Today we have come together to remember Sister Remigia Mraz, and her life among us as our sister in community and as a member of the Mraz and Dowley families. Remigia’s father, Charles, was of Bohemian descent and her mother, Marguerite Dowley Mraz was Irish. Here is a little-known story about her parents. During World War I, the women in Ohio made socks for the men overseas. They sewed their name and address inside the socks. Remigia’s grandmother was one of those who knitted socks. After the war ended, a certain soldier, named Charles Mraz came to the home to say “thank you”. There he met young Marguerite Dowley, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Remigia was born in 1921 in Canton, Ohio. Her given name was Helen Cecilia. That seems providential given her later deep interest in music. There were two younger brothers, William and Lawrence, each born three years apart. So they were quite young when, on June 22, 1939, on her 18th birthday, young Helen Cecilia came to Monroe to enter the IHM community. When interviewed about this most recently, Remigia did not remember much of those days, but I think we can fill in the blanks in terms of loneliness and hope. What she did record for us is that the Chapel was newly erected and there was a fair amount of focus on the “acoustics;” and that, as a novice she was first antiphonarian, and the song book of choice was the Liber Usualis.

In 1941, after just two years of being with us, Remigia was teaching. She wrote, “It was rote singing – no textbooks in those early days.” Her teaching career spanned the years from 1941 to 1972. Remigia taught little children, middle-grade and high school children. She was a classroom teacher as well as the school music teacher; she gave private piano lessons and autoharp lessons. Some of her major tasks were: to prepare the students to sing for the pastor’s jubilee at St. Joseph, Trenton, and at St. Vincent, Detroit; to prepare 50 singers for an archdiocesan concert at the University of Detroit Hall; and to teach autoharp, a diocesan project in Cleveland. Remigia was missioned to many schools and at most of them she was classroom teacher as well as music teacher.

On her IHM Book of Life page, Remigia wrote about those days:

“My life flows on in endless song
Above earth’s lamentations,
I hear the real though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.”
Remigia stayed close to family. Once we began home visits, she was delighted to visit her parents, and later, the family of Bill and Louise, and their nine children. “She was a dear person, nice to have around,” said Louise. “In fact, with so many graduations and weddings for our big family, our motto became ‘Remigia, I need ja’”. Remigia’s brother Larry died when his two children were teenagers, and Larry’s wife died soon after.

In 1972, Sister was invited to return to the Motherhouse to work in the Infirmary. She was a nurse aide and later was in charge of scheduling nurse aides. According to Eileen Semonin, Remigia was a very compassionate person and a very hard worker. This is what Remigia wrote on her ministry commitment form of those days:

“The longer I live and the more I reflect, I seem to discover more and more of what the Gospel means. The essence of reaching beyond myself is found here. My vision of a better life is formed by the souls that touch my heart with the strands of their redemptive pain. Living at the Motherhouse, so close to the Infirmary and Health Care Center has helped me to recognize in myself seeds …of some of the full-blown scars I see in others.”

In 1981, Remigia began to work at the IHM Adult Education Center helping students with their adult basic education and English as a Second Language needs. Sister Pat Rourke said of those days, “Remigia had a wonderful sense of humor, and was very respectful of the people trying to get their GEDs. She reached down to their needs.”

Remigia was, as all of us are, uniquely different. She was very intelligent, courteous, kindly and sensitive. She was quite simple in her needs—she did not need a lot of things. She was content to be herself. Never one to complain or criticize, Remigia was a deeply grateful person. Listen to her choice for scripture for this Remembering:

“I thank my God for you every time I think of you and every time I pray for you all, I pray with joy…. I tell the truth when I say that my deep feeling for you comes from the heart of Christ Jesus himself.”

When I was interviewing her for this Remembering, I began by reviewing all the wonderful things she had done in her life. I asked her which of these ministries she liked the best. “I loved teaching all those children,” she replied. Then I went on to her teaching of adults in the ESL program. I noticed she was crying and asked why. “I guess it is because I loved those people so much,” she responded.

In what she left for us on her IHM Book of Life page, there is no hint of any difficulty she may have experienced in her various ministries. When it came time for her to move to Health Care, she accepted this graciously, too. Remigia continued to live her deep faith and joyful spirit.
“No storm can shake my inmost calm,  
While to that Rock I’m clinging.  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,  
How can I keep from singing!”

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM, Dec. 3, 2013

**Bent-over Woman**

*She glides with a walker  
short, calculated steps  
with a mirror-like reflection  
that honors her image on the floor.  
She is a bent-over woman.*

*A flower garden skirt  
hugs her ankles and feet  
that knew service  
as a nurse’s aide,  
now, a bent-over woman.*

*Her veil drapes her head and face,  
somewhat like a cloth on a Tabernacle.  
That face exudes simple joys  
engulfing her heart,  
that bent-over woman.*

*She lines up with the best of them,  
unassuming yet determined;  
like a Ruth, an Anna and Esther;  
all formed from the bosom of the Sacred.  
How we cherish this bent-over woman.*

*Written by Carol Krolikowski, May 2005*