

FAITH

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The most visible evidence of Sim's transformation hangs on the walls of the dining room in the north side Indianapolis home where she lives with her husband, Charles, and their two dogs. The walls are graced with a series of paintings of the Blessed Mother that Sim has created—a collection she calls "I See Her Everywhere."

That artwork—and the sale of note cards and Christmas cards depicting those scenes—has now become her focus after 32 years as a teacher in high school and college.

"I took a leave without pay from IUPUI [Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis] last January," Sim says as she sits at the dining room table. "I was just extremely exhausted. My intention was to finish the book I'm writing about my trip to Ireland. I was completely blocked. One night, I was sitting in my living room, and I was thinking of a photograph of my grandmother holding me in her lap. As I thought of it, I thought of the Blessed Mother holding me, and that she has been holding me my whole life.

"My first thought was to paint that. I hadn't painted in 10 years, but I knew I wanted to paint again. To me, it's a visual form of prayer. All the paintings have come from a moment of tenderness and closeness that I feel with the Blessed Mother. I pray before I start every day. I always ask her to show me the face that she wants revealed."

A longing for a deeper peace

Part of Sim's revelation is that she has been called to be a Catholic. It's a destiny that has been a lifetime in the making for the 55-year-old mother of two grown daughters.

"I grew up as half Catholic," she says. "I had a Catholic father and a Protestant mother. I think my father was traumatized by his experiences in World War II. He left my religious upbringing to my mother so I was in the Protestant Church. But there was always that Catholic influence in the family as I was growing up. I remember as a very small child playing 'nun.' I would kneel at my bedside and pretend I was praying the rosary. I wanted that connection."

Her connection with her family was damaged about 20 years ago in a situation that Sim prefers not to share. When that same situation caused her to seek help from Christian Churches, she felt rebuffed and abandoned. So she turned to the Jewish faith.

"I couldn't be without a faith community," she recalls. "I had a lot of Jewish friends. I was always attracted to the vitality and warmth of the Jewish community. For a long time, it was a good fit. I found a place where

I could heal and serve. I don't regret having done it."

Still, touches of Christianity stayed in her life.

"There was a part of me that I could never turn off," she says. "I passed a traffic accident and made the sign of the cross. I went to a store and bought a rosary. There became a longing more and more for a deeper peace."

The breakthrough came after the death of her mother when she visited Ireland a month later with one of her daughters.

"As someone of Catholic Irish ancestry, I came home and said, 'Who am I kidding? It's in my DNA.'"

Baptized as a Protestant, Sim wanted to become a member of the Catholic faith. She began taking Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults classes at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Indianapolis through the help of a longtime friend, St. Thomas Aquinas parishioner Wanda Strange of Indianapolis.

"She was confirmed in our church," Strange says. "She's such a strong person. When she embraces something, she does it wholeheartedly."

Sim's connection with the Blessed Mother also brought her closer to Christ.

"I think of her relationship with him," she says. "And that led me to be drawn into relationship with him. I really think she has brought me to a place where I think I can have a full appreciation for the role of Christ in my life."

A tribute to two mothers

One of Sim's favorite paintings depicts Mary pregnant with Jesus, a painting she titled "The Ark of the New Covenant."

"I just wanted to express the humanity of the situation," she says. "This is a marriage of God and humans."

Her own marriage has also been touched by her return to Christianity. Her husband, Charles, is a member of the Jewish faith. They were married in a Jewish ceremony, a ceremony in which her additions of Irish songs and Irish blessings made the rabbi smile. Making the choice to become a Catholic added another element to their marriage.

"The hardest part was negotiating it with my husband," she says. "Once he saw the change in me for the better, he couldn't have been more supportive. I couldn't have done any of this without him. He's my biggest fan."

That support is at the heart of their marriage, Charles Sim says.

"I know [becoming Catholic] is something she thought about a great deal before she made her decision," he says. "I saw this was a very important change for her in her life, particularly after the death of her mother. I'm very impressed by her commitment to the work she's doing. She sees it as very important in recognizing the role of Mary in the Catholic religion."

Painting by Kate Duffy Sim



Submitter photo



Above, Kate Duffy Sim's painting of Mary and the baby Jesus reflects the artist's devotion to the Blessed Mother—a devotion that led her to become a Catholic.

Left, as a tribute to her late mother, artist Kate Duffy Sim plans to showcase some of her mom's artwork on the website, www.mymothersgrace.com. Before she died at 89 in 2009, Rose Marie Duffy, right, Sim's mother, poses with Sim's daughter, Sharon Grinnell.

Charles Sim also suggested that his wife give part of her earnings from the sales of her note cards and Christmas cards to a charitable cause. She has decided to donate 10 percent of her sales to Catholic Charities USA.

"I consider him to be my moral compass," Sim says about her husband. "It just seems sort of hypocritical to present her image and not do her work."

While Sim has deepened her faith, she has also developed a better appreciation of the woman who gave her life. She believes her mother would embrace the changes she has

made and notice the grace that has filled her since those changes.

As a tribute to her late mother, Rose Marie Duffy, Sim plans to showcase some of her mom's artwork on her website, www.mymothersgrace.com. The website will soon honor both the Blessed Mother and her biological mother.

"I do feel that I now have both my mothers' blessings," Sim says. "It shows the fact that there is no perfect human parent. If you want a perfect parent, you have to look higher up." †