



Remembering Sister Carol Starrs, IHM Nov. 30, 1936 - May 6, 2009

It might have been a cold November day, but it was into a warm, loving family that Carol Ann Starrs was born of William Joseph Starrs and Mary Louise Stevens Starrs on Nov. 30, 1936. A month later she was baptized in St. Gregory Church on Detroit's west side.

Carol took delight in reminding everyone that she was a "Star with 2-Rs". Her one brother, William, always known as "Bill", was 9-½ years younger than Carol. Carol remembers her parents as very loving and getting on so well together. She was very proud of having gone to school at St. Mary of Redford for 12 years and always considered herself a "Loyal Rustic" fan.

In September 1954, after her graduation from high school, her friends remember how excited Carol was to enter the IHM community in Monroe. She received the name of Sister Teresa Joseph at her reception May 31, 1955, and pronounced her first vows on June 17, 1957.

Carol received her bachelor's, and her master's in education from Marygrove College. Her teaching ministry took her to Epiphany, St Hugo, Christ the King, and St Agnes in the Metro-Detroit area. Sister Barbara Cardinal, who knew Carol before their entrance into community, remembers they were both assigned to Epiphany as their first mission. She recalls "If she (Carol) did have a difficult time, she did it with great dignity."

After her year of renewal in 1976-77, Carol was assigned to IHM High School, Westchester, Ill., assisting students in the English department with basic reading and English. During these years Carol lived with a group of Adrian Dominican Sisters in LaGrange, Ill., with whom she shared prayer and community. She thoroughly enjoyed "living with our cousins from up the River Raisin". During those years she often played cards with a group of women that she met, including our associate, Janice Hinsdale. Carol felt she would never forget the beautiful people at IHM, and is quoted as saying, "these were some of the most beautiful years of my life."

Upon her return to Michigan in 1985, she joined the IHM Sisters at Hospitality House, formerly Immaculata Convent in Detroit. During the succeeding years she studied for her master's in pastoral ministry at Marygrove College and served as Christian Service Coordinator at St. Martin de Porres Parish and later at St. Rita Parish in Detroit. In later years, she resided at Hartman Hall and at Marygrove Convent, where she volunteered in the writing center at the college. Throughout those years, Carol's friendliness and curiosity made her a familiar figure to many of the faculty and staff on the Marygrove campus.

Many of her friends remember Sister Carol Starrs as being able to sit at a piano and entertain us with music, improvising whatever song anyone might bring to mind. This was a gift Carol shared with us on many occasions. As she mentioned one day, she did "learn a bit of piano here and there." We discovered later that she inherited her musical genius from both sides of her family, as her mother's sister, Sister Marie Lucille, IHM, was a music teacher, and her Aunt Florence was a music and dance teacher in high school. However, Carol shared with us that it was her father, who often played the piano in the evening after dinner at home, who could pick up any tune and always sang in choir, that most influenced her musical abilities. Carol joined musical groups wherever she lived, and during her later years in Detroit loved to sing in the Marygrove Choral. For a number of years, Carol faithfully drove to Monroe, to play the piano and sing with the sisters in Memory Care. After her retirement to the Motherhouse, she was a faithful member

of the Motherhouse choir, often participated in choral groups in Monroe, and was part of the first Monroe County Community-wide presentation of Handel's Messiah in the Motherhouse Chapel.

One could overlook Carol's sometimes stubborn streak, because her happy disposition and unique sense of humor saved the day. I quote Barbara Cardinal: "Carol had a sense of humor that I often think we missed, and because we missed it, I think we missed a valuable part of who Carol was."

Mary Agnes Ryan recalls that Carol loved the goals and work of a variety of social justice groups, and would often attend meetings of these groups. "I think she wanted to be a part of "larger picture" and larger goals and used "solidarity" with such groups as a key way to do this. One simple illustration of this is how she made sure that Stella Dolan got to Freedom House where she volunteered several times a week. Carol would drive her there in the morning and at the end of day return to Freedom House to bring her home."

Mary McCann reveals how moved she was by Carol's sitting and contemplating the newspaper and praying over the different events and stories, revealing her awareness of the world, and its part in her spirituality.

As Carol became aware of the extent of her memory loss of, she struggled to find ways to help herself. Her "Franklin Planner," a day-by-day calendar, became her constant companion. In it she diligently kept track of the meetings, commitments and activities in which she wanted to participate. Misplacing this resource invariably became a serious dilemma.

In my more recent years with Carol at Marygrove, I remember her delightful ability for creatively "playing with words." Driving down the road with her, she would note in her agenda book all the unique names that she noticed on the license plates of the cars or the passing billboards and then perhaps later would create and share "puns" or jokes using her newly invented vocabulary with great precision and humor.

Another of Carol's gifts was her abiding all-inclusive love of Detroit. Mary Agnes reflects, "Some of this came through the influence of her father, who worked for the City of Detroit, but much of it came from her life-long living and working in Detroit. Throughout her adult life she immersed herself in the joys and sorrow of her beloved city."

Carol's love of the earth exhibited itself in her planting, nurturing of flower gardens, and her savoring of a walk in the woods. Many of Carol's friends remember her passion for photography. With her trusty camera, she profligately took pictures of events she attended or persons she was with, but more often of the beauty of nature around her.

Carol was always a service-oriented person. She helped others wherever and whenever she sensed a need. On the Memory Care unit, Carol was very mindful of the parents of Mary McCann, sitting with them for lunch and supper each day. Mary remembers this as a happy arrangement for all concerned.

In her "Book of Life" page, Carol speaks of herself and her call and role in community, as a

"Spoke in a wheel, holding it together through strength,
together with all other spokes,
Or a cog on a wheel, helping to pass on energy from its Source..."

Carol, we rejoice and pray with you today, trusting we will always be connected, and remembering your name, (Starr, with two Rs) we say with you, "Remember Carol, you are Stardust and to Stardust you have returned."

Dorothy Diederichs, IHM, May 11, 2009