



(Sr. Noeleta O'Dea prepared this Remembering about 10 years ago when, during a series of short meetings, she was able to reflect with Sr. Catherine on her life's story. Bringing back to Catherine and sharing with her each part as she wrote it, Noeleta helped Catherine to recall memories she might otherwise not have thought of. Both Catherine and Noeleta enjoyed the experience.)

### **Remembering Sr. Catherine (Florita) Crittenden Oct. 14, 1917 – Feb. 20, 2011**

Catherine's paternal and maternal grandparents lived in Windsor, Ontario. Grandpa Jones had married an Indian lady named Mary, who Catherine recalled seeing "dressed in black, wearing a hat trimmed in black feathers." Spying a rosary held in her hand, Catherine thought to herself, "If she says the rosary, she must be okay!" Both paternal and maternal grandparents knew one another very well. So it was not unusual that Fred Crittenden and Delia Jones were friends. As a young man Fred spent a few years in Saskatchewan. Upon his return home, he found Delia waiting for him and dressed in her Sunday best.

Soon after, Fred Crittenden and Delia Jones were married at Immaculate Conception Church in Lapeer, Michigan. They moved to Walkerville, Ontario, where their marriage was blessed by the birth of Catherine on Oct. 14, 1917. A few months after Catherine's birth, her parents moved to Michigan and settled in the area around Lapeer. Catherine had three brothers, Theodore, Carl and Dale, all of whom were Veterans of World War II. A sister, Rosemary, was the youngest of the siblings.

The family moved a number of times when Catherine was young. While living in Birch Run, Catherine was ready to start school. However, since Catherine was so small for her age, and the children had to walk to school, Catherine's education was delayed for a year. She could have been lost in the snow banks on snowy days, so her mother had to be sure the path from her home to school was shoveled. Delia added a red tassel to Catherine's hats so that she could be easily spotted.

Her parents were so busy moving, resettling and raising a family that going through the process of becoming United States citizens was not their immediate concern. It was not until Catherine entered the IHM community that she became an American citizen in the 1940s.

When Catherine was only nine years old, her father died, and her mother became the resourceful one. She moved her family to Mt. Morris, Michigan. They built a home on the edge of the cemetery across the street from St. Mary Church and rectory. Catherine entered the fourth grade at St. Mary School, and her mother worked at St. Mary Convent where she prepared a daily meal for the IHM Sisters who lived there.

Catherine thought highly of her mother, Delia. "As a seamstress," Catherine stated, "she made everything we needed to wear except our shoes and stockings." In addition, she made girls' hats, coats and dresses; and made suits for boys which she sold at a store where she worked.

At times, with the blessings of the store's manager, Delia would board a train for Detroit to get new ideas, and purchase material for her sewing business. One time, she made a coat for one of Catherine's

brothers and had just enough fur to add a collar to the coat. After wearing it to school a few times, he begged, “Mom would you take it off? I don’t want to be dressed like a girl!”

Catherine’s mother fostered prayer in her family and taught her children the Catechism. For a while, the family attended Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Birch Run. Catherine remembered the large bookcases in the back of the church from which they could take books out for a week. Each Sunday after Mass Catherine and her brother, Theodore, selected three books which Delia read to them in the evening. The family said the rosary every night after supper and prayed novenas for approaching feasts. Catherine believed that her vocation was fostered by these experiences.

Other events had encouraged Catherine to think of a religious vocation. When she was in the third grade she was invited to attend a May-Crowning service at her cousin’s school, St. Matthew’s in Flint. Catherine boarded a streetcar to go there and was awed by the beauty of the May altar, Mary’s statue, and the impressiveness of the service.

As an eighth-grader, she viewed a mission film shown at St. Mary’s which further reinforced her positive thoughts about religious life. Some time later, she attended the ordination of a first cousin in Canada. On this occasion her family members predicted that Catherine would become the religious from their family, an announcement that surprised, yet pleased Catherine.

At the close of Catherine’s sophomore year at St. Mary’s, the principal, Sr. Beatrice, spoke to Catherine and her mother about the possibility of Catherine’s entering the convent. Sr. Beatrice indicated that Catherine could complete her high school education at St. Mary Academy and then enter the Postulate. This was agreed upon. Catherine graduated from the Academy and entered the Postulate on July 2, 1934.

On the same day that Catherine entered, Mary Laubacher was also a new Postulant. She remembers seeing this little girl in a pale orange organdy dress as Mary was changing into her postulant outfit. Mary figured that one of the new candidates had brought her little sister to watch while she donned her postulant clothing. Imagine Mary’s surprise when the Postulant group assembled later that day to see this “little girl” herself wearing Postulant garb. It was Catherine, a member of her class!

Catherine was received into the Novitiate on Aug. 15, 1935, and received the name Sr. Florita, a name that Mother Ruth believed fit her very well. First vows followed the novitiate on Aug. 15, 1937, and Sr. Florita finalized her IHM commitment in 1940.

Catherine’s ministry as a primary teacher for 30 years included St. Charles, Newport; Holy Redeemer, Detroit; Our Lady of Lourdes, River Rouge; St. Charles, Detroit; and St. Cyprian, Riverview. It was while Catherine was stationed at St. Charles in Detroit that she first experienced vision problems. She began doctoring for these at this time. Sometime later, her hearing began to give her difficulty. Both of these problems challenged her until the end of her life.

In 1972, Catherine’s work took a new direction as she became a Pastoral Minister to the sick and elderly at St. Martin’s in Detroit. She described her duties as handling all aspects of parish ministry. “With no resident priest there,” she explained, “I felt strongly that I should continue to minister to the daily spiritual and physical needs of the people of St. Martin’s and the St. Ambrose community.”

Twelve years later, the people of St. Ambrose published an article that read: “It is with a true sense of loss that we of St. Ambrose received the news that Sr. Catherine Crittenden, IHM, will be leaving this area of Detroit. Though her primary ministry is to St. Martin Parish, she has been a quiet presence for the

people of St. Ambrose, too. Since 1973, she has coordinated the Meals-on-Wheels Program at Faith Lutheran Church which serves so beautifully our housebound Senior Citizens in Detroit.”

The St. Martin Parish Bulletin said, “We are grateful for Sr. Catherine’s 12 years of service here at St. Martin’s. She has been part of the changes and challenges we have faced in our parish and our community. She has served us with dedication, enthusiasm and affection. We will miss her love and concern for us.”

Catherine had so earned the appreciation and respect of Fr. Edward Scheuerman during these years that whenever he visited Monroe to say Mass for us he never left the Motherhouse without a visit to Catherine’s room.

At St. David School in Detroit she served as librarian for three years. She wrote in her commitment form, “In this ministry I want to grow in compassion and sensitivity to the minority groups in this community. I wish in a special way to help educate the poor and oppressed persons on this inner city school. Mindful of the needs of both children and parents, I hope by my presence to bring the Good News to the people of this neighborhood.”

Catherine’s last five years of ministry were spent being receptionist for the Northeast Province in Taylor. Undertaking this work of service to her IHM Sisters, she wrote, “In prayerful thanksgiving to be happy and rejoice with every moment of life; every breath, every touch, every sight, every smell and sound. May the dreams never disappear with age, but continue to be alive with knowledge that the dreams will one day come true.”

As a retired sister, Sr. Catherine experienced the move from the Motherhouse to St. Mary Center during the reconstruction of the Motherhouse. She was a member of the Health Care Center when she had the great happiness of celebrating her 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as an IHM Sister. Just before this event, Catherine’s brother, Dale and his wife, Jean, who live in Alabama, and a niece and her husband from the Flint area, arrived for a visit that turned out to be a most enjoyable time for all, especially Catherine.

Stories and memories surfaced as they visited. Dale, Catherine’s youngest brother, recalled that Catherine had taken him to town on the day that he made his First Communion and bought him an ice cream cone. It was an event that he treasured so much that it had stayed with him in memory over all these years.

So, dear Catherine, we are here with you today in celebration, and with gratitude for your unique life among us and God’s people in all the places in which you ministered. May your beautiful dreams become now a reality as you joyfully enter the fullness of life in the presence of your loving God!

Written by Sr. Noeleta O’Dea in 2000 and updated 1/18/11.

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