

Remembering Donna Kerr, IHM
June 16, 1927 — July 19, 2021



Donna Mary Kerr, known later as Sister Noel Marie, had a quote at the end of her autobiography which I think expresses her own philosophy of life:

*What comes, comes.
From the ashes new life emerges.
Out of the darkness — light.
Everything, every change is challenge.*

Donna was born to Grace Irene (Thurtle) and William Kerr on June 16, 1927 in Battle Creek, Mich. She was joined by her two sisters, Patricia Ann and Beverly Jean. Donna's mother, Grace Irene Thurtle, was born in Bad Axe, Mich. Her family originally came from England and moved to a farm in the County of Durham, Ontario, in 1812.

The Kerr family had a simple lifestyle and enjoyed vacations that involved outdoor life including fishing and camping. The interest in fishing was probably from her father, Bill Kerr, who was born in Eyemouth, Scotland. When he was 12 years old his family moved to Earlston, an area in Scotland where fishing was the chief occupation. His mother worried about her four sons, afraid they might "follow the sea." One had already started to do so. Young Bill was kept from this life on the sea by working in the family's fish and chip store. The family delivered and sold fish over a larger area to manor houses and castles as well as to ships. Bill also had a delivery route and gave good care to his horse. When he was sixteen his father moved the family to the United States.

Eventually, the Kerrs settled in Battle Creek, Mich. Both Donna and her two sisters were born there and attended St. Philip School, where she became an outstanding "A Student" and became well acquainted with the IHM community. At the same time her musical talent and skill emerged, and she became the organist at St. Philip Church.

Donna's family enjoyed summer vacations in the Upper Peninsula and at Big Star Lake near Baldwin, Mich. On Sundays during the year, they went to nearby lakes where her father knew the fishing was good and her mother was sure that the swimming areas were good and safe. They prepared for these trips getting bait and camping equipment together. Donna was a ready helper for her father rounding up all that was needed. About this lifestyle Donna wrote, "Because of this I never really liked big cities, but appreciated lakes and open spaces."

Throughout her childhood, Donna's dream was to be a music teacher and a librarian. So when thoughts about entering a religious community surfaced, she quickly put them down since that would not help her reach her goal. She wrote, "During the sixth grade at the Consecration of the Mass, I felt the Lord was calling me to be a Sister. I kept telling

Him, "No, I want to be a music teacher and librarian."

She thought that settled everything, but when she was a senior in high school it was suggested that she meet with Mother Teresa, the Superior General, when she made her annual visit to the sisters in their ministry. After that visit, Donna finally said, "Yes. Not my will but Thine be done."

She entered the Postulate on June 22, 1945. It was there that her strong desire to become a music teacher was realized when she began studies for a bachelor's degree in music. After first profession, she was sent to several missions where she was the music teacher of her dreams.

In 1954, IHM music teachers became classroom teachers. This was difficult for most of them, Donna included. She wrote, however, "Luckily for me, I was assigned to grades three and four in Gustine, Calif. Sr. Mary Kinney taught Grades two and three, and she became my guardian angel in classroom teaching."

Later, Donna pursued a degree in her second big interest, library science. Thanks to her studies at Western Michigan University where she met Mrs. Henry Frese, Director of Niles Community Library, Donna found employment at the Niles Library. She remained there for nearly 24 years. She wrote, "Since I worked in a library, I had easy access to my old friends: Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Merton, Bernard Haring and St. Alphonsus Liguori. Book reviews came through my desk so I could easily zero in on the latest publications and issues."

However, her life interests went beyond the library. During those years the parishes were developing parish councils. She was asked to visit nearby churches of all denominations to inquire about the process they used in setting up councils and how they divided duties. At the time she was involved in this, we were still in full habit, so it had to be an interesting experience for her as well as for the persons in those congregations. She was also a member of the Catholic Family Movement. She was active, too, in the Cursillo group in the Jackson, Flint, and Saginaw areas playing her guitar at the group meetings.

Donna participated in a variety of projects. She worked in a hospital gift shop and was a bell ringer for the Salvation Army during the Christmas season. She was a member of the Business and Professional Women's Organization and served in the food concessions during the Niles Apple Festival. She was also appointed to the Diocesan Pastoral Council of the Kalamazoo Region.

Among her many library experiences, she particularly enjoyed working on the research project of a South Bend professor. He was translating the old, old French records found in the Charlevoix volumes housed in the Niles Community Library.

In December 1996, Donna returned to the Motherhouse, where 51 years earlier in 1945, she had responded to her calling. Her library skills were immediately put to the service of the Motherhouse sisters when she was appointed to the Motherhouse Library, situated off the community room and the main floor of the Infirmary. She was generous with her time and her talent in assisting the sisters who made good

use of that library.

In 2004, Donna left that position and became one of the Motherhouse video camera operators. As her health declined, she moved to the Health Care Center in 2007.

And so, we recall the quote from the beginning of this Remembering and can see a little more what this meant to her in her life:

***What comes, comes.
From the ashes new life emerges.
Out of the darkness— light.
Everything, every change is challenge.***

Rest, now in peace, Donna as you enjoy the music of heaven. May your love of life and of God's people continue to bless us in the way only you can do.

Originally composed by Mary Ann Untener, IHM.
Delivered by Mary Ann Bredice, IHM, July 28, 2021