



Remembering for Sister Mary Ellen Glosser

May 2, 1919 – June 5, 2011

In 1999 on a Ministry Commitment form Sister Mary Ellen wrote: “Hopefully I can sing a song of praise for all the blessings I have received as a member of this community.” This attitude of gratitude permeates her life story. Mary Ellen wrote her biography when she retired to Monroe in 1983. Much of what I say here is in her own words.

Mary Ellen Glosser was born in Canton, Ohio, on May 2, 1919. Her parents, Andrew F. Glosser and Eleanor Mary Lyons, were the first couple married at St. Mary’s Church in Canton in 1899. They had six children, three boys, Arthur, Earl and Andrew, and three girls, Dorothy, Mary Ellen and Margaret. Margaret married and is still living in Canton. There are numerous nieces and nephews, too.

Mary Ellen grew up in Canton and attended grade school at St. Mary’s and St. Joseph’s and later St. John’s High School. The St. Joseph Sisters of Cleveland, who staffed the grade school, exerted a great influence on her life, yet she felt strongly drawn to the IHMs through her high school experience. She wrote, “The first sister I knew in high school was Sister Helen Cecile Schaner, and she suggested that I might like to join the IHM order.

“When I entered tenth grade, Sister Dolorosa was my teacher and she too, encouraged me to become an IHM.” Mary Ellen visited Monroe with the Laubacher family when they came to visit Mary Laubacher and she was sure it was her calling. She wrote: “Although our parish priests and the St. Joseph sisters felt I was being disloyal to leave the diocese, the pull toward Monroe was very strong. When I was in the eleventh grade, Father Paul Reinert, SJ, was directing our retreat, and he encouraged me to enter the Monroe congregation, and even to do so at that time as the IHMs were suggesting. Since Father was the brother of our first Sister Mary Basil, my parents, being people of great faith, did not want to oppose his judgment. They too, however, would have preferred that I enter the Sisters of St. Joseph, as had my older sister, Dorothy.”

On June 21, 1935, at age 16, Mary Ellen entered the congregation. On Christmas Eve of that same year, Mary Ellen’s father went to his parish church for confession and was hit and killed by an auto as he returned to his car. It is not referred to in her autobiography -- perhaps it was too painful a memory.

Not having finished high school, Mary Ellen stayed a year in the Postulate, and was received and given the name Sister Susellen on Aug. 15, 1936. She made her first vows on Aug. 15, 1938, and her final vows three years later.

Mary Ellen had various mission experiences, including teaching in both grade school and high school. She wrote, “I was directress at St. Mary Academy, principal at St. Mary’s - Wayne, superior at Marygrove Convent, coordinator at the Motherhouse Infirmary, co-provincial for the

Southwest Province, coordinator at Crawfton and Hospitality House, and Business Manager at Marian High School. Having been indoctrinated with the principle that we could do anything that obedience gave us to do, I have experienced a rich and fulfilling life in each of these ministries.” Clearly Mary Ellen was a very capable administrator and a very personable one. The St. Mary Academy girls dearly loved her and visited her regularly when they came for reunions.

“My cherished memory and the greatest spiritual experience of my life,” she wrote, “was a spiritual direction workshop and retreat for 23 days at Oxford, Mich. Sister Margaret Brennan felt that anyone who was in a position of authority needed this, and she obtained the very best directors available. It was truly an enriching experience -- a time of renewal, prayer and quiet.”

In 1983 Sister Mary Ellen returned to the Motherhouse because of the difficulty of venturing out in inclement weather. Here she served the Motherhouse community in many ways – first as a switch-board operator, and then as director of dietary services. She wrote on her Ministry Commitment Form: “Although I lack the physical stamina for the actual work, I have found it a fulfilling ministry by being able to offer a caring presence to the sisters I serve, and also the women with whom I work.” According to Sister Rita Rennell, who was nursing supervisor at the time, Sister Mary Ellen had a pleasant demeanor. The staff loved to work with her.

After five years of working with the dietary needs, Mary Ellen began to work in a different capacity with the sisters in the Infirmary. She wrote in 1999, “I see myself responding to the needs of the world by prayer. I assist in the ministry of the Motherhouse by serving as a companion to sisters going to doctors, and helping them interpret the medical terminology they receive. As a hospital visitor, I hope I bring some solace to those whom I visit.”

More memorable than the many works Mary Ellen did during her life among us is the beautiful spirit of gratitude that exudes from her Page of Life. I quote almost exactly from it:

“A very powerful influence in my life was my mother’s illness. All other facets of my life paled in comparison with the suffering I observed on her part for 26 years. It started at my first profession in 1938, and colored my life for many years to come. Because of it, my superiors showed exceptional kindness to me, even to the point of permitting me to visit her once a year (although this was not the IHM custom at the time). One General Superior told me to do whatever my St. Joseph sister did while we were at home, but to keep quiet about the subject. Understandably, my perception of authority was colored by their charity to me.”

There is a cute little anecdote I want to insert here. The sisters who knew Mary Ellen say that she was always a lot of fun. One of the times when May Ellen and her St. Joseph sister, Dorothy, were visiting their mother together, they switched their habits and ran around trying to fool folks. A snapshot was taken and Mary Ellen proudly displayed it to her friends. Recently Sister Jean Laubacher and Mary Ellen looked through her picture albums together, and no picture was found. But the time spent pouring over the albums was most appreciated. (Back now to the Page of Life.)

Mary Ellen wrote, “Over the course of my religious life, I have met great-souled women: one, abounding in common sense to the point of teaching us the poverty of time; a second,

showing us the value of a prayer life over concentrating on picayune details; and a third, leading by a simple lifestyle and a gentle, caring spirit.

“A second factor of great importance in my life has been the gift of friendship I have experienced with so many Sisters. Such friendships have been essential and life-giving for me. These strong ties to people I care about and can rely on have been a powerful buffer against the ordinary stresses of daily life. Among these people have been my classmates. We formed a strong bond in the Postulate, and have carried this all during our lives together over 75 years. Our solidarity has helped me share values and gifts. I have been blessed to be an IHM.” Among these classmates are Sisters Rosemary Creteau and Lucille Smalley. Ask Rosemary to sing their Postulant song to you and Lucille will join in.

In recent days, whenever Sister Margaret Brennan would visit Mary Ellen and ask her how she was, the response would be pretty consistent, “There’s nothing they won’t do for you here.” In return, Margaret would reply, “When they write your Remembering, Mary Ellen, I’m going to tell them your name is ‘Sister Mary Ellen – there’s nothing they won’t do for you – Glosser’.”

Ever a lot of fun, ever a kind and gentle person, Mary Ellen, you allowed yourself to be formed by the joys and sorrows of your life. How you must be singing that “song of praise and gratitude” you wrote about in 1999. We, too offer praise, love and thanksgiving for the gift you have been among us.

Sister Roberta Richmond, IHM
June 7, 2011