

Sister Denise was born May 24 1925 in the small village of Barnstorn in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. She was the eighth child of 13. Her father, Willie, was a blacksmith and had a general repair shop. Her mother, Obdulie Chenette, was a homemaker and kept the accounting ledgers of the shop. The children grew up in a happy home where evenings were spent singing and dancing to the rhythm of their father's violin and their mother on the piano.

At six, Denise attended St-Jean-l'Évangéliste primary school in Coaticook. At 12, she attended the FMM secondary boarding school in Rigaud. During her studies, she felt the growing desire to become a missionary. Just after high school, she spoke to her parents of her project. With faith, they let her enter the novitiate in Quebec City. It was their fourth child to enter religious life. Denis was a Redemptorist. Rose-Marie and Yolande were FMM.

With deep faith, enthusiasm, and joy, Denise began her religious formation on September 13 1943. She completed all the requirements. She deepened her relationship with Jesus, asking him to nurture the apostolic flame that burnt bright in her. She thus became the words of the psalmist: *For the zeal of your house has consumed me.* (Ps 69:9) Right after her temporary profession, she went to teach in our primary school of

St-Malo, a working class neighbourhood of Quebec City. The children quickly discovered that with Sister Denise learning could be such a fun game. They all wanted to be in her class. On weekends, she taught introductory Bible classes, home education courses, and accompanied the girls in the youth club.

Just before her 27<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1952, she finally fulfilled her dream of going to an overseas mission. She set out via Rome to Singapore where she established kindergartens and mobile clinics for the poor. After three years and astounded by her great potential, her superiors requested her for a new foundation in Malaysia. She began an unbelievable mission experience.

Barely arrived in Kuantan, she stated, *I want to know these people and share their daily lives.* She quickly learnt to drive a jeep and was soon off on the winding road to the rubber plantations. She got to know the owners and proposed a free education program for the children. At first, they were skeptical, as nobody had ever taken such an initiative towards these poor people. The mothers quickly recognized the great value of education for their children. Soon word spread from village to village. Children filled the sisters' schools. Her endeavor grew in leaps and bounds.

She was posted in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia's capital. For 15 years, kindergartens grew like mushrooms with Sister Denise forming the teaching staff. After being informed of the scope of the project, the prime minister in his amazement asked her to create the ***National Kindergarten Association***. In her spiritual notes, she writes, *What a joy to have spent 30 years of my life to the education of children deprived of such rights. Through this commitment, I never failed to transmit the Evangelical message of Jesus, my spouse.*

At 57 in 1982, Denise returned to Canada. *I do not leave my mission. I carry it in my heart.* She first took a sabbatical year in Jerusalem. She then dove into her Canadian mission with her legendary zeal and her psychological training in-group dynamics. In Quebec City and Montreal, she took part in parish and school missions' appeals. She was on the ***Diocesan Vocations Council*** and preached youth retreats. In 1984, as Superior of Calgary, she opened the ***Native Pastoral Centre*** and became the ***Diocesan Missions Council*** director. In St-Laurent, Manitoba, she worked in school pastoral programs. During seven years in Montreal, she was the ***Missions' Appeal*** Director.

The source of such a missionary life could only come from a deep interior life. Her prayer lets us in on this secret. *Lord, may the zeal that you have placed in my heart*

*become contagious so others may discover the call to spread your love to the world. She does not speak of her successes, but only of the pride, she had in serving and persevering in times of trial.*

At 83 in December 2008, she is admitted into the infirmary. For her, retirement is prepared on earth, but celebrated in heaven. Every day, she gave herself challenges to face the aging process with humour and faith. She turns over her health to God and thanks him for the little services she can still render. She courageously accepts the complications of severe diabetes and asks God to turn them into moments of redemption. Over the years, she loses her autonomy, independence, and finally her memory. However, when we spoke to her about her mission, she lit up and began to sing.

In June 2021, with her sisters, she is transferred to Carrefour Providence infirmary. Her joyous smile seemed to thank the staff for all their care. Little by little, she wraps herself in silence and refuses to eat. We can foresee that she is preparing the encounter with her God of love. Thank you Denise for your life among us. Rest in the peace of the Lord.



*Small San Damiano Crucifix  
found on her prayer shelf of her desk.*



***Sister Denise Paquette  
(Marie Notre-Dame du Cap)***

***Franciscan Missionary of Mary***

***Born in Barnstorn, Coaticook, QC  
on May 24 1925.***

***Entered the Institute in Quebec City, QC  
on September 13 1943.***

***Died in Montreal, QC  
on August 23 2021***

***in her 97<sup>th</sup> year,  
the 78<sup>th</sup> of her religious life.***

***May she rest in the peace of Christ!***