# SISTER MARGARET DENIS KNIGHT
## 1912–2003

At Sister Margaret Denis Knight's funeral, Father Roland Calvert, OSFS, remarked that she was a very private person.

> *She revealed that trait by not having an autobiography. But it is clear . . . that Sister made a deep impression on many people—her family, her friends, her students. The world is a better place because she passed through it.*

Elizabeth Ethel Knight, the future Sister Margaret Denis, came into the world on February 24, 1912. She was one of eleven children. Nine reached adulthood: Ellsworth, Ernest, Hariette, Caroline, Richard, Joseph, Rose, Ellen, and Elizabeth.

She was the daughter of Emery E. and Catherine (Connor) Knight. Emery Knight was originally from Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Catherine Connor was born in England. How the two from such widely different places met is not known, but after their marriage they settled in Houghton, located in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where Elizabeth was born. Emery Knight was a maintenance worker, had steady work, and provided well for his large family.

The family moved several times in the Upper Peninsula. When it was time for Elizabeth to begin school, they were living in Dollar Bay, and she attended the public school there for four years. In 1924 the family moved back to Houghton, where she spent two years at J. A. Hubble School, and a year at St. Ignatius School; then to L'Anse, where she finished eighth grade and her secondary years at the public schools.

Elizabeth graduated from high school in June 1931. Three months later, on September 11, she became a postulant in Adrian, recommended by the pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in L'Anse. At the wake, Sister Joan Sustersic commented, "Sisters in her crowd recalled that she was refreshing and unsophisticated."

Elizabeth received the habit and her religious name on August 2, 1932. The required canonical novitiate year followed, ending in the profession of first vows on August 3, 1933.

All of Sister Margaret Denis's teaching ministry was in Michigan and Illinois. Her first appointment card read, "St. Mary, New Baltimore, Michigan." There she taught third and fourth graders for three years. She spent the next five years with middle grade students in Illinois: two years at St. Celestine in Elmwood Park, a semester at Bishop Quarter in Oak Park, a semester at St. Clare of Montefalco in Chicago, and two years at St. Carthage, also in Chicago. In 1941 she returned to Michigan and spent three years at St. Bernard in Alpena. In April of her last year there, she and her siblings buried their mother. A happier occasion was the reception of her bachelor's degree from Siena Heights College, Adrian, in July 1943. She had studied there for several summers.

Twenty-one years in Illinois followed. Sixteen of those years were in Chicago: a year at St. Columbanus, two years at St. Kevin, and a second time at St. Columbanus, where she taught for thirteen years on all levels, from grade three to grade seven. As a result of summer study at Mount St. Mary in St. Charles, in 1953 she added a certificate in theology to her academic credits. The New Year of 1955 was a sad one for her. Her father died on January 14. More sorrow followed when her brother Ellsworth died in March 1957.

In 1960 she was sent to Riverdale where she taught for two years at Queen of Apostles. The year 1962 saw her in her beloved Upper Peninsula, where she taught sixth grade for a semester at SS. Mary and Joseph in Iron Mountain. The balance of her teaching ministry was in Chicago: five years at Our Lady of Loretto in Hometown, a year at St. Rita, two years at St. Denis, a year as a substitute teacher, and three years at Our Lady of Good Counsel.

In 1981, sixty-nine years of age, she retired and went to live with a group of retired sisters at St. Rita Convent, where she also volunteered in the parish. During the fourteen years that she spent there, she was saddened by the deaths of several siblings: Ernest in June 1982, Hariette in June 1992, Caroline in March 1993, and Richard in April 1995.

Sister Lila Watt was teaching at St. Rita during these years. At the wake she illustrated Sister Margaret Denis's sense of humor and spoke of her dedication.

*She used to make this comment when people would say "Good night." She'd say, "I'm the only one people should say 'Good night (Knight)' to!" She did have a good sense of humor, and she put her whole heart and soul into things. When she put her mind to something, she did it!*

*On Sundays there wasn't a cook at St. Rita rectory for a while. Sister Margaret Denis volunteered to do the cooking for the priests on Sundays. She would go over there in the entire modified habit, and put an apron on. This was in the summertime, and there was no air conditioning in the rectory kitchen. I felt sorry for her, so I would go over and help her with the dishes. When I saw her working in all that heat, I thought, "Oh, woman, you are too much!"*

*When winter came, she'd put on her cloak and shawl and go plodding along through the ice and snow to church. The priests gave her special approval to go through the tunnel into the rectory and then to the church. They would unlock the rectory door so that she could go up the stairs to the church. That was their way of saying "thank you" to her.*

Sister Ann Kelly was also at St. Rita at that time. At the wake she reminisced:

*I used to take her to the doctor, and then we'd go out to breakfast and coffee. I got to know her quite well.*

*I'd like to share a couple of stories. She loved baseball. The pastor's sister, a Caldwell Dominican, would visit us sometimes, and if there was a game on TV she and Sister Margaret Denis would watch it. When you passed the door of the room they were in, you'd hear "Whee!"*

*One time I answered the telephone, and a man said, "Is Sister Margaret Denis still around?" I told him that she was still there but she was not there at that time and asked if I could take a message. He said. "I had her in school, and she was tough but all the boys loved her. Does she still wear black shoes with holes in them?' I said, "No." I thought, "Now they're white shoes with holes in them," but I didn't tell him that. Later I told Sister about the phone call, but I didn't tell her that he asked about her shoes.*

*She had a wonderful sense of humor. She sometimes referred to herself as "Denis the Menace." She was like a little rogue, with a twinkle in her eye.*

*She was a very private person and people didn't know much about her. She was a very prayerful person, and she prayed for everyone and everything. She never missed her prayers. No matter how late it was, she would never go to bed without saying her prayers. She had a lot of faith in God. No matter what he wanted, it was all right with her. It was hard for her to leave St. Rita, but she knew that was what God wanted so she did what he wanted. She was one of the holiest people that I know.*

*On the feast of St. Rita in 1995, part of the façade of the convent fell on my car—about 12,000 pounds. I was away at the time and had parked my car in front of the convent, and the sisters called and told me about it. The convent had to be taken down. It was during a very hot summer that the sisters had to vacate the convent. It was during that year that Sister Margaret Denis left and went to Adrian. It was still very hard for her, but if God wanted that, that's what she wanted.*

In December of 1995, Sister Margaret Denis's health was not good, and she knew that God wanted her to go home to Adrian. She moved into the Maria Building of the Dominican Life Center, where she remained until her death in September 2003.

A wake and remembrance service was held for Sister Margaret Denis on September 3 in the temporary chapel set up in the Rose Room. Many of her relatives were present, including her sisters Rose Borgam and Ellen Cote, her sister-in-law Marie, her niece-in-law Barbara DeLongchamp, many nieces and nephews, and her many Dominican friends.

Sister Joan Sustersic, Prioress of Holy Rosary Chapter, opened the service, welcomed all those present, and summarized Sister Margaret Denis's life and ministry. Among her comments were:

*Sister Margaret Denis's teaching career was with youngsters in the elementary grades. Those who knew her noted that she was an excellent teacher who had the interests of her children at heart. She worked long and hard with her youngsters to help them learn.*

*Sister Margaret Denis was a very private person. Those who knew her here at the Dominican Life Center recall that she loved to write letters . . . and enjoyed conversing on the phone. She enjoyed the outdoors. Always inquisitive about families of sisters she knew, she would remember to ask about their loved ones.*

*Her smile lit up the room when she walked in. Her time spent in prayer was sacred to her. She was a deeply spiritual woman who loved her God and people.*

*For the past few years, it has been difficult for her to communicate. Recently, her condition declined. She did open her eyes, and appeared to know when someone was speaking to her. You knew that she understood you when she lifted her eyebrows at statements that were made.*

Barbara DeLongchamp, Sister Margaret Denis's niece-in-law, said:

*My husband, who died a while ago, was her nephew. She would come to us at Christmastime and stay with us. My husband was Catholic and I was Episcopalian, but that didn't stop Sister. She was determined to convert me and my children. She recognized a good future Catholic when she saw one.*

*We enjoyed having her visit us. Sometimes she'd come in the summer, and she'd watch my daughter Olivia at her swim group. When our son was born just before Christmas, she was there. She was always there to help us. We truly enjoyed her.*

*I was confirmed in the Catholic Church on August 5 of this year, and Olivia is now in the RCIA. She started all of us on the right road. It was because of her determination that we became Catholic, and I thank Sister for that.*

Sister Margaret Denis's funeral Liturgy was celebrated on September 4. Father Roland Calvert, OSFS, was the presider and homilist. Among his remarks were:

*Sister Margaret Denis's life has now concluded. There's an old song with the title, "Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life." But the mystery is not always sweet. In the last weeks, Sister's condition had deteriorated. A group of us gathered in her room several days ago, had the anointing of the sick, and prayed for Sister. She gave no external indication of knowing what was going on. But, as she demonstrated so often in her life, prayer has its own interior logic ands power, so you never know what really happened. We give all things back to God, the One who is really in charge.*

*Sister is now in a place where, as the Eucharistic Prayer says, one will find "no more tears, no more suffering." . . . We give thanks this day for the life of Sister Margaret Denis Knight and for the many lives that she touched.*

As Father Calvert reminded those assembled, on September 2, 2003, Sister Margaret Denis's hope for heaven became a reality. There she will spend eternity with the One for whom she lived her earthly life, and with the loved ones who preceded her into that glorious place of light and happiness.

