

**Remembering Katherine Blanchard, IHM**  
**May 3, 1950 – March 20, 2021**



Let me begin by first thanking all those who made this gathering of Kathy's family, friends, administrators, colleagues and students possible. For Kathy Blanchard, from her first day on campus as a student, Marygrove was a place of relationships, personal and professional development, celebration, tradition, innovation and unimagined possibilities. It was here she earned her bachelor's degree, made her final profession as an IHM and here that she spent 25 collaborating with others living out the mission of both the IHM Sisters and the college. She did both very well.

Rita Marie (Sheele) of Delphos, Ohio, and Andrew William Blanchard of Adrian, Mich., had seven children: three daughters, Mary Ann, Theresa and Katherine Marie; and four sons, Chas, Bill, John and Jerry. The children went to St. Michael for grade school. Three of the boys were educated at Catholic Central, and one at Monroe High; two of the girls went to St. Mary's and one to Monroe High. During a conversation with Theresa, I asked her if she had a treasured memory of Kathy. Her immediate response was the following.

One day when Kathy was about 12, the kids were out playing a little distance from home when winds began blowing hard, and from their perspective, a tornado was heading in their direction. The kids became fearful and anxious to get home and so they headed off racing as fast as they could to get to safety as soon as possible. Theresa, who had brought her bike, was wearing bell bottom pants that day. Unfortunately for her, one pant leg got caught in the bicycle chain. No one could unhook it from the chain and so Theresa was unable to run with the others. According to Theresa, Kathy took the matter into her hands, picked up Theresa and carried her and the bike home. Theresa continues to be grateful to Kathy for "saving the day," and Theresa as well.

Following graduation from St. Mary's, Kathy worked as an assistant parts manager at the former O'Brien Ford and at Webster-Duvall Lincoln Mercury. About this same time, she joined the choir at St. Joseph Catholic Church, where she met Camille Brouillard who was working at St. Joe's in parish ministry. They soon became good friends.

Kathy first talked about entering religious life with a woman in the parish who shared the news with Camille. Shortly after, Camille met with Kathy "informally" and "invited her to join the IHMs." Kathy entered the community Aug. 30, 1981. The focus of her years in formation was two-fold: immersion into the life of the IHMs and preparation for ministry. She received a bachelor's degree in December 1988. She made her final profession of vows at Marygrove on Sept. 12, 1990.

When reflecting on her first experiences as a student on the Marygrove campus she wrote, "I immediately headed toward the 4<sup>th</sup> floor art department, where I met great friends and professors and joined a community that laughed together through long hours of hanging exhibits, discussing our work, and getting through our senior shows. In

the best sense, I loved how equalizing Marygrove was – it was possible just to hang out with IHMs, who were administrators and professors, with staff from every level of the institution, and with students from all over the city. Often, we found ourselves together in the computer graphics lab late at night or on weekends, each of us engaged in some project we were trying to figure out – The Authors Series or the winter schedule or the honors convocation program book. I am especially grateful to those who were willing to try new things and who encouraged me to do the same, whether it was silkscreen prints, watercolors, computer graphics, videography, photography or digital editing. They constantly encouraged my curiosity about electronic media and design simply by asking my advice on how to solve a problem, or by approaching me with that innocent-sounding plea, ‘KAAATHYYYYYYYY, I just know you can do this on your computer.’”

Kathy also recalled, “One of my favorite moments happened in 1992, when Chuck Geshke a founder of Adobe Systems, was on campus with his wife, a Marygrove alumna. During their visit, he had learned that we produced a number of publications in-house, including the grad and undergrad catalogs, so he came down to our dark, unpainted, pretty grim basement office. He told us that we were using more of his products and producing more out of our small shop than many larger universities, including some where he served on the Board of Trustees. Suddenly we felt like we were in a guildhall where the light beamed through leaded glass windows onto the golden heads of accomplished artisans. We thought we might be delusional. Maybe it was just some screen saver that escaped from my Mac. But his words weren’t an illusion – they transformed, on the spot, how we viewed our operation and how we would continue to think of it for many years. For me, that transformation was not isolated, but was simply the most recent in a long line, a transformation that had begun much earlier, on that first elevator ride to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.”

Following her graduation in 1989, Kathy was immediately hired by the college as a graphic artist, which she was throughout her years at Marygrove. What changed over the years was the responsibilities she had as the job grew in expectation and necessity.

Kathy worked at Marygrove from 1989 to 2013. Some of her titles were:  
Assistant Director of Publications – Graphic Art;  
Director of Publications – Graphic Artist;  
Chief Graphic Designer;  
Senior Graphic Designer.

The American Authors Series was introduced to the college and the Detroit-Metro area by members of the English Department: Barbara Johns, Lynne Schaffer and Frank Rashid. It was an idea that drew enormous energy and enthusiasm. Of course, there was no money to pull it off, so energy was needed to find ways to fund it. The problems were addressed and the series began.

For more than 32 years, the college has hosted the Series, drawing poets and novelists to the campus for an evening of readings, input from the authors and book signings at the conclusion. Hundreds of people have come to these wonderful evenings. Kathy was

part of the team that advertised the venture, creating and circulating posters and advertisements of all kinds. The team also designed T-shirts to sell after the lectures. The posters and T-shirts reveal the history of this unique contribution Marygrove has offered to the college at large, the surrounding schools and Metro-Detroit community.

Kathy was multi-gifted and always generous. Kate Pierce, IHM, emailed the following as an example of her experience.

Kathy certainly knew what it meant to be the “new kid on the block.” I felt those feelings when I first arrived back in Michigan after being away for 44 years! She came over to my office one day to welcome me back to Detroit and to offer me assistance with needs I might have requiring design, graphics, photography and the like. Her services would be free of charge. For the next 14 years, she provided ICS (Intercultural Consultation Services) with the kind of professional and creative posters and invitations every organization, nonprofit or otherwise, would be proud to use. Her thoughtfulness included keeping a calendar of ICS’s regular events so she could remind me of the following year’s programs and dates. She would send me reminders including samples of new posters she’d designed. She was ready for my approval of the new year’s posters before I had even checked my calendar!

Kathy was a hard worker, one who loved what she was doing; loved the challenges involved keeping up with the innovations in graphic design and technology. She loved their goals and dedication. In truth, she was a woman in love, not so much with the work but with its potential for good. She was also a woman who found time to have fun.

There were the Friday evening barbeques at Jerry’s; the card games at Gerry Selman’s; and the Sundays at the symphony with Judy Dutka. She joined Super Bowl gatherings at Mary Ann Markel’s. Much to the consternation of some of the others, Mary Ann told me Kathy was less interested in the scores than she was in the ads! And this, from a woman who was a star on her women’s softball baseball team and an essential member of her bowling team. There is a picture of her sky diving, which judging from her smile, suggests she really did know how to have a good time!

Relationships were vital to her. When reflecting on her life and the contexts in which she seemed most comfortable, it is most often with others, be it a family, a group working on different projects; enjoying music with a friend; being a member of groups with shared values and/or goals. She was not the first to speak, but according to those who worked with her closely, she could/would speak her mind. She was a truth-teller and for her, the integrity of the relationship required candor and openness.

The artwork on the front and back cover of the booklet for her Remembering and funeral were done by Kathy. The front cover was done originally in the context of the 2012 IHM Chapter. As you can see, it is a silhouette of an obviously strong woman extending herself as fully as she can in an effort to reach into the heights about her. The woman appears to have no feet to support her. What she does have are numerous roots extending from her into the Earth. The roots extend out from her in various directions.

And my sense is that this picture is not only Kathy's image of the IHM congregation, its life and mission, its present and its future, but also, an image of herself. (Probably not shared consciously, but of herself nevertheless). And as a picture of her, it is revelatory.

The silhouette is of a strong, purposeful, woman. Even her reaching has meaning. She is reaching as high as she can. She is confident that the object of her reaching is worth striving to secure. The woman does not appear in any way anxious or fearful, but rather utterly confident in her pursuit of that which is truly important to her life. The source of her stance was her rootedness in the Earth. In Kathy's life it was the Earth of family acceptance and love; community love and gratitude; and the respect of all those whose paths she crossed. Kathy was a woman with a very large heart, significant energy, insight into beauty, nature and relationships. She also had a wonderful ability to see the humor in much of life. She shared it all through her designs, her recordings be they pictorial or audio. She was herself an artist whose drawings and pottery captured well those things that had first captured her. Kathy, a woman of courage, did much to make the world as we know it a better place.

It was a privilege to know her. We are the better because we did.

Written and delivered by Mary Agnes Ryan, IHM  
March 26, 2021