

INDIE SALES & ESCAZAL FILMS  
PRESENT

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

# Marie's Story

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

ARIANA RIVOIRE

A FILM BY  
JEAN-PIERRE AMÉRIS

ISABELLE CARRÉ



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# *Marie's Story*

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JEAN-PIERRE AMÉRIS

(ORIGINAL WORKING TITLE : MARIE HEURTIN)



# Synopsis

MARIE'S STORY is based on real-life events that took place in France in the late 19th century.

Born deaf and blind, Marie Heurtin, aged 14, is incapable of communicating. Despite the advice of a doctor who believes she is "dumb", Marie's father, a humble artisan, cannot bring himself to commit her to an asylum. Out of despair, he goes to Larnay Institute near Poitiers, where nuns take care of young deaf women.

Despite the Mother Superior's scepticism, Sister Marguerite, a young nun, takes this «wild little animal» under her wing and does everything she can to bring her out of her darkness. She will succeed, in spite of some failures and the temptation of discouragement, armed with her joyous faith and love for young Marie.



# Historical Facts

In the second half of the 19th century, The Larnay Institute, a convent near Poitiers directed by the “Sisters of Wisdom”, brought together a group of deaf-blind children to give them an education and teach them to communicate through sign language.

Larnay gained worldwide renown after the publication of Louis Arnould’s “A Soul in Prison” in which he graphically described the method pursued by Sister Marguerite for the education of Marie Heurtin, deaf-mute and blind by birth.

Marie Heurtin, often seen as the French Hellen Keller, arrived at Larnay in March 1895 at the age of 10. She was in an even worse state than the American girl: struggling and howling like a wild child, carried by her arms and feet, it was impossible to predict if she could learn anything and how, since she had neither sight, hearing nor power of speech.





June 4, 1910. (7)

## THE FRENCH HELEN KELLER.

No less a person than a member of the French Academy, Henri Lavedan, calls attention in a Parisian paper to the recent death of a remarkable nun, Sister Sainte Marguerite, who taking some years ago a little child, deaf, dumb, blind and almost an imbecile, so instructed and trained her as to make it possible for this much afflicted child (now grown a young woman) to be counted among the most highly educated young people of France. It is the case of Helen Keller over again, only that Marie Heurtin even in a worse state than the American whose education has been the talk of country and of the world.

Some few years ago, the REVIEW contained an interesting article on the awakening of the spirit of this poor Marie Heurtin. We then gave in some detail the method employed by Sister Sainte Marguerite to bring out of the chaos of the child's mind some conception of God and of the universe and of herself. M. Lavedan says:—

One should know this unheard-of story which deserves to be read on bended knees and the Golden Rule.



Marie Heurtin tient sur les bords de son abécédair, Sister Sainte Marguerite.



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## Marie Heurtin en Europe

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## I. — Marie Heurtin en Allemagne.

## A. — SUPPLÉMENT DE LA « GAZETTE D'AUSSBOURG »

Trois semaines après son apparition, l'article de la *Quinaine* était exactement résumé à Berlin, dans la *Revue quotidienne* (*Tägliche Rundschau*), n° du 24 décembre 1900, sous le titre *L'Enseignement d'une aveugle-sourde-muette* (*Das Unterrichts einer Taubstummen und Blinden*), signé J. W. La Bavière s'en occupa davantage. M. le docteur E. Dentler, qui avait publié, l'année précédente, des études psychologiques remarquables dans les *Feuilles historiques et politiques* (*Historisch-politische Blätter*), fit connaître l'article de la *Quinaine* dans le 1<sup>er</sup> Supplément scientifique de 1901 de la *Gazette d'Augsbourg*, où il en cadrait l'histoire résumée de Marie Heurtin d'un commentaire élevé de philosophie spiritualiste (1). L'article, intitulé : « Education d'une jeune fille aveugle et sourde-muette de naissance. — Une démonstration effective de la spiritualité de l'âme humaine », commence ainsi :

« Pour établir la distinction essentielle entre l'âme spirituelle de l'homme et l'âme sensible de l'animal, pour apporter la preuve de l'immatérialité et de la vraie spiritualité de

(1) Beilage zur *Augsburger Postzeitung*, 5 janvier 1901.

Clarence H. Hoover of  
ford City, one of the best  
newspaper men in Indian  
died recently at Kneip  
itarium, Rome City, Ind.



After many months of struggle and hard work, Sister Marguerite finally made a first step in teaching her sign language by establishing a link between an object and a sign for Marie to designate it: a pocket knife which the girl showed a great affection for. The nun would take it away from her and designate it passing her fingers through her hands. Through these fingers flowed canals of patience and faith, a sort of supernatural stream which worked and kneaded young Marie until she learned all the signs of the deaf-mute alphabet.

Marie Heurtin would later learn Braille, use a typewriter, play dominoes and other games, sew, knit, learn history, geography, know time, and become a delicate young woman. Her story is considered a miracle.

The Larnay Institute still operates today.





## *Director's Note*

This project began with my fascination for the story of Helen Keller. In my research, I came across the lesser known story of Marie Heurtin and I immediately decided to visit the Larnay Institute in Poitiers, where she lived in the 19th century.

The Institute is no longer a religious establishment, yet remains a center for deaf-mute children. In light of the scientific progress of the last hundred years, I was surprised to find that the institute was still in operation,

It is difficult for me to describe how I felt when I met these children who could only communicate by touch and who were eager to feel my hands and face as soon as I arrived. I felt quite powerless trying to communicate with them.

I also met these children's parents who explained the challenges they faced. Exactly like Marie Heurtin's father over a century ago, some were told by doctors that their child was mentally challenged and would never be able to communicate. The parents' despair ended when they were introduced to the instructors of the Larnay Institute who taught their children how to make contact with the world.





Marie Heurtin's case, which depended on hard work and tenacity, far more than mysticism, is considered a miracle and the techniques Sister Marguerite invented are used today. Ever since my visit, I have felt compelled to tell Marie's story.

People who are considered different, and consequently marginalized, is a central theme in my films, such as *ROMANTICS ANONYMOUS*. What I find thrilling in Marie Heurtin's story is the exceptional character of Sister Marguerite and her unshakable conviction that she will succeed in releasing young Marie from her inner prison.

The bond created between Marie and Sister Marguerite is nothing less than a nun experiencing something which, by definition, she is not intended to experience : maternal love. This bond includes an inevitable separation which represents the final stage in young Marie's learning process.

The film I have in mind is a luminous one. I want to film Marie's hands touching animals, trees and faces, moving moments which turn out to be the invention of a language and the story of a liberation, a rebirth.

Jean-Pierre AMÉRIS









## Cast

Sister Marguerite

Marie Heurtin  
Mother Superior

ISABELLE CARRE (Romantics Anonymous by Jean-Pierre Améris, The Refuge by François Ozon,  
Holy Lola by Bertrand Tavernier)  
ARIANA RIVOIRE  
BRIGITTE CATILLON ( Love is in the Air by Alexandre Castagnetti, Tell no One by Guillaume Canet)

## Crew

Directed by  
Screenplay

Cinematography by  
Sound  
Production manager  
Producers

Production Company  
In Association With

French Distributor

JEAN-PIERRE AMERIS (The Man Who Laughs, Romantics Anonymous)  
JEAN-PIERRE AMERIS  
PHILIPPE BLASBAND (Romantics Anonymous, Irina Palm by Sam Garbarski,  
Nathalie... by Anne Fontaine, A Pornographic Affair by Frédéric Fonteyne)  
VIRGINIE SAINT-MARTIN (A Pornographic Affair)  
LAURENT LAFRAN (The Man Who Laughs, The Snow of the Killimandjaro)  
PASCAL METGE (Funny Games US)  
DENIS CAROT (Home, The Source, Live and Become)  
SOPHIE REVIL  
ESCAZAL FILMS  
FRANCE 3 CINEMA  
RHÔNE-ALPES CINEMA  
DIAPHANA







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