

**Remembering Sister Elizabeth Bowling, IHM**  
**Oct. 3, 1916 – Feb. 20, 2014**



I promised Elizabeth to begin with a thank you from her. "...to the Congregation for these many wonderful years, to my Family for their love and concern, to all the Nurses, CENAs, housekeepers and staff who took such great care of me especially those on Health Care Second floor 2E, Pastoral Care, the Sisters on Liguori Main who became community for me and the many friends who consistently visited me and

encouraged me. I will remember all in eternity. Thank you."

Elizabeth began her autobiography with this brief paragraph.

"I begin this biography with a simple statement. I am a very ordinary person and have lived an ordinary life. My greatest achievement is perseverance in my religious vocation – due solely to God's Grace."

Such depth of spirituality in a few statements. The sincerity of an inner humility steeped in the love and mercy of a faithful God. A richness of extraordinary beauty experienced in a common ordinary life. Thus, Elizabeth depicts her beginnings in the same succinct manner with which she introduced her biography.

"My ancestors go back to England on both maternal and paternal sides. At some time, relatives migrated to Kentucky. My parents, Joseph Chester Bowling and Agnes Charlotte Ballard, were born and raised in Bardstown, Ky., a small picturesque city about 45 minutes from Louisville."

Her dad's education was cut short after sixth grade to work on the family farm. Her mother had the best education of the time since her parents came from a wealthier farm family. They married and moved to a farm of their own.

Elizabeth continues her history. “It was here, that I, the oldest of 10 children, made my debut on Oct. 3, 1916...after a few years, a sister and a brother became part of our family.”

The early years on the farm were happy years for Liz; she spent a great deal of time with her maternal grandparents. Often her mother took them to pick raspberries. Elizabeth happily recalled “the wonderful blackberry pies and delicious blackberry jams” they enjoyed. Elizabeth’s mom disliked farming very much. At about 6-and-a-half years old, Liz and the family moved to Akron, Ohio. Work was plentiful in Akron so her dad was able to get a job in one of the rubber companies.

The following September, Elizabeth and her sister Mary Ellen were enrolled at St. Bernard, a German parish located in center of town. Although far away from home, the girls walked to school every day; the Bowlings did not have a car then. In 1922, both she and her sister made their First Communion...thus began Liz’s ardent devotion to the Eucharist and the sacred liturgy. In fact, Elizabeth recalled that she still had (after 92 years) the First Communion holy card given her by her teacher, Sister Mary Victor, a Dominican from Our Lady of the Elms.

In Liz’s third year, Mr. Bowling purchased a home only two blocks away from St. Mary Parish and school on the south side of Akron. What a joy – moving into a larger home with “lots of room for all of us.” 815 May Street became home at some time or other, to not only Elizabeth and Mary Ellen, but to the other Bowling siblings: Kathleen, Agnes and Richard, Joseph Chester, Gertrude Rose, Catherine Louise, Pauline Marie and Jeanette Terese.

When Elizabeth was in fourth and fifth grades, she lost two sisters and a brother within a year and a half: Kathleen, Richard and Agnes. This was a fearful time for young Elizabeth. After this, anytime anyone would become sick, Liz was afraid they would die.

The Bowlings made it through the Depression years. Mr. Bowling never lost his job, but Elizabeth remembers that many times his paycheck would only be \$6 and the house had to be mortgaged for survival.

Three short paragraphs speak to her vocation as a religious. Elizabeth says:

“I enjoyed my grade school years and had some wonderful teachers: Sisters Mary Gregory, Rose and Francelia. In the seventh grade, I used to think how nice it would be to have a vocation.

This desire grew as I went through my high school years. During my high school years, I used to enjoy visiting the older people on our block. As a result I used to think I would like to be a Little Sister of the Poor. However, one day they came begging at our door. I knew I could not do that.

My senior teacher, Sister Miriam Therese, helped me make a decision to enter the IHMs in June 1936. When I told my parents about my decision, my Dad said, “I had prayed for this all my married life but did not expect it so soon.”

Then Elizabeth tells of her 77 years as an IHM Sister in four brief statements.

“On June of ’36, Jerome VandeVelde drove us to Monroe. My final profession was in January 1939.

“Most of my teaching career was as a math teacher in seventh and eighth grades. I taught at schools in Detroit, Pontiac and Lorain, Ohio. I began my teaching career in Gesu Parish, Detroit, and ended it in Gesu many years later.

“I spent the last 32 years at Marygrove College in various roles and responsibilities. My last nine years were my favorite – having charge of the Math Lab.

“I retired to the Motherhouse in July of 2003. I am very happy to be here. How lucky we are to have such a splendid place to spend our final years.”

Thus she ends her autobiography.

But there is more to Elizabeth than three pages of simple statements. Those who knew her well – her family, her friends, her co-workers – would offer a prism of

many characteristics, traits, activities we experienced in our relationship with her. And so I begin...

Indeed, Elizabeth was an ordinary person. But she was real. No airs: what you see is what you get. She lived her simple life extraordinarily well.

She loved her God: prayer was the lifeline of everything she was or did. All through her life it was in prayer and through prayer that Elizabeth found the grace and energy to be herself in whatever stage life presented itself. Our Blessed Mother was an ever-present source of strength. In retirement, Elizabeth looked to prayer as her primary apostolic endeavor.

Her family was special to her. In 1977 she went to Akron for three months to care for her dying mother (one of the most difficult times in her life). Another occasion of deep suffering was the time her sister Gertrude left religious life after 28 years as an IHM Sister. Again it was prayer that moved her forward.

Elizabeth was a family woman; loved each one for who they were, enjoyed reminiscing good times with them; excited when they would come to visit her; excited when she was able to go to them. Her trips to Kentucky to be with Father Chester and/or the trek to Virginia in January were but a few highlights of the year. She held bragging rights for any niece's or nephew's accomplishment. Nothing surpassed her time with family.

Elizabeth's own claim to fame was persevering in her vocation as a woman religious...being an IHM...given the opportunity to serve God by using her gifts in reaching out to others regardless of who they were. She was a Community Woman; an IHM who loved her congregation dearly and was grateful to be an active member.

Elizabeth was an excellent teacher at any level she taught. Early on during the summertime, Elizabeth took advantage of many programs offered by National Science Foundation in other states at other universities to further her own education. Committed to Catholic education, she carried the "good news" to parents as well as to students. Well prepared, she knew how to motivate the student to do his/her best. She brought an excitement to the content whether it be English

or math. Her greatest joys were the years she taught college students in the Marygrove Math Lab. Many acknowledged that they learned much more than math but also basic Christian values, which added security to their struggling lives.

Elizabeth loved life in its fullest, entered wholeheartedly into joy and fun that life offered, whether a party, a card game or a game of chance. She looked forward to the times her family would take her to the casino. Here at home, she had a routine time for playing cards with her usual “buddies.” She also enjoyed an evening out to dinner.

Elizabeth was an accomplished seamstress designing her own patterns and making her own clothes. She was on a high when baking up a storm, be it coffeecakes, donuts or the perfect fudge, and brought the same skill of organization and common sense stewardship to her responsibility of being a treasurer at the local convents wherever she lived.

Elizabeth loved to read...mysteries, historical novels as well as current spiritual/theological books and had her favorite book characters such as Winnie the Pooh and Eeyore. No word puzzle was too difficult for her to work.

Yes, Liz accepted the ordinary challenges of daily living, could be irked at the messiness of an event; demonstrated an impatience in the midst of a friendly argument, but was always able to put things in their proper perspective and happily move forward holding no grudges, or bitterness.

Elizabeth lived simply, had nothing extraneous in her possession, desired only the necessities she needed to perform her ministry and was happy in whatever environment she found herself.

When the sisters were in the process of closing Marygrove Convent, each one had boxes and boxes for whatever would be moved out. One of the sisters dryly suggested they had better start looking for a cigar box so Elizabeth would have enough room for her belongings. Elizabeth could enjoy laughter at her own expense.

In her Book of Life, she mentions that when she realized her physical life was changing and she was becoming acquainted with aging and all that it entailed, she found it a bit frightening. As she puts it, “I found myself quietly rebelling at the thought of growing old. I no longer could walk up and down stairs so quickly. (Thank God for elevators when they work). Slowly and surely, I began to accept my changed status in life. It still wasn’t easy. Many times God heard a goodly number of complaints from me. God probably turned the receiver to mute. But as in all new challenges one does come to acceptance. As the Psalmist says, ‘Lord, I put my hope in you. I have trusted you since I was young.’”

She continues: “Today I find peace in these days of aging. There is an acceptance of me as ‘me.’ How wonderful! I don’t have to be like anyone else.”

Elizabeth was humble and simple in how she assessed herself. She knew her own limitations and was comfortable with them. Although somewhat shy by nature, she was truly a people person. Elizabeth enjoyed friends and nurtured their friendship, offering them kindness, encouragement, support and generous love. She was a very loyal friend.

Elizabeth, here we are – your family, your sisters, your friends – coming together to celebrate your final journey home. We’ve tried to speak about what we remembered when you were among us. Now I think I’d like to hear from you – your message to us who miss you. I know you would borrow some words from one of your favorite characters, Eeyore as he’s saying goodbye to Winnie the Pooh:

“If there is ever a tomorrow that we are not together, there is one thing you should always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is, even if we’re apart I will always be with you in my heart.”

Ciao, my dear friend.

Written and presented by Josephine M. Sferrella, IHM  
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