

## Episode 3: Mother

**ERIKA LANTZ:** Mother Teresa was always traveling. Flying here. Flying there. I tend to think of her as living a spartan life, but, of course, she took planes like anyone else.

Mary Johnson remembers this one time in particular: The two of them flew from Rome to Sweden. Mary was Mother's traveling companion and assistant for the trip.

**MARY JOHNSON:** We were going there for an ecumenical conference where Mother was going to be honored and was going to give a talk.

**ERIKA:** They boarded the plane in their blue and white saris. Mary also packed two heavy boxes of "Miraculous Medals" -- these small religious tokens that Mother Teresa would kiss and hand out to people.

Mary and Mother Teresa settled into their seats in first class. They'd booked economy, but Mary says airlines always upgraded the tickets.

**MARY:** They're trying to avoid all that commotion that would happen if people knew Mother Teresa was on the plane.

**ERIKA:** Mary says Mother Teresa pulled on the sleeve of one of the flight attendants and said:

**MARY:** "All that extra food, you know, that people aren't eating, that you're going to have to throw away anyway -- could you give it to me, and I will use it for the poor?"

**ERIKA:** The flight attendant looked hesitant, awkward. She explained they had to throw the food waste away; it was against the rules to keep it.

**MARY:** And she said, "Oh no, just tell them Mother Teresa needs it for the poor. They won't make any fuss for you." And anyway, long story short, eventually she went around with a big, black trash bag collecting things from people, and, of course, that's how people came to know that Mother Teresa was on the plane, and then they all started to come one by one and standing next and Mother would sign things for them and kiss the medal and give it to them and pray with them and all the rest of it.

And when we finally landed in Stockholm, and we got out of the plane, and there was the the Catholic bishop and the Lutheran big-shot guy -- whoever he was -- and the Salvation Army general and they were all waiting for us there.

**ERIKA:** And as Mother Teresa met them, the flight attendant came out.

**MARY:** With these two huge trash bags full of sugar packets and ketchup packets and salt packets and little candy bars and whatever else. You had these these big trash bags. And

Mother Teresa saw it and she turns to the Salvation Army general and she says, “You work with the poor, don’t you?” And she gives him the two trash bags full of all of these little things from the airplane. And I haven’t had any idea what he did with them.

**ERIKA:** Hearing this story made me wonder about Mother Teresa the person: the woman who loved to hand out “Miraculous Medals” so much she ran out. The woman who’d do anything to save a few scraps of food, who was tough enough to lead a worldwide organization until months before she died at 87. The woman who wrote she knew from the beginning she was setting herself up for misery -- all in service to the poor. I wanted to know more. She hadn’t always been a living saint. She was young once. She had a whole interior life. How did Mother Teresa the person become Mother Teresa the icon?

I wanted to talk with sisters still in the order, but finding current sisters who would speak with us was not easy to do.

**PHONE CALLS OVERLAPPING: (ERIKA clears throat)** *Gosh, I’m nervous. Hi, um, my name’s Erika Lantz, I’m a journalist in Boston, and I’m working on an audio documentary series ... (ELIN) Testing, testing. My name is Elin Lantz Lesser, and I’m calling because ... (ERIKA) Oh yeah, my name’s Erika Lantz. (phone dialing, ringing tones, busy signals) (ELIN) If you would be willing to chat with me for a few minutes or if there’s somebody else ... (ERIKA) I’m gonna try Haiti next ... (dial tone)*

**ERIKA:** A couple of times, a sister would answer a few questions, as long as we didn’t record.

**PHONE CALLS OVERLAPPING: (ELIN)** *OK. I totally understand ... (ERIKA) Oh you’d need permission from the mother house ... (ELIN) She said she couldn’t give me any information ... (ERIKA) I’m not I’m not interested in becoming a sister personally, no ... (ELIN) She also ended the conversation with “God bless” or “God bless you,” I can’t remember which ... (ERIKA) Sorry? That was a really quick “no.” Wow ... (ELIN) I guess that’s the way they say goodbye ...*

**ERIKA:** Most of the time, they wouldn’t talk.

**PHONE CALLS OVERLAPPING: (ERIKA)** *Hmm. I’m getting this sound that ... (ELIN) Still ringing ... (ERIKA) All right, that time I got the busy signal ...*

**ERIKA:** Instead, they directed me to a regional house. The regional houses would direct me to the Bronx house -- the main house in the US.

**PHONE CALLS OVERLAPPING: (ELIN)** *Oh gosh, just imagine they’re in grand silence and this phone is ringing and won’t stop.*

**ERIKA:** The Bronx house sent me to the Mother Teresa of Calcutta Center, which has an amazing website, by the way. When you open it, you can hear music and Mother Teresa’s voice.

**PHONE CALLS OVERLAPPING: (ERIKA)** *Lantz. L-A-N-T-Z.*

**ERIKA:** But they sent me to the top: the Mother House in Kolkata, and the superior general, Sister Mary Prema Pierick.

(**PHONE SOUND:** “Your call cannot be completed as dialed.” Error tone.)

**ERIKA:** Sister Prema declined to speak with me.

In some respects, their refusal to be interviewed makes sense. Mother Teresa wasn't always very open with journalists. She was careful about which writers and interviewers she talked to, so her followers don't like to talk to journalists, either.

The Missionaries of Charity are very protective of Mother Teresa and the organization. Early on, I was warned by multiple people: They're not gonna talk to you. But some former sisters would -- sisters who knew Mother Teresa, who worked with her directly, who have stories they haven't shared publicly before.

**ERIKA:** When I say Mother Teresa, what comes to mind immediately for you?

**SISTER KATHLEEN HUGHES:** Who she was. Because I knew her. I knew her well.

**ERIKA:** From Rococo Punch and iHeart Media, this is “The Turning.” I'm Erika Lantz. Part 3: Mother.

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**SR. KATHLEEN:** I'm feeling I'm being much too open and, um, not guarded enough, in a sense, for something public. That's my fear. I mean, I do have some apprehension about that.

**ERIKA:** I don't think Sister Kathleen Hughes worried she'd tell me something horrible or some major piece of dirt. I think it's just that concern that any imperfect detail could take away from all the good Mother Teresa did. In general, one thing I've noticed is that part of the power of Mother Teresa is that she's a symbol. I think sometimes there's a mindset that any blemish or misconstrual could take away from that.

And, I mean, think about it. As an MC, you're essentially instructed not to talk much about your life with the outside world. Don't write about it in letters to your family. Don't discuss it with outsiders. So, talking to a journalist? I can see why that might feel a little strange, even for ex-MCs.

I can't speak for Sr. Kathleen, but it was clear she wasn't sure she wanted to talk.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** It was a definite no for me. And I'm sure you felt that; it was going to be a definite no. And then the Holy Spirit just -- I don't know how he did it. He was like, “No, you're gonna do it.” And I said, “Oh, okay.” (laugh)

**ERIKA:** Let me introduce you to Sister Kathleen.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** I was 29 years a Missionary of Charity with Mother Teresa of Kolkata. I was our first American sister to join from the United States.

**ERIKA:** Even though Sister Kathleen is no longer an MC, Jesus is still her spouse.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** I've lived the last 17 years as a consecrated woman, a consecrated virgin here in the archdiocese of Boston.

**ERIKA:** A consecrated virgin is basically a woman declared sacred by the Catholic church -- committed to a life of virginity as a bride of Christ. She's not a nun per se, but Sister Kathleen attends Mass daily and continues her mission work in the community.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** I'm very grateful to God for all my years, in whichever path he's led me, if I may say that.

**ERIKA:** Sister Kathleen was drawn to join the MCs the way a lot of women were: by a British documentary filmed in 1969 in Kolkata, called "Something Beautiful for God."

When she was 20 years old, Sister Kathleen wasn't a sister yet. She was a college student in upstate New York at Syracuse University. She heard that "Something Beautiful for God" was going to be screened there.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** And when I arrived, somehow I mixed up the time or was delayed, and I missed the film. And something inside of me actually kind of gave a sigh of relief. I don't know why. It was just instinctive, you know? And I knew the guy who was, uh, the projectionist, and he said, "Why don't you sit down? It's so good. I'll I'll just sit here and and show it again, just to you." And I thought, "Oh dear, (laughs) I guess I'm going to see this."

**ERIKA:** This film was a big deal because it showed a lot of people who Mother Teresa was and it inspired a lot of women to join her order, including a number of the former sisters we spoke to. So I wanted to watch it, and I watched it with Elin, who's a producer on the show, and also my sister.

**ELIN LANTZ LESSER:** So basically, there is this guy, Malcolm Muggeridge, who is a TV commentator and filmmaker, and he interviewed Mother Teresa in London for TV. And he honestly thought the interview wasn't very good.

**ERIKA:** I think he called it barely usable.

**ELIN:** Yeah, but they aired it anyway, and it ended up getting this huge response. So he decided to go to Kolkata to make an entire film about her. And it's this film, "Something Beautiful for God."

**ERIKA:** It's an interesting film to watch.

**ELIN:** Hmm.

**ERIKA:** You see all of these Indian locals who are in very difficult situations, they're sick or dying, they have leprosy. I doubt the film crew asked for their permission to film them. They don't talk with them directly, they don't feature any interviews with them. It's like Muggeridge is interested in what Mother Teresa is doing, but not so much in the people she's doing it for.

**ELIN:** Yeah. And basically what happens is Mother Teresa shows Muggeridge around and at one point she comes up to these cribs of babies just crammed in these cribs like sardines, and she picks a baby up that's really a tiny baby. And she kind of holds it out for the camera and strokes the baby's head. And the baby looks very sick.

**ERIKA:** I could see if you are watching this and you wanted to help people in the world, it's like, well, these people need help, they're right in front of you.

**ELIN:** And that becomes even more clear when they go to the home for the dying, where there are just rows of cots of very thin, sick-looking people, their hair cut short. And Mother Teresa tells Muggeridge that they've cared for over 23,000 people there, that half of them have died.

**ERIKA:** And Muggeridge asks this question. He basically says that some people might say, "Why keep these people alive at all?"

**ELIN:** And Mother Teresa says that she wants to show them love before they die. And she quotes someone. She says, "They live like animals, but now they die like angels."

**ERIKA:** "Now they die like angels."

Sr. Kathleen watched all of this alone in the auditorium in upstate New York.

In 1973, she joined the Missionaries of Charity, and she remembers the first time she met Mother Teresa.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** Somebody said, "Mother's here." And when I saw her, something struck me! I felt like I fell back a little bit. There was a force of power, a presence that moved me somehow. And she said, "Come, come!" And that's how I met her.

**ERIKA:** In the early 1970s, Mother Teresa was just at the start of her rise to fame. But over the coming years, she would become an international figure, meeting with the likes of Kofi Annan, Nancy and Ronald Reagan, Queen Elizabeth, the Dalai Lama.

There were critiques of Mother Teresa, to be sure, and we'll get to those. But in the public eye, she was a living saint.

**SR KATHLEEN:** She could look right through you. She would look right into your soul, into the depths of your soul.

**JOAN WURSTER:** I loved her. She, she was, I mean, people say, "Well, she's just human" and all of that. Yes, she was, but she was a little bit above humanity.

Joan Wurster was a sister with the Missionaries of Charity in the 1980s. And she said the same type of thing about Mother Teresa.

**JOAN:** And when you talked to her, you could tell that, because when she talked to you, she wasn't looking at you like we look at each other and we're talking, she almost looked through you.

**ERIKA:** Almost, Joan says, like she could see into your soul. But what was in hers?

## MIDROLL

**ERIKA:** It surprises me sometimes how much isn't known about Mother Teresa's life. The information we do have is often clouded with inaccuracies repeated over and over.

But here's what we do know: Mother Teresa was born in 1910 in an Albanian family in the city of Skopje -- now part of North Macedonia. Back then, her name was Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu.

We think of Mother Teresa as this impoverished figure, but her family was pretty well off when she was young. Her father was sort of a celebrity in their town. He was a member of the town council, a businessman and an activist.

But when she was around 9 years old, her father died. He may have been murdered because of his political activism.

A few months later, seven more close relatives died. It was the 1918 flu pandemic, and they'd gotten the Spanish flu.

Years later, when she was famous, Mother Teresa wouldn't publicly talk about her childhood much. But it seems her Catholic family became even more religious after her father's death and the loss of her other family members. As she told Malcom Muggeridge, she felt the religious call when she was just 12 years old.

**MOTHER TERESA:** And since then, those 40 years, I've never doubted even for a second that I've done the right thing. It was the will of God. It was his choice.

**MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE:** And that has given you complete serenity and peace and happiness?

**MOTHER TERESA:** A happiness that no one can take from me. There has never been a doubt or unhappiness.

**ERIKA:** When she was 18, she joined the Loreto Sisters -- a Roman Catholic order in Ireland known for its schools. And so, Agnes became Sister Mary Teresa.

She chose the name Teresa after Saint Therese -- a saint known for valuing simple acts of kindness.

The Loreto Sisters stationed Sister Teresa in Kolkata, India -- the city she'd become synonymous with.

**SHANTANU CHAKRABARTI:** What happened was when Mother Teresa was here, uh, you know, she saw quite a vibrant city.

**ERIKA:** This is Shantanu Chakrabarti. He's a history professor at the University of Calcutta and an expert on contemporary Indian history.

In the 1920s and 30s, when Mother Teresa arrived, India was under British rule.

**SHANTANU:** Of course, uh, there was a lot of colonial exploitation. Indian industrialization was hampered to a large extent. But, you know, colonial connection also linked up India globally.

**ERIKA:** People were moving to Kolkata from all over. There was a Buddhist revivalist movement. And in the 30s, it was an epicenter to the country's film industry.

**SHANTANU:** All the major movie studios were located here.

**ERIKA:** With the Loreto Sisters, Mother Teresa taught at a school for girls and later became headmistress. In 1937, she took her final vows and, following Loreto custom, became "Mother." She was no longer Sister Teresa. She was now *Mother* Teresa.

Then came September 1946.

Mother Teresa is 36 years old. She's on a train to a retreat in the foothills of the Himalayas. And she hears a voice.

**FATHER BRIAN KOLODIEJCHUK:** The voice, as she called it, was very clear and distinct.

**ERIKA:** That's Father Brian Kolodiejchuk. He's an MC priest and Superior General of the MC Fathers -- the one person from the Missionaries of Charity who agreed to record an interview. He edited the book on Mother Teresa's divine calling, compiled her personal letters and studied her spirituality.

Father Brian says Mother Teresa knew that voice was Jesus, and that Jesus told her to follow a new calling. He said to quote "give up all and follow Him to the slums -- to serve Him in the poorest of the poor."

In a letter, Mother Teresa writes that Jesus told her, quote: "Little one, give Me souls -- give Me the souls of the poor little street children." He said, "I want Indian Missionary Sisters of Charity -- who would be my fire of love amongst the very poor ... The Sisters that would offer their lives as Victims of my love -- would bring these souls to me."

**FATHER BRIAN:** And Jesus will say, speaking of the poor, “They don't know me, so they don't want me. *You go, and be my light.*”

**ERIKA:** Her call came at a pivotal time in Kolkata's history.

August 16 to 19, 1946, is known as the “Great Calcutta Killing” in India. Mother Teresa was there. Here's Shantanu Chakrabarti again.

**SHANTANU:** In 1946, you had severe communal riots in the cities between Hindus and Muslims, as a result of which, you know, you had dead bodies festering in the drains for five to 10 days, a lot of people, you know, killed or maimed for life.

**ERIKA:** Somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 people died. This all happened just a month before Mother Teresa heard that voice on the train.

Then, in 1947, India gained independence from Britain, and the country was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Violence broke out near the border with what is now Bangladesh. Fifteen million people were displaced from their homes. Refugees flocked to Kolkata.

**SHANTANU:** And the first thing which must have struck her was the huge number of people simply living on the streets. And she started catering to them. And perhaps, to her, this strengthened her sense of mission.

**ERIKA:** After Mother Teresa's calling on the train, she experienced visions for months. Father Brian writes that during this time she “enjoyed an intense degree of union with Our Lord...” He likens it to a kind of spiritual ecstasy. Mother Teresa wrote, “I have been longing to be all for Jesus ... to identify myself with Indian girls completely, and so love Him as He has never been loved before. I thought it was one of my many mad desires.”

She tells her confessor what Jesus said. Eventually, she tells the archbishop, too: She wants to start a new congregation of religious sisters as Jesus instructed, but she's rebuffed. They want her to slow down. They need prayer and reflection and time to see if her call is true. At one point, they even say she's not allowed to think about it anymore. Mother Teresa obeys. But when they open the door, she goes full-force writing letter after letter. She needs to obey Jesus's call, too. Finally, after two years, it pays off: The Pope grants her permission to form a new congregation.

In 1950, Mother Teresa officially founds the Missionaries of Charity under the Archdiocese of Kolkata.

By the way, what she created was technically a religious institute -- not a religious order. And they're not actually nuns -- they're religious sisters. Nuns live contemplative lives, while religious sisters are active out in the world. But these terms are used interchangeably all the time, and even former MC sisters will call themselves nuns.

The Missionaries of Charity started with just 12 sisters.

At first, Mother Teresa planned that they'd live off of just rice and salt, but she was advised that's not enough to survive on.

They wore an Indian sari as their habit. Mother Teresa said Jesus told her to quote, "Dress in simple Indian clothes or rather like my mother dressed -- simple and poor." So Mother Teresa chose a sari that resembled what women who swept the street would wear. The blue stripes on the border would represent the Virgin Mary and purity, and their mission would be to serve the poor, but not quite how most people understand it, I think. Mother Teresa often said that the MCs were not social workers. Because, for her, helping the poor was not an end in itself. It was the means of expressing love for God. It was all for God.

Let me explain: In MC houses around the world, you'll find painted in big letters the words "I thirst." It comes from the Bible -- the Gospel of John -- when Jesus is dying on the cross and says, "I thirst."

Mother Teresa interpreted his words metaphorically. She said he thirsted "not for water, but for love, for sacrifice." She believed the MC mission was to satiate that thirst, and the way to do it was to quote "love, suffer, and save souls."

Here's Mother Teresa addressing a group of sisters before they take their vows.

**MOTHER TERESA:** We are fully consecrated to Jesus to serve the poorest of the poor. And by so doing to satiate his thirst, the thirst of Jesus on the cross for love, for souls, by working at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor.

**ERIKA:** In short, love the poor like you love Jesus. And bring souls to him. Or you could say conversion.

Mother Teresa knew this would be hard. Father Brian says she signed up for suffering.

**FATHER BRIAN:** Your vocation is to love and suffer and save souls.

**ERIKA:** To love, suffer and save souls.

**FATHER BRIAN:** And save souls. Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause she would say quench, satiate Jesus' thirst for love and souls.

And Mother Teresa did just that -- even when her suffering became great. And she did suffer. This is how she put it in her letters: "In the work there will be complete surrender of all I have and all I am -- there will be nothing absolutely left."

Most of us have secrets, parts of ourselves we try to hide. And Mother Teresa wasn't any different. She labored with a deep darkness -- a spiritual darkness. But none of the sisters in the congregation knew. She kept it to herself.

**MOTHER TERESA:** I've never doubted even for a second that I've done the right thing. It was the will of God. It was his choice.

**MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE:** And that has given you complete serenity and peace and happiness?

**MOTHER TERESA:** A happiness that no one can take from me. There has never been a doubt or unhappiness.

**ERIKA:** In reality, almost immediately after she formed the MCs, the foundation of her life cracked. The Jesus who'd been speaking to her, calling her -- he went silent. She couldn't feel God's presence anymore. Instead, prayer felt dry.

She wrote, "There is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead." And it would stay that way the rest of her life -- almost 50 years.

### MIDROLL

**ERIKA:** Mother Teresa's darkness was profound. She only told a handful of people about it -- her confessors and the archbishop. She wrote to early on to him: "*Your grace... There is so much contradiction in my soul. Such deep longing for God. So deep that it is painful. A suffering continual...No faith. No love. No zeal. Souls hold no attraction. Heaven means nothing. To me, it looks like an empty place.*"

But to the world, she smiled.

By the 1970s, Mother Teresa's order was booming. They'd expanded throughout most of South America, and after the success of the documentary "Something Beautiful for God," they just kept growing. It seemed like Mother was everywhere at once. She received international awards. MC houses opened around the world, including the U.S., with a convent in the Bronx.

Despite her unyielding schedule, she still spent time with sisters like Kathleen. Sister Kathleen remembers what she calls "the early days," when Mother Teresa would visit the Bronx in the summer.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** She would come and the first thing we would do was pack the van and go on a picnic (laughs) with her. It was so much fun.

**ERIKA:** Sr. Kathleen remembers. One of these picnics, someone had donated a tin of chocolate-chip cookies:

**SR. KATHLEEN:** Homemade, which we never got. And one of the sisters knew I loved cookies. She used to call me cookie monster, even though (LAUGHS) we didn't have a lot of cookies around! But she brought this tin over to me. And my eyes popped open, and I showed great

delight. And I looked over the front of the van, and I saw a Mother looking at me, Mother Teresa, and I felt so embarrassed.

And so I composed myself. And we never saw those cookies during the picnic. And it was on the way home, I was driving the van, and uh Mother Teresa got the cookies and started breaking them up and was reaching from behind me and breaking them and putting them on my lap, so I could eat little pieces of cookies, and I think I got more than anybody else, too. (Laughs) She was so afraid I would be left out.

But that was her thoughtfulness. She had that mother instinct with the sisters, as well as the poor, of course.

**ERIKA:** Sr. Kathleen has lots of fond memories of Mother Teresa. Like one groggy morning when she and Mother arrived in Rome after being up all night in an airport for a layover.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** I was dead tired. I was ready to drop. And I said to the sister in charge there, "Please let Mother go to bed."

**ERIKA:** Sister Kathleen insisted Mother get some rest. She hadn't had any sleep.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** Mother would not hear of it! Mother Teresa was not going to bed. And I saw her go in and sit down with these young postulants that were joining. And her face became the face of an 18-year-old with rosy cheeks! I couldn't believe it. She wanted to inspire them in her own quiet way. And I went off to bed! (laughing)

**ERIKA:** After these touching moments with her sisters, she'd be off. She received more awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize. She opened a contemplative branch for sisters. Another one for brothers. She added priests.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** The congregation grew really exponentially, for a congregation within a founder's lifetime.

**ERIKA:** But this growth meant Mother Teresa worked constantly.

**SR. KATHLEEN:** Every time she opened a new foundation, a new house of sisters, she always had something to suffer. One time, she got up during the night to go to the bathroom and instead of the bathroom door, it was the staircase to the basement and she fell down the basement stairs. Broke her arm. Another time, she did something to her foot. She said, every new foundation, she had to suffer. She had to make a sacrifice for it.

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**NEWSCASTER:** "It's mysterious. It's deadly and it's baffling medical science: acquired immune deficiency syndrome." "The gay plague, as AIDS has been called, is the center of a political storm. The moral majority claiming AIDS is God's punishment for the gay lifestyle."

**ERIKA:** On Christmas Eve in 1985, Mother Teresa opened one of the first AIDS hospice centers in the United States. It was a 14-bed “guest house” in Greenwich Village. She wore aviator sunglasses and a stony expression to the press conference -- all business. More Lou Reed than the Saint of the Gutters.

Sister Kathleen was an MC at the time.

**SR: KATHLEEN:** We would take the people that really had no place else to go. We didn't have televisions for them and all the amenities; it was really bare bones.

**ERIKA:** After New York, they opened AIDS hospices in other cities.

**SR: KATHLEEN:** That was a very controversial move. There was a lot of opposition from the neighbors, particularly in Washington. And they would have meetings, and they would present these hypotheses: “If somebody up at the AIDS home blows their nose or bleeds into a Kleenex or something and drops it on the ground and then my dog grabs the Kleenex and brings it to my house, are we all going to be contaminated?” They did not want us in their neighborhood. But Mother was determined.

**ERIKA:** Did you get a sense were were any sisters scared when opening these AIDS homes so early on?

**SR: KATHLEEN:** No. None of us would ever express that because it's like being in the Army. You're prepared for war. In a sense, we were always in a war of good against evil.

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**ERIKA:** In the 1990s, Americans agreed Mother Teresa was the most admired woman in the world in an annual Gallup Poll -- twice.

**MARY JOHNSON:** Everybody in Rome knew who Mother Teresa was. And she would be accosted everywhere.

**ERIKA:** Mary Johnson says Mother Teresa drew huge crowds, especially at professions: when new groups of sisters professed their vows.

**MARY:** People would would fill the church every time, no matter how big it was. And on the way from the church to the convent, we'd have to form like this kind of honor guard.

**ERIKA:** The sisters surrounded Mother Teresa to hide her when they walked in public. But the saris were a dead giveaway. Eventually they came up with a new method using Vatican ushers.

**MARY JOHNSON:** These are big guys, and they would come and form like a circle around Mother Teresa, walking from the Church to the convent, just so that people wouldn't wouldn't crush her -- literally crush her -- wanting to touch her.

**ERIKA:** Sister Kathleen says she didn't enjoy the attention.

**SR: KATHLEEN:** Once we were in the airport with her, and (laughs) a woman came up to her and said, "Oh, Mother Teresa, I'm writing a book about you. I can't believe you're here, and I get to meet you." And Mother Teresa looked at her as as though she had two heads -- so puzzled-looking. And she said to the woman, "Have you nothing better to do?" The last thing on Mother Teresa's mind was any notoriety, publicity. She found it a terrible burden, actually.

**MARY:** She hated to have her picture taken. She just genuinely hated it.

**SR: KATHLEEN:** So she said, "I told the Lord, 'For every photo, I want a soul out of purgatory to go to heaven.'"

**MARY:** And that was the only reason that she would agree to get her photo taken.

**ERIKA:** And there were a lot of photos taken of Mother Teresa.

**MARY:** Oh, a gazillion, gazillion. Purgatory has to be empty, right? (laughing)

**ERIKA:** Close to it. (laughter)

At this point, people already saw her as a saint. They were pretty sure she'd be canonized someday, and Mother Teresa saw the possibility, too.

**MARY:** One day I remember so much is she had all of us gathered around and she told us, "You know, I think all of you should hurry up and die." And it was like, "*What?*" "You should all hurry up and die, because this Pope is canonizing everybody."

**ERIKA:** Whoa.

**MARY:** Completely whoa! (laughs) It also didn't feel like her commanding us all to die, OK, let's be clear. But it confirmed to me something that I had very long suspected: that being named a saint was something very significant in Mother Teresa's eyes.

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**SR. KATHLEEN:** When I think of looking at Mother's face, I remember it as tired. And, in later years, like stretched -- stretched with a kind of, a pull of gravity, of burden, of labor. And she asked Pope John Paul II, "What am I to do? I have all these invitations. And, uh, at the same time, I have the responsibility for the congregation." And he said, "You give loving care to the people, and then you give necessary attention to the sisters."

**MARY:** "Give necessary care to the sisters, but loving care to all the people." And she took this to mean that the Pope -- and therefore God -- wanted her to limit her time with the sisters to what was only essential and to spend all the rest of it accepting all of these invitations she was getting to give speeches, to receive doctorates, to whatever. And that's not what she wanted.

**ERIKA:** At the risk of overstating it, Mother Teresa became a victim of her own success. As she would put it, a willing victim of Jesus's love.

One expert told me, Mother Teresa was used -- by individuals, institutions and countries for their own purposes. But he said Mother Teresa was shrewd. She had her own mission, and, as he put it, she used her users just as much.

One of the more unusual images of Mother Teresa was filmed on a street in the Bronx in 1997: Mother Teresa and Diana, Princess of Wales, holding hands. Mother Teresa in her sari and sandals, Princess Diana in a suit and heels.

In 1997, Mother Teresa was very ill. She'd had three surgeries in the previous year. Her recurring heart issues were getting worse. Plus, according to the Associated Press, she had lung and kidney problems, too. In just a couple of months, she would die. Princess Diana visited because of Mother Teresa's poor condition.

It wasn't the first time they met. Mary Johnson remembers. She was there, in Rome, a few years earlier in 1992.

**MARY:** For me, Diana and Mother had so many things in common. It was, it was crazy.

**ERIKA:** It does seem crazy given how differently they lived. The class difference alone. But they were both icons in the 1980s and '90s -- sort of symbols of love, promoting humanitarian causes, and advocating for the downtrodden. They both navigated old institutions -- one the Catholic Church, the other the British Monarchy.

**MARY:** Both of them working within these very closed systems, these very demanding, traditional roles of one sort or another.

**ERIKA:** And both of them had internal suffering they tended to hide. Princess Diana once said, "the public side was very different, obviously, from the private side."

**PRINCESS DIANA:** The public side, they wanted a fairy princess: touch them and everything would turn into gold, and all of their worries would be forgotten. Little did they realise that the individual was crucifying herself inside.

**ERIKA:** On the day of Princess Diana's first visit, Mary Johnson woke up at her usual 4:40 in the morning. Paparazzi were already crowded around the convent. That afternoon, Diana arrived by limousine.

**MARY:** And Mother told me, (whispering) "Don't let anyone else in the chapel. It's just Mother and Diana for now, all right?" And so I kind of stood guard out there, not letting anybody else in.

**ERIKA:** Mother Teresa removed her worn-out sandals, and Diana took off her shoes, too.

**MARY: And** Diana had these beautiful black pumps, and these two shoes were the only ones right outside the chapel. And you saw those shoes and these two women inside praying. And it was beautiful.

**ERIKA:** When Diana visited her again, five years later in the Bronx, Mother Teresa looked pale. After they both waved to the crowd, Lady Di bent over to say goodbye to Mother Teresa with a hug and a kiss, and then drove off. It was the last time they would see each other.

Princess Diana died in a car crash six weeks later. Mother Teresa died a week after that. She was 87.

According to testimony, on the day of her death, she lay in her room at the Mother House in Kolkata. Her breathing was labored. She complained of back pain. And an hour and a half before she died, there was a power outage. The lights went out in Kolkata.

During her life, Mother Teresa had her critics. Harsh critiques. Behind her simple message of love, they saw something else.

**AROUN CHATTERJEE:** I would say that practically everything about Mother Teresa is a result of myth, conscious lies and hyperbole.

Next time on “The Turning.”

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## CREDITS

**ERIKA:** “The Turning” is written by Erin Lantz Lesser and me. Our producers are Elin Lantz Lesser and Emily Forman. Our editor is Rob Rosenthal. Andrea Asuaje is our digital producer. Fact-checking by Andrea López-Cruzado.

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