

## Musical Memories Podcast: Susan McCarthy

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[00:01] **Record turning on sound effect**

[00:05, narration] **Greer McAllister:** I sat down with Sister Susan McCarthy to talk about her favorite songs, as well as the relationship between music and her religious life.

[00:15] **Susan McCarthy:** I do enjoy a lot of different kinds of music. I enjoy a lot of instrumental music. I enjoy smooth jazz.

[00:26] **G:** Me too!

[00:27] **S:** I enjoy classical music, although I don't know a lot of it, but I do enjoy it and I enjoy learning about it. I enjoy— I listen to the opera many times on Saturdays. So there are a lot of different ways that I do enjoy music and I was thinking as— as I was thinking about this, I remember growing up in our household where, oh, I wish I had looked up the name of the show. It was a show on, I want to say it was Saturday night, but there were a whole lot of like crooners or singers, and they would sing every Saturday night.

[01:11] ***Your Hit Parade* theme song**

[01:46] **S:** My mother and father, especially my father, got such a kick out of it and in those days, you only had one television. And everybody— I'm one of, I'm the oldest of nine, so we would all be sitting around and that's what we did on Saturday night— listen to all these different songs and they were just, and it was funny, the other night I was listening to the T.V. station and PBS was talking about the music of the 50s and a lot of those crooners were there. It's really funny, so I enjoy all of that.

The song that I think is probably the— means the most to me in this particular stage in my life as I grow older and grow, and am interested in deepening my relationship with God, which my religious life is all about, a relationship with God. A song that has really come to mean a lot to me is this song by Anne Murray. And I think it's difficult for people who are not religious to understand, but my whole purpose in life is to grow in my relationship with God. And to deepen that, and so maybe you can just hear the words.

[03:17] **G:** Yeah, I would love to listen to it. Do you mind if I just play a little bit of it?

[03:20] **S:** Sure.

[03:22, music] *Could I Have This Dance* by Anne Murray

[04: 36] **G:** So does it sort of feel like the “you” in that song is God?

[04:40] **S:** Yeah, yes, yes. It’s about developing and strengthening my relationship with God. And it has nothing to do with male or female, it just has to do with a spiritual person that is helping me to be a better person.

[05:01] **G:** I love the line of, you know, “could I have this dance for the rest of my life.”

[05:05] **S:** Yeah, yeah.

[05:06] **G:** It’s a nice image, dancing, dancing with God.

[05:10] **S:** Yeah. So that’s the song I would say means the most to me although there’s just a lot of music that I like a lot.

[05:17] **G:** Yeah, for sure. I like the— it’s a little country.

[05:21] **S:** Oh yeah, I love Anne Murray.

[05:23] **G:** Yeah? I don’t know her.

[05:25] **S:** Really? She’s a Canadian singer.

[05:27] **G:** Oh cool!

[05:29] **G:** Well, would you want to talk a little bit about how you became a nun?

[05:35] **S:** Well, I grew up in a religious family. Mostly through my father, my father was a very religious person and I mean— recently, my brothers and sisters and I, we text back and forth and my father’s birthday was June 3rd and we had little memories of him that we shared. And one of the ones I remember, that I think really, probably meant a lot to all of us, although we never talked about it, every night before my father went to bed he was on his knees, praying, before he went to bed. I tried to do that in the beginning part of my life, but I’m not on my knees anymore. But anyways, we went to Catholic school and I found this community of sisters that I belong to. They were teaching in the elementary school and I went on to the high school and I was very impressed with them. They had a, they had a commitment to compassion and it was something that interested me. And I had a, I thought about joining the Maryknoll sisters, but that was too far away and would be too far away from my family.

[06:59] **G:** Yeah, where did you grow up?

[07:00] **S:** I grew up in White Plains. I was born in Boston and then my father's job brought him to New York City. So we all grew up in White Plains. And we always bragged that our parents took really good care of us. We don't know how my father did it because he put us all through Catholic school and I mean there are a lot of— we didn't have a lot of extras in life, but we always had good food, good healthcare. We were well taken care of. And well loved. So anyway I entered after high school and...

[07:47] **G:** And what was it called, what was the convent called?

[07:51] **S:** The community's called the Sisters of Divine Compassion— Religious of Divine Compassion. And this year I'll celebrate my sixtieth anniversary.

[07:59] **G:** Wow, that's awesome!

[08:01] **S:** Sixty years. I used to babysit and he said to me when I was babysitting, he said, "You won't last six months." So I always wanted to find him and say, "I made it."

[08:16] **G:** That's great.

[08:17] **S:** Anyway, so...

[08:18] **G:** Did you work? Did you teach at all?

[08:22] **S:** When I was in the community, in the convent? Yes. I began as a teacher. That's what mostly we did. And then after about— I taught in elementary school for two years and then I thought, I kept pushing myself and I taught—I thought it would be great if I taught in high school, so I moved into high school. And I taught in the Bronx. We had a high school in the Bronx and a high school in White Plains, the one I had gone to. And then after twenty-five years, I had a real interest in working with the poor. So I was looking for doing some form of pastoral ministry. I went to Fordham University and got a degree in pastoral ministry. And on my twenty-fifth anniversary year, I moved into parish work down in Manhattan. I worked in Manhattan for three years and then different parishes in the Bronx. And after about ten or twelve years of that, I looked into this opportunity to travel and promote scripture study around the country.

[09:43] **G:** Cool!

[09:44] **S:** And I interviewed on the phone with somebody, with the director, and we hit it off and she invited me to come out to Little Rock, Arkansas, where it was stationed. And the leadership in my community encouraged me to go and look and I ended up staying out there seven years, working there for seven years.

[10:10] **G:** In Arkansas?

[10:12] **S:** Yeah. and it was a wonderful experience because I got to see the middle of the country, which they call “fly-over country.” And I got to know the people there, but because of my work I did travel and I did promote scripture study around the country. This was a method of Catholic bible study that was developed in Little Rock. And it was the most widely used Bible study. At that time it was used in small groups and my job was to go around the country and provide workshops in different dioceses around the country. So I spent a lot of weekends traveling to different parts of the country doing that sort of thing.

[10:56] **G:** What was your favorite place to go?

[10:58] **S:** To visit?

[10:59] **G:** Yeah.

[11:00] **S:** Oh, I don’t know. It’s hard to say because there are so many nice areas of our country. You know, one of the hard parts was this was a weekend kind of thing, where I would fly in on a Friday. I would do the workshop on a Saturday, maybe I could get out on a Saturday night, but in those days, usually they wanted you to wait and go back on a Sunday. So, and you didn’t get a chance to see much, although the very first weekend that I worked, not the very first but one of the very first, we went to Canada to do workshops in Canada, in Calgary. And I said to my boss, “I am not going to Calgary and stay and see the beautiful places around here.” And she said, “Well, I can’t afford it.” And I said, “Well, I’m going to rent a car and I’m going to have a hotel room. You can stay in my hotel room and you can travel in my car.” So we stayed an extra thirty-six hours and we went to Banff, Lake Louise, and we traveled on the glacier. There’s a glacier there that we went to. So that was a really beautiful place. You know, I play Sudoku and I play Canasta. And while I’m playing Canasta online, I have a recollection of one of those places I stayed at, you know? And it’s not like anything fancy or anything, but it’s just a pleasant memory of being together with people that I liked, doing things...

[12:39] **G:** Yeah, seeing new places.

[12:40] **S:** Yeah.

[12:41] **G:** Yeah. Did you ever get to Minnesota? That's where I'm from.

[12:44] **S:** Yes!

[12:45] **G:** You did?

[12:46] **S:** Yes, because our publishers are from Minnesota.

[12:47] **G:** Oh, cool!

[12:48] **S:** Liturgical press.

[12:50] **G:** Oh, interesting!

[12:52] **S:** There are still a lot of states I haven't been to and I regret that because I don't think I'm going to get to them at this point. But I did get to visit a lot of different states that I was happy about, in a lot of different ways.

Honestly, my take on the world is that people are about the same all over. They're good and bad. You know, it's the same all over, no matter in what state you are.

[13:14] **G:** Yeah, people are people.

[13:17] **S:** Yeah, and it's how you treat one another I think that really makes a big difference.

[13:21, Outro music] *Could I Have This Dance* by Anne Murray

[13:46] **Record turning off sound effect**