

Remembering Sister Mary A. (Mary del Val) Reuter, IHM March 16, 1927 – Nov. 24, 2011



"I will stand on my watchtower...watching to see what God will say to me..." Mary chose this reading, saying that she identified with being one to stand alone on the watchtower to see what was out there, to appreciate, and to see what God would say to her. She heard and believed in the vision of life – she was fascinated with life in all its dimensions.

Mary was proud of her German heritage. She kept in a prominent place the three volumes of genealogical research her cousin, Irene, did on the Reuter, Theisen, and Korte families. She was named Mary Antoinette after her mother and both grandmothers. Both

Theisen and Reuter families had a long history in Dearborn that dated back into the mid 1800s and the beginning years of St. Alphonsus Church when earlier generations had migrated from Endorf, Westphalia and Schoenholthausen, Germany.

In her geneology, Mary recalls cherished memories of family reunions at Grandma and Grandpa Theisen's and Christmas with Aunt Ida and the cousins, and yearly trips in the summer to Belle Isle for picnics and to the Detroit Zoo, the beginning of her lifelong fondness and tradition of visiting parks and zoos. Of her parents, she wrote: My parents leave me with a remembrance of peace and caring, of love for each other, for family and friends, and for those in need; they were quiet and unassuming in their way of life. If the Gospel is true, and I know that it is, then "Their reward is great in Heaven." Mary made these same values her own.

She treasured the memories of several trips to Germany. On her page for the IHM book of life, she wrote about one of these trips, saying: In the summer of 1983, my cousin Irene and I traveled to Germany, to Endorf, the home of the Reuters, and to Dungenheim and Urmersbach, the home of the Theisens. This was a very real experience of a return to my family

roots. I cannot put into words how I felt as we visited these small towns and met distant yet familiar relatives. It was a true sense of 'being home.' She told me how she brought home some dirt from Endorf in her shoes and she has kept it all these years in a small vial which she requested be buried with her.

After graduation from high school, Mary originally wanted to go to pharmacy school at Wayne State University; however, her application was returned saying she lacked some prerequisites, so she went to Marygrove College where she came to know the IHM Sisters. She graduated from Marygrove in June 1950, she entered the IHMs on Aug. 21 of that year and made first vows on Aug. 15, 1953. She was now known by her religious name, Sister Mary del Val.

Actually, Mary had one other name that she shared with her closest friends, the name of Gretchen. It was a name she received during her tertianship in the summer of 1966. The story she told me of how the name initially came about was that she once asked Father Pare, one of the leaders who was from Louvain, if they taught in French or German. When he asked her the reason for her question, she said: Well, I'm curious because I'm German, to which he responded, Mary del Val – that is not German. You are Gretchen. She later wrote of her tertianship saying, "This experience was a true turning point in my life. Liturgies, scripture, time for prayer and the interactions with Father Hennessey and Father Pare opened up a free, new life in Jesus – and therefore a new name, Gretchen."

One of Mary's first ministerial experiences was teaching religion and the sciences at our Lady of Lourdes High School for three years. She said that the children there were easy to teach and that they had so much spirit, that when they sang *Lady of Lourdes*, (in her words) "They took the roof off the Church." She chose this song to begin this remembering service and also wanted the song to *Our Lady of Marygrove* included in her services as symbols marking the beginning and end of her teaching career.

From 1957 to 1959, Mary did graduate work at St. Louis University. It was here that she did her first research project studying the activity of an enzyme in fruit flies. Many of us are familiar with the story of how her research was aborted when the fruit flies died. Recently, Mary was recalling the story with me and how she called home to Monroe to tell Sister Juliana and how she later learned that the next morning in chapel they prayed for the dead fruit flies and she wondered if anyone had prayed for her. She later did her doctoral work at the University of Northern Colorado. And yes, her research again involved fruit flies.

Mary's commitment to formal education, and especially to the mission of Marygrove where she served from 1970-1996, is revealed in her annual Ministry Commitment forms. She speaks of education as a way of living the mission of Jesus, a way of fostering liberation and how Marygrove serves the people of the city of Detroit and the near areas in ways that assist students to take their places in society.

Whether you knew her as Mary, Mary Antoinette, Mary del Val, or Gretchen, she brought a steadfast, caring, unassuming presence of a woman who quietly formed deep friendships. She was not one who liked to participate in big community gatherings; rather, she preferred individual visits or small, intimate ones. She could also be quite comfortable alone with herself pursuing solitude and solitary activities. She was a scientist who used scientific methodology to seek deeper understanding but she could also just be caught up in mystery and the beauty of the many places that we visited on vacations. She had a quiet sense of humor and play and somewhere along the way she gradually acquired a collection of teddy bears and she had a name for each one of them.

During these final years, Mary gave us living witness of her belief in life. She made the important choices affecting the course of her life. She chose Hospice rather than continue with dialysis although she was told she would live about two weeks at most without dialysis. That was the first week of January 2006. Since then, it has been an amazing journey to accompany her. We were able to talk so openly about life and death, dying and living. Even as the years passed and she lost her sight and her hearing worsened, making interaction with others more challenging, still she remained vitally interested and concerned about her family and friends and kept up on the latest news. Last week as she faced increasing respiratory problems, she again chose to enter Hospice.

To know that each day is a gift is a basic truth, one we all know intellectually, but Mary came to realize this truth and to live this reality with a heightened awareness; she showed us how to move consciously and gracefully, keeping her sense of deep faith and trust in the Mystery of God's Love even as she adapted to the changing physical realities and limitations that were associated with these final years. For Mary, each day was a miracle, each day a celebration of life, each day a Eucharist. How appropriate she would enter eternal life on Thanksgiving morning. We will miss her presence with us, yet we also celebrate her life and give thanks for the gift that she has been to us.

Patricia McCluskey, IHM
Nov. 28, 2011

Remembering Sister Mary A. Reuter, IHM

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I am honored that Mary asked me to be a part of her remembering. I met Mary during my interview for the position of assistant professor of Biology at Marygrove College in the summer of 1974. Sister Edna (John Clement) Hungerman, Sister Suzanne Fleming, and Sister Mary Reuter were the interviewers. In the fall, Mary left for Colorado to pursue her work on her Doctor of Arts degree and I became the head of the Biology Department.

When Mary completed her doctorate, she returned to Marygrove and we very quickly became close friends. She has remained my friend and soul mate for 37 years. Our collegial working relationship was very unique. We always referred to one another, with the deepest sincerity, as "my other half" or "the other half of the biology department." We developed a unique synergy. Our students admired and respected her because of her compassion and commitment to them.

As friends, we frequently went out for lunches when time permitted, usually during the summer or on major holidays. Mary had some favorite restaurants: Miller's Bar and Grill for hamburgers in Dearborn; the Dakota Inn on John R. in Detroit for German food; and Andiamos' in Royal Oak or Salvatore Scallopinis' in Madison Heights for Italian dishes. At the Dakota Inn, she frequently enjoyed a glass of German dark beer. She often spoiled me with bags of chocolate covered almonds from her favorite bulk food store and I shamelessly contributed to her teddy bear collection over the years. She donated this collection to a children's center just after her diagnosis of illness in 2007. Mary lived a simple and humble life, following Jesus' example. She had few possessions and always shared with others those things that she treasured. She valued most highly her friendships with those of us whom she loved and respected. She loved life and became known as "The Miracle Nun," surviving a terminal diagnosis for over four years, even doing therapy, giving up dialysis, and attempting to walk again.

Mary was a competent colleague and faculty member. Our talents were complete opposites: She the molecular biologist and geneticist and me the organismal biologist. This was a perfect match for Marygrove's needs in biology. Mary taught microbiology, cell biology and genetics, her main areas of expertise. However, she also taught comparative vertebrate anatomy and kinesiology because no one else was qualified. Thus, she had to teach herself these disciplines and she became an expert at them

as well. In addition, she taught introductory math classes and science modules on such diverse topics as cancer, aging, bioethics, drugs, and women in science. In addition, she was our teacher certification officer in biology and taught the methods of teaching general science with Sr. Georgianna Simon, and she alone taught the methods of teaching biology class. She also supervised all student teachers in science. She was a jack-of-all-trades and master of all. When Dr. Mary Reuter retired in 1996, we had to hire three people to replace her. Besides her full time replacement, we hired an adjunct to teach comparative vertebrate anatomy and another adjunct to teach kinesiology. We currently have one of Mary's biology graduates, Hallie Jones, teaching the biology methods course. Mary also served on major college-wide committees such as Rank and Tenure, Curriculum and General Education.

In addition to being an excellent and devoted teacher directing student senior seminar research projects, Mary has always been completely supportive of all tasks that needed to be accomplished by the biology department. We worked together on two North Central College-Wide Accreditation reviews, a North Central Association Teacher Education Accreditation review, long range plans, and assessment. My happiest years at Marygrove were working with her. She completed every assigned or volunteered undertaking with a smile. In my 37 years of knowing Mary, she never once lost her temper or overreacted towards anyone. She remained a calming influence on an occasionally stormy sea. We remained good friends right up to her illness and death. She was and always will be a part of my life. I loved her with a deep and sincere love reserved only for a very close friend. She even became a part of my extended family. She really enjoyed my Italian cooking, especially the lasagna, a glass of wine, and an occasional Rusty Nail (a combination of Scotch and Drambuie). She knew all of my closest friends. She visited my home and my companions, Jess and Rico, and loved both our cats Misty and Ms. Cleo. When she visited, she always had doggy treats for our English Bulldogs Bonnie and Clyde and they always greeted her with great affection and enthusiasm. They even visited her in the Health Care Unit. You have probably seen their picture in her room here at the Motherhouse. As a biologist, it was natural that she loved animals. She often talked about her cousin Irene, her dog Skippy, and the cat Cinnamon that Mary took care of when Irene was out of town.

Mary was primarily and foremost a dedicated teacher. She was completely committed to the IHM mission at Marygrove College to empower students, believing that education was a liberating force. Her commitment to her students attested to her belief in social justice and her deep respect for the environment. She believed in a liberal arts

education with rigorous academic requirements which any student who registered for her upper level biology classes could attest to. She taught at Marygrove from 1970 to 1996, a commitment of 26 years of her professional life. Her most difficult course to teach was microbiology because she had to prepare agar plates for every lab. This entailed coming in on the weekends to autoclave and mix media. She never once complained of all the extra work that this course entailed and she taught it every fall semester. Today we have virtual labs on computers to replace most of that work and we now even grant release time for the instructor for this course.

So today we come to celebrate the life of this woman, faithful Sister Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We are her friends, fellow Sisters, family, colleagues, traveling companions and admirers. We come to say good-bye to this faithful servant of God. We believe that He has raised her up on eagles' wings, made her to shine like the sun, and holds her in the palm of His hand. We know that she now has a new career and will look after us from her heavenly abode, carefully monitoring our lives and making sure that we keep those promises we made to her. Thank you, Mary, for being such a wonderful friend and colleague. We shall all miss you deeply but we will always treasure the lessons of humility, compassion and commitment that you exhibited during your time with us. May God bless you and keep you close to His heart and may you maintain a spiritual connection to us all.

Donald C. Rizzo, Ph.D.
Nov. 28, 2011