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5 April 2015

Administrator  
St Francis Xavier Mission Gift Shop  
Shrine of St. Kateri  
P.O. Box 70  
Kahnawake, QC JOL 1 BO

Dear Friends of the Shrine:

Although I have never visited the Mission of St Francis Xavier, I hope to do so some day. I have received postcards from friends who have been there. Thus I had enough information to look up your Web Site and hopefully, am addressing these booklets to the right place.

The booklet, *American Lily* is the story of Kateri Tekakwitha and her transition from Venerable to Saint, and my own efforts to follow her along that journey.

I have included ten copies, that you may distribute as you see fit or sell in your bookstore/museum. Please retain any income for the support of the shrine.

My prayers are that God may continue to bless your work and that you will continue to share in the abundant joy we share as His faithful children.

Sincerely in Christ and St. Francis,



Blandin W. Karabinos

# *American Lily*



*Saint Kateri*

# ***American Lily***

**Saint Kateri Tekakwitha**  
*The Lily of the Mohawks*

*"The only tragedy is not to be numbered among the saints"*  
*La Femme parve ("The Woman Who Was Poor"), 1897*  
Leon Bloy

## ***A Love Story***

My personal journey with Kateri Tekakwitha  
from Venerable (1943) to Saint (2012).  
Blandin W. Karabinos

**2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2015**

## *American Lily*

**Toano, Virginia**  
**October, 2012**

I made it to my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday this past week.

Incredibly, I remember events in my life that date back more than seventy years. My first vivid memory is still of my Aunt Virginia leaving in her Canadian military uniform to go to England to serve as a translator in the early years of the Second World War. That was in the summer of 1941, nine months before the United States entered the war. I was not yet four and she joined the Commonwealth forces to serve with Poland's soldiers who had escaped to England to continue the fight against Hitler and Stalin. Later, after America entered the war, she was incorporated into the US Women's Army Corps. Not only did she survive her heroic adventure, she returned to America in 1946, married to a Polish combat veteran, my memorable and wonderful uncle, Edic Bucko.

Most of my other early memories have been re-enforced by family discussions and reminiscence, but I can still visualize train rides to Loretto, walks with my grandfather, watching my grandmother bake and – even celebrating VJ day in Loretto. I can vaguely recall Dad's victory garden, saving aluminum foil and grease, ration stamps, Slovak picnics at Kennywood and putting ice blocks in our ice box.

In 1946, we got an electric refrigerator, a Frigidaire, and to this day I still call our cold keeping apparatus a “frigid-day-tor.” Though I can't remember kindergarten or moving to Glen Hazel, I do remember going to St. Stephen School, Father Murphy and the good Sisters of Charity and being in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

Which leads us to the story of my love affair with the *Lily of the Mohawks*.

Flashback to the summer of 1946, and a walk with my Aunt Pebbie and my sister, Blandina to the Carmelite Monastery in Loretto. It may or may not have been a pleasant summer evening, but summers in Loretto were usually perfect in my recollection, so it had to be a delightful walk through the campus of St. Francis College to the top of the hill where, about a mile west of town is the cloistered



enclosure that Charles M. Schwab, the "Steel King" had built for the Discalced Carmelite nuns in 1930.

**College Heights**  
**Loretto, Pennsylvania**  
**July 1946**

The red brick chapel was, and still is, one of the most comforting and prayerful places you can visit. Cool, kind of dark, quiet and with the smell of lit candles and frankincense that has always been a familiar sensory perception in my lifetime. It was on these walks that Pebbie would tell us beautiful stories and patiently answer our questions. She explained to us that the Carmelite sisters practiced "silence" so as not to be distracted by worldly events. She told us how they were always praying for us and it is their prayer that is the "dynamo" that brings God's grace to the world. That was heavy stuff for a nine year old, but if my Aunt Pebbie said it, it had to be true. She was the most blessed and precious lady I was to ever know.



A feature of the monastery chapel is a glass enclosed elaborate coffin with the wax image of St. Therese of Liseiux laid out in her Carmelite Nun outfit and filled with roses. Pebbie explained that this was the "Little Flower" and a favorite saint of the cloistered nuns. She also told us, that when Therese died, roses from heaven fell upon her body, and years later when her body was dug-up (we use the word 'exhumed' these days) it was in perfect condition and more beautiful than when she died. It was a miracle that put God's seal on her canonization as a saint.

Well, I stood there in awe. I still have that vivid memory. At the time I forgot that the image in the glass case was of wax and cloth and believed probably for the next ten years, that it really was the body of St. Therese.

Simplistic? Superstitious? Psychotic? You haven't read anything yet. The sanctified body of St. Therese is only a segue into what comes next.

**St. Stephen School**  
**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**  
**October, 1946**

Returning at the end of the summer to Pittsburgh, I started my fourth year at St. Stephen school filled with the knowledge that God sometimes beautifies dead bodies for the edification of the faithful. Sometime during that year, while we were studying the settlement of Canada and the phenomenal exploits and martyrdom of the French Jesuits, our good Sister (forgive me, but I can't recall her name) told us the story of an Indian maiden known as the "*Lily of the Mohawks*."

**Kateri Tekakwitha**, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Mohawk young woman was born to a Christian Algonquin mother and a Mohawk warrior in 1656 in what is now, New York state. When she was very young, a small pox epidemic took her parents lives and left her with impaired vision, poor health and pockmarks.



She was raised by her uncle who took her to the Jesuit Mission along the Mohawk river near the present day town of Fonda, New York. When she was 18, she was inspired by the Jesuits to study Catholicism. At age 20, she was baptized by Father Jacques de Lambertville on Easter of 1676.

Now that was not a good time to be a Catholic Indian in the Iroquois nation as they were usually at war with the French and Christian Indians and not adverse to killing missionaries. Only ten years before her birth, Father Isaac Jogues and Donne Jean de Lalande were martyred in the very village where she was born.

***Let me pause here*** – for the story of Kateri cannot be told in a vacuum. We have to back-peddle four centuries and begin with the arrival of the French in Canada, and the harrowing experiences that awaited the Catholic missionaries before we can fully appreciate Kateri's conversion and holiness.

***New France  
Canada, North America  
1608 - 1759***

From Maine through the Great Lakes and into the middle west, we find settlements surviving from the 17th and early 18th centuries. Sault Ste. Marie and Detroit in Michigan; Green Bay, Wisconsin; Duluth and Marquette in Minnesota; Kaskaskia in Illinois and Vincennes in Indiana are only a few of the better known here in the United States. Add St. Louis, Missouri; Mobile, Alabama; Biloxi and Natchez, Mississippi; and of course, New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana to that list and we are naming settlements established by French-Canadian explorer-priests. There is an oft-quoted verse attributed to the 19th century American historian, George Bancroft that states: "*not a cape was turned, not a river entered, but a Jesuit led the way.*"

Missionary priests often accompanied the early trappers whose penetration of Canada was only accomplished by the raw muscle of those men and their endless pursuit of beaver pelts. Those remarkable woodsmen, the *coureurs de bois* or "runners-of-the-woods" possessed admirable qualities of courage and *élan*, a capacity for adapting themselves to any environment, a spirit of adventure and an instinct for survival and may have even excelled the Indians as hunters and trappers. For sure, they improved upon that great invention of the North American natives, the birch-bark canoe. They made bigger and more enduring canoes and were thus able to transport missionaries as they penetrated deep into the Great Lakes region – all the way to the source and the mouth of the Mississippi and, eventually, as far west as the Rockies.

The history of New France and the early years of Canada, is really a story about the *coureurs de bois*, the canoe, the missionaries, Huron Christians, Iroquois raids, and ice-bound rivers. The excitement of the north woods was played out on an expansive *tableaux*, not

hundreds – but thousands of miles apart. It is a story worth telling although it may be somewhat familiar, for many of the episodes took place on sites that are well known, both in Canada and in the United States.

New France, sprung from a foundation laid by Champlain in 1608 when he arrived at Quebec and lasted until 1759, when the British and American colonists won the French and Indian War. In that 150 year span the European settlers who came to New France and their descendants never exceeded 70,000, while the English colonies had grown to almost two and half million in the same time frame. But while Catholic priests could rarely be found in the English colonies, their impact in the settlement of Canada was extraordinary.

This small band of clergy were called Black Robes by the Native Americans and that name followed them deep into the Rockies, and still in this day and age, retains a certain legendary status. They paddled canoes from Montreal (via the Ottawa and French Rivers) to Lake Huron; fighting the cold winds they crossed into Lake Superior and penetrated deep into Western Canada and even as far west as present day Montana, Idaho and the Dakotas. That was at least a century and a half before Lewis and Clark.

But no description of Canada, Quebec, and the life of adventure in the wilderness would be complete without stories of harrowing escapes from Indian ambushes, the thrill of running the rapids in a birch bark canoe, or the discovery of such wonders as the falls at Niagara or the sheer colossus of the Mississippi. All these stories were captured in the journal reports of the original Jesuit missionaries of New France: ***The Relations***.

The *Relations* were accounts sent to France as the annual report of events in the missionary region. Because of the published *Relations*, the story of New France is probably the most exciting and best narrated history recorded prior to the 20th century. The reports began in 1632, and spanned some forty years only to cease publication in 1673, which was unfortunate, as the stories of the discovery of the Mississippi, the trip down its length, the founding of New Orleans and Mobile would have provided all of us with even more phenomenal stories.

But the journal accounts of missionary efforts in that fascinating new land became an instant hit, not only for the clergy and nobility,

but for all of France as well. The skillfully described accounts of Indian atrocities, exploratory journeys, sufferings and successes, together with the unimagined geographic vastness of the territory and the adventures that greeted the missionaries produced for the 17th century reader (and for us today) a story as exciting as any adventure novel hitherto published.

***Huronion, Georgian Bay***  
***New France***  
***1626-1649***

The Jesuits were not the first to bring the Gospel message to the Indian tribes of North America. Within a decade of the establishment of the fortress at Quebec in 1608, Recollect (Franciscan) friars began work among the Hurons, Algonquin and Abenaki tribes. Their early success was augmented by the Jesuits in 1626, as the Recollects were assigned to care for the French *habitants*.

The Jesuits stepped out smartly and established twelve missions on the peninsula between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron from 1639 to 1649. This land, they named Huronia, featured clustered villages around frontier chapels. They taught the Hurons to till the soil, plant and harvest crops and even constructed an aqueduct and canal complete with locks, a water wheel mill and irrigation ditches. Conversions were abundant. Other Christian Indian stations were founded as well, notably in Maine and on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence, and life was good for both the Indians and the missionaries.

**[The term First Nations has come into general use for the Indigenous peoples of Canada, except for the Inuit of the Arctic Region and the Metis (those of mixed ancestry). Canada recognizes 600 Native American governments or bands which include those tribes or bands that we commonly refer to as Indian. In America, we have recently preferred the title, Native American as opposed to the terms common in our history and tradition. Occasionally I will refer to the Native Americans as "Indian" or "People of the First Nation."]**

Jesuit Father Jean de Brebeuf was one of the most successful of the Huronia missionaries. Not only did he learn the Huron tongue and understand their culture, he wrote a catechism in their language and even composed a beautiful Christmas hymn that is still sung in Canadian and Native American chapels.

## **In the Moon of Wintertime**

**T'was in the Moon of Wintertime  
When all the birds had fled  
That God the Lord of all the Earth  
Sent angel choirs instead.  
Before their light the stars grew dim  
And wandering hunters heard the hymn.  
Jesus, your king is born;  
Jesus is born – in excelsis Gloria**

**The earlist moon of wintertime  
Is not so round and fair  
As was the ring of glory 'round  
The helpless infant there.  
The chiefs from far before him knelt  
With gifts of fox and beaver pelt.  
Jesus your king is born;  
Jesus is born – in excelsis Gloria**

**Oh children of the forest free,  
The angel song is true;  
The Holy Child of earth and sky  
Is born this day for you.  
Come kneel the radiant boy  
Who brings you beauty, peace and joy.  
Jesus your king is born;  
Jesus is born – in excelsis Gloria**

The Jesuits dreamed of someday converting all the wilderness into a kind of peaceful kingdom or “Paraguay,” as they called it, after their most successful effort at christianization in South America.

For in that South American country, early in the 17th century the Jesuits did gather native converts into what they called *reductions*. These were communities of up to five thousand people, where the converts were instructed not only in religion and secular subjects, but in agriculture and various trades as well. These communities became so successful that the civilian and military authorities jealously sought control. In that ultimate struggle for power in Paraguay, the Jesuits themselves lost out to the combined kingdoms of Spain, Portugal and France and were themselves suppressed in 1773.

However in Canada, a “scalping knife” of fear hung over New France and the missions. That gloom was the hostility and ferocity of

the Iroquois Federation. Just as the Huron Indians became allied with the French in the sixteen hundreds; the Iroquois became, and ever remained, their sworn enemy.

The Huron alliance was an asset for both the missionaries and French trappers. The Hurons, as well as the Lake Indians (the Algonquins) and the adventuresome Abenaki, willingly served as guides for the early priests, trappers and explorers well beyond the Great Lakes; all the way to western Canada and south into future United States territory. We know that several Abenaki scouts accompanied LaSalle down the Ohio and, then with his lieutenant, Tonti, as far as the Gulf of Mexico. The Lake Indians introduced the Franciscan, Father Hennipen to the beauty, terror and sheer grandeur of Niagara Falls; paddled Pere Marquette to Green Bay, and were in the party of virtually every trek into the Great Lakes region. But at the same time, this French-Huron alliance inflamed the hostility of the Iroquois and served as the primary factor in stunting the growth of a French empire in America.

The Iroquois Confederation inhabited most of present day New York state, with the Mohawks as the eastern most tribe, followed by the Oneida, Onandaga, Cayuga and the Seneca. Once chastised by the French for attacks on the Hurons – Champlain himself introduced them to the business end of a gun barrel as early as 1609 – the Iroquois became enemies of the French and allied themselves in 1642, with the Dutch traders around Albany (Fort Orange) and later their English successors. Initially that alliance with the Dutch was to compete for control of the fur trade and self-protection against their natural enemies, the Hurons. However, once the Iroquois acquired muskets and steel hatchets of their own in exchange for beaver pelts, they went on a wide-ranging offensive and unleashed years of savage attacks that destroyed Huronia, its villages and missions in 1649, as well as many French settlements west of Quebec.

Jesuit Father Antonie Daniel was tortured and martyred in the 1648 raid of Huronia and, then in 1649, Fathers Jean de Brebeuf, Charles Garnier, Noel Chabanal and Gabriel Lalemant were butchered at their missions when the Iroquois totally destroyed Huronia, killing and capturing as many as 13,000 Huron men, women and children.

**Mohawk Village**  
**Ossernenon, New York**  
**August 1642**

The ferocity and torture of most captives and that was to include the Black Robes, actually took place south of the St. Lawrence, in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon, today Auriesville, New York. The first Jesuit to die of the eight North American martyrs was Brother Rene Goupil who was captured with Father Issac Jogues in 1642. Brother Rene was tomahawked to death, and thus spared hours of torture.

St. Issac Jogues had come to Canada in 1639, as a newly ordained priest. He quickly learned the native languages and was a skilled cartographer. His superior in Quebec, Father Jerome Lalemant, sent him to open a mission even further west than Huronia. In 1641, traveling with Father Garnier, they paddled a considerable distance west and came to the falls at Saint Marie, where the waters from Lake Superior flow into Lake Ontario. Today we call that place, Sault Ste Marie. Here they established a fort and a chapel and promised the Chippewa Indians that they would return to teach their people of the Christian faith. In August of 1642, on the return trip, Issac Jogues, Brother Rene Goupil and several Christian Hurons were captured by the Mohawks. After St. Rene Goupil was killed, Father Jogues and the others were taken to Auriesville, about 40 miles west of Albany where they were ritually tortured and the Jesuit lost two fingers on his right hand.

Father Jogues survived the torture and was living as a slave of the Mohawks when he was ransomed by Dutch traders and taken to New Amsterdam (New York). Actually, he was the first Catholic priest to visit Manhattan Island. Another Jesuit, Father Bressani, whose tale of torture and mutilation is well documented in *The Relations*, suffered a similar fate and was also assisted by the Dutch. He was not ransomed, as was Issac Jogues, but assisted in escaping to Fort Orange and then down the Hudson River to Manhattan Island. Both Issac Jogues and Francesco Bressani returned to France and were given dispensations by the Pope to say Mass with mutilated hands. Canon Law at the time required that the Blessed Sacrament could only be held by the thumb and forefinger of the right hand.

Incredibly, both Jesuits returned to the missions and Issac Jogues together with Brother Jean de Lalande returned to the Mohawk nation in 1645, and established a tentative peace. However,



In October of 1646, the missionaries were tortured and killed by their hosts and their bodies dumped into the Mohawk river.

Notwithstanding the hostility of the Iroquois Confederation, now allied with the English, the Jesuits did not cease trying to convert the New York tribes. Eventually they did have some success once peace was restored and even established Christian Indian settlements across the river from Montreal. The mission at Caughenwauga has a remarkable heritage. Established by one of Canada's great early missionaries, Father de Lamberville, Caughenwauga was the community where Kateri Tekakwitha spent most of her life.

**Caughenwauga,  
Quebec Province  
1656-1680**

**Saint Kateri Tekakwitha** was a Mohawk maiden of the Iroquois Confederation. She initially was a sickly girl baptized by Father Jean de Lamberville in upper New York State. She grew in wisdom, grace and beauty before God and man. Kateri was like a character from a story of high romance. The daughter of a Mohawk father and Algonquin mother, she was a slender girl, who despite a slightly scared face was of such grace and beauty that we Americans would call her the "Lily of the Mohawks," and of such a devote nature that in Canada she is known as the "Genevieve of New France."

Because of her devout faith and the open hostility of other Indians, her family moved to the Christian mission-town of St. Francis Xavier de Sault, along the St. Lawrence, across the river from Montreal. When she arrived at the mission, called Caughnawaga by the Native Americans, she had a letter from the Jesuit missionary in Auriesville that stated: *"I send you a treasure, guard it well."*

At Caughnawaga she led a life of prayer, love of the Eucharist, devotion to chastity and intense penitential practices. She spurned offers of marriage and instead taught prayers to children, cared for the sick and elderly, attended daily Mass and made wooden crosses which she erected throughout the woods and on the banks of the St. Lawrence.

After suffering for years of poor health, Kateri died in 1680, at the age of 24, uttering the words *"Jesus, I love you."* After her death, it

was reported in the Jesuit *Relations* that her small-pox scars vanished and she appeared to her friends with a message: *"the cross was the glory of my life and the glory of my death, and I want you to make it yours."*

She was also known for her love of the Eucharist and the Rosary, and upon her death, this pockmarked maiden was suffused with even greater beauty and has been venerated both in Canada and in New York long before her cause for sainthood was introduced in 1884.

The mission at Caughenwauga itself was destroyed a number of times by hostile raiding parties but continued to rise from the ashes. The Christianity infused there by the missionaries eventually migrated as far west as the Rockies. Almost two hundred years later and a half-continent away, when Father Pierre de Smet, S.J., crossed the Rockies into Montana in 1840, the Flathead Indians were anxiously awaiting the return of the Black Robes. Iroquois and Huron Christians, dispossessed from Upper New York and Canada after The French and Indian War, found a home in Western Montana among the Flathead and Kalispel Indians and introduced some Catholic practices and traditions to these peoples. When a new wave of American Jesuits ventured across the Plains with legendary Mountain Men like Jim Bridger and Tom Fitzpatrick, before forts were built along the Oregon Trail, the Jesuits were to find a welcome precipitated by the descendants of the Mohawk Mission of Caughenwauga.

***St. Stephen School***  
***Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania***  
***October. 1946***

Now, after seeing what I thought was the glorified body of St. Therese of Lisieux in Loretto that past summer, there was no doubt in my youthful mind that God had glorified this Indian maiden, Kateri Tekakwitha as well and my love affair with the surreal vision of the Venerable Kateri began. She had been declared "Venerable" by Pope Pius XII in 1943. She was to be beatified in 1980, by Pope John Paul II, and canonized in October, 2012.

Now, after my introduction to Kateri in 1946, days, months and years ticked off the calendar, yet she remained a peripheral companion, as thoughts of her appeared from time to time to give me a story to tell other children. Her first name was unique and I couldn't

pronounce her surname but I targeted the Shrine of the North American Martyrs in Auriesville, New York for a visit someday, because I thought, *"that's the closest place I'll get to her."* I knew she would be honored there along with the martyred Jesuits. I didn't imagine as a youngster, that I would have to wait almost 50 years before I made that trip, and that the shrine was constructed on the site of the village where she was born.

But I missed the boat, or rather failed to notice that there was a shrine right under my nose.

***St Anthony Picnic Grounds  
Clymer, Pennsylvania  
July 1953***

In 1953, Father Francis B. Karabinos, my Dad's first cousin built a shrine to Blessed Kateri at his parish in Clymer, Pennsylvania. Clymer was a coal mining town in the foothills of the Appalachian chain, only 70 miles east of Pittsburgh. His parish, St. Anthony (then in the Pittsburgh diocese), primarily served first and second generation Slovak-America parishioners. Later when the new diocese of Greensburg was erected, Father Frank, was named a Papal Chamberlain and Monsignor.

The good monsignor spoke fluent Slovak along with a number of other Slavic languages and had been a sports icon in the Pittsburgh area before he entered the seminary in 1927. Fifty years later, Pittsburgh sportswriters were still hailing him as *"the best shortstop to have ever played in Forbes Field."*

Father Frank, as we called him, was a well loved pastor both at Clymer and later in Freeport, Pennsylvania.

Besides constructing the shrine, he purchased a large statue of Blessed Kateri and offered a prayer after each parish mass for the canonization of Kateri Tekakwitha. Father Frank's sister, who we all called "Aunt Rose," served as his housekeeper and catechist both at Clymer and in Freeport. She remained with him until Monsignor died in 1978.

Naturally family members visited his parish over the years, and they too were imbued with a love for, and a devotion to, Blessed

Kateri. I did not make my first trip to Clymer until 1958, when Father Frank celebrated his Silver Jubilee as a priest, and was thus ignorant of the existence of the shrine. Not so my cousin Rosalia, who I have always called "Pnutz." She visited numerous times with her mother, Father Frank's sister, Bertha and her sister, Barbara.

Rosalia sent me this picture, taken in 1953, of her kneeling at prayer at the shrine of Blessed Kateri on the picnic grounds of St. Anthony parish in Clymer.

Pnutz, though small in size, was large in capturing the hearts of all the family members, (obvious from the picture) especially my father and me. She and I have remained close friends for the last 60 years, yet I never knew until after the canonization of Kateri, that she too, my "Aunt" Rose and the good Monsignor, had such a special devotion to the newly beatified Servant of God.

I was unable to attend the funeral for the Monsignor in 1978, but did attend the funeral of his sister, our dear "Aunt" Rose in 2007. The prayer card distributed at Rose's wake and funeral featured a picture of St. Kateri and a prayer for her canonization. I had forgotten that fact, until Pnutz so reminded me and sure enough, the picture I had inserted in the story of the American Lily on page three, was that very prayer card.



***St Francis College  
Loretto, Pennsylvania  
October 1955***

Back in Loretto and at college now, I entered the Franciscan Order as a candidate for the priesthood and was taking classes at St. Francis College. A few classes into the year, the venerable John

Powers, our history professor does a soliloquy on *The Lily of the Mohawks*. "Doc" Powers, a New York resident before coming to St. Francis was a brilliant man but a no nonsense instructor. Why he deviated from his brash style to tell such a sentimental story surprised me.

The story stuck with my classmates as well, so much so that the prettiest girl in our class joined the Franciscan Sisters after graduation and took the religious name Kateri. I didn't know Barbara all that well, except to see her in the classes we shared at St. Francis, but I did admire her from afar. She was beautiful, vivacious and ever so kind; a young woman who was the ideal "All-American girl." Once she took the habit, our friendship grew and I cherish it to this day, even though I have only seen Sister Kateri once since 1965. She was stationed in New Orleans and for the last many years, has been doing catechetical work in a rural mission parish in Southwestern, Virginia.

***St Elizabeth Seton Parish  
Lake Ridge, Virginia  
October 1980***

Twenty five years and a quarter of a century filled with adventure, career change and a new lifestyle would elapse before Kateri Tekakwitha rebounded to the front of my consciousness, when our favorite pope, John Paul II beatified her on June 22, 1980. By that time I was married to the vivacious Sharon Grover and Michael, was our exciting three year old son. We were members of St. Elizabeth Seton parish in Lake Ridge, Virginia and there was another connection. Elizabeth Seton was the founder of the Sisters of Charity; the good sisters who taught me in grade school and introduced me to Blessed Kateri. She was still messing with my mind.

As Sharon and I were fully engaged in those years with Michael's growth and education and our own careers, Kateri was neglected again. Vacations tended to take us south, not to the New York or the Canadian woods and so I seldom thought of visiting the site of Kateri's influence. But I still sat up and took notice at the mention of her name. Amazingly, 33 years later and 30 years after we moved from Lake Ridge, Kateri will bring me back to our old parish to mark another asterisks in my love affair.

***Shrine of the North American Martyrs  
Auriesville, New York  
April 1993***

Then in April of 1993, I experienced a catharsis that proved to be such a release of emotions that it granted me a few exceptional days -- a Disney moment, in which dreams are made to come true.

Here I have attached a copy of the story of my visit to an area that the French Ambassador in the Treaty of Paris of 1763, referred to as a "few acres of snow" when the land was ceded to the English at the conclusion of The French and Indian War.

***"Delusional"***

***I love driving alone.***

In my case, that is dangerous as I also like to look at the scenery. It is better when my wife is along as she is intense in watching the road and quick to bring my attention back to the direction I should be heading. I do tend to drift across the center line or onto the shoulder.

But I still rather drive alone with the windows open, the radio off and the freedom to deviate from dead center. I also like to take roads least traveled and explore places I have never seen before.

In early April, 1993, I had that opportunity.

A friend, just retired from the Army, was to be married in New York state. He had served faithfully for 23 years. We served in Vietnam about the same time in 1971, and he stayed in the service; retiring as a full colonel.

The wedding was set for Gloversville, New York and it was snowing from the Mason-Dixon Line to Canada. I lived in Northern Virginia.

Between my wife's work schedule and son's school and activity schedule, I was able to travel alone ... and I couldn't wait to get on the road. A new exploration awaited me, another adventure driving in a snow storm and of course, on roads less traveled.

So very early on the third day of April, I started north to the New York border. Snow on the ground most of the way but as I moved

beyond Binghamton it began to cover the roads. Leaving I-88 at Oneonta, New York, I drove north on highway 28, riding on a snow pack and arrived in Cooperstown, 20 minutes later.

I had often dreamed of visiting the Baseball Hall of Fame and there it was, even more pristine in the new fallen snow than I imagined.

I arrived at 3:30 and they encouraged me to go check in at a hotel and come back the next day, as they were closing in two hours. But with the snow coming down, they couldn't guarantee me they would be open the next day. I opted to visit then and try my best to see all the displays in the short time remaining. The good folks there, in turn were gracious enough not to charge me an entrance fee. Wow! Just like baseball. It reminded me of my youthful days in Pittsburgh, when we could walk into Forbes Field after the 7<sup>th</sup> inning through unattended turnstiles.

The place was remarkable. All the great ball players that I had heard of or read about were featured there as were many I saw play in my lifetime. The Abbott and Costello routine: "*Who's on First*" greets you as you enter and stare at the bigger than life statue of Ted Williams – one of the heroes of my youth. Ruth, Gehrig, Musial, the 1960 Pirates and Mazerowski's bat are all there as are so many other accoutrements of the game. It was two hours of star-studded flickers assaulting my eyes; not annoying, just exciting. My anxiety was only in the fact that I didn't have long to savor it all.

That was the old building. Since 1993, they have remodeled, added on and included so many more of the players of my viewing era. Today, I could never have done it all in that short period of time, but in 1993, I managed to get to the end as they were locking the front door.

When I came out, my car had six inches of new snow atop and the surrounding area had a total of 18 inches. Driving north along frozen Lake Otsego, I wondered if I could find a motel in the storm. After about 10 miles, the road narrowed to one lane and I was following a snowplow. He took me west to a main highway and then north where I found a motel at a major intersection and checked in for the night. I was in the town of Mohawk ... and to my very good cheer, there was a Domino's pizza parlor across the street. **Life is good !**

Now, although the wedding was the focus of my trip, and the visit to the Hall of Fame a succulent sidebar, a visit to the Shrine of the North American Martyrs would be the icing on the cake. I knew it was in the vicinity of Schenectady and Gloversville and along the Mohawk River. And there I was ... in Mohawk, New York!

As I was insistent on getting to see the Hall of Fame, I was also going to do my darnedest to see the Shrine, no matter how deep the snow.

From my early childhood, I had been enthralled with the stories of the French Jesuits laboring among the Indians of New York and Canada, long before the English established a stable colony at Jamestown or Plymouth. The stories of their capture, torture and martyrdom were breathtaking and as gruesome as anything I ever read or saw on the big screen. But even the narratives of the final moments of their lives, played second fiddle to the record of their explorations on the Great Lakes, the Ohio and Mississippi, Niagara Falls and the establishment of mission churches as far west as present day North Dakota. Their whole history fascinated me and I just had to find that shrine.

It wasn't on any of my maps, but I knew it had to be close by, as was the shrine of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, the convert Indian maiden who lived such a miraculous life among the Mohawks – the most fierce of all the six Iroquois nations. I was once again reminded of Kateri when the most beautiful girl in our college graduating class, entered a Franciscan Order of nuns and took the name Kateri. Like Tony DiNozzo of NCIS fame, who is really and secretly was in love with Ziva, I too had a crush on my classmate, Barbara. But since we were



both working in the same industry, we couldn't let that interfere with our jobs and so drifted physically far apart but stayed close in our dream worlds.



When I awoke early the next morning and opened my blinds, I was actually looking down at the frozen Mohawk River. No birch bark canoes, but shimmering ice crystals atop new fallen snow. Grabbing a light breakfast at the motel, I was back on the road by 7:30 ... really too early. Snow plows weren't out as yet, and so the big Pontiac station wagon and I blazed the trail.

The snow had stopped, but with 6 to 10 inches of new snow, I was thrilled to make the first tracks for the next 23 miles ... life doesn't get any better than that!

It did take almost an hour to go those 23 miles before I saw a sign with the word "Shrine" just above the snow bank. Making the right turn up the hill proved difficult and I had to make a run at it three or four times before I crested the hill. I knew this trip was going to be memorable. The first two entrances were drifted shut with a large metal cable re-enforcing the snow banks. Driving a little further I saw a road sign: "Shrine Road," and made a left there.

After a quarter mile I came to a cross road. On my right and up on the hill was a retreat center, but that road was drifted well shut. To my left the road dipped into a parking area around the Shrine and it too had not been plowed ... or driven on for some time.

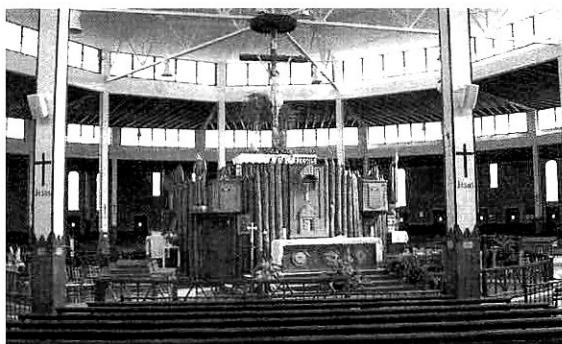
I paused long enough to assess the snow depth and then I plunged the big Pontiac into the drift, burst through into a level lot with only about 8 to 10 inches of snow. A circular building panoramic-ed before me ... and it was big. I had arrived.

Driving and plowing in as far as I could, I left the warmth of my car and made my way on foot to the wood frame structure (unfortunately without boots).

There was no sign of life and I thought maybe the Shrine was closed for the winter.

Wandering around the circular structure I tried three or four doors hoping to get in. Finally, and at the last door and with my feet screaming for a warm rug, I found that it was ajar: frozen open. Snow had piled up between the door and the floor so that it wasn't able to close all the way. Forcing the door, I walked stealthily and yet reverently into the shrine-chapel only to find it cold, dark and empty. It was now about 8:30 in the morning and there was enough natural

light coming through the frosted glass windows so that I could see the excellent woodwork and art work in the shrine.



Statues of Isaac Jogues, Rene Goupil, Jean de Brebeuf and the other North American martyrs surrounded the altar. Walking slowly around the circular shrine, I felt that I was surrounded by ghosts: good ghosts. They

should have been the ghosts of the Jesuit martyrs who had died willingly bringing Christianity to the North woods. As I viewed the statues from the back wall, I also wondered if the Blessed Sacrament was present and concerned that if It were, why was It left unattended. Just maybe those Jesuits up at the retreat house were not made of the same stern-stuff that characterized their fraternity in the early sixteen hundreds.

After circling almost half the shrine, I noted a glowing red votive candle near the center altar. Walking to the center aisle, I was about to start toward the altar rail when I suddenly stopped cold in my tracks.

### **Kneeling in prayer in front of the candle was a young woman.**

How could this be? There were no other cars in the parking lot. In fact I hadn't seen a car on the road for the last 15 minutes. I saw no tracks in the snow as I walked toward and around the shrine trying to get in. How did she get there?

An earth-tone babushka covered her head and her cloak of a heavy gray cloth almost concealed a dress the color of buckskin. I noted that the hem of her dress was edged with leather tines, just like the hunting jacket that Davy Crockett made famous. I stood motionless and watched her for a couple minutes. She never moved but remained in prayer looking up at our crucified Lord on the Cross.

Getting a little braver and more curious, I started down the aisle at an angle to get a look at the profile of her face. She was attractive in

a way that is hard to describe. Her face was pale, calm and although it had pock marks it was singularly beautiful. Like that of a wax Madonna, it was precisely chiseled, with blushing cheeks and a refined nose. Her cheek bones were high but her chin was firm and featured a face that had a determined look.

And ... this may be hard to believe: a soft warm golden glow seemed to surround her.

Beautiful women have always paralyzed me. I had a reputation and enough success in enough venues that might indicate I was a leader of men; but beautiful girls have always been able to lead me by the nose. I was stunned to silence and couldn't utter a word.

In my infallible analysis, she was an Indian princess. I couldn't help think irreverently: *"Wow, I'd give a hundred horses for her!"*

Now trembling and not just from the cold, I held my place some sixty to seventy feet away even while my toes ached from frostbite. A feeling of guilt suffused me, and I knew I had no right to be there. I bowed to the altar, never did locate the exact location of the Blessed Sacrament, and backpedaled up the main aisle to the very back of the church-shrine. I watched for another several minutes, or maybe longer. I found the location of the Blessed Sacrament ... how dumb could I have been, it was right in front of her.

For some reason I started to sweat and so thought I had better get back to the safety of my car. I walked across the back of the shrine, now more carefully noting the stations and the statues of the many Jesuit martyrs.

At the west side altar, there was also a statue of an Indian maiden dressed in buckskin. It was the statute of Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks, who died in 1680 at the Catholic Indian settlement of Caughnawaga, near St. Francis along the St. Lawrence River. I looked at it for a long time and then back toward the altar rail where my beautiful Indian princess was kneeling. She was gone.

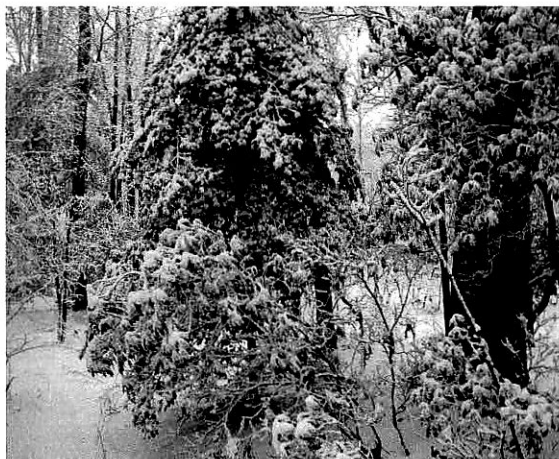
I scanned the entire shrine, no movement and so now I grew bold. I walked behind the side altar and into the main sanctuary; still no sign of anyone's presence. I stepped into the sacristy, even found a light switch and flicked it on ... still no one.

Where could she have gone. It was impossible. I had excellent hearing in those days and great peripheral vision, I would have picked up any movement, any sound in the silence and emptiness of that wooden amphitheater. How did she slip away?

Sadly, I gave up and started for the door that was frozen open. As I pushed against the wind to leave, I noted that only one set of footprints (mine) had entered. I turned to look back into the shrine, and make one final scan – still nothing. The beautiful girl, the young maiden was gone ... and I hadn't been drinking as it was only about nine that morning.

Pouncing over the snow I got back to my car and tried to get my feet warm once again. After it warmed up, I decided to force the big wagon through the drifts and find out where the young woman had exited the shrine and where did she go. The car responded well, it had power and size and I had lots of experience driving in snow, but I couldn't find another footprint or tire track anywhere around that shrine. I circled back, still very curious, left the comfort of my car once again, and circled the shrine on foot. Still not another footprint but my own and no sign of anyone in the Church.

I understood that with lake effect snows in mid-state New York, the shrine was probably only open seasonally. But I couldn't understand why the Blessed Sacrament would be left unattended, not with a house for priests but a quarter mile away. I guessed that when they got the road plowed, they



came down and maybe even celebrated Mass. The shrine building wasn't completely closed, as the electricity was on and some heat (very little) was coming from the radiators. But then again, if there had been activity that early in the morning, I may have not seen the young maiden ... who I now thought to be Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

When I again got back into my car, I had to think I was delusional. If it was the sainted Indian maiden who died in 1680 at the age of 24, why would I ... the wretched sinner that I am, be privileged to witness such an apparition? And besides, the girl I saw had pock marks on her face, whereas according to the record of eyewitnesses, including two of the Jesuit missionaries of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the scars on her face suddenly disappeared after her death.

Well enough. I still had a wedding to attend, more bourbon to drink and a good time in front of me. Once back in the car, I roared out of the parking lot, followed my own tracks back to the main road and arrived just in time to get behind a snow plow headed west. The plow left the road I came to Auriesville on, and turned right through a tunnel under the Interstate emerging on the banks of the Mohawk River, near the small village of Fonda, New York. Less than three miles along that road I saw another small wooden structure: the shrine and museum dedicated to *The Lily of the Mohawks*.

It too was closed and snowed in and there was no sign of life. I couldn't help myself, I had to stop. Once again I stepped out of the car with cold and wet feet and waded through the deep snow to the entrance. Kicking the snow away I climbed onto a porch and tried the door. Locked. No lights inside. No one around ... and no footprints but my own.

It wasn't much of a place, didn't even see a gift shop. But Kateri had only been beautified by Pope John Paul II in 1980, and maybe she wasn't as popular in New York State as Isaac Jogues.

I finally made my way to Gloversville, checked into a motel and warmed and dried my feet. Later that day, I was in contact with the wedding party, attended the wedding of my good friend and celebrated with the bride and groom's family and friends. George and Stephanie's wedding was memorable, but it was an even more unforgettable trip, even if part of it was a delusion. ***Life is good.***

***There is no end to this story.***

***Blessed Kateri, wasn't to leave me alone too long. After the Shrine experience in 1993, she had other things to do and better people to care for, so true, I was neglected for a few years. But I was too self-absorbed to notice.***

*Late in 1998, I retired from government service, my wife, Sharon, gave up her great job as the evening Nurse-supervisor at the new Loudoun County hospital and we moved to Williamsburg, Virginia. We moved there primarily to be close to our son, Michael who was battling Hodgkin's disease and then living in Richmond.*

*God was good to us, and Michael made it through radiation and fought chemo so well, that with the help of the prayers of so many, he beat cancer. He has been cancer free for 12 plus years. Don't know if Kateri had any hand in his recovery, but do know that we have been blessed as we now have two vivacious grandchildren and Michael has a great loving wife, a good job, his own home ... and a tattoo to commemorate his survival.*

**Montana**  
**St Ignatius Mission**  
**June/July 1999**

Not long after we left Northern Virginia, our good friends, Walter and Rose Mary invited us to their son's (Bob) wedding in Montana. Another dream come true.

I always wanted to drive to the great West, see Mount Rushmore and Yellowstone and count buffalo in Montana and now we had the time to follow that path. We planned our trip so we could visit friends in Wisconsin, the Franciscan friars in South Dakota, an Army chaplain classmate in Iowa, Boys Town in Nebraska, and stops at various bourbon distilleries in Kentucky. See why I say, it doesn't get any better than this !

But our primary objective was the wedding, and it was going to be held in Polson, Montana at the base of Flathead Lake some 70 miles north of Missoula. There were lots of buffalo. We drove west in late June, as the wedding was on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July.

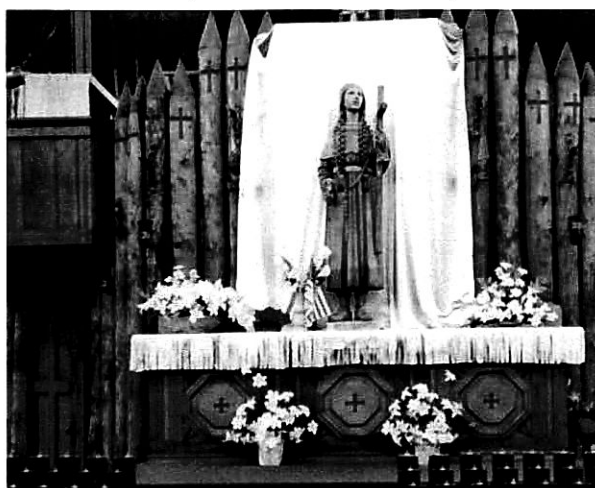
Arriving the afternoon before the wedding, we checked-in at a quaint lodge called Nine Pipes. Almost all the out of town guests stayed there, as there was a rehearsal dinner that evening and a scheduled buffet breakfast the next morning. It was a great reunion of friends and a joyous evening getting to know new ones.

The next morning, I was so excited to be in Montana and between snow covered peaks in the Rockies, that I got up early and went to get coffee. The corridors were deserted, as most of the guests had partied late into the night (self-included). As I walked around with my coffee, the only other guests who were up, were Bob's, two grandmothers. They were sweet Polish ladies, who preferred to converse in their mother tongue, but were as proficient in English as a college professor. I got them each a cup of coffee, and as we talked, I noted that they too were ready to explore the wild west. I knew that they were devout Catholic ladies, whose lives revolved around the Sunday and daily Mass schedules back in Sugar Notch and Ashley, Pennsylvania, so I mentioned that I had passed an historic mission church on my way in, and I wanted to go back and visit it.

It was the Indian mission church established by Father de Smet and his fellow Jesuits in 1841. DeSmet was the American missionary to the West in the 1840's, where he served on the frontier both as a carrier of Christianity and an infallible trail companion and scout for the United States Cavalry until his death in 1873. His love for the great American West and the native tribes who lived there, the Potawatomis, Flatheads, Coeur d'Alenes, Kalispels, Blackfeet, Yankton Sioux and others is legendary. And here we were right in the heart of the territory he explored in the 1840's.

The grandmothers were eager to go, and so off we drove to the mission of St Ignatius on the western slope of the Mission Range and directly east of the National Bison Range. We arrived as the morning Mass concluded, and had time to explore the ancient chapel, walk the Stations, admire the devout though primitive art work of the native population and say a few prayers.

Exiting the side door, we found ourselves in a mission garden that featured a shrine dedicated to Blessed Kateri.



The grandmothers wondered why these western Indians would have such a devotion to a child of the Mohawk Nation far away in the Northeast. The historic marker at the mission church provided the answer.

*During the long Indian Wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> and continuing into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many of the Catholic Indians of Canada and New York fled west and merged with other tribes. This included Indians from the Mohawk valley in New York and from the Catholic mission along the St. Lawrence in Canada. Although they assimilated with their new tribal families, they nonetheless retained remnants of their Catholic faith, continuing through six or seven generations. In truth, shortly after Lewis and Clark returned from their historic trip in 1805, a delegation of Indians came down the Missouri River to request that the bishop in St. Louis, send priests to the Plains Indians. Members of that delegation were descendants of Christian Indians who had lived at Caughnawaga, the Christian mission on the St. Lawrence where Blessed Kateri had spent her final years.*

We prayed at the shrine, and I took the grandmothers back to Ninepipes Lodge. Its a good thing I did so then, as the wedding party was in a frenzy, looking for the groom's grandmothers, who seemingly had disappeared. They were about to call the State Police, when we returned. Of course, I was scolded by everyone "for kidnapping the grandmothers," but eventually we all returned to the joyous spirit that preceded the wedding ceremony and activities. Just another reminder from Blessed Kateri, that she was still haunting me.

***O God, grant that though the intercession of the Blessed Kateri, whose life of innocence helped cause Christianity to flower among Native Americans, gather all at the foot of your cross. May children of every nation, tribe and tongue, gather that they may magnify you in a single canticle of praise.***



**Archbishop's Residence  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
December 2011**

On December 19, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI signed the decree recognizing the miracles in Blessed Kateri's cause, clearing the way for her canonization.

*"The Indian people in the United States and Canada have longed for the canonization of Blessed Kateri from the moment of her beautification,"* Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia told Catholic News Service. The former bishop of Denver is a member of the Prairie Band of the Potawatomi Tribe and the only Native American Archbishop. He added that her canonization would bring *"great rejoicing for the Indian community"* and predicted *"we'll show up in significant numbers here and in Rome."*

On February 18 of 2012, Pope Benedict XVI announced she would be canonized on October 21, of that year.

**Toano, Virginia  
January 2012**

Then in January 2012, I felt a need to write the Kateri story as I remembered the various events that led up to this point and the year of her canonization. I first went back and revised an earlier account of my trip to Auriesville, the site (that I now know) to be the place of Kateri's birth. Then I added an introductory account of the events that brought Kateri into my life, and now conclude with a summary of events since my "personal introduction" to the saintly Indian maiden.

Beginning in 2010, I started to build little shrines and bird feeders to hang on trees in the woods behind our home in Toano, Virginia. Our property backs up to reservoir land and no one can build behind us and the land back there is a natural reserve for birds and wildlife. Naturally, we feed the birds and squirrels, mostly during the winter and the deer feed off my garden in the spring and summer. They too get some apples in the winter. I place small statues in these little shrines, much like you see in Bavaria. And of course, there is a large statue of St. Francis in my garden. When I ran out of religious statues, I asked my darling wife, Sharon to watch for old statues in antique stores, those that can withstand the weather and fit neatly into the small cedar frames I construct.

**Prescott, Wisconsin  
Hasting, Minnesota  
August 2012**

In August of 2012, we traveled with our dear friends, Tom and Lorraine to Wisconsin and Minnesota to see other good friends, John and Allene in Prescott, Wisconsin.

John, Tom and I met in 1980, at the IRS and have been friends and golfing companions since. Our wives naturally gravitated to each other as they are all of a kindred spirit: loving, generous, hospitable and extremely considerate ladies.

When John retired from government service in 1995, he moved back to Prescott, Wisconsin, across the Mississippi River from where he grew up in Hastings, Minnesota. We have visited them there at least three times and, he and Allene have been back east more often than that. Tom retired in 1996, and Tom and Lorraine spend part of their year in Arizona and part here in Northern Virginia. Distance has not diluted our friendship, so we stay in touch. In recent years both John and Allene, Tom and Lorraine have had some serious health issues, and we all know our days are numbered. Tom and I, together with our wives, determined that we would visit John and Allene this summer, "come higher gas prices or economic meltdown."

So we made our way through Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota to get there and back at the end of August. It was a great trip, and a deeply moving visit. Allene and John's efforts to provide the highest level of hospitality will seldom be matched. It was a joy to be with them and spend time with great friends on some of the most beautiful days this summer could provide.

But on that trip, Kateri too, caught up to me once again ! This time in an antique store in Hastings, Minnesota. Drifting away from my dear Sharon, as we roamed through the store, I noted across the room on a top dusty shelf a statue of an Indian girl. The statue was not an expensive or particularly old object, but it was familiar. As I approached I knew it was a statue of Blessed Kateri. When I reached up and pulled it down from behind a number of other objects, I looked at the base. A simple sign was attached: "Indian Maiden" and the price was four dollars. Incredible ! I had never seen a statue of her before and she looked like the girl I think I saw kneeling in front of the

altar in Auriesville in 1993. No question, no bargaining: I bought the statue and waited outside with my find.

Upon closer examination, I noted she was **holding a simple wooden cross** and that seemed natural, but at the time didn't understand the meaning. That meaning would be explained a month and a half later.

### **Williamsburg, Virginia** **October 2012**

October 4, was the Feast of St. Francis and, my Chaplain School classmate from our U.S. Army days, Father Francis Simeone, invited me to Mass at his apartment. Fr. Frank is a retired Army chaplain who served in Vietnam at the same time as I did and stayed in the Army for 23 years. After that he was a diocesan priest of the Fresno Diocese and retired at age 70, from his parish in Lone Pine, California. Francis moved to Williamsburg, Virginia and helps out at various parishes in the area, more often attending the spiritual needs of the Poor Clares in Barhamsville, VA. This particular feast day, he had no place to go, so we were going to celebrate the feast of St. Francis together.

Mass was at 8:00 and following the celebration we enjoyed breakfast at the Cracker Barrel in Williamsburg. But before we left for our grits and eggs, Father Francis handed me a copy of the Knights of Columbus magazine, *Columbia*, for the month of September. On the front cover was a picture of Blessed Kateri dressed and coiffured exactly like the statue I found in the Hastings, Minnesota antique store. ***She too was holding a wooden cross.*** Reading the story later, it all came together. She made wooden crosses and erected them in the woods around the Indian mission in Canada to edify the Native Americans. Now, I understood the significance of her depiction with a wooden cross and the tie-in to my current hobby of erecting shrines in the woods behind my home.

She was indeed sent by Jesuit Father Lambertville in 1676, to the Mission of St. Francis in Caughnawaga with the note to his fellow missionary: *"I send you a treasure, guard it well."*

That treasure, The Lily of the Mohawks has traveled well and a lot further and longer than the 100 mile trip she took in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. She has traveled to our time and place with growing glory. From

Servant of God to “Venerable” and “Blessed” and now, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 2012 to “Saint.” To think that I have had the privilege to ride along with her on that journey a few times is (to me) incredible, inspiring and more than anything else, humbling.

**Poor Clare Monastery**  
**Barhamsville, Virginia**  
**October 14, 2012**

I was running a little late that morning. For some reason, I dressed in my best suit and put on a long-sleeve white shirt and my favorite tie, not because it was too cool (50 degrees), but because the light in my closet burned out and I couldn't find a short sleeve shirt.

I haven't been to the Poor Clare Monastery for Mass in awhile, so I decided to go out into the country to Mount St. Francis. Arriving a little late to the small chapel, I entered while the Sisters were singing the *Gloria* in Latin. I love their soft voices, so I quietly found a pew. My regular spot was occupied by one of the many devout and generous Philippine families that often drive the 70 miles from Virginia Beach to attend Mass. They usually unload “mucho” groceries for the Sisters after Mass. I've watched them do this for about 7 years now.

Once in the pew, I found a copy of the *Magnificat* monthly missal and opened it to the *Gloria* to follow the singing. After the *Gloria* ended I tried to flip to the Mass of the day, but instead of opening the book to the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, I opened to the 13<sup>th</sup> of July. Then I realized I was holding the July edition of the *Magnificat* and not one for October. As I looked at the July 13<sup>th</sup> Mass, it was for Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha and I thought: “oh no, not again. How did she know I'd be here.”

Blessed Kateri was canonized on Sunday, the 21<sup>st</sup> in Rome, and I am well aware of that special day. No I didn't make it to Rome, but instead Sharon and I attended the Mass requested for my nephew, Thomas Robert Donahoe who had recently passed away, by our good friends, Walter and Rose Mary. The Mass requested for T.R. was celebrated at our parish of St. Olaf in Norge, Virginia. And of course, Father Tom (our Pastor) made Kateri's canonization a major part of his homily. Too many coincidences ... .

**Vatican City**  
**October 21, 2012**

Claudio Lavanga, **NBC News**

VATICAN CITY – She was known as Lily of the Mohawks, or the Pocahontas of the Catholic Church. But on Sunday, Kateri Tekakwitha went down in history as the first Native American saint. Born more than 300 years ago in the Mohawks village of Ossernion - today Auriesville, forty miles from Albany NY - she was one of seven people canonized by Pope Benedict XVI Sunday in an open-air ceremony held in Saint Peter's Square. Kateri had a short life – she died at 24 – and yet, as for most saints, her devotion to Christianity, sacrifices and “heroic virtue” were so inspirational that her legacy survived for generations. Her mother was a Christian Algonquin woman who was captured during a raid and given as wife to a Mohawks tribal member. She was born in the middle of the 17th century, a time of infighting between rival American tribes, deadly diseases and colonization. And a time when French Jesuit priests preached in the area, trying to convert locals to Christianity.

***Still ... this story has no ending.***

**Woodbridge, Virginia**  
**January 2013**

**Kateri Grace** was born on 13 January 2013.

Kateri is the fourth (third surviving) child of an Army Warrant Officer Jesse Birch and his wife, Erin. Jesse was a high school classmate and close friend of our son, Michael. After graduating from Paul VI in Fairfax, Virginia in 1995, they were roommates in Richmond for a year before Michael moved back to Northern Virginia. In 2000, Jesse joined the United States Army. A veteran of the Iraqi War (two tours as well as one to Kuwait), CWO Birch has risen in the ranks from

private to Chief Warrant Officer and was then stationed at Fort Belvoir in Virginia.

His wife, Erin is a wonderful young woman, who we first met at their wedding in Fort Meade, Maryland in 2007. Erin and Jesse *"met when Jesse was returning to the Catholic Church after 10 years of being away from home. Her faith and his fire have fueled a devout and faithful marriage in Christ, his bride the Church, and to each other."* [Jesse's words]

Erin had a difficult pregnancy and early in November, shortly after Kateri's canonization, a pregnancy induced asthma, not responding to treatment, prompted widespread requests for prayer. In December, 2012, Erin was transitioned to high risk OBGYN care due to breathing issues and concerns that the child would come early. At that time, I sent a note suggesting we pray through the intercession of the new saint (Kateri) for the baby to go full term. Providentially, our prayers were answered and a healthy baby girl was born on January 13, 2013, at 10 lbs, 4 oz -- naturally and with no complications .

Jesse writes: *"Erin had known about Kateri from her days at Mt. St. Mary's College in Emmittsburg, Maryland. I had heard of her during the preparations for her canonization. We named our first child after St Gerard Majella and Blessed Mother Teresa as this child never came to term. We had more time for our subsequent children and made a list of name that we liked; talked about them, prayed about them, etc. St. Tobias and St. Genevieve informed us they had chosen our next two children over the course of the pregnancy. St. Kateri also let us know, although I firmly believe she was less subtle. From the day we started looking at the list, the only name I saw was Kateri. Erin also was drawn to the name from the beginning."*

Jesse and Erin named her Kateri.

**St Elizabeth Seton Parish**  
**Lake Ridge, Virginia**  
**April 2013**

Kateri Grace was baptized on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April at St Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Lake Ridge, Virginia. It was a glorious day in Northern Virginia and the swirling circumstances of events included our attendance at Kateri's baptism. She was baptized in the same

parish where we first registered when we moved from Atlanta to Virginia in 1980. St Elizabeth Ann Seton was the foundress of the same Sisters of Charity that taught me in grade school and who introduced me to "The Lily of the Mohawks," almost 70 years ago. The circle of life has become a "Slinky." As my mother often said: *"what goes around comes around."*

Two days before the baptism, my wife Sharon gave me a beautiful medal of St. Kateri and a sterling silver chain. It was our 38<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We also took a small nursery room statue of the American Lily to CWO Jesse and Erin to place in Kateri's room. Our prayers are for all of Jesse's family; his wife, Erin and their children Tobias, Genevieve and especially Kateri.

**Yet another interesting coincidence, though more likely part of God's plan, is that Jesse and Erin's second child is named Genevieve. She is a loving and affectionate special needs child. In America we refer to Kateri as the Lily of the Mohawks, in Canada, she is often called "The Genevieve of New France." I believe Kateri Grace Birch will grown very close to her older sister, Genevieve and as the years go on, be her protector, guide and helper. That has to be so. God will guide and protect them and St. Kateri will watch over them.**

This story ends for now ... but the "Slinky" will continue its journey down to the next step.

## ***About the Author***

**Blandin (Bill) Karabinos** was born in Pittsburgh and a graduate of Central Catholic High School. Beginning in 1940, he spent his summers, and holiday vacations in Loretto at the home of his grandparents, Michael and Meri Ann Karabinos. His uncle, Father Michael J.T. Karabinos, T.O.R., was a member of the Loretto Franciscan community and his aunt Pebbie, Margaret P. Karabinos, managed the fund raising campaign for the Franciscans. The Franciscans were frequent visitors to his grandparents' home and he was virtually in daily contact with the friars and residents of the small tightly knit community of Loretto.

Bill entered the Franciscan community in 1955; took the religious name, Blandin and was ordained a priest in 1964. After seven years of teaching, preaching, parish work and serving as a hospital chaplain, Father Blandin entered the U.S. Army in 1970, serving in Vietnam in 1971 and 1972. He was a decorated "muddy boots" chaplain of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 7th Cavalry's, Gary Owen Task Force. Following military service he served at Franciscan University in Steubenville. In 1974, he was granted a leave of absence and in 1975, a dispensation from vows.

Bill married Mary Sharon Grover in April of 1975, at Christ the King Catholic Church in Atlanta and their son Michael was born in 1977. Bill retired from government service in 1998, after a distinguished career with the Internal Revenue Service and the Office of Chief Counsel. Named Analyst of the Year at the IRS, he also served as the International Training Officer, and was on the team that established the Electronic Filing System. At Chief Counsel, Bill created an ABA approved graduate level education program for government attorneys that he produced on a national satellite network. Bill moved to the Williamsburg, Virginia area in 1999.

Throughout his secular years, he served the Church in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, where he wrote for the diocesan newspaper, chaired the Adult Education program and was on various parish committees. In the Dioceses of Arlington and Richmond in Virginia he continued his voluntary service at the parish, diocesan and community levels and was especially active in Scouting programs. In 1990, Bill was the co-chairman with Supreme Court Chief Justice, Warren Berger, in creating and implementing a program for Scouts with Disabilities in the DC metropolitan region.



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