

## Reflections on the Life of Sister Lois Sculco, SC

November 12, 1938 – April 5, 2023

*Funeral Mass at Caritas Christi, April 12, 2023*



We will miss our Lois but her memory is surely our blessing.

Let us all take a deep breath, close our eyes, and remember Sister Lois Sculco.

No doubt each of us had quite a different picture memory, story. Storytelling came to have a significant meaning in Lois's life. She worked with this idea in her doctoral dissertation, "The Empowerment of African American College Women through Storytelling." And since last evening we have been trying to weave together the stories of our memories of this very dynamic, organized, inquiring, fiery, always loving woman the world knew as Sister Lois Sculco, S.C.

In November of 2010, Sister Lois sat down with Sister Marie Corona Miller, and recorded her oral history. This reflection is based on that recording.

Family and friends were important to Lois—so at the very beginning we learn that her father Judge Alexander Sculco, immigrant from Italy at age 7, married the dark, tall, beauty, Rose Condelli and settled in New Kensington. Lois along with her younger brother Tom and life-long friend Sharon enjoyed a happy childhood. The Italian parish Mount St. Peter did not have a Catholic school but her father, who always seems to have had a deep intellectual influence on her, wanted her to have a Catholic education and so Lois was sent to St. Joseph School and later attended New Kensington High School. Judge Sculco's work at the courthouse in Greensburg led to his connection with Seton Hill College, and the decision that Lois should go there. At the time Lois had only experienced Seton Hill through a visit and ride on the famous swings, but she was happy and willing to accept her father's decision.

Now as a freshman Lois became immersed in and impressed with life on "the hill," and especially the Sisters who taught them in class, ate with them in the dining room, slept with them on the same floors, and prayed with them. The Sisters had even managed to get a certain Lyn Dwyer, close friend of Lois, to enter the novitiate in her junior year.

It was early in her college experience that Lois also came to know and love Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton. That love began with an assignment in her freshman year to write a paper on why Elizabeth should be canonized. Not terribly happy about this assignment, she decided, in her words, to “take a creative approach.” Lois wrote a play that turned out to be the prize-winning paper.

Following graduation in the fall of 1960, Lois decided to enter the Sisters of Charity, and so began her teaching career, first in high schools, and then on to Seton Hill. As she expressed it, “In a sense, I never left Seton Hill, although I did teach in Pittsburgh. . . my students . . . readied me for my return to Seton Hill.” There, in 1968, she became a member of the English Department and later assistant dean of women.

While most of Lois’ years were at SHU, she was elected to the General Council of the Sisters of Charity from 1985 to 1989. While serving on the Council and living in Regina House, she celebrated her 25<sup>th</sup> jubilee as a Sister of Charity. Now if her father Judge Sculco influenced her intellectual life, it was certainly her mother Rose Condelli Sculco who inspired Lois’ flare and gift for beauty and hospitality. And for the 25<sup>th</sup> Mrs. Sculco was excited about being the mother of “the jubilarian”—so much so, that Lois remarked it was as if her mother was finally able to have a “mother of the bride experience.” But as Lois humorously accounts, things got so bad that on one of the preparation days, after the 6<sup>th</sup> call, Lois told Sr. Laverne who had answered the phone (no cell phones then) to tell her mother she had eloped.

During those years on the Council, Lois continued to be an advocate, for the Sisters individually and for Seton Hill College, but now in her position of religious leadership. When her four-year term ended she went back to the College, and this time as assistant to the new president JoAnne Boyle. In this capacity Lois brought her gifts of strong creative leadership, beginning with the hiring of the first laywoman dean of students, Dr. Charmain Strong.

Along with Sister Lois’ responsibility for student life, she also took on the administrative organizing of the newly founded National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education. Because of her strong commitment to justice issues, she became the mission effectiveness officer at Seton Hill, and in this important capacity she became known, as Dr. Mary Finger put it in her recent letter, as “the conscience” of Seton Hill.

Lois put great energy into her work, which also required that she travel—as a Councilor of the Sisters of Charity to Korea; as vice president of Seton Hill to China, Puerto Rico, twice to Italy; and because of her Holocaust teaching and administration of the Center, five times to Israel, and twice to the Concentration Camps in Poland with students in

the March of the Living. Travel involved her in interreligious dialogues, Catholic-Jewish groups and also with Muslims, and because of and through our Korean Sisters, with Buddhism and Confucianism.

“I love traveling,” Sister Lois said, “because one meets new people, is introduced to new cultures, new foods.” And this led to her commitments on the home front--to the Greensburg-Jeannette NAACP and affirmative action, the YWCA, the Blackburn Center, Community College, Project Forward, Holocaust education on the local and national level. She advocated for students if they needed financial aid or had other personal needs; she paid special attention to those who were first generation students in college, those who were different for whatever reason. She took students to Poland to the camps, and she arranged that all in her classes would meet survivors Bob Mendler, Shulamit Bastacky and Solange Leibowitz, so that they might understand the Holocaust and commit to the work of ending antisemitism, genocide, racism, bigotry.

Lois found the strength and spiritual stamina for all this in her vocation as a religious in the Church. She valued her traditional novitiate, and at the same time she was ready to commit to the changes that came with Vatican II and deeply appreciated the documents of this Council. She drew deep inspiration from the life of Elizabeth Seton, convert, married then widowed mother of five children who provided for them and for others to live in the world (not a monastery) where they were committed to serving God in that world as loyal “children of the Church.” Sister Lois carried this inspiration into all her relationships.

Despite busy schedules she was committed to community living in many different forms; she especially treasured her place with the Delmont community of Sisters Lyn Marie Dwyer, Dorothy Dolan and Susan Jenny; she was the helpful “senior” of the group of Sisters she had entered with, and always the willing hostess of the “spirit group” that included her cousin Sister Mary Arleen Squitieri.

The last words of this reflection are from her lifelong friend Monsignor John Regoli who spoke them at Lois’ 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee: “It was Sister Lois who reminded me that this is a liturgy of thanksgiving, she returns to give thanks to God, for her parents Rose and Alexander, her family Lorraine, Lisa, Loren, Jeannine and their families, her dear friends Sharon and Alice, the Sisters of Charity, the students, the alums, the faculty and staff of Seton Hill University. And we give thanks with her and for her. . . .”

We have tried to do that, and so we sing what she sang at the door of this Chapel as she struggled for words: “Amen, amen, amen, amen, amen.”

--Sister Gemma DelDuca, April 5, 2023