## Interview with Sister Jancy and Sister Tresa Jose

## Interview by Polly Sonifer

## Interviewed on January 21, 1995 at St. Thereses Parish in Deephaven

PS: Polly Sonifer

STJ: Sister Tresa Jose

**SJ:** Sister Jancy

PS: Good morning. How are you today?

Both: Good.

PS: First of all, can you each take a turn telling me what part of India you are from?

**SJ:** I am from Kerala, the southwest part of India. My birthplace is Kalloorkad, near Muvattupuzha.

PS: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

SJ: I have two sisters, and no brothers.

PS: And what type of work did your parents do?

SJ: My parents were doing agriculture.

PS: And Sister Tresa Jose?

**STJ:** I, too, come from Kerala, southern tip of India. I am from a large family; I have five brothers and two sisters. My parents are still living. They were also in agriculture.

**PS:** I am going to assume, that because you both became nuns, that your parents were Catholic?

Both: Yes.

**PS:** How is it that you each chose to become sisters?

STJ: I went to my home parish school, and from first grade on, I had Franciscan sisters teaching me. From childhood on, I was very close to the sisters, because the convent was next to my house. My parents and my family were always close to the church and the convent. I always was attracted

to the life of the sisters because they were all good teachers for me. That attraction remained with me after high school. I decided to become one of the sisters of the same community; Franciscan Clarist Congregation.

**PS:** So, you were finished with high school before you made that decision?

STJ: Yes.

PS: How did your family feel about that decision?

STJ: Well, they were okay with letting me go, except they thought I was a little too young. During the first two years, I was living next door to my house, it was okay because I was not too far away. They said okay to me, mainly because I was not going to go too far. Going to America was another question for them.

**PS:** We'll get to that later. Sister Jancy, how was it for you?

SJ: I came from a family very strong faith in God. I think I got the vocation from my family. I studied in a convent school. Sisters taught me grades 1 - 11. Their Christian living was a real good example for me. I wanted to use my life to do service for other people. All through gradeschool and high school, I thought about going to join the religious community. I studied with the Carmalite Sisters. I didn't choose to go to that congregation. Instead I joined the Franciscan Clarist congregation.

PS: Will each of you tell me how you decided to come to Minnesota?

**SJ:** I was asked if I would go and do the work in Minnesota by my superiors?

PS: How old were you at the time?

**SJ:** I was 24. I was in my final year in college finishing my BA. I finished my studies there and came over here in June 1970.

**PS:** What went through your mind when you thought about that choice?

**SJ:** I knew it was going to be difficult. I would learn a new culture, and new people. I thought it would be a good experience for me to venture it. So, I came.

**PS:** Were you scared?

SJ: At first I was scared all the way through.

PS: Did you come by yourself or did you travel with others?

**SJ:** I came with Sister Tresa Margaret. She is working now in Vermilion, Minnesota.

**PS:** Sister Tresa Jose, how did you happen to come to Minnesota?

**STJ:** After my formally becoming a sister, I did my studies and I had my teaching degree from college. After finishing my education, my superiors asked me to go to Minnesota. They gave me some time to think about it.

PS: How long?

STJ: A couple of days.

PS: A couple of days! (laughter)

STJ: I did think about it, and I went back to my superiors and said, "I will go." I didn't have the amount of fear the other two had because they were the pioneers. I knew it would be hard, but there were two others who had gone ahead of me. I was traveling with two others; Sister Mary and Sister Ritty. Three of us were going to join the two who were already here.

PS: So, you didn't feel as scared. What years did you come?

STJ: 1972, October.

**sJ:** 1970, June.

**PS:** So, you were here for two years before anyone else joined you.

SJ: Yes.

STJ: At that point I had some strong opposition from my siblings and parents. They didn't want me to go that far away. At that time for Sisters and Priests, going to Europe or America was not really a great thing to do. It was not really appreciated by Indian people. So, that added to the concerns of my sisters and parents. They talked to my superiors about trying to get me out of this situation.

**PS:** How are they now?

**STJ:** They are okay now. They were not angry, really. I think they were more scared.

**PS:** Why do you suppose your superiors in India wanted you to come here?

SJ: We came to Minnesota to this particular place with the invitation of the parish priest. Servants of Mary were serving in this parish. They had told the parish priest that they would be leaving the parish school. Father Janski, who was the parish priest, wanted to get sisters from another community from this country. But, he wasn't able to get anybody. So, he contacted our community in India. Our community sent two of us first. They asked for four sisters, but they decided to just sent two first. That's the way we came over here.

PS: How was it that Father Janski had a connection in India with your community?

**SJ:** Father Janski met a priest from India, and his sister is a Sister in our community. That's the connection.

PS: And she was there in India?

**SJ:** Yes. The priest from India, Father Thomas, and Father Janski knew each other.

PS: When you came, what kind of a visa did you come on?

SJ: I came on religious visa, as a working missionary.

**STJ:** Mine was the same. It was changed to a permanent visa within months.

PS: Obviously, the parish here sponsored you?

Both: Yes.

**PS:** And how did you travel to get here? By airplane or boat?

SJ: I came from India by plane.

PS: How was that? Had you ever been in a airplane before?

SJ: No, it was the first time I was flying in a plane. I had seen planes, but I'd never flown one. (laughter) It was also a unique experience for us to come to Minneapolis. It was the very first time a 747 flew to Minneapolis. And we were on that plane. We were grounded in New York for two hours because they had engine trouble. The plane got late here and the people from the parish called Father Janski and the principal, Louis Doering, and a couple teachers, and a parishioner, Martha Bishop (she was a teacher in school) plus Marianne and Tom Calhoun, parishioners, were also at the airport waiting for us to arrive.

PS: What was it like when you walked off the airplane and saw all these people? You didn't know any of them, right?

SJ: No. We had tears; we were quite happy to meet them. We thought Father Thomas would be there, but he got sick that particular day, and he was in the hospital, so he couldn't come to the airport. It was scary, but we were also so happy to see these people. The only way we could identify anybody was a picture we had of Father Janski so we could recognize his face.

**PS:** Sister Tresa Jose?

STJ: I traveled with Sister Mary and Sister Ritty, so there were three of us. We were supposed to arrive in Minneapolis in the evening. Sister Jancy and Tresa Margret were supposed to meet us at the airport. The plane got delayed again. In those days, it was very common, especially on Air India. (laughter) So, we arrived in early morning. We knew they probably wouldn't be there, because we were very late. We got out of the plane and did everything we were supposed to do. We had the telephone number and called; they were sound asleep. They got out of the bed and came to the airport, so we got here. Again, because the other two were here, it was not so hard. It didn't feel like home right away, but we knew there were two more, so it would be okay.

**PS:** Were there any language barrier or other problems when you first came?

SJ: In a way, yes. We knew British English, and we spoke that. But here, it was American English. It was hard for us to understand the accent. Everybody had to speak slow. The only person we were able to understand very clearly was Father Janski, because he spoke very slowly and clearly. We didn't have any trouble understanding him. Everyone else said that we were speaking too fast.

**STJ:** In my four years of college, I was very much exposed to English. I could speak English, and I had been exposed to some foreigners, so the language was not really a big problem for me. Of course, the slang and the American pronunciation were hard. But, in a short time, it was fine.

PS: Did you find that when the four of you were together, did you end up speaking your mother tongue with each other?

**SJ:** Yes! Even now! (laughter)

STJ: It is really a combination of English and Malayalam.

PS: So, your mother tongue is Malayalam?

Both: Yes.

**PS:** I can see how you are living here, but why don't you describe for the tape how you situation is here?

SJ: All of us live here together. We do our work together. We go to school together. We pray together.

**PS:** So, just the four of you live in this house, and it is owned by the parish?

Both: Yes.

PS: Tell me about the work you do at the school?

**SJ:** I teach Kindergarten through 8th grade. I teach computer, in charge of the learning center, and assistant principal. I was teaching fifth grade for about 15 years.

STJ: I teach 6, 7 and 8 grade; Social Studies and Religion

for all these 22 years. Initially, the first couple of years, it was not that easy. I had to get used to a new method and a new everything. But, now I really enjoy teaching. The kids are pretty good. People might think that teenagers are a great challenge. And, they are challenging, but they are also enjoyable. Especially, I enjoy the two subjects that I teach. For your information, the sisters community is like a family; we have shared responsibilities and share times of prayer and work. We are like a family.

PS: And the name of the school here is?

STJ: St. Therese, Deephaven.

**PS:** And this is a private, Catholic parochial school. (both nodded)

And how many students are there at the school?

**SJ:** Now there are 175. Next year it will increase because we are starting a pre-school program. So, there will be more kids.

PS: Which parish is this?

SJ: St. Therese Parish. It has about 1,400 families in this parish.

PS: And how many teachers are at the school?

SJ: Fifteen teachers all together, including the principal.

**PS:** All of you have bachelor's degree in teaching from India?

**SJ:** Three of us have bachelor's degree, and one has a master's degree in chemistry from India.

**PS:** Was there any difficulty with having your teaching credential recognized here?

**SJ:** When we first came, we went to St. Thomas College during the summers, and took our Master's degrees in teaching. So, now all of us are holding two graduate degrees in two areas.

STJ: In the early years, it was not absolutely necessary

that we should have teaching certificate to teach in a private school. Within three or four summers, we got our Master's in Education, and then it was easy to get our Minnesota teaching certificate. So, now we all hold a teaching certificate. St. Thomas has been really good to us.

PS: In what way?

**STJ:** In every way; the quality of education and also financially. We were able to get some scholarships, otherwise it would be impossible to do such studies.

**PS:** The next section is about Indian associations. Have you been part of any Indian associations?

SJ: No, we haven't, except for the Malayali groups.

STJ: The Malayali groups have Indian celebrations. We have three special gatherings during the year. Christmas, Onum (which is a special Kerala celebration) and there is also a summer picnic. Christmas we always attend. Onum, which is sort of like Thanksgiving, we sometimes go to. It is a major celebration in Kerala. We used to go, but it's a long way to go from a Western suburb. But, in the summer, we try to go to the picnic. It's a fun gathering, and we do meet lots of people. Years ago, we used to know almost everybody, but now the numbers have increased so rapidly. There are so many we never met, or we don't know. Last Christmas, there were 300 people, I thought.

PS: How many were there when you first came in the Malayalam community?

**SJ:** The first Christmas we got together, there were two families and us; so that was seven or eight people! (laughter) So, we were the first Indian group in 1970!

PS: Now, there are 400?

**STJ:** Well, at least 300 including the children. There were lots of children because there were so many young people with young children.

PS: So, you've seen a lot more people coming from India.

SJ: Yes, especially the last two or three years.

STJ: It is amazing.

PS: Why do you think that is?

**STJ:** People are seeking for better living opportunities. Also, when there are family members here, they try their best to bring the rest of the family or some of their siblings.

**PS:** Have you brought any of your siblings here or have any of them come for visits?

SJ: No. They haven't.

**STJ:** One of the sisters, Sister Annucia, here has siblings in New York, but they came here on their own.

PS: Do you belong to any professional associations?

STJ: Yes, the Teacher's Association.

PS: Do you go to the meetings or gatherings?

**SJ:** Yes. We do. There are meetings twice a year to which we go.

PS: Do they hold conferences or other gatherings?

**STJ:** Mostly, its the arch-diocese that has the meetings. We are not in the Minnesota teachers association which is for public school teachers; we are in another group that is just for Catholic school teachers. Catholic school teachers usually attend such conferences.

**SJ:** We are members of the national teachers association which is connected with the Catholic schools. (NCA)

**PS:** Is that helpful?

SJ: Yes. it is. We get lots of ideas and lots of articles to read.

**PS:** Can you spend a little time reflecting for me how your life is different here than if you have stayed in India?

SJ: One thing I notice is different here is that we have to

do a lot of housework. We have these added responsibilities here. In India, I would be going to school and working; I would not have to take care of the household needs. Either there would be other sisters who did the work, or somebody who is paid to help with that work. Here we go to school and come back and do cooking, washing, and shopping. It is different.

STJ: Teaching is more of a challenge here. The students keep you on your toes. You have to be really, really prepared to meet their needs and be most up-to-date in science and technology. Perhaps it is changed now, but when I was in India, mostly we used a textbook, and the kids are eager to learn. The parents involved a lot more than many of the parents here. Education is the number one priority for our children in India. So, the parents do spend time day after day making sure they do their homework. Here, not all the parents are really involved with their children's education, which means the teacher has more to do. We have to push them and somehow motivate them. For our students here, at least until gradeschool is over and they are in high school, education does not seem to be the priority for lots of kids. There are some. So, I need to be really pushing them, and finding ways to be sure they are completing their school work.

**PS:** Do you make sure the children have homework every night?

**STJ:** We do. Just this week, one of our teachers whose daughter is in public school told me that her daughter had not homework the whole week; and her daughter is an eighth grader. She was kind of upset with that. I can't imagine an eighth grader not having any homework for a whole week!

SJ: Its very different in India.

PS: Did either of you ever teach in India?

STJ: I had just finished my teaching certificate, so I did not teach.

**SJ:** No, I didn't teach, but I did my teaching practice in Indian schools.

**PS:** If I ask you to compare the difference in working styles between India and America, could you do that?

**SJ:** I cannot do that, because the only teaching I have done is here! (laughter). I know the American way of teaching and not the Indian way.

PS: How did you figure out how to teach here? Were there people in the school who were helpful to you in learning that?

STJ: The first principal we had, who actually worked with Father Janski in the process of bringing the sisters. He was Louis Doering. He was a tremendous amount of help for me. He supported us, and understood and accepted us and just stuck through it to help make us the people we are today. He was here for 12 years, and he was very good. He lives in St. Paul now. Because of health problems, he had to retire from education; he had a heart attack. So, he is the one I really appreciate a lot for helping me. Especially during the first couple of years, if I didn't have that kind of support and caring, I don't think I would have continued here because it was very different and hard. The other teachers we had were also very supportive and accepting and understanding of people from different cultures.

PS: Did you ever think about going back to India? Did you ever feel, "This is just too hard! I can't do it!"

**STJ:** I thought about it. (laughter) Not lately, but the first few years I had thought about it.

PS: If you have decided you wanted to go back to India, would that have been a choice for you?

STIT: Oh. ves.

Ps: What made you stay? What made you stick with it?

STJ: I felt that this was something that God was asking me to do. I believe that God speaks to me through my superiors, and my superiors asked me to come here. So no matter how things were, there is a reason for everything. So, I tried my best to continue, and I did. I'm glad I did.

**PS:** How about you, Sister Jancy? Did you ever have the feeling that you wanted to leave?

SJ: Not in the teaching sense from school; things were going okay for me. I missed my home and the people. I wished I were in India the first two years. But after the other three sisters came, it was like a community, and we were okay. I had alot of homesick at first.

PS: How did you keep in touch with family those first two years?

SJ: By letters.

**PS:** Have any of your family ever come over here to visit you?

SJ: No. Its easier for us to go there and visit everybody than for one or two of them to come over here and visit us.

PS: How many times have you gone home to visit?

STJ: We go home now once every three years; so, once in three years we spend the whole summer in India. We rotate who goes back each summer. At first, it was every four years. Its something that we look forward to and it is very good. The third year is always exciting because we start to count the months, and then weeks and then days! (laughter) I'm counting months now!

PS: Are you going this summer?

STJ: Yes. This summer.

SJ: I want to go back to who helped you when you first came. When we first came, we were here for only two days, and then we went to a community called Sisters of Notre Dame in Mankato. That's where they have their mother house. We were with the sisters there for two months going to summer school to learn the way of teaching and how kids here learn and American methods of teaching. Really, those sisters were wonderful. They helped us in many ways. We were with a big group of sisters and we were forced to learn American style, and American English and we really picked up everything in two months. It was really helpful for us to come to school here in September and start teaching and be with everybody. So, I cannot forget the help of those sisters.

PS: So, you were well-prepared, or at least as well

prepared as anyone can be in that new situation?

- **SJ:** Yes. People were great. They were helping us here in the church; they understood that we were coming from another culture was going to be different; we needed a different type of help and they were good at giving that.
- PS: When you came, did you move directly into this house?
- SJ: No, Sister Tresa Margret and I came first. We were living in a small house next to the church. We moved to this house in 1970. At that time, the church was being built, and they hoped to finish it by August, but they didn't finish until Christmas, so we had to be in the other house. This building used to be the priest's rectory. When they finished the new building, the priest moved to that one, and we moved out to this house.
- PS: I assume that most of the people with whom you have regular contact here in the United States are part of the parish of St. Therese. When you go out into the larger community, for grocery shopping or whatever, how does that feel? Do you ever experience prejudice or do people make comments? What is that like for you?
- STJ: I've never felt any prejudice. People, at a conference or any kind of gathering or even out shopping, sometimes look at us because of our outfit (refers to her gray habit and black veil.) Especially children think we look different. Lots of time, they make interesting comments. We have heard children tell their moms, "Hey, look -- there is God! There is Mary!" From older people, I have experienced nothing but respect and acceptance. I have felt no discrimination.
- **SJ:** We do visit nursing homes and people from all denominations and age groups are there. They all welcome us as sisters. I think they just look at us as sisters.
- **PS:** The fact that you are from India doesn't make any impression at all?
- **SJ:** Sometimes they asked, "Where are you from?" They are curious to know.
- PS: Then, of course, you tell them. How do they respond?

**STJ:** A typical response is, "How do you come to be here?" That gives us an opportunity to give a brief history of how we happen to be here. They are fascinated or amazed or surprised.

**SJ:** Some people are surprised to see that we are here from India. People often go from here to India as missionaries. So, that's different. We thought, we go as missionaries to here.

STJ: When we talk to elderly people and tell them we are from India and we teach in a school, they automatically think that we teach children from India. Some people just can't imagine Sisters from India coming to teach in a typical American school. And, yet we haven't sensed any prejudice or anything like that.

**PS:** So, you yourself don't feel strange or unusual, so people don't respond to you in that way? I must admit that I was fascinated when I heard about what you are doing here. (laughter)

STJ: Lots of people are. Going back to how we found our work here, Sister Jancy did mention briefly that besides teaching, when people from our Parish or those who are sick or hospitalized or in a nursing home, we try to visit them as much as we can. I have to say we don't do as much as we should, but we do try our best to visit. We get in touch with them and let them know we are thinking of them and praying for them. So, besides teaching, that is something that we like to do and try to do. We also help with the Sunday School.

PS: Are you teaching in the Sunday School?

Both: Teaching. Yes.

PS: Right now, there are four people living in the house. Please tell me all of their names.

sty: Sister Mary and Sister Annucia. In 1982, Sister Noel and Sister Annuncia came from India, and then Sister Noel and Sister Tresa Margret moved to South Dakota. They lived there and worked in a parish. Sister Annuncia stayed here. Just this year, Sisters Tresa Margret and Noel moved back to Minnesota to Vermilion. So, there are four here at our house, and two in Vermilion. When Sister Mary and I came,

we had another sister with us, Sister Ritty. She went back to India in 1979 because of her health problems.

**PS:** How do you divide up the tasks here in your house? Do you take turns with cooking and driving and cleaning and shoveling the snow?

**SJ:** (laughter) We don't have to shovel the snow! That's one good thing about living here; we are living in the parish compound, so they do around and shovel the snow. That's one good thing!

PS: Would they come to my house? (laughter)

SJ: We'll ask them (laughter). We take turns with other tasks; Monday is my cooking day. Tuesday is Tresa Jose, Wednesday is Sister Mary, Thursday is Sister Annuncia, and Friday we all help each other. Saturday and Sunday we help each other too. Its easy for us if we know what we have to do in the house. We can plan. Sometimes we have meetings or need to stay after school for events. So, we each help each other.

PS: You also share the cleaning?

STJ: We share the cleaning. Saturday is our cleaning and laundry day. Sunday is pretty much church day and we do some planning work for the week. Sometime we go out to visits friends or invite friends over and spend time with them.

**PS:** Do you all drive the car?

**STJ:** I don't. Most of the driving is done by Sister Jancy and Sister Mary. They are good drivers. If there are two drivers in a family, that is enough. For some strange reason, I am not comfortable driving.

**PS:** How was it when you were learning to drive? I assume you didn't know how to drive in India?

**SJ:** No, I didn't know back in India. I learned it in the first year; slowly.

PS: How was it?

**SJ:** My first driving experience, you really want to know?

(laughter) The very first day I can remember, Father Janski took us on the playground. School buses were coming and construction was going on. He said, "Go ahead and try." I was pretty scared. But we did take the driving instruction from a driving school. He came here and took us around on Saturdays, and we also learned from a driving instructor.

PS: Did that feel like a really big thing to you, or was it something you just took in stride?

**SJ:** Well, we knew that we had to learn it. In the house, we were the only ones. If we want to go anyplace, we had to learn. Also, being teachers, we had to drive to get to workshops or school meetings. Its part of life. You really cannot depend on other people always.

PS: Does the parish provide you with the car?

SJ: Yes, the parish does.

PS: Do you also get paid a salary for your work?

**SJ:** They call it a stipend. The arch-diocese decides what stipend the sisters and priests get, and we get the same.

PS: So, the house and car are provided for you. Do you buy your groceries from your stipend?

SJ: Yes, groceries and personal expenses.

**PS:** I'm curious whether you eat Indian food all the time or a mix?

Both: A mix.

STJ: During the school days, we usually cook American because it is easier and quicker. In the first years we did mostly American cooking. We didn't have places to buy the spices or anything that we needed. Now, we can go to Minneapolis or co-op store and get what we need. So, we do more Indian cooking than we used to do. We like both, but American is easier.

**SJ:** When we came, we had two American sisters who lived with us the very first year. The second year, we had five other American sisters who lived with us.

PS: That must have been a full house.

**SJ:** Then until 1976, we had an American sister who lived with us. Back in those days we did practically no Indian cooking.

STJ: Only after they moved away did we start doing any Indian cooking. Also, none of us really knew how to do Indian cooking.

PS: You didn't learn that as children?

**STJ:** No, we didn't. We helped our moms with cutting and chopping. In the convent, we didn't have to do cooking either. So, once we were alone, we started experimenting and cooking. Now, we do pretty good.

PS: Did you have any really terrible disasters?

**STJ:** No, we didn't. (laughter)

**SJ:** We had to go to Indian families to taste Indian food in those days. But, now we do lots and we are getting pretty good.

**PS:** Were there other Malayalam families who taught you how to cook, or how did they just let you taste their food?

**SJ:** We did ask the other Malayali women, "How do you do this?"

PS: Did that seem odd to you?

STJ: Not really. In our time, the girls actually didn't do a lot of cooking in India. They were going to school and they were studying. After school, they would start to cook, but during school we didn't do real cooking; only helping mom with cutting and cleaning. But, we didn't really do "the cooking". Nowadays, its different; girls learn at a younger age. They get good at it. But, not in our time.

**Ps:** Did your families have servants in India?

SJ: Our family had help.

**STJ:** Now my parents do have help because they are aging and they have a girl who helps.

PS: Was it unusual in Kerala to have household help?

STJ: Its quite common to have helpers. Its not because all the families are really, really rich. We come from middle class families by Kerala standards. But there are lots of poor families and they appreciate the opportunity to have work. Then, they can meet their expenses. There is a two-fold reason; it helps us and gives them a way to support their family.

**PS:** Is it almost a work of charity for you to hire a servant?

**STJ:** Exactly. In a sense, if they are not hired for work, there is no other job for them. They do seek for these opportunities to help in a house. That's common in India. If you are average or above-average family, you do have help in the kitchen or with housework.

PS: I'd like to spend some time talking about cultural values. As I've talked to other people on this oral history project, I know that there are some very strongly held Indian values that people have, and they want to make sure that their children get those values. What are the values that you want to make sure you pass to the children that are Indian values that you hold really dear?

**STJ:** Respect for parents, authorities and teachers and elders is a highly valued virtue in our society. I want children here to learn this. Also, I want them to learn the virtues of love, kindness and compassion and non-violence. Most of all the value of Christian living.

PS: Do you talk about Gandhi in your classes?

SJ: No, I don't. I don't talk about Indian culture in school, because we have a set computer curriculum.

**STJ:** I often talk about Indian culture, especially in the spring for 6, 7 and 8 graders when we have a unit on India. I do teach Indian culture, history, values and geography.

PS: How do the children respond to that?

STJ: Oh, they love it! And every year, as part of my teaching on India, I teach them a Malayalam song also.

Usually, its a church song and they get really excited and do a good job. It's never the negative stuff of "who wants to sing a song in Malayalam?" They like it, so the last few years I've been doing it. I find the children really interested in learning about other cultures.

SJ: We do want to pass on the faith that we got. We are called St. Thomas Christians. We believe that St. Thomas the apostle came to India and that's where Christianity started. We have that deep faith. Of course, India is a religious country; all religions. We respect all the religions. We want to learn family values; that's what our children need to learn.

**STJ:** One thing I teach for the 6th graders every year is about the major religions of the world. They do a project and one thing I try to instill in them is to respect all religions. Religion is a path leading us to God. You must respect all because there is good in all religions.

**PS:** Is that a Catholic notion?

STJ: Now; it didn't used to be. In the old days, until 1960's the teaching was there is no salvation outside of the Catholic church. We have come a long way. Not any more! (laughter) It's not just us who changed; its the whole Catholic church. Especially after 1965, after the second Vatican Council the church is more open. Now, it is a Catholic notion. I tell the children about growing up with the Hindu and Muslim children. My parents didn't ask if my friends were Christian, as long as they were good kids. And, they were good kids.

**PS:** Are there any other values things that you feel strongly about?

STJ: There are some cultural values that I teach the 6 - 8th graders social studies. I keep on reminding them and reinforcing the idea that all cultures are unique and special. Just because someone is doing something differently, you don't say, "That's weird." I tell them never to use the word "weird." Just say "different." Each culture had its own different values, customs, traditions and we need to learn and respect. The reason we teach them is that the more we know, the more we understand that there is good in every culture. No culture is inferior or superior. We try to teach them to respect and value all

cultures. I think it is a good opportunity for the kids that they have four teachers from other cultures. There are two factors; we are sisters and we are from another country. I believe they will learn to be more open to other cultures and people. I hope we do help them learn that value.

PS: Are the children at St. Therese's school mostly white?

**STJ:** White! We have a couple of adopted kids who are Korean. The whites are a combination of Irish, German and Polish and so on. I think we are an opportunity for them to learn about other people.

**PS:** When you go back to India to visit, do you feel like you fit right in?

SJ: During the first few times, in the first few years I was gone, India was changing too. We noticed the changes. Now we go back to India, we just fit right in. Sometimes I have to think, "Am I in India or in America? I don't see much difference."

STJ: There is no language problem in either place now. We are able to speak well both English and Malayalam.

**SJ:** I think it helps that here we are living in a religious community. When we go back there we are living in a religious community. There isn't much difference between living here or there. It helps us to fit in.

PS: So, that's the common element between the two places.

**SJ:** Our families don't notice any difference either. They say, "You are the same." My mother wanted to see me so badly the very first time; to see if there were any changes. When she saw that I was the same, she said, "Now you can go back!" (laughter)

**PS:** When you are old enough to retire, where do you think you'll settle in for the retirement years?

**STJ:** Before we retire we will go back. We don't intend to stay here permanently. We will go back.

**PS:** Is there a certain age at which you will retire? How does that get decided?

SJ: It is up to our superiors. If they ask us at any time to go back, we will. So, it is up to our superior and us and our parish. There is not any set time, but we will go back to India hopefully before retirement. I think we were here this long because of the problem of transferring us to India and another group coming, because of the visa problem.

**PS:** Would it be hard for them to bring any other sisters over here?

SJ: Yes, to get a visa is very difficult.

PS: Are you US citizens now?

**SJ:** No, we are permanent residents. Because we know we will be going back to India, there is no reason to change citizenship.

PS: When you go back to India to retire, will you live in the convent or with your families?

**STJ:** Convent. Sisters live in the convent; convent is the family. But where, we wouldn't know.

**PS:** So, they will just assign you someplace. It might not even be in Kerala?

STJ: We want to be in Kerala. We can choose.

**SJ:** Home is home; we cannot replace it. (laughter)

PS: That's right. What would you like to do with your time when you retire?

**SJ:** I'll be doing convent work. I'll be doing crafts or art, praying. I hope to be spending more time in prayer.

STJ: We may also help with teaching students English. They are always looking for people who can teach English. I would like to do that.

**PS:** This is the last question here; are there any other things that you want to talk about that I haven't asked you about yet? Any thing you think would be important to share with those who will read this history?

STJ: I know it has been a really good, enriching growth

experience for all of us. First of all, being exposed to a different culture and different way of life. The education we received is good. I'm really glad that I took the challenge of coming to America. We do miss home, but the fact that we go home every three years is really good. The anticipation of going home every three years has been really exciting.

PS: How long do you stay when you go back?

STJ: The whole summer; two and one half months.

**SJ:** And those are really the most exciting two months we spend in our lives; those two months in India. Meeting and being with our families and meeting all our other Franciscan sisters is really exciting.

PS: When you go there, where do you stay?

STJ: Convent and home, we go back and forth. Now, the fact that our parents are aging, its getting harder saying goodbye. Especially because who knows; they are aging and getting weak as the years pass. But, as the years have passed, our parents have been accepting the fact that we are far away. It is easier for them now, because they know that we are okay. Again, we owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to St. Thereses Parish. They have been good to us. They have accepted us.

SJ: I want to quote from the Bible where it says, "When you leave your family and your friends for my sake, you will be provided for one hundred fold." I think that's what we have seen here. We left our families and friends and came here, and we have so many many families and good friends here. This is very wonderful for all of us, and we are grateful. We are able to see how God creates each of us in different places. We are all looking to that Great God.

**STJ:** We are all blessed. When we serve this parish, we are meeting their need for sisters. And the fact that we are here helps our mission in India. Kerala and Deephaven; we help each other.

**SJ:** This June we are completing 25 years of being here. We are thinking about a small celebration.

PS: That's a long time.

SJ: Yes, it is.

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