

Remembering Sister Maurine Mahoney, IHM

June 22, 1915 – June 4, 2008



Sister Maurine wrote her autobiography in such a detailed manner that I plan to read it verbatim, adding a few points later. She wrote:

"I was born on June 22, 1915, the oldest of a family of four. I had a brother, John, a year younger than I and two younger sisters, Margaret and Patricia. Both John and Margaret are deceased.

"My father came from an Irish family whose fore bearers had come over to Montreal during the potato famine. His parents settled on a farm near Brighton where he grew up in a devout Catholic atmosphere. My mother's parents were English and Scotch, part of the group that

had emigrated to the East coast of America many generations earlier. They were church-going Presbyterians. Her home, also on a farm, was outside of Milford. Both my parents graduated from Milford High School and went their separate ways to work in Detroit. After working for a few years and trying not to fall in love, they were married at St. Leo's Church, Detroit. My mother had taken instructions (much against her family's wishes) and received her First Communion on her wedding day.

"When I was six years old we moved from Detroit to New Hudson and kept our home there until my mother's death some sixty years later. I have many happy memories of my four years of public school there. But in 1925 my father, who was a banker and traveled to Detroit daily, thought his children should be in the Catholic school. From then on we rented a house in Detroit in the fall and moved there for school and back out to New Hudson in the spring every year."

Maurine told Sister Mary Jo Maher that before they rented a home in Detroit, her father would drop the children off early in the morning and Sister Jane Edward (Sister Mary Jane Brown) went over from the convent to unlock the school door so that the Mahoney children wouldn't have to wait outside in the rain or cold.

"When I was a junior at St. Mary of Redford, our principal, Sister Irmina, said to me, 'Well, Maurine, are you coming to Monroe with us to become a Sister?' That thought hadn't really entered my head but I couldn't think of a valid reason for not becoming a Sister. In fact, the idea wouldn't go away. So I entered after graduation in 1933 and was perfectly contented from the first day. I was received in January 1934 and given the name Hilaire, professed in 1936, and made final vows in 1939."

Sister Maurine wrote this page in her Book of Life:

"The one big episode which had a major effect on my life occurred while I was still a novice.

"In January 1935, I was scheduled to replace Sister Mary Joel at St. Joseph's School. (Sister was going on mission.) I had the list of seventh and eighth grade students, the textbooks were in my desk in the novices' study. I had been given a black veil to wear and we had made plans to go over to the school on the Saturday after Christmas.

"In the meantime, I was getting pretty nervous about the whole arrangement. It wasn't just the teaching, but more the fear of having to handle students who were probably taller than I and quite experienced in giving the novices a hard time. So on Friday night, I retired with a definite feeling of trepidation.

"Then, on Saturday, we got the word that St. Joseph's School had burned to the ground!

"To say that I was awestruck is to put it mildly. I hadn't really prayed for deliverance, but I had asked the Lord to give me courage. Was the accident punishment for my cowardice? Or did God know that the experience would have been more than I could handle at that time of my life?

"I do know that from that time on for the rest of my life I learned that I must trust the Holy Spirit and ask for help with assurance. And many a time I was brought up short by crises that happened, and the marvelous way my life was enriched and my faith strengthened by the way events turned out for the good of my students and the peace of my soul.

"I wasn't sure I could be a teacher for the first few years. I guess my heritage came to my rescue. (My mother's mother and two of her

sisters had been teachers.) Anyway, I felt at ease in the classroom, and thoroughly enjoyed teaching students everything from Latin, biology, and religion to mathematics for over 50 years.

"I remember most vividly a letter my father wrote me in 1946. I had been sent to Akron which was totally unexpected and so far away. I'm sure my letters showed some of my homesickness. Finally, my father wrote to say, 'Maybe you should start looking around where you are instead of looking back. I'm sure God has work for you to do there. If you want to be happy, you must work with the students you are sent to serve.' That letter changed my thinking forever! I have ever since tried to find a niche wherever I went and to enter wholeheartedly into the school activities. I felt an integral part of every mission from Akron, Lorain, Pontiac, Flint and Marian High to St. Mary Academy. I have to say I loved working with all the students I had. I think I was able to be an influence in their lives and to add my bit to the happiness of the Sisters on the mission.

"Being retired since 1987 has been a peaceful time for me. I have gotten to know most of the Sisters through working in the Service Office. I enjoy tutoring when I can and I love being a bit more leisurely about my daily life.

"I hope to continue these activities for as long as my health permits and to be contented when I have to live a more restricted life as an 'older' Sister.

"Perhaps a bit about my experience through the years would not be amiss. I started teaching in 1935 with a group of fourth-grade pupils, and spent 13 years teaching in grades one to six. I had sixth grade only one year and loved it dearly. I had hoped to stay at this level for many years, but alas, the principal decided that I should go into high school teaching. I have to admit that I felt at ease immediately and spent the next 17 years instructing students in a variety of subjects, including science and Latin. I didn't realize it at the time, but my work with them was a powerful influence in their lives. Somehow what I said and did stayed with them. Many years later they would write to thank me.

"In 1950 I received a letter from the Community asking whether I wanted to study for a master's degree. Then I went to the University of Detroit through the National Science Foundation to earn a degree in mathematics which had always been my favorite subject. So for the

next 25 years my work was mainly in math. I even tutored some students in college subjects when they came for help.

"These last few years since I am retired, I spend a lot of time thanking God for the work of the Holy Spirit in my life."

On a personal note, I always marveled at Sister Maurine's teaching style. As a geometry and algebra II teacher at St. Mary Academy, she was firm but highly respected by both the girls and a few boys from Monroe Catholic Central who attended her classes.

Many of us recall Sister Maurine as she and her good friend, Sister Ruth Daly, treated themselves on Saturday mornings by walking over to Big Boy for lunch. They resembled Mutt and Jeff—one tall and the other short—as they strolled across the campus.

Maurine loved to play Scrabble and she and Sister Doris Henn were lively rivals. Sister Jean Booms also came to the Motherhouse on Sundays and played Scrabble with Maurine.

After Maurine broke both hips and could not get around on her own, Bernie Booms would drive her around on our campus when the weather permitted and through Main floor and the Chapel on other days. Maurine loved that!

While in the Health Care Center, Maurine was frustrated because of her vision and hearing loss. She, who had been so alert and aware, could no longer read her prayer book and enjoy hobbies and activities that were so dear to her. Even eating meals became a chore because she could not see. But now, Maurine, you are enjoying the beatific vision of the God you loved and served so well and can hear God to say to you, "Come, My Beloved, to the place prepared for you from all eternity."

Mary Laubacher, IHM
June 9, 2008