

Molly: [00:00](#) Habits are who we are, and we get to choose every day who that is. What's remarkable about these women is that their habits are changing the world. Hi and welcome to habits, the good, the bad, and the holy. I'm Molly and I'm sitting down every week with adorers of the blood of Christ religious sisters to hear their stories and learn how habits have become more than a symbol for their vocation. They become the means to which they change lives. Hello and welcome back to habits. Today we're here with sister Joann Stuever. Joann, thank you so much for joining us.

Joann: [00:31](#) You're welcome. I'm glad to be here.

Molly: [00:33](#) Awesome. So you have a unique story of how you found your way to the sisters. You were 69 when you took your final vows. What prompted you to look at joining religious life later in your life?

Joann: [00:53](#) I had no intention of joining religious life. I, um, was a school teacher. I'm a mother. I'm very active in my parish. I had a very intensive prayer life, uh, dating back to 1976. And, um, really did not think I was looking for anything. And, uh, then I had what turned out to be a life changing event. I had a car accident, which, uh, should have killed me, but didn't and left me quite angry with God because I would just assume I've gone home. Then, uh, it's pretty funny because I was about 55 at the time. So, um, part of my recovery from that accident, in addition to having to learn to walk again and recover from serious concussions, um, part of my recovery was spiritual. I, um, had to get over being so angry at God. Um, and, and as part of that journey, I, um, uh, did seek spiritual direction and, um, began to wonder, well, if I'm alive, why am I alive and what's left?

Joann: [02:27](#) Am I supposed to be doing something? And I was discerning that, uh, with the help of a spiritual director, I thought about being a people volunteer, uh, check that out pretty thoroughly. Um, nothing seemed to fit. I thought about, uh, becoming a, um, we're, we had a, uh, the diocese of Oklahoma City, I'm from Oklahoma City and the diocese there had a mission in Guatemala. It's Santiago. I take [inaudible] and I thought going down there, there was a group of people who were going down there to do some work for an unspecified length of time. Uh, but I didn't, uh, nothing really seemed to be it be it. And, um, so I just continued. I was teaching school, I was teaching, I had two jobs. I'm just teaching in the daytime and also moonlighting at our junior college, well I guess it was a four year college, but it was a local community college.

Joann: [03:30](#) Um, and I was, uh, I'm a science teacher, so I was teaching science daytime and also in the evening. And uh, the life I lived was pretty full. I was a very active member of Sierra club and led outings and I was a mountain climber and taught people how to climb and how to use ropes and uh, cross country skiing, uh, with the boys scouts. Um, I managed to stay pretty busy and pretty happy, but, uh, I just, all the time I, in a back of my head, I knew there was something I was supposed to be doing and, um, every time I would pray about this, uh, I would not get any answer at all until after that car wreck. And then after the spiritual direction, I began to, um, circle and closer and closer I became acquainted with the adores of the blood of Christ, uh, through that car wreck because my spiritual director down in Oklahoma was a member of the adores.

Joann: [04:34](#) And, um, gradually, uh, eventually she asked me if I might like to be an associate. So I said, I thought that would be nice. And so I said, how much does it cost? And she laughed and she said, there's no charge. It's just, uh, you'll need to go through our preparation program. And I said, oh, okay. Um, you have a little book or something. She said, it's a year long program. Oh, oh, dear. Me. Okay. Well, um, I got about maybe halfway through that year of preparation to become an associate and I began to think, uh, where have these ladies been all my life? Because they are on my wavelength. They think like I do. They, uh, their, their particular brand of Catholicism and the way they practice it, uh, I find very satisfying and it meets my needs. And, um, as I, uh, got closer and closer to becoming an associate, I asked if I could read their constitution.

Joann: [05:49](#) And I think that was sort of an unusual question. But, uh, the sister did find me a copy of the constitution and I read it and I thought, I would think, Jesus, this is how, how come I'm having to find this one? I'm so old. And, um, it's really, you know, it's kind of laughable because I'm a divorcee, married, four kids, divorced. Um, I'm in good graces with the church, but I don't know how these sisters would feel about all of that. So I thought it was just a lovely dream, but I wasn't ever going to get to do that. And so finally I shared that with my spiritual director and she said, it shouldn't laugh at me. I thought she would, we would just have a good laugh and that'd be the end of that. And she said, this is something we will need to pray about.

Joann: [06:40](#) And so we did. And gradually, one by one, the barriers just sort of fell aside. And I finally had to sit down and write a letter, uh, asking for admission to membership in your doors of the blood of Christ. And I did. And I did not hear back for at least six months, maybe longer. Nobody answered my letter. And I

thought, well that's that. But then the answer came. And um, it was, yes, it was. Come on up. We'd give it a try. And I, um, I did come and we did give it a try and I did a sign on the dotted line.

- Molly: [07:24](#) I was going to say, I think you gave it more than a try because you took your final vows 17 years ago.
- Joann: [07:30](#) I did. Um, I signed on the dotted line for a membership as in her door on April the tenth just had an anniversary, uh, in 1993 and then three years later I made first vows.
- Molly: [07:48](#) Yeah. So you mentioned, um, something very unique about you is that you had this incredible full life before you even considered religious life. Um, and we've talked about this before, but how did your, how did you tell your children I'm going to go become a sister?
- Joann: [08:10](#) Oh, I didn't tell them.
- Molly: [08:12](#) Just kept that one a secret.
- Joann: [08:13](#) No, I talk to each child individually and I said I was considering this and what did they think? And if any one of the four had objected, I would not have pursued.
- Molly: [08:27](#) But they were all supportive.
- Joann: [08:29](#) Three of them were very supportive. Um, my second daughter Anne, who we call the middle child for lots of reasons. Um, when I, uh, found her, I, she's the only one I didn't talk to face to face because she lives on the east coast. And so I called her up and I was telling her what I was thinking about doing and she listened. And she listened and then she was quiet for a little bit and she says, oh, for God's sakes, mother, I don't care what you do, just don't move in with me. and I said, uh, okay. I think I'm taking that as a yes. Can I go with okay, if we don't care what mother does okay, then,
- Molly: [09:19](#) well then you're good to go. Yeah. You have a, or had a little red truck. I did a Ford Ranger, a Ford Ranger, and a, when we talked last time, you mentioned that it was the hardest thing in the last thing for you to give up before you joined.
- Joann: [09:38](#) Yeah. I had to do that before I could make vows, the voucher, poverty, chastity and obedience. Right. And part of the vow of poverty is that you do not hold any personal property. Any property you have is owned by the community. Right. So the

directions were to dispose of everything. That's my house and my, um, furnishings and, and the art collection and the books and all of that had go. And, um, I did have a biggest estate sale. And so most of everything and uh, finally sold the house. The house was hard to sell. It was one of those Ho hum real estate markets that year.

Molly: [10:24](#) But you still hold onto that truck a little while longer?

Joann: [10:27](#) Yes, I did have the truck up here in Wichita. I brought it up here with, um, a few treasured possessions. I had a footlocker that had some things in it and some clothes and ma, but eventually I had to sell it too. So.

Molly: [10:46](#) And why did the truck mean so much to you?

Joann: [10:48](#) I don't know. I, yeah, we had had a lot of cars and most of them had been owned jointly. And I had owned, uh, I had been divorced, uh, a long time, probably 10 years, 11, 12 years maybe by the time I actually entered community. And so I had owned several cars and um, but I had never had a little truck before and I'm just, I'm just really kind of like the truck and it, it gave me kind of a sense of freedom because it had a bunk bed and back. And I could, you could sleep there. I could go camping and I could sleep there if I didn't feel like pitching a jam. And, um, I took it with me when I went out to, I was missioned out at crown point, New Mexico for six months as part of my, um, early formation before I went to the novitiate and I had it out there with me and bounced around all over the reservation in it. And it was just kind of, kind of a fun thing to ham. Yeah. So,

Molly: [11:53](#) um, so you mentioned earlier that you, you did a lot of nature. Yeah. You went climbing, you and your daughter did something pretty unique and uh, fantastic. Uh, do you want to talk about that?

Joann: [12:07](#) Yes. This was, uh, my baby daughter Mary, the third child and um, she calls herself the third daughter from the sun and um, she's, um, a very unique person in that she loves backpacking, climbing, um, trees, flowers, the whole bit rocks. She loves them about as much as I do. And so we were just kind of on soul partners and um, she got the bright idea when she was 14 years old. We were up climbing up in the sand, Greater Christos and um, who looked out west and, uh, there's another range of mountains out in western New Mexico and they had snow on them. And I said, you see those mountains over there? And she said, sure. I said, well, they are part of the continental divide. And she said, what is that? So I was explaining to her the

concept of the continental divide, which is a high point that runs from um, Canada to Mexico across the United States and these high points, um, a marked a watershed, um, in, uh, over-simplified the water that's on the east side of the continental divide flows toward the Gulf of Mexico and eventually the Atlantic Ocean, while the water on the west side of the continental divide drains into what eventually empties out into the Pacific Ocean.

Joann: [13:45](#) So I said, I, you know, it's not aligned on the ground. You can't just walk over there and see the, the dash marks. But I said, it's, it is on most maps. And, um, she said, well, someday I'm going to walk that out. And I said, oh, okay. Oh, all right. So, you know, we went on who finished that hike and came down and, um, uh, a few, maybe two years later, she said to her, daddy and me now, soon as I get out of high school and we walk that continental divide, I've got it all planned out and we both looked at her and we said, oh no, you're crazy. You're not doing that. You're staying in school. You have to go to college. She said, no, no, no. I need to walk a divide. And we said, put her foot down. We said, absolutely not.

Joann: [14:35](#) You're going to need some help. We're not helping you until you finish college. So she said, we helped me then we said, yeah, yeah, yeah, sure. So, um, she just delayed it a few years and um, we actually, she actually started the hike in the beginning of her near the end of her junior year in college. And, uh, we took a year, she took a year off college to hike up the continental divide and it turned out to be a wonderful experience for her. You provided I was her supply agent. Yes. As she spent years planning, uh, menus, ordering, backpacking, food, uh, processed dried food, ordering maps. The maps were a huge undertaking that came from the u s geological survey. Each map, uh, was about as big as, well a three foot by three foot wow. And had to be folded just so and um, had to be carefully marked.

Joann: [15:44](#) She marked her whole trail across each map and she could walk across one map in about two or three days. So it's a lot of math, a lot of maps. And they had to be in sequence. They had to be numbered, they had to be, um, had the trail mark and any, then she had to write and get permission from private land owners because a lot of it was private land. Wow. And, um, it was a huge undertaking and she did it and did it well. Her supplies, we've packed in standard size cardboard boxes, um, with enough food for a week, enough maps for a week, one or two articles of clothing, depending on what kind of terrain she was gonna be going over a foot care. She used up a lot of mold, skin,

band-aids, things like that. Uh, a, a, I don't know, most of it was food.

Joann: [16:39](#) Oh, she took a dog with her. She took a catahoola leopard dog named Gerrit. He was, uh, the most wonderful, though I'm not a dog lover, but that, uh, was an angel from God.

Molly: [16:54](#) So her and this dog hiked three thousand miles,.

Joann: [16:57](#) about 3000 miles. Yeah. 3000 miles.

Molly: [17:00](#) How long did it take you to do it?

Joann: [17:02](#) We'll she, um, we put her on the trail on March the 17th St Patrick's Day. And, uh, unfortunately, um, due to a serious illness called Giardia. Uh, and, um, then some subsequent calcium deposits, we had to take her off the trail in Montana. She did not finish. She was about 600 miles from, uh, uh, glacier national park, which was our goal for filmic finishing. And, um, I was with her at the time that we made the decision to, uh, go to a foot specialist at the end.

Joann: [17:44](#) Her foot just broke down from, she probably would have made it if she hadn't gotten the GRD. Uh, which was a US little parasite that hides in the breaking water. I knew she was not feeling well when she came down out of the mountains and I Rhonda booted with her after that on the North End of the wind rivers. And I waited for it, that hotel and she didn't come, she didn't come. So I started backtracking back down the trail that she would be coming up and I found her, she was about, um, half days walk away from the hotel and she was crawling and dragging her pack. And I said, okay, that's it. Where'd that guy? I said, you have to see a doctor about that ankle. I said, you know what, we're just going back to Oklahoma City. They have foot.

Molly: [18:37](#) Yeah, yeah, yeah. So aside from hiking the continental divide with your daughter, you have been heavily involved in activism for HIV and AIDS. How did you end up in that, in that game?

Joann: [18:54](#) A long before I became a sister, I was, um, it was the names project, the aids memorial quilt that first got my interest. And, um, the aids memorial quilt was probably started around 1981 82. And what that is, is a series of panels, uh, that are grave size. They're three foot by six foot. They're fabric people, make them in memory of someone who has died of aids. And then, uh, they, uh, started sewing them together to make these big squares that cover a large, they're, they're bigger than the

average room when you spread them out. So you really need to go out in the yard to spread them out. And, um, I, uh, went to see the first display that came to Oklahoma City. It was probably 1986, I'm gonna say, and my brother invited me to come and see this quilt. And so I did.

Joann:

[20:05](#)

And, um, I, it was overwhelming. I just, um, not only that, so many people had hit, I knew about aids. It was what gay people got, uh, from, um, sexual activity that I considered immoral. And, um, so, you know, there wasn't just a whole lot of empathy in me and, but I went to this display because my brother asked me to, and I, uh, was looking at it and there were panels there for grandmothers and there were panels there for little boys who had been haemophiliacs and there were panels there for. And it suddenly dawned on me how narrow minded I had been and how this was a serious disease that was impacting all of us, the people of God. And, um, and not only were these people so sick that they died, but you could just tell from the comments that were on their panels of some of the terrible rash judgement, um, discrimination that they had been subjected to by of course, the church.

Joann:

[21:24](#)

Yeah. And, um, I couldn't tear myself away. I just, I just stood there and, and I would walk from one panel to the next and every one of them was such an education for me because it was somebody else who was young and the vibrant stage of life in love and suddenly had this horrible, ghastly disease for which there is no cure and symptoms were awful. And, um, my brother had to drag me out of there. They were closing the place down and I was still staring at these things and thinking this, this can't be, this is, this is too awful. And I just, what got me, not the death was sad and the disease was horrible. But what got me was the terrible up families were split up. Parents rejected children that they wouldn't go to their son's funeral. Horrible things happened. And um, I just thought that us, somebody's got to do something.

Joann:

[22:32](#)

And um, I didn't know anybody that had aids. At least I didn't think I did. And I thought, well, how can I help? And I thought, well, these people who are presenting this quilt, I can help them. So I got active in the Oklahoma chapter of the names project and um, helped, uh, display it, help take it to schools to talk about it. Um, and eventually I ran into some people who had aids and also I ran into people who were helping take care of people who had aids. And I, uh, eventually wound up on a care team, um, that was sponsored by the African Episcopal Church and believe it or not, a Catholic church. Wow. And the two churches each provided for members of their parish to

form an eight member team called a rain team. Rain was an acronym for regional aids, interfaith network and we eight people for, for black, African Episcopalians and for people from my parish.

Joann: [23:53](#) Um, we formed a team to take care of one person, just one sick person. And it took all eight of us. Yeah. Because, uh, at that time hospitals were not admitting people with aids because they thought it could be spread and they did find effect their population. No one knew what caused it. No one had any idea. There was no knowledge of HIV. The virus that causes AIDS. And so there were all kinds of cocky Mimi theories out there about what caused aids. But, um, no one had any real answers. So there was a lot of fear. Um, the young man that we wound up how helping, um, his name was Harlan. He was a black, um, probably in his twenties. Um, very, very sick bedfast really. And, um, um, Caroline, a hopper friend of mine, good friend of mine, uh, she was my buddy.

Joann: [25:03](#) We went to buy two and uh, we each took a day or two each, each pair of us and we would go and we would do everything for him. We would clean, we would clean him up. He was always, you know, he couldn't get to the bathroom. So, um, his bedding and, and him fix him a couple of meals. Um, uh, give him a, a, a leg rub, a back rub, anything to ease his suffering. If it was hot, we would, uh, give him a sponge bath with cool water. Um, we would do anything we could to try and ease his suffering and we would pray with him if he wanted to. And he usually did wanna pray.

Molly: [25:47](#) Um, and you also guarded something for him?

Joann: [25:51](#) Yeah, we did. We, uh, tried to keep his family from, um, taking his money, his, his little bit of a check that he got and um, so we would try to keep that for him when it came in the mail. They always knew when to come. So it was very dangerous. We knew that and uh, we were protected by God because it was in a poor neighborhood and his family was not exactly happy that we were there, but were they, they were kind of happy in a way because they didn't want to take care of him. But um, they certainly didn't want us interfering with their, you know, getting the, what little money he got.

Molly: [26:39](#) And so you were really a pioneer when it came to activism for HIV and AIDS. So you really had this, Incredibly full life. You were a teacher, you are a mom are a mom, you are a grandma, you are a sister. You're an activist and educator. A trailblazer. Literally on the continental divide. Yeah. What sticks out to you



most as, as what you're most proud of or what was most fulfilling to you?

Joann: [27:16](#) I think the thing that, uh, changed my life and, um, for which I will always be grateful. Um, I had a very powerful religious experience and encounter with Jesus Christ. I had no doubt who it was. And that happened in 1976 and, um, I was completely stunned, blown away, thought I was hallucinating, thought I was losing my mind. Um, I tried telling me I wanted to sh it was such a wonderful thing. I wanted to share it with Joe, that it's my husband and it scared him. He was, you know, he thought I was losing my mind too. But he also thought of me as a religious fanatic and he didn't want anything to do with me or my story. He also said, don't you dare talk to Hank, our son, who was still living at home about any of this because I don't want you scaring him too. So, um,

Molly: [28:28](#) and this encounter was in a dream or walking through your normal day.

Joann: [28:32](#) Oh, I was just sitting at the table grading papers when all of a sudden I'm hearing this voice and I'm like black, Ooh. And it was, it was him and there would no doubt in my mind who it was. So I laid my pencil down and listened. Um, basically what he told me was that, uh, well it was just, it was a message of love and comfort and, um, he, it involved a great deal of healing, spiritual kind of healing. Um, um, father used the word tonight in his, a homily at mass, um, wholeness. And, uh, that was what I experienced was that I was just kind of broken pieces that got nipped back together and, um, it was a wonderful feeling. That's why I wanted to share it with Joel because I was just like, oh, wow. And um, I experienced a great deal of because there wasn't anyone I could really talk to about it. And so I turned to journaling and I started journaling at night after I had all my paperwork done. And so late at night I would be journaling and, um, basically people say, what did you write? I wrote love letters to God, just one after another one every night. They never got old, at least to me.

Molly: [30:12](#) And that gave you such a great sense of fulfillment.

Joann: [30:15](#) Well, he did. It was, um, I kept little green spiral notebooks and I called them journals.

Molly: [30:22](#) Do you ever feel like it almost came, like you had been or changed from, um, you had made vows to, Joe and then this experienced happened and all of a sudden you had opened this relationship of giving your life to God?

Joann: [30:43](#) Not really that, I'm not really that divisive. Um, Joe was a part of my life for a long time. After 1976, um, I prayed for him. I prayed for my son. I prayed for everybody I knew. And that was just part of the experience was the prayer. It was all so long ago.

Molly: [31:10](#) So you talked a little bit about it, but the one question we ask everyone on the podcast is about habits, which is the namesake of the podcast. Um, what is your best habit?

Joann: [31:22](#) Hmm. Um, probably journaling.

Molly: [31:27](#) And you still do that today?

Joann: [31:29](#) No, I don't do it every day. I, I journal occasionally. Uh, what happened to me after I entered the adorers, well, what happened to me after I moved in with the sisters, I lived with the sisters as a lay woman for a couple of years while I was discerning all of this. And, uh, during that time I had such wonderful companions that I didn't really need the journal anymore. And so I would journal occasionally, but not daily. Uh, it had met a certain need. Uh, it had filled a, a loneliness gap. It, uh, it fed my spiritual growth for a long time, but then I got kind of beyond that or something and it wasn't as important as it had been. And to this day, I still journal, I have a little green spiral notebook up there in my room right now. I don't journal. I, my journal maybe once a week, once a month. You know, it varies.

Molly: [32:32](#) and what is your worst habit?

New Speaker: [32:37](#) Um, like else that I know in the world. Procrastination. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Or over committing, you know, getting thing, getting myself in over my head because I don't have enough time to do all the stuff I said I'd do.

Molly: [32:55](#) Thank you so much for letting me pick your brain. I know we covered a lot of things. Um, but you are one of my favorite sisters shock too, because you have such a unique story, so thank you for letting me.

Joann: [33:07](#) Well, you're very, you're welcome.

Molly: [33:09](#) Thanks for joining us for show notes and behind the scenes check out our website adorers.org habits is brought to you by the adorers of the blood of Christ u s region, co-produced by Cheryl Wittenauer, Laurie Bengé and Molly McKinstry edited by Molly McKinstry. Thanks. We'll see you all next week.

