



Remembering Sister Helen (Marianna) Glaser, IHM
Feb. 4, 1918 - March 5, 2008

Everyone's life is a journey with many twists and turns and every life journey is unique. Helen Louise Glaser's journey began on Feb. 4, 1918, when she arrived as the fourth child of Joseph Paul and Myrtle Lathrop Glaser. She was greeted by her older siblings Joe, Jack and Mary Elizabeth. She in turn helped to welcome three younger children into the family Nancy, Ruth and Bob. Helen described her family as one with a strong family spirit due to the influence of her parents who sought to foster religious values as well as kindness, love and support for one another.

Helen was a competitive person and sports were a vital part of her life in school as well as in the convent. Every winter the Glasers had a skating rink in the backyard equipped with special lighting. The neighborhood children were always welcome to come for an evening of skating and to enjoy some hot chocolate when the skating was finished. Basketball and tennis consumed much of her free time during her high school years – and she excelled in both. Later when she was in the community, the 'Redeemer Girls' formed a formidable team against any group of Sisters willing to challenge them. You might understand this if you realize that the 'Redeemer Girls' included Margaret Cutcher, Margaret and Paula Marie Schloff, June Denne and Joan McGrath, to mention a few, in addition to Ellen Balle and Helen Glaser.

Helen and her close friend, Ellen Balle, entered the community on July 16, 1936, after graduating from Holy Redeemer High School. That date was chosen because their very close friend, Mary Margaret Boland, had entered on that date the previous year. The three who became known as Sister Johnita, Sister Berchmans and Sister Marianna, maintained a close friendship through the years and were a support for each other.

There's a little story about Helen's religious name. Msgr. Markey, the brother of our first Sr. Marianna, was a close friend of Mr. Glaser and the Glaser family. Sr. Marianna died on June 17, 1937, and Helen was to be received as a novice on August 15, 1937, and asked for Sr. Marianna's name. The community leaders thought it was much too soon to give out the name of a Sister as revered as Sr. Marianna but Msgr. Markey interceded saying that he would be honored to have a Glaser have his beloved sister's name, and so it was.

After several years of teaching in elementary and junior high school and after receiving her master's in English, Helen taught at the high school level. Her students recognized her ability as a teacher, and also admired her strong values as well as her love and knowledge of sports. A story is told of her "battle" with the St. Francis de Sales seniors to really proclaim their leadership by singing and actively participating in the daily school Mass. After several fruitless attempts, in desperation, she promised to lead them down the second corridor of the school carrying the American flag. It worked! The class filled the rafters in song and prayer. True to her word, Helen, with stars and stripes aloft, led the cheering seniors to their classroom.

During these years Helen experienced the loss of her father who was very active and highly respected in the Catholic community of the Archdiocese of Detroit. Both Helen and Ruth felt the pain of not being able to sit with the family at their father's funeral nor were they able to go to the cemetery according to our customs at that point in time. This was definitely one of the difficult times in her life journey.

After receiving her degree in religious education from the University of Detroit through the Pius XII Institute, Helen was invited by Father Robert Humitz to work in the newly formed religious education office of the Archdiocese of Detroit as a consultant for high school religion teachers. She enjoyed the challenge of developing Religious Education Programs throughout the Archdiocese. She was fondly remembered for her giftedness and willingness to help others.

From there she moved to St. Anselm's parish in Dearborn Heights where she organized their first religious education office. Upon leaving this position, she moved to Marian High School as a member of the guidance department and as the admissions director. She loved her years at Marian High and her organizational skills and ability to deal with teenagers was an asset.

After these turns on her journey, Helen's next ministry brought her back to Monroe where she worked in the Health Care Center in the capacity of a Personnel Director interviewing prospective employees. Many of our present and past employees were hired by her, and speak of her fondly, remembering her kindness and concern for them. They can tell you many a good story about Helen. She was firm but gentle, forthright but caring.

In July of 1992, Sr. Rose Matthew Mangini invited her to work in the IHM Archives. She often referred to that ministry as a great blessing primarily because she learned so much about the history of the community. She felt that her ministry there enriched her life in many ways.

One of the greatest influences for Helen along the way in her spiritual life was the retreat given by Fr. Armand Nigro at the Motherhouse in 1990. This retreat introduced her to Anthony de Mello, SJ, and brought a powerful change in her prayer life and her spirituality. Two other strong influences in her spiritual life were the writings of Fr. Ronald Rolheiser and Bishop Untener's *Little Books*.

As Helen's health began to fail, she agreed to move to the Health Care Center. Though this move had its difficulties, she often told people that she was convinced that God is in everything and in every circumstance of our lives. She was most grateful for the care she received in the Health Care Center, and she tried to continue to minister to others as her energy level allowed.

Helen's journey had its usual ups and downs but she felt they all contributed to a full life for her as a family member, a student, an IHM, a teacher and a retired Sister

Now, Helen's journey on this earth came to an end on March 5 – one month after her 90th birthday. However, it was not an abrupt end even though it seemed to come faster than most of us expected. Her death was an experience that she could not fully

understand during her time on earth but it was something for which she prepared along the way – sometimes consciously and other times through happenstance. Henri Nouwen, the author of many books on spirituality, taught that our lives belong to others besides ourselves through the sharing of our gifts and talents. He later came to see our dying as a gift also, an opportunity to pass along to others our own sense of peace with God. Helen was peaceful and, in the eyes of her closest friends, she was ready to enter into the final phase of her journey with the faithful in heaven and that she did in the early morning hours last Wednesday with her dear sister Ruth at her side.

St. Francis of Assisi once said, “Remember that when you leave this earth, you take nothing that you received, only what you have given – a heart enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice and courage.” And Helen’s heart was so enriched.

As we gather today to remember who she was as each of us knew her, we are grateful to her for having the opportunity to be part of her life-long journey. And we thank our God for gracing us with her presence for 90 years. Helen now enjoys the fullness of life in a way she could never dream and will continue her loving care for all she came to know and to love in this life.

Mary Ann Untener, IHM
March 6, 2008