

Remembering Sister Eleanor Sekol, IHM Oct. 5, 1928 - Dec. 3, 2008



As we begin this time of remembering the goodness that Eleanor was in our lives, I ask you to take a moment and remember a time that you had with Eleanor, picture it and name for yourself what was her gift to you.

There are often common threads that are woven through a person's life and clearly with Eleanor it was her sense of calm and peace, her faithfulness and loyalty, her sense of order and common sense and her willingness to do whatever needed to be done for the good of the people.

What I'd like to do is share a few stories that have been told over the past few days that are a reflection of how we knew and loved Eleanor.

Eleanor used her gifts in a variety of ways throughout her life as teacher, principal, religious educator, parish pastoral minister and volunteer extraordinaire.

Mary is convinced that the fruits of Eleanor's spiritual life were visible in her gentleness and reverence for people. Mary says it was Eleanor who tamed the wild Irishman in her during their 40 year friendship. She was the calming and peaceful presence, the voice of reason in the midst of chaos. She was always there for Mary in countless ways.

Mary recounted that Sister Miriam Therese was with Eleanor at St. Mary's Mt Clements when she was principal. She said Eleanor ruled with a "velvet hand." The time at St. Mary's was a very difficult one because the school building was unsafe for the children and needed to be closed and it was hard for the parents to understand and to accept.

Mary often was the one to set their social calendar and Eleanor would go along for the ride. But this summer Eleanor had a need to go to Virginia Beach to visit her "favorite" niece, Bev, who is here today. She was able to spend time with her family, especially Bev's college-age son, Kevin, who was Eleanor's godson.

Since the death of her brother John a few years ago, Eleanor spent Tuesdays with her sister-in-law, Vi, who lives in Novi. Together they would attend liturgy, go to lunch and do a little shopping.

Kristen, Mary's niece, once asked Eleanor what is the most important quality you can teach a child. She answered, "Self control."

As you can tell her family and her extended Downey/Lenhard/DeVooght family were close to her heart.

A friend told a story about a young man who worked at one of the parishes where Eleanor was. He came to Eleanor in angst over his credit card debt. Holding up his cards, he said to her, "What should I do?" Without a word, she took his cards and cut them up!

My own personal experience of Eleanor is that she was an extraordinary volunteer. She would pick up Sister Mary Jo Rosenau every week and they would arrive at the IHM Development Office about 10 a.m. and stay till mid afternoon and do whatever we needed done from stuffing envelopes to working on the database and recording raffle income. During lunch she would always tell us the latest adventures of the grand nephews and nieces – Max, Sam, Charlie, Timo, Luke, Ben, Lily and Ruby. You gave her such delight! We could always count on her to be there and for Sister Mary Jo the rides back and forth from the office was the start of a new friendship.

Invitation to community to share their stories.

As we conclude this time of remembering, return to that significant moment you recalled in the beginning and let Eleanor's face shine for you.....

In the rising of the sun and in its going down, we remember her.
When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember her.
When we are lost and sick at heart, we remember her.
When we have joys we yearn to share, we remember her.
So long as we live, she too shall live, for she is now a part of us, as we remember her.
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we remember her.
In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring, we remember her.
In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer, we remember her.
In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn we remember her.
In the beginning of the year and when it ends, we remember her.

Marianne Gaynor, IHM