

Then & Now – Bernetta Booms

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Born the oldest of 10 children -- eight girls and two boys – Sister Bernetta (“Bernie”) Booms grew up on a farm near Harbor Beach, Mich. She learned early the struggles of everyday life, having lived through the Depression years and the deaths of three infant siblings. She was able to attend high school by working for a family for room and board. But in high school, “...the dances, parties were not life-fulfilling. Jesus my Shepherd was guiding, inviting, drawing me to other pastures – to the more,” Sister Bernie recalls. She entered the IHM community in 1945.

For the first 10 years she taught grades one and two at St. Joseph (Monroe), Blessed Sacrament (Detroit) and St. John (Fenton). In 1957 she travelled to Santurce, Puerto

Rico. She taught grade seven at the Academia de Santa Teresita and, in 1961, went to Cayey, Puerto Rico, where she taught grade eight. She found ministering in Puerto Rico to offer dramatic changes to her life – in language, culture, climate and landscape (huge mountains!). “But these changes helped me learn patience, and being hopeful each new day,” she admits.

In 1970 Father Hilarion Summers, a priest from Spencer, Mass., came to Puerto Rico and talked about a home for the poor and aged he was building in Mt. Rodney, Grenada. He hoped to find someone to be a charismatic, prayerful presence with the residents of the home. Sister Bernie knew this was a ministry for her. “I don’t believe I ever desired anything more! But I needed patience and trust. My teaching position had to be replaced before I could leave.”



In 1973, Sister Bernie’s prayer was answered. Sister Rose Graham offered to take her place in Cayey. And so Sister Bernie began her new ministry in Grenada at the Father Hilarion Home. The days were filled with getting to know the residents, sharing life with them, praying and singing together.

“Our life was truly filled with new experiences: sharing life in love and simplicity,” Sister Bernie remembers. “We filled a pail in the morning for our water supply that day. On Saturdays, we walked to a local market for a cut of meat for the Hilarion Home for the week. And of course bananas were plentiful so we learned to fry plantains for our daily meals. We spent evenings on a veranda overlooking the Carribean.”

Political and mission changes in Grenada caused Sister Bernie to decide it was time to go home in March 1982. She returned to Monroe and for the next 27 years ministered as a driver and later as transportation coordinator.

“I enjoyed this position. It allowed me to get to know the sisters better because we’d talk as I drove them to appointments in Toledo or Detroit. I also got to know their families,” Sister Bernie explains.

Today Sister Bernie is involved in helping the Motherhouse residents in memory care, assists in funeral services, is an arm-chair activist and serves as a Eucharist minister.



Sister Bernie walked a steep path up mountains to give Eucharist to shut ins while in Grenada.



Sister Bernie (2nd from left) with three of her sisters and family dog.



This is a family photo of stepfather and sisters at mother's funeral. Sister Bernie is third from right.