Sister Jackie Damoiseau

by Barbara Scanlon, CSJ

“If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your heart.”

Psalm 63

Jacqueline was the only child born to John and Frances Damoiseau in Waltham, Massachusetts. Her youngest uncle was only five years older, and they developed a “somewhat sibling” relationship. This uncle taught her to ride a bike, and, in turn, Jackie helped with his paper route. Since both parents worked, Jackie grew up with a special relationship with her grandparents, who lived nearby. She was also close to her grandfather’s sisters, a Sister of St. Joseph and a Sister of Charity of Convent Station. A quiet child, a tomboy, Jackie thrived in their blue-collar neighborhood where children played in the street. It was a place where neighbors watched out for them, and all followed the time-honored custom of “coming home when the street lights went on.”

Jackie’s schooling began in Waltham Public Schools, although her parents had attempted to enroll her in St. Luke’s. After three years, a place opened up and, for the next five years, the Dominican Sisters taught Jackie. She was a serious student and enjoyed classes. After school, Jackie went to her grandparents’ house where she recounted the happenings at school, had a snack, and played “Sorry” with her grandmother before playing outside or doing homework. More sharing happened around the supper table with her parents.

Saint Charles High School was the next step in her education. Here, there were more challenges. Jackie was known as the niece of Sister Dorcas. She took a summer school class in math, and her aunt was the teacher. Jackie studied how her aunt taught, how she engaged students in the learning process, and how she exercised a calming control within a classroom. These lessons would be valuable later when she began her teaching career. For a year after graduating high school, Jackie worked at the telephone company. Then, at the age of nineteen, Jackie entered the Sisters of St. Joseph.

During this period of the 60s, society in general and the Church, in particular, experienced both excitement and turbulence. Jackie, now known as Sister Theresa St. John, continued to discern her calling. Experiments in religious formation were tested. After three years, following her studies, Sister Jackie received her first assignment working with young children at Sacred Heart in Weymouth. She worked in the library and encouraged youngsters in their love of learning and reading. Additional studies followed, as well as a variety of teaching assignments.
At St. Clare High School in Roslindale, Sister Jackie worked with sisters from other religious congregations and discovered how much the values and ideals of these other women were so like her own. Here she became interested in technology. With strong encouragement and mentoring from the Principal, Karen Hokanson, SND, Sister Jackie studied for and obtained a master's degree in Instructional Technology; these skills she has shared through many avenues. For example, as an ongoing member of the CSJ Technology Committee, Sister Jackie helps various groups to feel more comfortable in this venue.

This past October, Sister Jackie, along with approximately twenty other Sisters of St. Joseph and Associates, made a pilgrimage to France, the birthplace of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Her visit to the “convent kitchen”, and the spot where sisters were guillotined during the French Revolution, profoundly moved Sister Jackie to appreciate the many women who have gone before her. This pilgrimage brought to mind an earlier time when she visited the Holy Land and walked some of the very paths where Jesus walked while here among us - to be where these others have been, to help her continue to focus her life toward unity and reconciliation.

And now, Sister Jackie is employed at Emerson Hospital. In her role as a switchboard operator, she is the human, welcoming, knowledgeable, calm recipient of inquiries laced with anxiety. People in vulnerable positions, be they patients, personnel, or family are the “dear neighbor”. Indeed, this ministry is one of listening to God’s voice and sometimes being God’s voice to others.†