

# Come On, Claire!

Siblings at home...Sisters in the same monastery

by Debi Snyder (their mother)



They were very different, Jennifer and Claire.

Jennifer, the older, was a take-charge, “go-get-em” type of girl. She was reckless, adventurous and impatient rushing through schoolwork and tasks to have play time. Jen would often help her siblings with their chores, or even do the chores herself, so they would be available to play with her sooner. She would lead her younger siblings from one escapade to another- hiking in the park with corncakes and bacon for a picnic lunch, playing adventure stories which included swimming in their costumes, racing through a storm or chasing the wind! In her adventures, Jennifer wanted company!

Claire was happy to play alone. Once, at a young age, she even got lost in a closet! Her siblings were doing schoolwork, so to amuse herself she was playing “hide-and-seek” though, she neglected to tell us.

She was a quiet, soft spoken, introvert. Claire took her time to do things neatly and in an orderly manner. She appreciated organization and often delayed her playtime to tidy a cabinet or straighten a shelf. Claire thought methodically, ate methodically and worked methodically. She liked to help her father and me with tasks around the house that involved a systematic method or organizing. Claire was happy to follow Jennifer’s lead.



If something was *happening*, Jennifer wanted to be part of it! If nothing was happening, she made something happen! If something was *happening*, or if nothing was *happening*, Claire would read or play quietly.

“Come on, Claire!” called Jennifer. Claire would close her book and follow.

Jennifer loved discussing our Faith, what it looks like in “real” life; Claire loved reading about and pondering our Faith, before telling us what she thought.

Before our family trips, Jennifer would plan car activities and the seating arrangement.

“Come on, Claire!” urged Jennifer.

Claire, following up on Jennifer’s ideas, would begin packing her younger siblings’ car bags weeks in advance, making mazes and word searches or copying coloring pages.

The siblings would decide to play an outdoor game, and I would hear Jennifer,

“Let’s go! Jacqueline you get the ball. Therese, please bring a water. Robert, would you get chalk to keep our score?” followed by, “Come on, Claire!”



But, maybe they were not quite so different. Neither liked to wear shoes. Or socks. Both daughters enjoyed reading or Daddy reading to them. They are both accomplished bakers- cookies, cakes, bread and even pizza! Jennifer and Claire experimented in the kitchen- Jennifer by trial and error; Claire following along, only guided by a “teaching” cookbook, such as *The Wooden Spoon Bread Book*.

On Saturdays, when it was Jennifer’s turn for breakfast out with Daddy, she would have her list of things to talk about. Claire followed her lead and did likewise, pulling it from her pocket to remind herself of the topics she wished to discuss with her Dad.

They both loved to hear and read stories, especially Saint stories.

When outdoors, Jennifer and Claire reveled in the beauty of nature! The wind, blowing through their hair, sang to them. The rain danced with them. In the Fall, Jennifer was gathering her siblings to pick apples. “Come on, Claire!” Then they were in the trees picking every apple in reach, filling basket after basket to make applesauce, apple crisp and apple pie.

During our short time living by a pond, Jennifer had the idea of building a raft. All the children gathered branches and borrowed rope. When it was time to launch the raft...

“Come on, Claire!” and the raft was afloat!

When Jennifer was a young woman she announced her desire to enter a convent. We were not surprised at all and encouraged her along her path. We prayed daily for guidance for our daughter.

Jennifer knew what she wanted; she strove forward in her search. But where would she find it? The children knew nuns, so they were interested in Jennifer's search, especially, we later discovered, Claire. She was supportive and encouraging, quietly praying for God's direction in Jennifer's quest.

Retreat after retreat, visit after visit, no Religious Order seemed right, no place felt like "Home." In these moments of frustration it was not uncommon to hear, "Jacqueline do you want to go out with me?" or "Come on, Claire, let's go hiking!"

One day, Jennifer declared, "I am writing to the Carmelite Monastery of the Holy Cross in Michigan."

"Okay," her father and I thought, "Michigan is not too far."

"Where did you hear about that Community?" I asked.

"I *googled* 'Sisters that wear habits' and that was the first one that came up."

"Well, okay," I chuckled.

About a week later, Jennifer received a reply from the Mistress of Novices. Then began a series of communications by mail, followed by a few phone calls and a scheduled visit. Now the adventure really began!

"The Convent is in the Upper Peninsula, 650 miles away! That's 10 hours!" her father exclaimed after looking up directions for our trip.

Jacqueline and Claire watched the younger siblings while I drove Jennifer to The Carmelite Monastery. As we visited with the Sisters and learned of their vocation to pray for priests, I watched Jennifer's eyes and could see her heart in them. She loved it here, here in this Carmel.

Before we left, Jennifer had completed and turned in the application. After being reviewed and completing all the necessary forms, Jennifer was accepted as a Postulant and was scheduled to enter the first Sunday of Advent, two days before my birthday. What a gift!

The family drove Jennifer up to the Carmelite Monastery of the Holy Cross and met the Sisters. Clothed in her postulant habit, Jennifer, with her the family, sang in the chapel with the Sisters in their Choir on the other side of the Grate. We then approached the Enclosure Door. We all hugged "Sr." Jennifer, her telling each of us the one "last thing." What was it she said to Claire?

Life at home continued pretty much as normal. Our Lord, Jesus, filled the place our Carmelite had left. The children did their schoolwork and tasks. We prayed for the Carmelites; they prayed for us. We wrote regularly and were able to visit a few times each year. The whole family enjoyed the letters from "Sr." Jennifer telling us of her new life and escapades, from picking beans to getting stuck in the apple tree.

One year after her entrance, Jennifer was given the religious name of Sr. Mary Brigid of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. It took a while for us to get used to calling her by her new name. The letters, phone calls and visits continued.

During her Junior year, Claire mentioned her desire to become a nun. “What order?” we asked. “I think I’m called to the Monastery of the Holy Cross, but maybe that’s because Sr. Mary Brigid is there.” That spring, we helped friends landscape the property of Christ the Bridegroom Monastery and were blessed to meet the Sisters and Mother Superior. Although, Claire and Mother Theodora formed a bond, Claire did not feel called to this monastery. We continued to pray for God’s guidance.

Before starting her job that summer Claire asked if I would take her to the Monastery to visit Sr. Mary Brigid. On the trip she said, “After the hectic schedule and study, I need a time of quiet and inner rest.”

“Do you feel at peace there?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Well, that’s God’s answer.”

At 18 years of age, to the Sisters’ delight, Claire applied to the Monastery of the Holy Cross. Mother Prioress, prudently suggested Claire wait a year or so. Off to Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts went Claire, growing closer to Our Lord in her prayer and studies and confirming her discernment of God’s Will in her life. During Freshman year, Mother Prioress and Claire kept in contact. After graduating her sophomore year, Claire was accepted as a Postulant. She spent the summer working part time and saying farewell to friends and family. On September 14, 2019 “Sr.” Claire entered the Carmelite Monastery of the Holy Cross. And as she stepped through the Enclosure door, we may have heard, “Come on, Claire.”