

Remembering Sister Mary Anne Huddleston, IHM
May 18, 1920 – Aug. 2, 2014



By all the odds, I never should have been born.

My story begins with my mother, who went to Serbia to serve as a nurse with the Red Cross during World War I. A last-minute change took her off the doomed Lusitania and booked her on the Canopic, another ship carrying Red Cross personnel to Europe. The Lusitania sank.

After Mother's stint was completed she returned to her birthplace, Akron, Ohio, and married my father, Frederick Buel Huddleston. After their marriage, my parents settled at the Portage Lakes outside of Akron. There I lived with my two younger brothers, John and Robert, until I was 17. In my early life, I was the beneficiary of well-educated and conscientious

parents, and of the natural beauty of the Portage Lakes.

During the Great Depression my father lost his job. My mother had to resume nursing to support us. My mother's youngest sister, a victim of pulmonary TB, lived with us and was a potential source of TB for the rest of us. Fortunately, we escaped. "Aunt Millie," I should note, was my godmother, confidante and nurturer of beauty on several levels. On many counts, she was one of the great influences of my life.

Although probably my mother planted the seeds of my vocation, they took root, I believe, in St. Vincent High School, Akron. There I found the IHMs to be excellent teachers and exemplary religious. Sister Mary Jane Brown's classes (four years of English and one of religion) were paradise for me. I saw her as a richly human personality, an exciting teacher and a woman religious for whom God was the bedrock of her being. To be like her was the reason I chose to become a SSIHM.

Sadly for me, graduation came all too soon, and high school ended in 1937. Because of family financial straits, and because my mother thought I was not capable of a mature vocational decision at age 17, I applied for nursing school (only as a better alternative to staying at home or working in a rubber factory). I received a surprise scholarship and entered St. John's Hospital School of Nursing in Cleveland, in the fall of 1937. Despite feeling like the proverbial "fish out of water," (I never wanted to be a nurse) I stuck out nursing school for three years, but spent much of my free time in the Cleveland Public Library reading poetry. I graduated in 1940, took and passed state board exams, and came to Monroe on July 2, 1941.

After surviving the rigors of student nursing, in those days it was 12-hour shifts with three hours off, if we were lucky. In operating rooms there were no fans or air conditioners. After a shift in

surgery under those conditions, the postulate and the novitiate were bliss for me. Even my father's sending back my letters and refusing to see me did not diminish the bliss. Eventually he did visit, and on his death bed, became a Roman Catholic.

In the community, my education began as a postulant with a French class in the summer of 1941. I was ecstatic. Although I never expressed my not wanting to do nursing in the congregation, fearing such expression would be contrary to God's will, I thought it would be my fate. Happily, the French class started me on a liberal arts career with only a stint of nursing during my early years.

In 1942, at Novitiate's end, I was assigned to study at Marygrove. Again, though science was a discipline I tried to avoid, it was my assigned field of study. "Better than nursing," I thought; so I persevered in it through undergraduate and graduate studies, the latter at Catholic University in D.C. There, by the grace of God, I completed master's and doctoral studies and was granted an MS and PhD in Zoology. Despite my disaffection for science, my three years in graduate studies were three of the happiest years of my life. To see the universal Church represented on Catholic University's campus by priests and nuns from many different religious orders; to look out on the nation's capital from my lab workbench; to have the camaraderie of fellow graduate students (especially one who has been my friend and professional mentor for over 50 years) were all very enriching experiences.

After only three years at Catholic University, I returned to Marygrove and began my career teaching biology. It spanned from 1949 to 1973 at Marygrove and from 1975 to 1988 at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore. I loved my seminarians and directees for spiritual direction, many of whom continued to correspond over many years.

This is an excerpt from a letter by Provincial Rev. Paul Purta, SS.

“Sister’s teaching is excellent. Her work in the formation program is especially noteworthy, since she had to overcome more than a little skepticism and even negativity, initially, on the part of both faculty and students about having a woman as a full-time resident doing formational tasks in a seminary.

Though she is by now enthusiastically received, her many duties keep her busy and often pressed. She is a hard and effective worker. You can indeed be proud of her.”

Four years before I left St. Mary’s Seminary, in 1984, at the Johns Hopkins Willmer Eye Clinic in Baltimore, I was diagnosed with macular degeneration, an event that changed my life. A friend once asked a question: “Mary Anne you can’t see, you can’t hear and you can’t walk. How do you tolerate the frustration?” I paused and answered, “When the time comes the grace comes, also.”

In 1988, on my own initiative, I left the seminary and returned to Monroe. Here I continued my third career (begun part-time in 1984) of writing for publication. Since 1984, with the aid of a closed-circuit TV magnifier, I have had published three books; *Celibate Loving*, 1984; *Springs of Spirituality*, 1995; *Friendship*, 1999; seven articles and four or five letters to the editor. Prior to 1984, a number of my poems were published. My JFK [John F. Kennedy] poems (1968) are in the Kennedy Library in Boston, as are two letters from Bobby Kennedy to me. Additionally, encouraged by my spiritual director, I have given lectures, and have planned and implemented five lecture series.

As I grow older, I find myself to be profoundly grateful for all sorts of "graces" that have brought me to this crossroads. Concretely, I am most grateful for the Catholic education afforded me by my parents at great personal and monetary cost to them; for continuous exposure to natural beauty, for good health care at home and in the congregation; for the higher education and the other cultural and spiritual opportunities afforded me by the congregation and the seminary; for my 13 years on the faculty of a major seminary; for the sterling example of many IHMs; and the enrichment by and the forbearance of relatives, friends, colleagues and companions.

On March 6, 2004, a letter of gratitude was sent to Mary Anne from Kathleen M. DuBay, religious education coordinator at St. Michael Church, Monroe, Mich.

“I thank you for presenting the topic, ‘The Burden of Personal Suffering’ for our Growing in Holiness program. This topic was probably the most difficult of all our topics this year because it touches so many people emotionally, physically, socially and hopefully, spiritually. Each person in the audience probably had their own story of suffering to tell. Everyone, at one level or another, identifies with suffering and yet so few of us are able to make any sense out of it, especially, spiritual sense.

Some of the most impressive parts of your talk, in my opinion, were your definition of suffering, which included experiences beyond just physical pain, the discussion of the consequences of staying at the anger/evasion stage, and the advice on how to reach the transformation stage.

Again, I can’t say enough about the overall clarity and organization of your talk. You have a gift of zeroing in on the most profound truths and making them seem so simple when they are in fact, just the opposite. . .”

Here in her own community Mary Anne was also recognized in a letter to Lourdes College by her Provincial, Sister Carol Quigley, IHM.

“The quality which I wish to emphasize is integration which we know is the major theme of all quality programs in spiritual direction today. To find in one person the poet and the scientist is unusual; to find also that one to be strongly committed to spirituality and social justice remarkable. Yet more, she has the discipline of scholarship and perseverance while also being a delight as a person. . .”

Mary Anne describes herself **as a person**. “I am passionate (about almost everything), perfectionistic, outspoken, intolerant and private. I am a lover of beauty, academics and people, and intolerant of pretentiousness. If asked to characterize myself in a word, it would be ‘passionate.’ I have loved life and the people in it.” Her gentle side, her fun side was not always on display, but it was pure magic when it happened. “**As a Religious**, I have high ideals, but fall short of achieving them. At best I have never given up praying despite my struggles.”

My indebtedness to my family is incalculable. My two sisters-in-law, each in their own situation, have been heroic, and Pat (my brother Bob’s wife) is both a relative and a friend. While bearing and rearing eight children, she cared for my invalid mother. Dolores, my brother, John’s wife, was admirable in her care of John who sustained a serious World War II injury. My nieces and nephews (in-laws included) have challenged, enlightened, and delighted me, and I have been honored and impressed by their initiative in visiting, phoning and otherwise keeping in touch with “their elderly aunt.” My grandnieces and grandnephews have been a great joy. I deeply love my relatives and thank God for them.

Mary Anne left a little note telling us, her friends who loved her, how friendship affected her.

“To
the friends,
who,
 like fine liqueurs,
 set my spirit tingling.”

Mary Anne’s love of our Blessed Mother is legendary. In her handwritten book of prayers she leaves us with a lovely thought:

“Think how wonderful it will be at the hour of death to look into the eyes of our Mother and have her lead us to her Son.”

Amen, Mary Anne, Amen.

Written by Sister Mary Anne Huddleston and Sister Jeanette Boudreau