

Megan Young

Age 13

Grade 7

Toronto, Ontario

Lily

I met her as she ran, through the river, soaking her clothes. Her eyes were closed so I thought she was crazy. I ran to her and she fled me.

“Wait! I want to help you!” She stopped and waited for me to catch up.

“I am running away, would you like to follow?”

“Yes, please.” She nodded her head and didn’t open her eyes. She started to walk before stopping.

“Aren’t you coming? They’ll be searching soon. I must run.” The girl ran, and I ran after her. “Ah, much better.” They ran through the forest and came to a swamp. The girl, whose name I learned was Kateri, continued running through the mud. I ran after her and we spoke of why we were running. She longed to explain in detail but could not until she was far from her village, she would run until nightfall and had lost miles because of me. We ran and barely spoke. I continued looking up at the sky through the trees, or at the ground looking for dappled light but none came. We came to a field and she sat ran to the opposite side. I followed at a slower pace, tired from the days run. I found a star in the sky and stopped in the middle of the field.

“Oh Mighty Creator,” I began to say loudly. She was native, this I knew from her skin, hair and clothing. She was dark-skinned, had black, braided hair and animal skin for a dress.

“You are not Catholic?” She questioned me as she lay down.

“Catholic?” What was Catholic? I began to question her religion and nationality. She explained to me that it was a different religion from Europe and I thought of her as an outsider. Kateri was odd to me, and I understood why she ran from her home. When I questioned her nationality she laughed and answered she was a Mohawk. I had many questions and Kateri answered them all. The religion wasn't evil, it was very much the same – they prayed, rejoiced, worshiped – except for a different God. God? The proper name for the Creator. I was confused, she said it wasn't like small pox or any disease the white people brought to us. It wouldn't kill us and many Natives had become Catholic. She explained her life as I gazed upon the stars. I looked at her, expecting open, blue, beautiful eyes but found eye lids.

Kateri's father was a chief, her mother a Catholic Algonquin. She had hated the whites at times. Small pox had killed her parents and her siblings. She was an orphan. Kateri survived although she was partially blind and scarred for life. The light of the sun blinded her fully but she knew her way by feeling. She was adopted by her aunts and uncles and she had to move to a new settlement after the outbreak of small pox subsided. Her childhood was normal, as was mine, and although she was blind, she was a skilled bead worker. Kateri wasn't baptized as an infant but remembered her Mother always being prayerful. She connected Earth and God by praying to him, alone in the forest. When she was 18, a Jesuit priest came and built a chapel. Her uncle was against this priest but didn't bother him. Kateri attended this priest regularly and learned much about the religion. At the age of 22 she was baptized on Easter. Kateri's family did not accept her choice to embrace Christ. After her baptism, Kateri became the village outcast. Her family refused her food on Sundays because she wouldn't work. Children would taunt her and throw stones. She was threatened with torture or death if she did not renounce her religion. She ran away and was here. I found her life interesting.

“What will you do now?”

“Go to the Catholic mission of St. Francis Xavier at Sault Saint-Louis, near Montreal, with you?” I told her yes and we slept. I awoke to find Kateri praying in the open field, she spoke a prayer I didn’t know and I didn’t disturb her. Soon she noticed me watching, finished her prayer and started to walk forward, careful to not damage the wilderness. We spent almost two months in the wilderness, eating and sleeping peacefully. She prayed a lot and made crosses in the woods. When we arrived at Sault Saint-Louis, Kateri was welcomed and asked if she could have some help teaching me about the religion. I was happy to learn and soon wanted to become Catholic as she was. I learned the prayers and on the day of the first snowfall was baptized. A few months later, at Christmas, Kateri received her communion. We led lives of prayer and became best friends. We went around the village and Kateri taught the young and helped those in the village who were poor or sick while I tried to continue as if I was still a native. I led my own life, praying before bed and meals, going to the chapel regularly, but not like Kateri.

She was always praying when not helping, loved the rosary and kept God with her everywhere she went. When she went winter hunting with the village, she carved a cross in a tree and knelt there in the snow. Kateri would talk to the people about everything she was taught and they would listen for hours. My children knew Kateri well and listened to her words, memorizing and living them. They enjoyed being with her because they felt the presence of God. One time a priest asked the people why they gathered around Kateri in church. They told him that they felt close to God when Kateri prayed. They said that her face changed when she was praying. It became full of beauty and peace, as if she were looking at God's face.

In March of 1679, Kateri swore to be ever a virgin. I tried to persuade her but she said that my children were lovely, but she was still a child herself, a child of God. Kateri wanted to open a convent for Native sisters but Father Pierre Cholonc told her to take better care of herself. Her health was never very good and it became worse because of the penances she took upon herself to do.

In the end, we prayed together, still best friends and when she died due to her bad health I prayed for her. She died in 1680 at the age of 24. I was in the room after her death and her scars disappeared, made beautiful by God. I died shortly after but our souls caught up with each other and we smiled as Kateri was declared venerable in 1943, beatified in 1980 by Pope John Paul II and became the first Native woman to become blessed.

I miss Kateri to this very day and our “adventures” in Faith were wonderful. She taught me about God, how to pray and was still true to her native side. Now whenever I see a lily bloom and die, my soul drifts to Kateri’s grave. She was called the lily of the Mohawks or the flower of the natives.

Kateri was brave, a heroic Catholic – and yet a Native none the less.

Written in memory of Kateri Tekakwitha

Lily

Native

1656 birth
Never aggressive
Love the earth
My beloved all killed
By the small pox that attacked
My faith I had to rebuild
My family did react
When I was baptized
A plan I devised
I would run, run so far
Although my skin was scarred
And my health was bad
I was nothing less than glad
To run 2 months, 200 miles, through the woods
Just to know that I did good
I had my communion, I cared for the sick
If someone called, I'd be there quick
I'd care for the poor, and the children I'd teach
I'd tell stories of what I'd learned, I love to preach
My life was filled with nothing but prayer
My virginity I did declare
I died due to my continuous bad health
I died knowing I had helped
1680 at the age of 24
My help, they'd need no more
"Jesus, I love You" I said through my last breath
My last words before my death
A blessed person my soul became
Kateri Tekakwitha is my name