

Remembering Sister Rosalyn (Benedictus) Hengstebeck, IHM
Dec. 15, 1924 – Feb. 16, 2014



Sister Rosalyn stated emphatically that her remembering should be short, but how can one condense 89 years of life and ministry into a few short words? We have honored her request.

Rosalyn was born Dec. 15, 1924 in Detroit to Frank and Alice (Francis) Hengstebeck, the sixth of 11 children. She had five brothers and five sisters and wrote that she enjoyed a happy childhood in a very close family. Three of her sisters are still living: Bernice, Lorraine and Joyce. All the children attended and graduated from St. Catherine Grade and High Schools. Rosalyn knew at an early age that she wanted to be a sister. She loved the blue habit.

Rosalyn came to Monroe July 2, 1942, was received Jan. 2, 1943, and given the name Benedictus. She made first vows in 1945 and final vows Jan. 2, 1948.

As a novice she was sent to St. John, Monroe, where she taught third grade. For the next 13 years she taught elementary and junior high pupils. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Marygrove College and a Master of Arts degree from the University of Michigan with a major in Latin, all during the summer months. It was at St. Mary, Mt. Morris, where Rosalyn began her long career teaching Latin and English, and then at St. Michael and Luke Powers High Schools in Flint.

Latin was her passion. Judy King, assistant principal at Luke Powers High School, remarked at a farewell party that many of Rosalyn students could still conjugate Latin verbs or give a good speech long after graduation. By 1991 Sister continued her work at Luke Powers High, ministering as attendance officer and then as an assistant in the library.

Rosalyn wrote that she enjoyed visiting at the summer cottage her father owned. Earlier, she could stay for only one day; later she visited for several days or a weekend.

She was an avid sports fan. Judy reported that Rosalyn kept score at volleyball tournaments and attended basketball and football games. In fact, when Rosalyn was planning to retire to the Motherhouse in the fall of 2012, she postponed the move until after the Luke Powers football games! Judy related that when she made a phone call to Rosalyn shortly after she was settled in Monroe, Rosalyn was switching TV channels so she could watch both the Tigers and the Lions games!

Noeleta O'Dea, who lived with Rosalyn for many years in some of the convents in Flint, remembered that she never said an unkind word about anyone. After the convents closed, Rosalyn moved to an apartment in the heart of the city and continued to live a life of simplicity

deep faith and poverty, much to the admiration of the administration and faculty at Luke Powers High School.

Rosalyn was a learner as well as a teacher. On her page of the Book of Life she wrote that her Dad's death "deepened her faith in a loving God" and that "one particularly difficult situation taught me to grow in wisdom and patience."

Marion Duggan remarked that when Rosalyn joined IHM gatherings in Flint, she was the heart of the celebration and often provided the meals. "She had a warm and generous heart, never judging people, but accepting everyone, never an unkind word."

Rosalyn was an avid reader, a skilled bridge player, an "all-around IHM." She was well aware that in religious life she developed personally and spiritually as she carried on the work of God and the IHM community.

And now, Rosalyn, you continue the work of God as you join your Hengstebeck family, your deceased IHM Sisters and Luke Powers friends, as well as thousands of deceased students. We pray that you, who instructed so many, now shine like a "star for all eternity."

Written by Mary Laubacher, IHM, and Marion Duggan, IHM
January 2014