

My PhiloSophical Vocation

Before beginning to speak to you all, a small but important disclaimer.

I have never been a Head of School, nor have I been a Principal or division head. While my duties as a mid-level administrator *did* keep me awake at night for fourteen years, and while I found myself continually second-guessing myself and my decisions, I never carried the full weight of a Sacred Heart school on my shoulders. Nor did I seek out the administrative positions I held: they simply happened to me. I am in awe of what you do and of your willingness to do it, and I salute you and hope that my presence here does not seem presumptuous.

When I was invited to speak to you of my relationship with St. Madeleine Sophie, I must confess to being more than marginally daunted. Not long after Madeleine Ortman emailed me with the invitation, I was teaching Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*—an essay on women and fiction that developed out of a pair of speeches Virginia gave in 1928. And as I reread it (for probably the 20th time, for it is a favorite of mine) it was as if Virginia were speaking directly to me of my own creative process. For I have not ceased thinking about my relationship with Sophie since that day in early December. Like Virginia as she prepared her own remarks, I have lived every moment since December 4, 2007, at least subconsciously aware of this talk. And like Virginia, for the first several months I kept asking myself exactly what the subject of this talk even meant.

My relationship with Sophie. Is it based on the self she has brought to me via my 36 years working in a Sacred Heart school? The accumulated impact of that portrait hanging on the faculty room wall, those pithy sayings I've read on the occasional prayer card, or the wisdom I've heard quoted in the occasional homily? Is it the voice I hear

whispering beneath the Goals and Criteria? Or is it the self *I* have brought to *her*, particularly in these last few years as I've actively sought her in Joigny, in the biographies and vignettes written about her, and in the letters and conferences which she wrote for others?

It is, of course, both things. Relationships always are. And in the case of my relationship with Sophie, it is a friendship constructed a bit like a spider's web: I sense her life connecting with mine in places I never dreamed existed, and proceeding from those connections into others—even less suspected, but there nonetheless. And is this not the sign of the richest relationships: a friend or a loved one who opens up places we barely realized were there? Someone who taps into our secret depths, drawing them out, illuminating them, helping us to find out who we really are? Someone who also helps us to fathom those relationships we already enjoy, whether they are personal or professional; whether they involve our contemporaries or people who lived hundreds of years ago?

And so much of what I will talk about today has to do with relationships. Mine with Sophie, ours with Sophie, ours with those people entrusted to our care at home in our various schools. For we are all in each other's care at a Sacred Heart school.

But I also want to talk a bit about coincidence. Because it is coincidence that brought me together with Sophie in the first place, as it is perhaps coincidence that first connected many of you to Sacred Heart. And as I talk about coincidence, I ask you to consider a definition that someone whispered in my ear at a retreat given at Oakwood last October: "*Coincidence is God's way of staying anonymous.*"

In 1972, I was halfway through a PhD in comparative literature at UCLA, a degree that I had to suspend (I thought temporarily) because my husband had accepted a

job on the San Francisco Peninsula. After two months of wedded bliss, the apartment was organized, I'd picked up applications for UC-Berkeley and Stanford, my husband was reveling in his new work, and I was bored to death. A local employment agency sent me to Convent of the Sacred Heart in Atherton to apply for a part-time attendance secretary position, and—coincidentally—the high school needed a French teacher for one section of French II. I had an undergraduate degree in French and teaching experience at UCLA, and Sr. Sally Rude hired me on the spot, uttering words I'll share with you later on.

And so one of the questions I would invite all of you to ponder as I weave my way through this meditation is how you came to be at Sacred Heart? What forces sent you spinning in the direction of Madeleine Sophie Barat's vision of education? What forces have made you stay there?

For though I was taking a temporary part-time job in September of 1972, I've stayed there ever since. The name of the school has changed twice; we've gone from an all-girls boarding and day school to a coed day school, complete with a football team and a men's *a cappella* group; we number well over twice as many students and faculty. But I and many of my colleagues have remained right where we are, and I would argue that it's largely because of Sophie.

Sophie said on many occasions that it is excruciatingly important to PAY ATTENTION. She didn't use that language precisely, but I think this is what she means when she speaks of the interior life or spirit. One of the bookmarks I distributed this morning features the quote: "*The essential thing is to keep interior spirit in the midst of all this fracas.*" It would seem that working at a Sacred Heart school has always

demanded much of people—more, it often seems, than we can reasonably be expected to do and do well. Because Sophie demanded, both of herself and of others, a balance between activity and contemplation, her writings and speeches are full of reminders to STOP, even if it's only for a minute, and connect with the divine. This pausing to reflect is what I mean when I say “pay attention.” Take the time to think, to ponder, to listen, to pray, to connect and to *recognize* those connections. To restore and make some sense of the fragments life's fracas has thrown into our paths.

One of the great gifts of the past three years of my career has been more time to pay attention. I began to think deeply about Sophie in the spring of 2005 when our school formed its ESCJ group. And--as reading so often does--in reading more and more about her, the pattern of my own life has become more and more clear. I've started to connect the dots, to assemble the fragments, to recognize the working of some kind of divine coincidence in my life.

As a student of French existentialism in college, I dutifully swallowed the phenomenological maxim that “reality exists in the mind of the perceiver.” On some level I still believe it, and so what I offer you today is *my* Sophie—the Sophie that my particular lens and experience allow me to share of her. And I offer it in hopes that it might add one more level of understanding to *your* Sophie, for we all have a Sophie of our own alive and well in the crevices of our minds and hearts, whether we are acutely aware of it or not.

So let me begin by saying that **my Sophie is an intellectual genius, a passionate mystic, an incurable Romantic, and a fabulously successful entrepreneur.** And while I will obviously never come *close* to her achievements or her disposition, the last three

years have allowed me to discover connections between the two of us that—while undiscovered for decades—do not surprise me as they surface, one by one, in the lake of my awakening consciousness. Her favorite books of the Bible are my own. We both love Dante. While she obviously didn't read Virginia Woolf, she surely shared Virginia's understanding of human nature and I think would have enjoyed her work as I do. She loved to knit; as I worked recently on a pair of booties for my first grandchild, scheduled to be born tomorrow, I imagined her hovering somewhere in the ether, checking my stitches and my gauge. She revered beauty and understood it to be a key element of a child's education. She loved music: one of my favorite stories involves her *bursting* into song as she strolled along the Adriatic in the moonlight. She adored children, especially the difficult ones whom she called "*les insupportables*." I have to believe that she would have delighted in my *insupportable* son. She loved and valued her sisters and other associates, preferring to think the best of them, even when they let her down—and let her down they did, and often. She reveled in laughter.

As all of you probably know, she was educated by an exacting and often merciless older brother who recognized early on that she was extraordinary. She routinely bettered the scores of his much older male students in the collège where he taught in Joigny, and she was passionate about literature. Under his tutelage she read the classics in their original languages, including Dante's *Commedia* in Italian. (She was still carrying a French translation of Dante around with her as she traveled in her sixties and once demanded that everyone in the carriage listen while she read aloud from it.)

This passion for ideas and the development of the mind stayed with her throughout her life and informed the first Plan of Studies and its subsequent revisions during her lifetime. (At one point in my reading I was amused to see that by the year

1845 her schools had to conform to rigorous standards set by the University of Paris, much as we in Atherton must knuckle under to the ever-changing requirements of the University of California.) One of my earliest Sacred Heart mentors, Sr. Marilyn McMorrow, now a professor at Georgetown, instilled in me the truth that high standards call forth high results. These high standards were *always* at the center of Sophie's thinking, and they are responsible for Sacred Heart's continuing reputation in the academic community. From the beginning, her educators wrote curriculum themselves, refusing to rely on existing approaches and always pushing to expand the known borders of the various academic disciplines. It is not surprising that both the President and the Provost of Stanford University recently selected Sacred Heart for their children's high school education.

That Sophie was able to maneuver her order and her schools through some of the most difficult and politically charged years of the 19th century owed itself in large part to her amazing mind. But it was a mind that was more than just analytical. One of her biographers, Margaret Williams, speaks of her many writings on the devotion to the Sacred Heart as follows:

She was more aware of the theological depths of the devotion than were most of those who practiced it in her time. This was due to her early readings from such primary sources—unabridged and in Latin—as the fathers of the Church and the great mystics. *It was also due to the nature of her mind, which went straight to the essences of things.* Recent scholarship has explored sources unknown to her, and has developed the theology of the devotion far beyond the point that it had then reached, but Mother Barat's grasp of it was intuitive, enlightened, and practical.

In short, the mind of one who saw well beyond her own times. A “mind which went straight to the essences of things.” The mind of a genius.

But Sophie was also aware that intellect, without the life-giving waters of faith and compassion, can shrivel and die—a Goal II talking head, rolling around aimlessly without arms, legs or torso; lacking heart or the imagination that the heart engenders in the mind; trying to figure out why it all matters.

For it was for the love of God—more specifically, for love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus—that Madeleine Sophie Barat did everything.

So **my intellectual Sophie**, the one whom my graduate student self would have looked on with *enormous* approval, was in thrall to another Sophie of whom Connie Hines would have been seriously leery.

I was raised Episcopalian, though my father took me occasionally to Roman Catholic masses, and I loved the Latin and the incense and the exotic mystery of pre-Vatican II Catholicism. (I’d also flirted around with being a nun at age 10, right after seeing Audrey Hepburn in *The Nun’s Story*.) I converted to Catholicism before marrying my Italian Catholic husband, but my conversion consisted of a series of conversations about *The Brothers Karamazov*, which I was teaching at UCLA at the time. The enlightened priest who took charge of my instruction must have guessed that a series of dogma sessions would have sent yours truly reeling out the door. My so-called conversion was thus an easy move—one that did little to disturb my apathetic stance toward organized religion. I’d pretty much stopped going to church by then, so stepping from my life as a student of existentialist philosophy into the world of Sacred Heart was a decided shift.

And yet it was my stepping into *this* world of Roman Catholicism, into the orb of *Sophie's* vision, that resuscitated my own relationship with God, though I didn't realize it at the time.

It was said by her contemporaries that Sophie Barat combined the head of Ignatius Loyola with the heart of Teresa of Avila, and indeed Sophie was intensely drawn to Teresa. As a young girl, she wanted to join the Carmelite order, and she had a side of her that was profoundly mystical, inclining at times toward ecstasy.

I invite you to consider the following images.

- 1802, the day of her final vows: the small group of religious were gathering for the ceremony, and Sophie could be found nowhere. After looking high and low, someone found her under a hazel-nut tree. Her beloved companion Sister Geneviève wrote, “She had been carried out of herself. Everything that surrounded her had disappeared from her sight. She was motionless, and we had to wait for her for some time.”

- In 1816, on one of her endless trips from foundation to foundation, the carriage was ready to leave after a brief stop, and again: no one could find Sophie. A Mother Girard, who “knew her ways,” began to beat about in the shrubbery. “There was Mother Barat on her knees, her arms stretched out, her face luminous. She had to be touched and reminded that she was still *in vita*.”

- Years later, the superior at the Villa Lante in Rome spoke of the long hours Sophie passed before the Blessed Sacrament, when she “felt herself set on fire with so great a love that she could hardly bear it or hide its ardors.”

Sophie writes endlessly about her passionate adoration of her Beloved. The language of the *Song of Songs* occurs often in her letters, and her vision of God takes a great deal from the sensual beauty of these songs. In addition, she was of course profoundly influenced by the devotion to the Sacred Heart, a devotion whose focus was God's love and compassion, and whose imagery included fire, a heart in flames. Her early life was also shadowed by the austere severity of Jansenism. But it is clear that Sophie was powerfully drawn to the Sacred Heart, and that she consistently resorted to images of fire and heat and ardor when describing her own moments of bliss and when counseling her sisters.

A far cry indeed from the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre.

In fact, I knew none of this about Sophie until many years later. But what I sensed in many of the religious and lay educators around me in the 1970s was the residual effect of this love and fire. For more than intellect was at the heart of their lesson plans and at the core of their impassioned discussions about education. The faculty meetings of those days often lasted up to two hours and featured voices as exciting and articulate as any I'd met around the seminar tables at UCLA.

Over the next twenty years, my literary enthusiasms moved along a strange trajectory, segueing from Jean-Paul Sartre across the English Channel to Virginia Woolf, taking a chronological tumble back into Greek tragedy, and finally landing somewhere in the middle of the timeline (and the map) with Dante Alighieri. Without going into intimate details of my intellectual affair with this most extraordinary man, let me simply state that he is a continuing obsession for me. The happiest months of my entire life were spent living on a hilltop in Tuscany in the year 2000, reading his *Divine Comedy* in Italian at the rate of one canto per morning, and then traveling with my husband in the

afternoon to a Dante-connected site. If I were 20 years younger, I might start a school whose curriculum would spin entirely around the *Commedia*. And surprise surprise: it would probably look a lot like a Sacred Heart school—except that everyone would have to learn Italian.

I don't remember the precise moment when it clicked. The way in which Dante's exploration of history and science, art and music, literature and theology takes its life from the heart; the way in which his image of God is grounded in the idea of endless love and often likened to heat and fire. A series of recent coincidences led me to meet a young woman at a Dante symposium at Stanford whose doctoral dissertation focuses entirely on the medieval understanding of the heart. It is my hope one day to trace a systematic connection between the heart as expressed in Dante's work (a heart that shares much with Sufi mysticism and the tradition of courtly love) and the devotion to the Sacred Heart, particularly as it was expressed by Sophie.

Which brings me back to “**my mystical Sophie.**” Sophie *got* it. Even surrounded by the restrictive coils of Jansenism and the horrifying detritus of the French Revolution's violent aftermath, she saw through to the mystical center of things, and that center was love. And this love is not one that is *earned* through a series of calculations or steps or behaviors. It is constant and selfless and generative and “passeth all human understanding.”

Another area of French literature that I enjoyed in college was the eighteenth century—the famous “Enlightenment.” And at some point, our professors forced us to choose between Rousseau and Voltaire. We couldn't, it seems, admire both. One either loved Rousseau and was thus allowed to call him Jean-Jacques; or one despised him and

clung to the wit and sparkle of his antithesis. It may not surprise you that I sided with Jean-Jacques, considered by many to be the father of French Romanticism. And I would argue that Sophie *herself* could not possibly have lived in a France that teemed with the poetry of Lamartine and the novels of Chateaubriand without being profoundly influenced by this most heart-ful movement. Margaret Williams records, in fact, that she had many of Lamartine's poems memorized.

And so of course, as I visited the vineyards at Joigny and there heard Sr. Doreen Boland's compelling stories of Sophie's love for these vineyards, I saw a young woman emotionally tied to the natural world that Rousseau and his literary descendants eulogize in their work.

There are many small episodes in Sophie's life that show her engaging in what might safely be termed a rapturous and Romantic relationship with nature.

- I have mentioned her breaking into song while walking along the edge of the Adriatic. In the same story, she picked up little stones and skipped them across the water, trying to get them to go to Greece.

- Another vignette, this one set in Rome, involves her going out onto a meadow with a group of very young children near the Trinità dei Monti to enjoy goûter among the lambs; a baby goat named Bichette would often join them and reputedly ate right from her hand.

- There is a lovely anecdote of her gathering grapes in a Roman vineyard, where she stopped to extemporize for her sisters on the parable of the vine and the branches.

- She prescribed moonlight walks for children at the school in Paris when the summer heat was oppressive.

- Much like Francis of Assisi, Sophie enjoyed unusual relationships with animals.

There's the story of a mother cat who found her way to Sophie in order to keep her new kittens from being drowned. She was successful.

- Or the story of the magpie who came to her window one day in Parma and never left. Sophie named him Gazza, and made everyone who entered her room greet him by saying "Good morning, Gazza." The bird reputedly drowned himself in a pool the day she left.

- Or the slightly more sinister story of her fixation on a waterfall in Aix-les-Bains, where she was sent for treatment of an ailing foot. Let's pause at this waterfall for a moment. In Sophie's own words:

Bordering [my] garden there is a charming waterfall that I hear murmuring all the time, then a louder noise where the waters meet, which reminds me that our days, however bad, pass as swiftly as this torrent. . . . I fall asleep to the noise of the torrent which has grown much fuller; I go to see it every day. What horror in its rushing speed, in its roaring like a furious sea! What a symbol! . . . It will pass with the rain, but in the meantime with what strength it sweeps everything before it! I shiver when I think of it, and I can hardly stand the sight of it for more than a few minutes. It turns my head, and then Sister Annette holds me firmly on the bank.

What do *these* words relay to us about Sophie? Her insistence on seeing the waterfall as symbol of life's quick passing recalls Ecclesiastes, and in fact Sophie loved this book of the Bible as well: a strange companion indeed to the Song of Songs. And why must Sister Annette hold her so firmly on the bank?

At the risk of suggesting that Sophie was prefiguring Virginia Woolf's famous suicide walk into the river Ouse, I *would* like to offer the suggestion that Sophie's powerful connection to nature allows us further access to her spirituality. Sr. Kathleen Hughes offers a wonderful definition of spirituality in the essay we all read prior to this conference. She states: "spirituality is a way of life, lived in response to the divine. It is a pattern of becoming fully who God longs for us to be. Spirituality is an experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms of self-transcendence toward the ultimate values one perceives." Sophie experienced moments of blissful ecstasy, moments when she quite literally seems to have left herself and entered into union with her Beloved. I would suggest that looking into the force of this waterfall, she was swept into its promise of oblivion—but an oblivion that was less a call to death than a call to a complete fusion of the self with the divine. She herself called it a symbol, and I ask myself what else she could possibly have meant.

While the typical Romantic poets of the 19th century distanced themselves from *organized* religion, many of them were pantheists—believers in a profound and mystical communion between themselves and Nature.

And so **my mystical Sophie** begins to merge with **my Romantic Sophie**. While researching Lamartine, I discovered that his life overlapped Sophie's almost exactly—and, like her, he was Burgundian. Being a woman of her time and place, it is not surprising that she would have found herself at home in nature, reveling in its beauties and its awe-inspiring power, seeking *meaning* in that beauty and power. And she clearly had the ability to sweep others into this awareness, enfolding them in her own rapture and extending its power to them.

I have reread three novels and several essays by Virginia Woolf over the past few months. And bringing the lens of Sophie Barat to bear on the recurring themes of Woolf's work—the terrifying fluidity of life, the craving of all humans for meaningful and lasting relationships, the reality that death will inevitably separate us all from what we love on earth—I find that, despite Woolf's repeated insistence that there is no God, her fiction is about nothing else. As I listened to Clarissa Dalloway say just the other day that the only sure and lasting connection one can forge between oneself and anything else is the “embrace” of *death*, two images came to mind: Virginia herself, as she moved toward the river with her pockets full of rocks, and Sophie, as she was held by Sister Annette at the edge of the waterfall.

Both women were supremely aware of the ephemeral quality of human life. Sophie counseled her sisters to “love to be nothing”—to empty themselves of their earthly dreams and desires and indeed of their very selves. (I like to call it “Zen Sophism.”) They were also both intensely aware of [and personally subject to] suffering. Sophie was physically frail and endured serious illness and injury throughout her life. She often spoke of suffering as a gift, a state to be welcomed. Like some Hindu saddhu or ascetic saint, she discerned the enlightenment and empathy that arise out of suffering. Many described Sophie as someone with a profound sadness in the depth of her soul. I believe it is a similar kind of sadness that Virginia gave to her characters, a sadness that resonated with her own. And while hers was a sadness far more profound than Sophie's, unrelieved by Sophie's faith and moments of transcendent bliss, there was something in her final act (*and* in Clarissa's inner monologue *and* in Mrs. Ramsay's monologue as she watches the lighthouse spin its glare into the darkness) that was redemptive. A movement *toward* something rather than *away* from it. A final recognition of the

primacy of relationships, human and otherwise. For while Virginia Woolf never accepts that there is a God, she writes often of the soul.

My point in all of this is to give witness to the complexity of Sophie's inner life, an inner life that echoes the inner lives of people who mean a great deal to me, but who on the surface of things seem about as different from her as they can possibly be. One of my fantasies would be to introduce the three of them at a café—Sophie, Virginia, and Dante—and sit back and listen to them discuss love and death. And just for the fun of it, let me throw in a venture capitalist, perhaps one of our former board members whose daughter is my daughter's oldest friend. Yes. G. Leonard Baker. Let's throw him into the mix.

For putting him at this table allows me now to pull in my fourth Sophie, the **entrepreneurial Sophie**, who over the course of her lifetime founded a network of over eighty schools that extended throughout France and into North America, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Algiers, England, Ireland, Spain, Holland, Germany, South America, Cuba, Austria and Poland. The Network of course continues to spread: I have just entered into an email correspondence with Robert Motavu at our relatively new school in Uganda, which has started its own Educators of the Sacred Heart group.

So how did this woman—not even five feet tall, not of aristocratic or even plutocratic origins, not from Paris but from a small village on the fringes of Burgundy—manage to found a global corporation, many of whose assets included properties that would be the envy of any business executive?

Phil Kilroy's biography does a masterful job of tracing Sophie's torturous journey as CEO of a start-up company that began as a dream—not in a garage in Palo Alto, but in the minds and hearts of several people, notably Louis Barat, Joseph Varin and Léonore de

Tournély. Most of us in this room know some of the story, and it is a story which when *re-imagined* is nothing less than astonishing. A young woman of twenty-three, after having been brought to Paris at age 16 from Joigny by her older brother, is told that she is to be Superior of a new religious order. Within five years, there would be six foundations. Eleven years later, she would send Philippine Duchesne to North America. The following year, the Society of the Sacred Heart would have settled into the Hotel Biron in Paris, where the daughter of one of Marie Antoinette's ladies in waiting would reign as superior for years.

Over the course of 65 years as Superior General, Sophie's Society would survive the regime of Napoleon, see France undergo two more revolutions, witness the nation of Italy's birth pangs, and walk an almost impossible tightrope between and among the multifarious governments of France, the bishops and archbishops of Europe, the Pope in Rome, and all the other hierarchies and power players who attempted to topple her company. Reading this part of her story makes the leveraged buyout and the hostile corporate takeover look tame by comparison. And realize once again that this business acumen, this fiscal wizardry, this tenacity, this ability to play the Archbishop of Paris off against the Vatican Secretary of State proceeded not from a Harvard MBA, but from a woman who originally wanted to be a Carmelite nun!

How did she do it?

I believe that she did it through the extraordinary power of her heart. For Sophie was *so* much more than an intellectual, *so* much more than a mystic, *so* much more than a Romantic, and *so* much more than your typical entrepreneur. If I HAD a noun at my disposal with which to describe it, I would. But I don't.

But here's how I think she ran her company.

I think she was the antithesis of today's alpha executive, if by alpha we understand ambitious, aggressive, dominating, and contentious. A recent (2006) article in the Harvard Business School Press asserts that 75% of all executive positions are held by alphas, both male and female. Sophie—while she surely held to her goals, held to high standards, and held her own in countless difficult situations—did so with a diplomacy and a deference that are well summarized in the sub-title of this conference: *I watch, I listen, I pray*. I could hold up numerous examples of how Sophie moved toward important decisions, whether they had to do with curriculum, personnel, or finance. Her early life as an administrator was filled with accusations that she was meek, indecisive, inept. She preferred to wait for consensus. She recognized the inherent danger in forcing things on people, even when her far-sightedness knew what was best in the long term. She was not afraid to recognize that a decision she had made earlier might not be the right one. She was slow to dismiss or reassign people who she felt were of use to the Society, even when she had proof that they were militating against her.

In 1815-16, at the time the Constitutions were being formulated and ratified, she underwent an agonizing period during which the Society was almost destroyed. A powerful Abbé went to the lengths of writing her threatening letters from Rome under a pseudonym, but Sophie persevered. The pope eventually ratified the Constitutions, in large part (many people claimed) because of the *charity* Sophie expressed toward the Abbé in her letters to others.

In the sixties, we called this “zapping them back with super-love.” And I ask myself today if this attitude wasn't at the core of her human interactions. For Sophie was

undermined by some of those closest to her. And yet she continued to find the good in them and avoided attributing their behavior to malice.

Witness some of Sophie's statements on your bookmarks:

- *We don't live with angels; we have to put up with human nature and forgive it.*
- *Show by charity how to meet a crisis.*
- *Before making any change take counsel. . . . Prudence and a wise slowness are*

necessary in the beginning.

- *More is gained by indulgence than by severity.*

Better yet, witness what was said *about* her: *"It was her way to think well of people until forced to do otherwise."* OR *"She loved people through their faults to the core of their best selves."*

Sophie wanted to believe the best in people. She had enormous patience--some would say inhuman patience, others might say a *mother's* patience. For of course Sacred Heart educators were called *mothers* until Vatican II, and the vision of Sacred Heart education and the spirituality of the RSCJ to this day are grounded in what I would call the feminine. But that is another speech for another day.

Margaret Williams likens her to a small shuttle weaving unity among her houses. Sophie viewed the society as a living organism and treated its members accordingly. She did not ignore the weaknesses of those parts of the "organism" that may have needed a reprimand or a pointed suggestion or two. But she couched her criticism in language that allowed the hearer to believe in her capacity to grow and change. She administered, in short, with the unconditional love of a very discerning mother with extremely high expectations.

And as difficult as it is to work this way, especially if one is living in a leadership position in a school peopled with many bright, independent, and—dare we say it?—sometimes *difficult* people, this was what she did. And this is how she thrived. And this is what made her company thrive.

Several years ago, Paula Lawrence Wehmiller (an Episcopal priest, educator, and popular speaker on the NAIS circuit) addressed our faculty and staff. Among other things, she spoke of Guardian Angels. According to her theory, Guardian Angels are those students who give teachers the most trouble. Sophie’s “*insupportables*.” But because they demand much from us, they *require* much from us—sort of an inversion of Sr. McMorrow’s mantra. They ask us to be our best; they force us to develop new ways to connect, to forge avenues of learning that we must imagine, using our hearts as well as our brains.

I believe that the best administrators apply this to their work as well.

As a fourth-generation teacher, I was raised to believe that teaching is the most noble profession, requiring artistry and a touch of magic in addition to intellect and skill. If we agree that education is an art form, and that artists require a certain level of trust and freedom and “space” in which to do their miraculous work, then we are echoing Sophie’s own words when she said: “Education is the divine art, . . . a work of progressive development, leading to that harmonious unfolding of nature which favors the action of grace.”

If one must err, err on the side of generosity, for—in Sophie’s words—“the work of the Divine Heart breathes only charity,” and we are about the work of the Divine Heart.

And of course this “breathing” must extend, if we are true educators of the Sacred Heart, beyond our classrooms, libraries, offices and athletic fields; beyond our neighborhoods and our political and economic borders. For we find ourselves in a global world whose particulars Sophie never could have imagined—but whose essence she well understood. Inscribed in her heart was a loathing of the class system, a horror of materialism, and a desire to transcend borders and limits. There are endless anecdotes that illustrate this fact, but I’ll urge you to explore them yourselves.

The point is that Sophie’s devotion to social justice in a global world was rooted in her being and is inseparable from the spirit of the Society. She would have been as horrified by the injustices of our day—probably more so, given their scope—as she was by those of her own, and she would have applauded the centrality of Goal III within her schools in the United States. In our school I think one could argue that Goal III animates much of what we do as educators: that it is often the road by which all other Goals are finally accessed. I read that the American notion of independence was hard for Sophie to grasp, and at times, as I look around at what goes on now in the name of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” I can’t say that I disagree. But I suspect that my skepticism is echoed by everyone sitting in this room, and that we are all committed to moving our students and their families beyond contemporary notions of American “happiness” and into a global awareness that impels to action.

So let me return again to my problem. How to define this fifth Sophie—this woman who lived by the divine heart of Jesus; whose administrative style was often founded in that difficult move of turning the other cheek and appearing rather ridiculous to those who judged her from the sidelines. Who *is* this woman who was heart personified? whose heart informed her intellect, her mysticism, her Romanticism, and

her entrepreneurial genius? whose joy and laughter infected those around her? whose community was the world?

The young professor whose dissertation focuses on the medieval heart recommended a book to me when I met her last January. It's by Gail Godwin, and the book is called *Heart: A Personal Journey through its Myths and Meanings*. Toward the end of Part I, after tracing the place of the heart in all the world's major religions and philosophical systems, Godwin references the Swiss cardiologist Frank Nager, who coined the term "cardiologist." It is this word that I must co-opt in order to describe the fullness of my Sophie. She was a *cardiologist*: guardian of and advocate for all that the heart means beyond that pound or so of muscle that beats in our chest cavity. It is the heart we mean when we say "take heart," "have a heart," "broken heart," "open your heart"; or when we use its derivatives like "hearty," "heartfelt" or "heartless."

In the last canto of *Paradiso*, Dante looks into the face of God and tries to find language with which to describe what he sees:

Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna

Legato con amore in un volume

Ciò che per l'universo si squaderna.

Within a brilliant light, he discerns a volume whose pages—pages representing the sum total of all things temporal and eternal—are bound together by love: "legato con amore." I would suggest that Sophie was a stunning combination of intellect, mystic, Romantic and entrepreneur, but that all of these "pages" were infused with a heart-ful essence that both informed and simultaneously emanated from them.

It is in our attempt to emulate *this* aspect of Sophie that we become true Sacred Heart educators.

I am quite sure that I have colleagues in Atherton who would recoil at my intellectual, mystical, Romantic or entrepreneurial Sophie. (I can see their faces before me now.) And I repeat: this is MY Sophie, the woman *I* see when I look through the admittedly strange and highly personal Solari lens. But what I would expect ALL of my colleagues to agree on is the *cordiological* Sophie: that large-hearted woman whose generosity was boundless, and who applied the *agape* test to virtually everything she said, wrote or did. The woman who saw the potential in everyone she encountered and worked to bring out that potential. The woman who was able, as one person put it, to “take things as she found them and go to their sacramental core.”

So what *was* it that Sr. Sally Rude said to me in her office as she hired me on that September morning in 1972? In looking for an attendance secretary, she had stumbled on a French teacher. In looking for a temporary, part-time job, I had stumbled into my life’s vocation: a vocation that would link up in the most inexplicable ways with my intellectual interests and my newly adopted religion, and would in some weird way help me even to understand my temperament. I had also stumbled onto the campus that would educate my children for most of their most formative years, making our entire family on some level “enfants du sacré coeur de Jésus.”

What Sally said was, “I think I’m doing this *way* too fast, but I feel as if God sent you to us.” Whether or not this was an accurate statement is God’s alone to know, though I do believe that Sally—in one of those hyper-accelerated moments of discernment—truly felt this way. What I also believe is that I’m a poster child for a life that “happens.” My life has proceeded from a series of coincidences whose full meaning continues to unveil itself, bit by bit, whenever I take the time to “pay attention.” And on

my best days, I like to think it was maybe *Sophie* who sent me stumbling onto the campus in Atherton. That it is *she* who has helped me both to construct and, in those gifted moments of reflection, to *discern* the pattern of “becoming fully who God longs for me to be.” I can’t imagine a more wonderful force to have guided and shaped my life, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to ponder, research, and share my love of Sophie—my *philoSophia*— with you today.

In closing, I invite you all to listen to that song which Sophie burst into while walking along the Adriatic under the rising moon. It is *Ave Maris Stella*, a ninth-century plainchant that has been reset by many composers over the centuries. I am presuming that this chant was the melody she used, though I don’t know for sure. It is certainly the melody she COULD have used, and so we shall at least *pretend* to enter into her heart through these two minutes of music.