## The amazing grace of Sister Thea

## **Book chronicles** inspired life of Franciscan nun

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Anyone who ever met Sister Thea Bowman already knew she was a person of amazing grace.

For those who never had the opportunity, Sister Charlene Smith, FSPA, and John Feister have written "Thea's Song: The Life of Thea Bowman."

1990, but as the book proves, she certainly is not forgotten.

Sister Charlene was a classmate Charlene said. of Sister Thea's when both studied to join the Franciscan Sisters of because she was so incredibly tal- she encountered as a black wanted the bishops to under-Perpetual Adoration in the 1950s. But their backgrounds couldn't struck me as an old soul – wise respond in anger, have been more different.

Thea had come to La Crosse from Mississippi, despite her parents' fears about sending their only child north into a white communitv.

But Thea would not be denied. respected." Even at 15, she knew her destiny and that began with study at St. Rose Thea's capacity to reach out in love important thing is to love, and University, New Orleans, deliv-Convent in La Crosse.

For Sister Charlene, the book was a way to immerse herself in the goodness of Thea's life and thoughts as she immersed herself in about her. She could sing the song those songs and she knew them parents and of God?"

research, reading everything she could find that Thea had written. And though she studied alongside her all those years ago, there was so much she didn't know about Sister Thea.

La Crosse was far outside Thea's experience. Sister Charlene said, but the young nun won over stony hearts and ignorant minds with the power of her personality and the strength of her love.

"She had to do everything we did, only she had to do it better," Sister Charlene said.

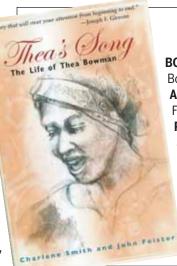
"Her parents would not allow her to accept any indignity. ... They that was in your heart even all." Sister Thea died of cancer in tried to teach her that the problem when you didn't know the was whites were ignorant. That's melody. She said herself she had ering of bishops by singing, really the truth, isn't it?" Sister a gift ... it enabled her to help

> "I knew she was special just ented and she was so funny. She woman, it was not Thea's way to stand how mistreated blacks beyond her years," Sister Charlene Charlene said. said, and that's probably because Sister Thea spent a lot of time have exploded if I had been thing said during a visit to a around her elders.

"She was treated so well by her treated." elders that she wanted elders to be

Beyond that, though, was Sister knew that love is power. "The Black Catholic Studies, Xavier to everyone, Sister Charlene said. she really learned to love. I ered a lively, inspirational hom-Not just to friends, but to those who think the thing that fueled her ily about Thea, saying, 'She would be enemies.

"There was something magnetic that literally. She could sing she was -a beloved child of her



## **BY THE BOOK**

BOOK: "Thea's Song: The Life of Thea Bowman"

AUTHORS: Sister Charlene Smith. FSPA, and John Feister **RECEPTION:** 4 to 6 p.m. May 13 at St. Rose Convent. 701 Franciscan Wav: free

BOOK AVAILABLE: Sophia Bookstore inside the Franciscan Spirituality Center, Viterbo University Bookstore and online at www.amazon.com

people make their lives better."

And despite all the injustices Sister were.

treated the way she had been memorial for Sister Thea.

She once challenged a gath-"Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." Sister Charlene said, because she

Sister Charlene said she "I think back, and I would recently was struck by some-

"Father Maurice, who suc-Thea was powerful, Sister ceeded Thea in teaching Charlene said, because she preaching at the Institute for was gospel music. She took knew who she was and whose