

Sister Carmelina Tarantino, C.P. (1937-1992)

Born on February 7, 1937 in Liveri, a small town north of Naples (Italy), Carmelina is the eighth of eleven children of a farming family. She is a beautiful girl with a lovely and lively personality. At the age of 25, she experiences her first symptoms of illness but no definite diagnosis can be given.

Between 1950 and 1960, one after the other her brothers migrate to Canada. Since her family worries about her health, her brothers decide to have her come to Canada. She arrives in Toronto on July 4, 1964, hoping to find answers to her unexplained illness. Canadian doctors suspect a rare form of cancer. She suffers through painful treatments, including the amputation of her leg and a mastectomy. Through it all, she maintains a devout life of prayer.



In 1973, Carmelina meets Fr. Claudio Piccinini, a Passionist Missionary. Recognizing value in the Mission he founded in Toronto in 1971, she joins The United Society and its Teopoli Catholic Spiritual Center in Gravenhurst (On). She chooses Piccinini as her official confessor and spiritual director from 1976 to her death. Upon his urging, she writes an extensive diary. In 1977, Carmelina reveals to Piccinini her desire to become a nun. After a request by Piccinini to the Passionist Sisters in Rome on Carmelina's behalf and with Vatican approval, she joins the Congregation of the Passionist Sisters of St. Paul of the Cross on November 26, 1977, at the hospital. A community of Passionist Sisters was later founded in Toronto in 1981. She never left her hospital bed. At Riverdale Hospital, in room 306 West, Sister Carmelina spends 23 years on her back, immobilized. She undergoes at least 23 major surgical operations.

By all accounts, Carmelina Tarantino's life was one of suffering - wounds that wouldn't heal, pain that required regular morphine - but, despite her continuing pain, she seemed joyful. As word spreads of her condition, the lineup of visitors extends well outside her door, both to visit and seek spiritual direction. She counselled thousands before her death on March 21, 1992, at age 55. People who met Sister Carmelina consider her a saint because of the manner she accepted daily suffering and for the genuine love she displayed for all people.

QUOTATION: "Oh Jesus, suffering has been my joy, the gift that allowed me to meet you. I am ready to take up all the sufferings you will ask me, out of the love I have for you.