

Joan Clare Simone

SEPTEMBER 22, 1940 – SEPTEMBER 26, 2022



Joan Simone was scheduled to be a speaker at our Annual Women of the Word - Toronto Forum in April of 2020. Unfortunately, when Covid hit, we regrettably had to cancel our event. Despite attempts to reschedule, timing did not permit Joan to give her talk. Even so, Joan has graciously allowed our ministry to share her testimonial in written form with all of you. We are very grateful to Joan for sharing her testimony with us! Joan's humble, gentle loving nature will forever remain in our hearts.



PHOTO CREDIT MARY FILANGI

Good morning, everyone. God be with us.

When Mary first asked me to be here today. I asked myself why?? I am not a perfectionist. (Our in person topic at the 2020 WOWT Forum was "I'm not perfect, you're not perfect, but it's ok") I have a learning disability. I learned many years ago that I was not able to be the top of the class. There was no help in my day. So, I settled to work hard to do my best and let God help with the rest.

I was born in England, at the beginning of WW2. My father was in the army and away most of the time. My Mom and I lived with my Father's parents. When he came home to stay, in 1946 after helping to clean up Belson, one of the Concentration Camps, he decided to immigrate to Canada to give me a better chance in life.

Here I was a very shy, quiet 7-year-old, in a strange new place. We had very little in the way of wealth, but my Dad was a hard worker. When I was 10, he opened a Shoe Repair store in a wealthy part of Toronto. We lived in the apartment above the store. So now competing with other students, who were smart and had everything. I felt pushed down another level.

Here Mom and Dad gave me a gift better than anything money could buy. They had another child. A little girl. I finally had something to help my aloneness. I loved this little one so much

Then the next year they gave me another blessing, a little brother. I centered my life around these two. I became their second mom. Life for me was opening up. I knew that I wanted to be a mother of a large family when I grew up.

My family was Catholic following all the rules -- Friday fast, Sunday Mass, even on vacation time. So, when a young people's club opened at a nearby parish, I joined. Here I met the boy that would be my lifetime partner, Andrew.

I was growing up and doing okay but I was still very aware of my lack of confidence and wealth. I remember being very self-conscious at the furniture in our apartment. My parents slept in the living room and we had metal chairs to sit on, nothing fancy. Now I can be proud that I came from humble stock.

Andrew entered medical school. I graduated high school and worked to earn money to help with tuitions and more important to get married. After Andrew's third year we went and talked to my father about marrying. He was happy for us BUT, we had to promise him that if a child came along Andrew would NOT quit school. It happened that on Graduation day I was expecting our third child. After that came Internship and Residency. To train in Dermatology we went to Boston for three years. Our fifth child was born there.

God was granting me my dream to have a big family. Being at home I had all the basic knowledge I needed. We had no wealth at all but I was happy. At that time, I did not realize how much God was looking after us.

Attending Sunday Mass became a huge problem...five small children, getting them up, ready and off to Mass. Tending with them during Mass was difficult to say the least. I decided that Mass was not important at this time. I would stop going and be a more rested Mom. God would understand!! Andrew said NO, we would go to separate Masses. . He would take the older ones to one mass and I could go to a later one, alone or with a younger one. This way proved to be successful. As the children grew older, we started to go together again. Later on, I questioned myself would God have understood? I do not think He would, but He opened up another door. This is when I started to think that He was really working with us. It was good that He was giving us the family we wanted. He was also giving us a way to raise them.

Andrew was finished training and he had opened his practice. Money was coming in slowly. I had been wearing the same winter coat for many years and it was not warm anymore. I told Andrew I needed a new one. He checked the finances and told me that if I got a new coat his secretary could not be paid that month. My new coat was not all that important, and I do not remember being cold. Perhaps a little miracle?

We bought the house we are still living in. We had a car; we built the medical clinic in the back of the house. By society's standards, all was well. But NO, it was not. We were not happy. Something was wrong. Something was missing. The older children were into their teens and getting into problems.

At this time Andrew's cousin was asking me to go with him to this great meeting he was attending. Each time he asked, I refused. I had too much to do, I couldn't go. He continued to ask me. I finally said okay, just to get him from bothering me. And they were great. I went for a few weeks. Then one week Andrew said to wait for him. He wanted to come. He, too, found it great. There we learned that the God that we had learned about in school, the God of power and rules and judgement, was a God who loved us and showed us how to turn to Him in our needs and follow His way to peace and love. We continued for some time and then went through a course called LIFE IN THE SPIRIT. The last night of the course we were prayed over for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives. He DID. I began to see that He was always there, leading and directing me.

Why did my father end up bringing us to Canada? The first two countries he applied to rejected us. Why did Andrew and I both go the young people's club? I lived in the next parish. Andrew lived in the center of the city. Why did we change the way of going to Mass? --- God was leading us and preparing us for our future. I realized that He was giving us means to follow Him

before we knew that He wanted us to follow Him, and that we needed to follow Him.

That night we went home and talked for a long time and knew that, somehow, we wanted to work with the poor. We went in front of a crucifix in the living room and asked God to guide us. His message was to live more simply. We gave away, what we thought, was not necessary -- TV, car, helped some people financially. We kept the house and what was needed to maintain it. To the horror of our accountant, we gave in our life insurance and our retirement fund. We kept the children and the dog. Flabbergasted, my mother-in-law asked how our children were going to get the necessary oranges that they needed. We said "you will get them". She did.

*For support we became Secular Franciscans.
Here we learned a greater need to depend on
Our Blessed Lord*

We started to take in Foster children. Over a few years we had taken in 24 children, usually a family rather than split the children up. Yes, it was hard to give them up when it was time for them to go back to their family or to adoption. One family of four children, the youngest was 6 months, we had for two years. When they left, one of our daughters and I stood at the door crying. Had this been an invasion of our privacy? An unnecessary task to take on? Yes, we all agreed it was. But it was bringing a little bit of love and peace into these children's lives for a short time. One or four more children into our lives, did not make that much difference to our lives. We ended up with one little, very challenging boy and adopted him. Eventually the Children's Aid took him back. He needed specialized professional help. We still have close contact with him.

As we were leading a much simpler life, our children were growing up. They realized they too had to be more responsible. If they needed something, we helped them; if they wanted something, they had to work for it. They worked in the office for Andrew, had part time jobs, and have all grown up to be responsible adults.

As we were giving away our time and money to church missions, a priest, Fr. Frank West, came to visit us. He was the Canadian Treasurer for Mother Teresa. He wanted help with the work. I asked him how many hours a day it would take. He answered about 9 hours a week. Andrew and I looked at each other and agreed we could do that. A few months after that we received a letter from Mother Teresa asking to send food to the Sisters in Tanzania and Ethiopia and advised us to not send money since there is NO food to buy there. Nine hours a week had blossomed into twenty-fours a day.

We were blessed to meet her 3 times. She was a tiny lady,

showing many years of hard work. But her eyes were warm, loving and welcoming. We sent food to her Sisters for a few years then she asked us to start sending to other communities because they had need also. The money coming in was meant for Mother Teresa so we could not use it for others. She told us to start a new charity to help anyone that asked for help. Thus, the birth of Canadian Food for Children. This has been continuing now for thirty years.

Our children are all grown up and live happily in their own homes. Fortunately for us they are all in southern Ontario. Our home was empty and too big for two people. We opened it up to mothers expecting a child who did not have a home to live in. We asked Aid to Women how we could help. In a very short time, we had a young lady who was living on the street with a 2-week-old son. We are still opening our home to Mothers in Need.

I have told you about some of the things God has led us to. How do we know that it has been God's will and not our own? We didn't but we trusted. We have been made aware of a situation and we have prayed to find God's will and sometimes just jumped in to help. Have there been disasters? Yes, but God has saved us. The hardest thing in our lives is the lack of quiet time and the loss of privacy. There are always people dropping off items for the charity, phones ringing, etc.

But remembering that Jesus did not even have a bed to sleep in or a car to drive the many miles He walked, makes our suffering nothing.

PHOTO CREDIT MARY FILANGI



How have our children reacted? I am sure that when they were young there were times when I was busy and not jumping to their want, they may have felt left out.

I feel sure however, that they always felt our love for them and our love of God.

Thinking back, I feel that this helped them to be more independent. As teenagers and young adults still at home they helped in many ways with the many projects and chores around the house. Some of them have come as adults and told me that they are glad that we did not do as many of their friends' parents did, giving them cars and expensive trips for the 16th birthdays. We had taught them simplicity and to work for their pleasures. Now some of our children are working with us helping the Poor through Canadian Food For Children.

Don't get me wrong, our children were normal children and did rebel in the usual ways. At these times I tried to keep calm. React but not over react. Stress the household routines—no drugs in the house, no fist fighting in the house, no swearing --- the usual things.

It is not necessary to have 14 children to have a family. In some cases, one child may be your limit. But do not be afraid to have children they are the greatest blessing. There is enough food to go around, enough clothing, enough things and especially enough time. It's important to keep life simple, set a limit to life's demands. Always keeping in mind who is the One in charge, the One we can always go to for help, advice, and comfort. God must always be the director.

There have been many times I have a thought or I receive something and I ask, why? In a short time, the question is answered. God has made something happen so that His will for us can take over. How can we recognize that this is happening? Only through prayer and trust.

Are our children sticking to the faith they were brought up in? That is out of our control. It is up to them. As parents we have to set an example, pray to God and trust Him to guide them. Always leave the door open to talk and support.

Through the years I have been a busy lady. And I have had to make choices to do this or do that. Yes, sometimes I will pick the wrong thing but eventually everything works out. Sometimes I will pick a time for ME. How I pick it, I do not know. I just do and do not feel guilt.

I know God loves me and will guide me but I MUST always ask Him to help me with everything. I am nothing and can do nothing without His graces.

God understands my needs and when I trust in Him, I know that He will guide me to get to know what He wants from me. I must spend some time in prayer. Washing the kitchen floor or ironing a shirt doesn't take much thought after years of doing it, you can be talking to God at the same time.

It is known that we give away all of Andrew's income to the poor. I do not know the last time I went grocery shopping. People have been giving us leftover food from parties or things they do not want, to the extent that we get so much we have to share with others. Many of these folks are single moms, students, and Food Banks. **There is too much thrown in the garbage that is perfectly edible, even after the best before date, which is a gimmick for you to throw it out and buy more.**

There can be a problem in our life that we have asked God many times for help. We may think He is not listening. But we must believe that He hears us and He knows when and how to help us. He also knows what is best for us. Keep praying and trust His will.

With a loving husband by my side, we have done many things but the most satisfying has been a close relationship with God because it has given me the means to do everything else. Quiet prayer time is special. It is good to know that service is also a prayer. God has carried me through sickness, moodiness, nervousness, alcohol addiction and also learning how to swim at age 55. He has carried me through family and friends dying, from all the things that are part of life.

Knowing that He and His Mother Mary are there for me is a calming fact. God has given me a good loving husband and a great family --- what I asked for when I was young. He had a plan for me and I am grateful that I chose His way.



PHOTO CREDIT - BLESSINGS MAGAZINE - CELEBRATING THE JOY OF FAITH

Am I a perfectionist? Maybe in my own limited way I am.

God is okay with our struggles and imperfect efforts. I think we must question ourselves why we want to do something. Is it for pride, wealth, status, or to help make our world a better place, for God's love to be spread? Thank you.

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Women of the Word - Toronto is a volunteer non-profit organization. Our mission is to inspire today's woman to foster her relationship with God.

We want her to experience the dignity, hope, and healing received by women whose hearts were transformed by the love of God; women whose living testimonies helped change the world.

Women of the Word-Toronto is a recognized lay movement under the guidance of the Archdiocese of Toronto and under the patronage of Our Mother Queen of Holy Hope.



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