her opportunity to visit the Fosters in their sickness and death three years apart.

A few years earlier, she had gone to Mount Pleasant–after an absence of 28 years–and there had become reacquainted with her brothers Leo and Lloyd and their wives and Leo's children, who were to mean so much to her. The family that she had held onto through correspondence had become more than pen and paper in her life.

Apart from seven years at Wyandotte, Sister Elizabeth Marie taught a total of 12 years at Queen of Angels, and nine at St. Rita, Chicago; another seven at Our Lady of Loretto, Hometown, and two at St. Albert the Great, Oak Lawn.

Her last active role in education was at St. Thomas Aquinas, East Lansing, Michigan. It is from here that Sister Lois Paha holds fond memories of her.

> *My memories of Sister Elizabeth Marie center on our five years together at St. Thomas Aquinas School in East Lansing. When she first arrived there, she taught fourth grade; but, after two years, then 70 years of age, she was encouraged to retire from teaching. She did this rather reluctantly, but turned her disappointment into positive energy as she became the school librarian. Her kindness to the students and her care about the library facility were evident in her dedication and faithful presence.*
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> *In the convent, she was a quiet but supportive member. These were the early years of renewal, and there was lots of confusion on the living scene. She was never critical–but only encouraged peace in the house.*
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> *We all had to take our turns at cooking, and she was always willing to fill in for someone else as needed. For me, she became a real teacher in the kitchen.*
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> *From St. Thomas School, she retired to St. Lawrence, Utica, Michigan.*
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> *She experienced lonely times, as she struggled with the diabetic condition and angina and failing eyesight. I recall her great joy in coming to Maria Hall last September. She was glad to be in the good hands of the staff there, and close to some of her friends. On my last visit with her in May of this year, she was grateful and happy for all that was given to her, and she was looking forward to celebrating her first anniversary at Maria this September.*

Sister Lois' profile of Sister Marie Elizabeth includes the substance of what so many sisters have mentioned about her. In return, she spoke in an interview of the many, many sisters who lightened and brightened her living situations, adding up to as much happiness as there can be on this earth.

Among her superioresses, she had fond memories of Sisters Vincent Therese (Walsh), John Mary (Patricia Hogan), Ellen William (Joslyn), Eileen (Tuohy), Helen Carola (Harnett). A fun-friend was Sister Margaret Joseph (Schweihofer); a special home-visit companion and friend, Sister Michael Ann (Glomboski); a dear retirement friend, Sister Rose Ann McIntosh. Her memory evoked one after another, too long to list. She had no enemies.



Her Dominican Community, she said, had made it possible to
family–the Searles children. Lloyd's family, so dear to her, was

That moment came at Bixby Medical Center on August 7, 198