

*Which of these do you like best?
Why?*

Three sayings are characteristic of Julie: "Better mistakes than paralysis," "You don't go to heaven on wheels, you go on foot," and most of all, "How good is the good God!"

Today you can recognize Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur anywhere because they wear the cross that identifies them. On one side it bears the initials of their patroness, mother, sister and model—Notre Dame—(Our Lady)) and on the other, Julie's favorite expression as foundress and saint: "Ah! Qu'il est bon, le bon Dieu." ("How good is the good God!").



The Church, in the person of Pope Paul VI, canonized Julie's life and work by declaring her a Saint of the Church on June 22, 1969. Now all of us can say to her: St. Julie, pray for us.

Would you like to know more about the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur?

Please contact:

www.SNDdeN.org

Friends you cannot forget

Marie Julie Alvarez, SNDdeN

*Do you know
this young woman?*

Julie Billiard was a country girl, born in the village of Cuvilly in the North of France. She had the happiness of being baptized the same day she was born, July 12, 1751.



*Marie Rose
Julie Billiard*



*Is there anything
in your life
that draws
you to her?*

Julie's parents had seven children but only three of them lived. She loved her parents and brothers and sisters dearly. She liked to play and talk with her friends, old and young, and to share her faith with everyone.

*Do you remember your first communion
and the impression it made on you?*

The priest of Cuvilly, Father Dangicourt, allowed little Julie to make her First Communion at the age of nine because he saw that she was ready. And the result? Her love of the good God grew: love for the Father, love for Jesus present in the Eucharist, present within her and in the hearts of others, and love for the Spirit who guided her. She continued her loving care of all around her. In 1764, on being confirmed, her love and commitment grew deeper still.



Do you need to work, as she did, in order to live?

There was a robbery in the town, in the shop of Mr. Billiard who lost almost everything. Julie lost no time. At the age of sixteen she began to work as a field laborer. On her free days she would walk or go on horseback to other towns in order to sell the merchandise that escaped being stolen.

Have you ever been so scared that it made you sick?

One afternoon, when Julie and her father were at home, they heard a shot being fired through the window. Her father was not hurt but Julie fell sick as a result of the shock and distress caused by the incident. Later on she became paralyzed. Finally, in 1782, a badly performed bloodletting left her completely crippled. She was only 31 years old.



Does suffering bring you closer to God or away from him?

Julie's illness continued. She spent months in bed. At times she was unable to speak, but her friendship with God grew and deepened. God came closer and Julie



Could you make greater use of your qualities and talents?

Her religious family inherited from Julie her pioneering spirit, her energy and love of order; her common sense and great sense of humor; and above all, her yearning and searching for God in prayer and action, through her educational charism, especially among the poor.

"Thy kingdom come". Lk. 11.2

At the death of Julie her great friend, Françoise Blin de Bourdon or Mother St. Joseph, remained at the head of the Institute which 12 years after its founding already numbered 8 foundations in full activity and 80 religious. In 1840, the Sisters of Notre Dame were called to the United States, to England in 1845, to Guatemala (1859-1875), to the Belgian Congo in 1894 and to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1895.

In the 20th century more foundations followed: South Africa in 1907, Japan in 1924 and China (1929-1949), Italy in 1931 and Hawaii in 1946. Significantly for Notre Dame, the Sisters returned to France, the land of Julie and Frances, in 1953. The foundations of the 60's and later bear witness to their preferential option for the poor: Brazil, Nigeria, Kenya, Peru, Mexico and Nicaragua.

The aim of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur has always been to educate children and young people—developing their natural and spiritual potential. Since the Second Vatican Council, they have broadened this service and participate in the evangelizing and pastoral mission of the Church through a diversity of ministries.

GOD SHUTS A DOOR AND OPENS A WINDOW.

Have you ever experienced this?

Suddenly, the shadow of the cross fell over Julie and her work, the result of lies, calumny and intrigue. Julie then remembered the words that she had heard at Compiègne. The Bishop of Amiens had misunderstood the true nature of Julie's group and in 1809 asked the co-foundresses to leave his diocese. Julie, Françoise and the majority of the Sisters accepted the kind invitation of Most Reverend Pisani de la Gaude, Bishop of Namur, to come to his diocese where, from then on, the Motherhouse has resided. For that reason the Sisters bear the title of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.



"My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord..."

Lk 1:46-47.

Julie died as she had lived: dedicated, content, loving and singing like Mary—*"My soul magnifies the Lord"* who is so good, faithful, powerful, and whose limitless mercy extends above all to the humble and the poor, throughout the centuries.

Julie Billiart surrendered her spirit to God on 8th of April, 1816.



responded; she reached a very high level of friendship and union with God. She prayed for all and instructed people whenever she could.

Have you ever suffered through violence?



In 1789 the French Revolution broke out. Julie had the reputation of being a spiritual leader—reason enough for the Revolutionary forces to wish to capture her and burn her alive. Her friends helped her to escape at the bottom of a cart covered with hay. Felicité, her niece, went with her. That happened in 1791.



Have you ever felt abandoned and then been helped by kind-hearted people?

When Julie and her companion arrived at Compiègne, her drivers, for fear of being persecuted too, abandoned them in a courtyard. Kind-hearted people gave them shelter, but only for short periods because it was so risky. Julie escaped being captured five times.

Paradoxically, during these years of helplessness, insecurity and illness, God revealed to Julie her future life's work. Julie had a vision of a large, luminous crucifix, surrounded by a multitude of women wearing an unfamiliar habit. Julie heard these words: "These are the daughters I will give you in an Institute marked with my cross." This experience took place in Compiègne on Good Friday 1793 while Julie was alone in her room.



"In You, my God, I trust."

Ps. 25:1.

What is the "test" of a true friend?

At the end of the Reign of Terror in 1794, a friend, the Countess Baudoin, obtained housing for Julie and Felicité in the mansion of the Blin family in Amiens. Slowly, the members of the family who had been saved from prison and the guillotine began to reunite. It was where Françoise Blin de Bourdon came home after months of imprisonment. And so it was that according to God's plan, they met for the first time: Julie, the "Saint" of Cuvilly, a poor peasant woman who was paralyzed, almost mute, and Françoise, a rich, gifted aristocrat—noble in mind and heart, who was also a great friend of God.



Father Enfantin, a friend of Father Varin and Julie's retreat director, decided to ask God to cure Julie. He began a novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and asked Julie to pray for a "certain person." Without knowing it, Julie was praying for herself! On June 10, 1804, she was cured miraculously. Jesus had done what was needed for the work to begin in full.



"For man it is impossible; but for God all things are possible."

Mt. 19:26.



Totally restored, with surprising vigor and energy, Julie, together with Françoise and a few Sisters, began the work of re-Christianization through education. Free schools for poor young girls were started in France and later in Belgium. On February 2, 1806, God revealed to Julie that her Sisters would not remain only there but that they would go throughout the world carrying the light of Christ.

"You are the light of the world." *Mt. 5:14.*

In 1806 the group consisted of 18 members. The imperial Decree granted by Napoleon gave them the authorization to accept new members and to teach the poor gratuitously. History shows that by 1807 there existed the first Notre Dame School for girls with evening classes for adults, as well as other establishments in various cities of France and Belgium.



*Notre Dame
Our Lady*

Mother of the poor, Mother of the afflicted, we pray to you for our suffering brothers and sisters.

The first group had chosen the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, as their patroness: "Our Lady". Now, on making their first vows, the first Sisters confirmed their love and devotion to Our Lady taking the name of Sisters of Notre Dame; they received a provisional Rule of Life and in the following year episcopal approval. That same year, Father Varin, with the help of Françoise, began the training of teachers.

Do you share what you are and what you have?

Julie and her Sisters participated in the great mission of April-May held at the Amiens Cathedral. It was there that Julie's charism as an educator in the faith become evident. Imagine what she could accomplish if she were not paralyzed!

Friendship comes from God and to God it should return.

Julie immediately liked Françoise. However, it was only slowly and with great effort that Françoise came to appreciate the gifts of intelligence, fortitude, self-surrender, holiness and spiritual understanding that God had entrusted to Julie. There began a profound friendship among the three: God, Julie and Françoise—a friendship that neither separation, nor time, nor death could break.



GOD SENDS US MESSAGES AND MESSENGERS.

Have you ever experienced this?

Father Antoine Thomas also came to Hotel Blin. The daily Mass he celebrated in secret in Julie's small room consoled and encouraged everyone in the house. With amazement, he noticed Julie's magnetism: helpless, almost unable to speak, she had attracted to her side several young women, including Françoise, sharing with them her life of prayer and her enlightened spirituality.

"Blest are those persecuted for holiness' sake: the reign of God is theirs." Mt. 5: 10.

The Revolutionaries made several raids on the Blin's house, and persecution forced Father Thomas to flee. In 1797 Miss Doria, a young member of the group, persuaded Julie and Françoise to seek tranquility in a more secure place—her castle at Bettencourt.

Julie knew how to wait for God. Do you?

In the peace of Bettencourt Julie got better. Here, also, the townspeople felt Julie's mysterious attraction. Together, Julie and Françoise began to re-christianize the people who, until their arrival, had been abandoned by the clergy.



*Your ways, O Lord, make known to me,
teach me your paths. . . .* Ps. 25:4.

Another very important figure in God's plan arrived at Bettencourt: Joseph Varin, a former soldier, now a priest and one of the Fathers of the Faith. His friend, Father Thomas introduced Julie to him. Upon realizing her astonishing gifts of prayer, spiritual discernment and knowledge of divine things, he was inspired to see the key role that Julie could play in religious education in France. But, how? Through an Institute of women consecrated to God whose apostolic love would be enkindled in the flame burning in the heart of a simple peasant woman from Cuvilly. It happened then that Françoise, the aristocrat in search of higher things, without knowing that Julie had seen her in the Vision at Compiègne, decided to dedicate the rest of her life and her extensive fortune to the education of the poor, the illiterate and the marginalized. She resolved to follow Julie, her spiritual guide. She was destined to become the co-foundress of the new Institute.

"You are the seed that must grow, You are the star that must shine. You are the yeast, the grain of salt, the torch that must light up the way." V.C.S.No. 82

The year 1803 saw a small group established in a modest house on the Rue Nueve in Amiens—the cradle of the Congregation of Notre Dame. The churches in France were once again open. There was freedom of worship. Father Varin told Julie and Françoise that the hour had come for them to look for co-workers, "those spiritual daughters" promised in the Vision at Compiègne.

*"It was not
you who chose me
it was I
who chose you
to go forth
and bear fruit."*

Jn. 15:16.



It was in Amiens, in the modest house on the Rue Nueve, that the Sisters of Notre Dame assumed the spiritual traits—simplicity, obedience, and charity which were to characterize them wherever the Sisters went in the future.

It was there, in 1803, that Julie and Françoise publicly consecrated their lives to the work of education of poor children and to the training of teachers.

It was there that they received their first postulants and on the 2nd of February in 1804 the foundresses and their first novice pronounced their first vows.