

Remembering Sister Colleen Sheridan, IHM

Aug. 17, 1942 – Oct. 13, 2017



“Where is my little Colleen?”

As the story goes, this was the question Mr. Sheridan often asked when he came home from his work as police lieutenant and then deputy superintendent in the police department of the City of Detroit. He was looking for his third child, the first little girl among the lively brood of 12 Sheridans born to Paul and Frances Rohan Sheridan. Paul Philip, Jr. and Patrick had preceded Colleen’s arrival in 1942. Actually, she was named Catherine Mary, but at her IHM reception she became Colleen. Still the family knows her best over the years as Cathy. By 1944 Mary was born, and then came Frances, Margaret, Michael, Timothy, James, Philip, John and the youngest, William.

The Sheridan parents came from Boston to Detroit because of the Depression. They had a strong Irish ethnicity and Catholic heritage. Paul and Frances managed the family with love and discipline. Paul Sheridan set a few serious rules and saw that they were honored. Colleen’s brother, Patrick, in his autobiography wrote about the Sheridans’ childhood and his parents:

“ [My Ma] always sat with [my Dad] in the living room, and when they went out, they always went out together, except on Dad’s monthly poker night and Ma’s monthly pinochle night. When she wasn’t with my Dad, my Ma was always feeding, changing, or rocking the latest of her twelve new babies. She also spent a lot of time cooking. If any of the kids were sick, they would get a lot of attention from both Ma and Dad ... Except for that the kids spent most of our time with each other.

We all had our chores – drying dishes at age four, washing them when we turned six, then we moved up to washing laundry, hanging it on the clothes line, and other duties. My sisters spent a lot of time playing with each other and their girlfriends down the street. *How Come Nothing Ever Kills Granddad?* Pp.19-20.

Today with 33 nieces and nephews and 34 grandnieces and grandnephews, we have no doubt that “little Colleen” had a lifetime of community experience. In her family and at the heavily populated St. Raymond School in Detroit and Regina High School in Harper Woods, she built bonds of friendship.

By the time she joined the IHM congregation on Sept. 7, 1960, Colleen understood the treasures and trials of community living. In the several schools of her busy years of ministry, she was right at home.

In those early years, Colleen did her undergraduate studies at Marygrove College and obtained a master's degree at Wayne State University.

Friends described Colleen as "her own person," as "one who knew her path." She was very straightforward. She was also seen as a private person.

Colleen taught at more than 14 Archdiocesan schools beginning at Epiphany in Detroit in 1962-64, where her principal and superior was her former sixth grade teacher, Sister Mary Ann Untener. Her years of teaching concluded at St. Angela School in Roseville in 2004. By then she had amassed hundreds of teaching tales. She spoke positively of those days with young children. She knew how to meet their needs and how to challenge them. For many years, parents and former students have kept in touch. A number of sisters remarked on her creativity and her ability to engage the children in fun activities such as performances of plays like the memorable one she presented on the life of Johnny Appleseed.

In 2004, Colleen joined the IHM Development Office as a data entry clerk. Scarcely, a year later her many skills made her a likely worker as special assistant in Archives. Donna Westley, who only recently retired as Archives director, spoke of Colleen as "careful, accurate, exact, organized, insightful ... She helped sisters to preserve items and papers for archives. She was inventive ... planned many games for our department Christmas parties ... In early days, she helped construct and re-arrange shelving units."

Donna noted how compassionate Colleen was in dealing with the sisters. A good number of sisters praised Colleen's helpful assistance when they were moving into the Motherhouse. Another characteristic they noted was her availability. So readily, early or late in the day, Colleen took people to the hospital in emergency situations. For them, she was truly a rescuer, someone to always rely on in need. Others recalled Colleen's seemingly favorite spot, the Mid-Town Coney Island on Telegraph – a getaway spot for a bite to eat and a refreshing chat away from the everyday gatherings. One of the sisters who entered the IHMs with Colleen affirmed Colleen's love of the community. "I always think of her as 'true blue,'" she mused. There are many who would agree.

It is also true that Colleen was in many ways a very private person. She worked and mingled quietly. No ostentation though all the while she shared herself with so many. Birthdays, anniversaries, jubilees, holidays – she noted them. A seasonal card, a chocolate Easter bunny, some red hearts on Valentine's Day – so many little celebrative gifts came from her, offering cheer and surprise.

Without a doubt, Colleen loved her large family. She spoke warmly of her parents and siblings. She shared their sorrows and celebrations. She drew up a booklet labelled "The Sheridan Family" containing births and deaths, addresses, relationships. Through

phone calls, emails, travel she kept in touch. Coming into the Archives workroom, we received an ongoing account, not only of the Lions football games, but of new family additions, weddings, requests for prayers.

Her sister-in-law, Jaycine Sheridan, admitted that the next home game for the Lions will have heavy emotional weight. She and Colleen have attended them together for the past four years cheering the coaching of youngest brother, Bill.

Looking back over the years I realize that Colleen had a very busy life. She touched many of us in meaningful ways. She offered herself again and again in care and service. She did it as her parents had done it quietly, steadily, consistently; we forget sometimes how much we internalize the life lessons of our parents. At the same time she left the mark of her own insights, inventiveness, and creativity. As she wrote in our community Book of Life, "My journey led me to the IHM community where my life was enriched and my faith deepened. She concluded, "I am grateful to my family, my community, my friends and all who journey with me."

"Where is my little Colleen?"

Colleen has moved ahead of us and is embraced by the mercy and kindness of our God. We thank her for sharing her love, her wisdom, her gifts. We will feel her absence for a long time and hold her in loving memory. We pray that she now knows comfort and joy. We are glad her suffering is ended. We rely now on her advocacy continuing for us who remain.

Written and delivered by Joan Glisky, IHM, Oct. 20, 2017