

Remembering Ann (Ann Arthur) Aseltyne, IHM
May 3, 1926 – Oct. 23, 2018



We are here today to honor Ann: my sister, your sister, and friend, for the life she gave so tirelessly. Anyone who received a letter from Ann knows that Ann would always tell us, “U R –GRRR – 8.” Now, we can just imagine the choirs of angels joining us in saying, “Ann, U R – GRRR – 8!”

Ann was born of great parents, Arthur Aseltyne and Kathleen Burke Aseltyne. We had an older brother, Art, who served in General Patten’s Army throughout WW II, a younger brother Bill, who served in the Navy during the Korean War, and me, her younger sister, who serves in our “Army Blue” as the IHM community song goes. Ann’s given name was Helen Mary, named after a wonderful Aunt Helen who lived with us from time to time.

I wish to also acknowledge our sisters-in-law, Dolores, who is with us here today, and Jane, who passed away in 2010. Dolores and Jane have been like sisters to Ann and me, and of great support to our family, especially during the “cloistered” life in our early convent days. Please note that a few names were missing from the Mass booklet, nephews, Patrick and Bill, who will say a few words following our ritual.

On one of the final days before her graduation, Ann’s class was asked to write on a piece of paper what they would be doing after graduation. Ann wrote that she planned to join some religious order. That was news to everyone, including our family. Thus began the great game of secrecy that was a crown jewel in Ann’s bejeweled life. That secrecy stemmed from Ann’s self-effacement; her decisions were made to make others happy, not to satisfy her own happiness. And so, in July of 1944, Ann chose to enter the congregation of the teaching sisters who had served her well for 12 years at St. Mary of Redford School: the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate of Mary.

Ann could not have chosen a better title since her whole life was lived as a servant to others. Sister George Ellen and others can give us many examples of this. She and Ann found out on their day of entry that they had the same number of family members and a lifelong friendship of 74-years began.

Sister Janet Sullivan relates a good example of Ann’s determination as many of us here are aware of the various “charges” we each had on mission. Ann and Janet were the young sisters at Annunciation who had the “heavy charges,” like doing the community wash, getting the meals, keeping the kitchen and checking the furnace.

One night, Ann went down the basement to be sure everything was locked up. Janet went to the kitchen to be sure that everything was locked up. You can likely guess what happened. Janet locked the basement door. When Ann tried to get upstairs she could not. The dutiful young sister immediately thought of the fact that she was also the ringer of the bell for the last signal. So, Ann went out the basement door, ran outside around the house to the front door, and rang the doorbell nine times. She was hoping that maybe someone would possibly wake up, – but no! Her night was spent in the basement.

In the morning when Janet went down early to put the coffee on, she noticed a paper near the basement door. It was written in red and read: "At your earliest convenience, will you please open this door." When Janet opened it, Ann was standing on the top step with one hand on her hip and the other on the wall, as if to say, "How could you do this to me!" No scolding; just wondering!

As we know, sisters were educated in various colleges and universities during the summers and sometimes along with teaching full days. Ann received her bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, her master's degree from Wayne State University and on the side took various courses from the University of Michigan, Notre Dame, Loyola and others that enhanced her abilities wherever she happened to be.

Ann loved to discuss various aspects of philosophy, theology and psychology. She knew well the important writers of the time. Our family also was highly motivated to be concerned about civic matters.

Spirituality, philosophy and psychology were well put together in Ann's mind and heart to form the wisdom that we will hear about in the first reading this morning. These were traits that Ann carried throughout her busy life.

You might say, along with the Mother Superior in "The Sound of Music," "How do we solve a sister like Ann?" She was at times a mystery to us all: at other times, an open book. Even close family and friends were often puzzled. She loved work, but never took comfort in knowing that her work was well done. She was unpredictable. Things that we might want others to know she would keep a secret. Like when she was leaving Africa for good. Ann wondered if she should tell the family or should she just wait until she arrived home on our doorstep.

Then there was the playful side witnessed at Ann's 70th Jubilee in 2015. We were all issued an ultimatum stated in quite an angry tone: THERE WERE TO BE NO PARTIES FOR HER! DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT! Well, Becky and friends had one anyway; did we say Ann was unpredictable! When we surprised Ann, she surprised us by being totally ready with her life history, charts and some silly little games that we all enjoyed. That was Ann.

Ann was a "lover of us all" being intense, playful, compassionate and untiring. We can all say, "To ANN, U R GR-R-R 8."

As Ann's list on her Tree of Life, Spiral Gift of Ministries, indicates, she taught lower elementary grades in Detroit, Birmingham, Lorain, Ohio, Hall of the Divine Child, Monroe, and in Minnetonka, Minn., until she was missioned to St. Felicitas, Chicago, where she became principal. Ann suffered through the difficulties of racism, the "white flight," and became endeared to teachers, students and parents as the years passed.

Can you imagine Ann as principal? She was very fair yet demanding of students. Parents were most helpful. After a short while, Father Tom Boyle became the pastor. He took over the building needs and Ann ran the school. A delight to any principal, Ann was a good delegator. She treated people well, as she believed that we were capable.

When Ann returned to St. Felicitas a few years ago for a milestone celebration, she almost did not go because she thought she would not know anyone or they would not know her. Wrong! Everyone clambered just to say "Hello" and to thank her again for leaving such a legacy.

When Ann was ready to move on, the new open placement process became problematic for her. She would have appreciated being placed by her superiors wherever an opening occurred. She also wondered why no one asked her until Sister Mary Jo Maher came up one day and asked if she would consider going to Africa. Ann's first reaction was that she could not because she had no skill in learning other languages. Mary Jo solved that one obstacle by telling Ann that the teaching was done in English. Thus followed 20 years of Ann's intense giving as a teacher/professor, mentor, preschool founder and pastoral minister in the three African countries of Ghana, Uganda and South Africa.

Her first IHM companions were Sister Becky Vonderhaar and Sister Rose Graham. They survived in Ghana without electricity, carried water from a distant well and lived in a small house that also had bats, rats and scorpions as unwelcome guests. All of this in what was often 120-degree heat. However, the people were as beautiful as the scenery and eager to learn, and so the sisters thrived, as did their students. Ann wrote many descriptive letters back to us.

Ann also had a string of supporters lined up when she went to Africa. She left mailing lists with several of her friends and relatives. She wrote to us and had us send her letters on to the people on the lists. It started a very good supply line, as people sent items from here to there. Near the end of Ann's time in Ghana, Sister Marie Esther Haflett was looking for a sister to be with her in Uganda, and so Ann became a teacher at Uganda Martyrs University. Please ask Sister Marie Esther to share about their trip from South Africa to Uganda by way of automobile – it was quite a trip!

Typical of Ann, she waited for an opportunity to be sure that her moves were covered. A young professor at the university brought his young British bride back to live at the university. She just happened to be an English teacher. Ann considered this a sign that she would be able to help this young bride find a job as Ann's replacement, and it would solve her problem of when to leave her position.

When Ann returned to the United States, she assisted teachers at St. Mary of Redford, Holy Redeemer and Christ the Good Shepherd schools.

In community, no task was too mundane for her. At community gatherings, Ann often had a repertoire of games and songs. On her frequent visits to Monroe, she took treats to the sisters in Memory Care. Her joy was in sharing her time and small gifts with those who were not very mobile anymore.

Sister Peg O'Shea, who now oversees the preschool in South Africa that Ann had begun, wrote that the school is still thriving after 18 years. It began with six little children and now numbers 58. It is just one of Ann's legacies. She was always aware of the need to look to the future when building on educational goals.

Sister Annette St-Amour sent a message from South Sudan and writes, "Ann's generous giving spirit will always stay with me. I treasure that I knew her this way in South Africa. Be comforted to know that she is in God's loving embrace."

We all know that Ann's wish was to continue to minister until the end of her days. She literally got her wish. Ann's longtime friend and companion, Sister Becky, moved to the new IHM retreat center in Riverview and Ann moved to Monroe. Ann was not even a year with us in Monroe before she was called Home to be with "Mary" and her "Lord, Jesus Christ."

I was the fortunate one to be present at Ann's final moment. She opened her eyes, looked right at me as if to say, "Remember all that I have taught you." Then she closed her eyes and took her last breath here on Earth. She could not keep her "Lord, Jesus Christ" waiting. We certainly could go on, but Ann would be the first to say, ENOUGH! So I ask that we all join together in Ann's style and say, "Ann, U R GRRR 8!"

May Ann's soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in the peace of our loving God

Written and delivered by Ann's sister, Pat Aseltyne, IHM, Oct. 29, 2018