

Remembering Katherine Seidenwand, IHM

March 4, 1920 – April 6, 2014

Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, devoted to the Eucharist, lover of people,
educator, woman of prayer

In her autobiography, Sister Kate writes:



Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical on "God's Gift of Love" sparked in me a gratefulness for this great gift of God's love which was present throughout my whole life.

I was born on March 4, 1920 in Cleveland, Ohio; the second eldest of eight children given to Harry Charles Seidenwand and Susan Loretta O'Dea. My siblings were Cecyle, Eugene, Harry, John, Mary Francis, Lois, and Jo-Ann. How fortunate we were to have such wonderful parents from whom we learned to love God, each other, our neighbors, and our extended family, namely, the St. Michael Parish community in Flint where we were raised. (As I review this document in my last year, my only living sibling is my beloved sister Lois McVeigh whom I love with all my heart.)

Our dear Irish Mom was pleasant, witty, patient and easy going, with one main concern for us – that we were good kids and received the sacraments as often as possible. Dad, too, was a most caring father with the same concerns as Mom but with the additional expectation of wanting us to excel academically. Every night we gathered around the dining room table to do our homework. Dad was there with his sharp, German mind to help with math, and Mom with her poetic bent guided our English lessons.

I often managed to disappoint my Dad as I was more concerned with making sure my clothes were the latest style (even to the point of wearing Cecyle's best without permission) and having a good time both in and out of school. Family life was filled with care, concern, and love for each other.

This spirit also permeated my school life at St. Michael, Flint. It was at St. Mike's that I first received the sacraments and was taught by IHM Sisters and Tom Smith. It was the soil on which the seeds of faith and a religious vocation were nurtured in my heart and my brother, Eugene's, too.

Small wonder then, the call to enter the IHM congregation was felt in the depths of my heart. Despite the intense pain of leaving my beloved family, parish and friends, on Feb. 1, 1939, I arrived at Monroe to learn how to become an IHM Sister. It was said that for one so energetic and "spicy" (as a certain teacher described me) a sense of awe and wonder filled the hearts of those who heard the news of my call to the IHM congregation!

After two and a half years, my novitiate completed and first vows joyously celebrated, I began my first teaching assignment at St. Cecilia in Detroit. Soon after this, I received shocking news. My beloved father had died of a heart attack while working bingo at St. Mike's. My mom was left with five school-aged children to raise alone. In poor health and financially insecure, Mom didn't know where to turn. I told Mother Ruth that God was calling me back home. I had to help my mother. She suggested that Mom bring the three youngest girls to Holy Family at the Academy. My mother made the heart-wrenching decision to accept her offer and leave my dear little sisters in Monroe. This sacrifice saved my vocation. And so, never pausing to look back, never regretting the path taken, I was determined to praise God for His loving call and to be faithful for the rest of my life.

My education included a BA from Marygrove College, MA from University of Detroit and post-graduate courses from Akron University, Notre Dame, and Siena Heights in Adrian.

My formal ministries: Elementary education at St. Cecilia in Detroit, St. Patrick, Wyandotte, Holy Name, Birmingham, St. Mary, Wayne, St. Mary of Redford, Detroit, St. John, Monroe, and principal of my beloved St. Regis in Birmingham.

My fondest memory was as founding principal of St. Regis in September of 1959. It was a tremendous challenge to open a brand new school and for the first four years to be a full time principal, full time teacher and this without a secretary. However, we had a close family spirit – parents helped as volunteer secretaries, librarians, tutors, great books, arts and crafts, music and lunch room mothers. The founding Sisters: Kathleen O'Brien, Jan Soleau, and Shirley Houff were wonderful. In those 11 years, we grew from 205 students to 784. New additions to the school and parish were in a continuous state of being built. What a fascinating time in my career as IHM educator! Generous benefactor and dear friend, Bill Pulte, then a young builder, was working on a development, known as the "Catholic Ghetto," located behind the school, houses starting at \$39,000. Bill later built St. Regis convent which freed us from our five and a half years living at the Marian High convent.

I later served as a member of the Northwest Regional and Provincial Councils, education supervisor for the IHM community (enjoying travels and escapades with my fellow supervisors, especially Sister Mary Choiniere, SJ) and finally co-principal with my dear friend, Sister Joan McGrath, at St. Mary of Redord in Detroit for many, many years.

Kate was a marvelous teacher and administrator, sharing her gifts as a directing teacher for aspiring young educators and giving her whole life in service to Catholic education.

Many and varied were her gifts...

Her **THOUGHTFULNESS** – Sister was perhaps the most prolific letter-writer and card-sender the world has ever known. In her last year, it pained her not to have the steady hand to write those notes and cards, although she tried. They were her loving connection to the host of people

about whom she cared. She was ever attending to the comfort of others. The life of the party, each a celebration of loving relationships, she had such zest for life. Gracious and considerate, her expressions of courtesy were as natural as breathing or the beating of her heart. She possessed an amazing memory for the names of people from her past as well as the wonderful staff in Health Care. Sister Kate told us she always tried to address everyone by name because that was a way of showing them respect. Still, it was a gift!

Her FRIENDLINESS was unparalleled, her friendships many and lasting. Kate, rarely, if ever, forgot those whose lives she touched or who touched hers, nor did they forget her. From lifelong friends, like Kay Etue, with whom she walked to school every day beginning in first grade, to the little children she taught and prepared for Holy Communion, to school staff, parents, parishioners, and even strangers, her ready smile, sincere interest and deep compassion were easily perceived. All this goes double for her own dear family, whom she loved with such passion, including her cousin Patricia and the rest of her beloved Canadian O'Dea's and Dillons. She had a very special affection for the staff in Health Care who showed her incredible kindness and love. The warmth she radiated was returned to her again and again. She felt so blest by the love shown to her by the sisters who visited her, cheered her on, offered their prayers or otherwise were there for her.

Her PRAYERFUL REMEMBRANCE of all those for whom she EVER promised to pray and for those in need was almost without limit. It seems that when we began a rosary in the car on the way to some event, we had gone many miles before Sister Kate, eyes closed and hands folded, finished mentioning all the intentions for which we would be praying and that was just for the first decade! Every morning she placed all her prayerful intentions at the feet of Jesus as she looked at her much loved statue of the little Infant of Prague.

Her FAITH and the convictions that flowed from it were powerful. Her devotion to the Church knew no bounds, her love and respect for priests, beginning with her brother, Father Eugene, (and her many beloved bishop friends), were deep and sincere. The source of her love was the Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, the Bread of Life through which we are all connected.

She always stood by the truth and would never back down from a battle if the honor of the Faith, respect for life, her family, friends or justice were involved.

Another gift Sister had in abundance was the Irish gift of TEARS! They were very real and flowed from a tender, loving heart. If you were seated next to her at a touching movie, funeral or even a very happy event, a smart choice would be to bring along a box of tissues and a light raincoat.

Sister Kate had incredible ENDURANCE! She was never too busy or too tired to bring assistance or comfort, to share the joy of anyone who needed a helper or a listening ear. Even as her strength began to fade, though she had no fear of death, even looked forward to it, she never lost her love of life here with family and friends.

A medical crisis on Ash Wednesday seemed to say that death was imminent; Sister was placed in hospice care. After saying "thank you" and "I love you" to everyone all morning, by afternoon

she said, "I don't think I'm going to die today!" Later when an unexpected opportunity for a medical treatment was presented, she asked me what it would do. I replied that she could probably live an extra month. "I'll take another month" she said.

On the occasion of her retirement as co-principal with Sister Joan McGrath at St. Mary of Redford, the following thoughts are among the many shared regarding her service: "a gift to all... makes others feel special and valued... finding and appreciating goodness in everyone... sterling character... dear, sweet friend... means what she says... a good stern teacher look when we needed it... helped us grow... smiles and hugs... pats on the back... decisive... all heart... moved through these halls with a grace that inspired us all to shine a little (or a lot) brighter... introduced me to her friend, Jesus, and changed my life forever at age 6...."

On her Ministry Commitment Form for 2013-14, Sister notes, "I've always loved God and the deepening of this love has and is the reason I try to accept each day's trials and blessings."

For all her cheerfulness, Sister revealed how suffering (physical pain, diminishment, loss of independence) touched her last few years. In her reflection on Mary standing at the foot of the cross, she writes, "Mary chooses to stand. We too must stand. God does not abandon us. The cross is a gift. The cross means to stand. Being sick is what I'm doing. How do I choose to respond? It's a journey of faith. I can't run away from the cross. No Easter without Jesus' death. We walk by faith and not by sight."

And so, early in the morning, long before dawn, on Sunday, April 6, she slipped away, ever so gently, her face the picture of serenity and peace, to eternal rest? I don't think so; rather eternal LIFE with the Lord, her mom and dad and all those she was looking forward to seeing again.

Dear sister, aunt, cousin, friend, teacher, religious... Kate, now you stand in the Divine Presence, the source of that light and love that you reflected so well. May we honor your memory by courageously living the Gospel of Love, running the race for goodness, until we see you again. We know you never forgot a friend, always were here for us. How much more, from where you are now, which I suspect is very near, just on the other side, you are still loving and caring for each one of us. What comfort, what strength we can take in this sure and certain knowledge, as the Lord Jesus has promised, "I AM the resurrection and the life..."

Sister Loretta Schroeder, IHM

April 14, 2014