



Remembering Sister Noraleen Smith May 3, 1917 – Dec. 6, 2009

*And know that I am with you always;
yes, to the end of time.
(Matthew 28:20)*

With these words Noraleen begins her IHM Book of Life page. Throughout her entire life, she saw the "hand of God directing my way and making my life such a happy one." Hers was a deeply grateful heart. Her constant mantra was, "Isn't God good!"

Born Mary Jane to James Patrick Smith and Iva Beatrice Eddy on Green Street in Detroit Mich., May 3, 1917, Noraleen was the second oldest of five children: Tom, the eldest, Patrick, Geraldine and Nora her three younger siblings.

Of her early years Noraleen reminisces, "I truly believe that Our Lord inspired me from early grade school to pray for a religious vocation. I was a 'public school kid' for the first three grades and praying, 'Lord, if it is your holy will, let me be a Sister.' Where else could this inspiration have come from? My mother became a Catholic when she married my dad, and surely was not overjoyed when her oldest daughter told her she wanted to be a sister!

Noraleen and her brother transferred to Most Holy Redeemer School in Detroit, Mich., when she was in the fourth grade. At this time the family lived in Dearborn, Mich., and taking two street cars twice a day was, in sister's words, no picnic. But she believed firmly "God was truly with me then."

Her desire to be a religious deepened when she became acquainted with the sisters at Most Holy Redeemer, especially Sister Josine (Margaret McKoan). At this time during her high school years, Mary Jane had a trip to Monroe to "look the place over!" Sister Margaret Cutcher was in the novitiate, so Margaret's brother Ed brought Mary Jane and another student at Redeemer, Madeline Broker (who later became Sister Althea), to see Monroe and visit with Margaret.

This trip confirmed Mary Jane's decision to enter the IHM congregation. After graduation in May of 1935, she entered the postulate on June 21. On Jan. 2, 1936, Mary Jane was received into the novitiate and given the name of Noraleen.

Noraleen began her teaching ministry as a novice teaching fifth grade at St. Philip in Battle Creek, Mich. Of her early years teaching, Noraleen says, "My first three years of teaching left a lot to be desired, but, again, the Lord saw me through it. "I lived with some wonderful sisters who strengthened my vocation. After five years in Mt. Clemens and 10 years at St. Catherine's in Detroit, I felt I could handle a teaching job."

She taught in the middle grades for approximately 25 years. After that Noraleen was assigned to teach business courses in high school. "I was not thrilled to go from grade school teaching to high school teaching, but once again the Lord was at my side."

Noraleen's last assignment was in 1969 to teach business at IHM High School in Westchester, Ill. She stayed until 1998 teaching business at first, then serving as secretary to the guidance department, and later as clerical assistant to the alumni association. The years at IHM, all 29 years, were the apex of Noraleen's religious and teaching life.

Noraleen was so respected that two counselors nominated her for a secretary contest available through a famous Chicago radio personality, Wally Phillips.

Students at IHM not only acknowledged Sister Noraleen's expertise in business courses but her caring concern for each of them as a person. At a special ceremony honoring Noraleen's 25 years at IHM, Judy Saraceno-Swenson from the class of '73 spoke, "Back in 1982, I was seven months pregnant with my first child and lost my mom suddenly to a fatal heart attack. Sister Noraleen was there again for me, prayed with me, cried with me and assured me my mother would help me now more than ever."

For many years Noraleen was a constant presence among the Alumni of IHM Westchester, celebrating with them and/or remembering them on special occasions. Together with Sister Patrick Mary Wood she attended reunions, helped plan and prepare for the gatherings, and thoroughly enjoyed being with "the Old Girls."

She loved being at IHM. Her co-workers described her as being professional, optimistic, respectful of others, dedicated to service and having excellent clerical skills. "This charming woman brings a sense of humor and a joyful spirit to her ministry." Noraleen had a marvelous sense of humor, a gift Noraleen attributes to helping her through hard times. One never left a conversation with Noraleen without one or two of her favorite jokes.

Noraleen had a special relationship with a group of Westchester women who chose to call themselves "Daughters of Jerusalem." They met to share spirituality and fun and frequently extended services and support to our educational ministry at IHM. They were truly IHM associates before we ever formalized an Associate program. We recall some of them as Janice Hinsdale, Marie Harvey, Pat Blondin and Janice Findlayson.

As sister writes in her Page of Life, "I have lived with so many wonderful IHM Sisters and have learned from them what a true friend can be. This inspires me to be true friends to all I meet here at IHM High School. In all these events I have seen God's hand directing my way and making my life such a happy one."

In October 1998, after a series of illnesses, Sister Patrick Mary Woods, a dear friend and companion of Noraleen for 29 years, died. Not only was this personal loss severe, but Noraleen unexpectedly had to move back into the Motherhouse. At this time, Noraleen was not well herself. It was decided that she stay in the health care center for a time. But, what began as a transitory move quickly changed into a permanent residence. To move away from her beloved Westchester after so many happy and fruitful years was difficult. What added to the deprivation was the fact that others had to pack up her belongings and bring them to the Motherhouse for her. Yet, being the free spirit that she was, it did not take long for Noraleen to be really "at home."

Noraleen had a deep sense of the presence of God in her life. She wrote, "My love for the world and all its people spills into everything I do." Noraleen's positive attitude toward life helped her in good times and at times of loss and drastic change. Ever striving to be a peaceful person, she found fidelity to her daily prayer routine and her love of the Rosary the nourishment needed for her solid spiritual life.

Noraleen, you have been like "a breath of fresh air" moving through our IHM congregation. Remembering you for your joy, your sense of gratitude and loyal service, we thank you for life among us. We know you are truly home as you rest in God.

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