

Remembering Joan Glisky, IHM May 22, 1930 – Jan. 13, 2022

Joan Glisky was born in Pontiac, Michigan on May 22, 1930, the first-born child of Joseph and Elizabeth (Galerneau) Glisky, into a home that was learning to blend Polish and French-Canadian cultures. The first several years of Joan's life were marked by both instability and stability. The instability of the Great Depression was countered by the stability of loving parents and grandparents.



Her family moved to Appleton, Minnesota, shortly after Joan was born so that her father could help on the family farm. Joan attended school in town because her mother was worried about her traversing country roads and pastures to get to the country school. So, she lived with her Polish grandparents during the week in town and spent weekends on the farm with her parents. It was probably life on the farm that gave Joan such a love of animals. Her Dad eventually lost the farm and they moved into town. Times were difficult and it was hard for him to find work. Becoming discouraged, he left the family, which now included Joan's three siblings, Mary Ann, Adrienne and Daniel, in Appleton, in search of work. He found it in Detroit with General Motors, moving the family in with the Galerneau's, her French grandparents in Flint until he found a place in Roseville. Once settled in Roseville, life became more routine and predictable. Joan remarked in her autobiography, that she "not only had the love of her parents, who were married for 52 years but also, until she was in the 10th grade, the influence of both sets of grandparents."

Joan entered the sixth grade at Sacred Heart, Roseville, where she first encountered the IHM Sisters and from there, continued with her IHM education at St. Mary's, Mt. Clemens. By graduation, she knew she wanted to enter the Congregation, but her parents were not supportive, thinking the community was too strict and that she would never be able to come home. Mother Theresa McGivney encouraged her to attend Marygrove College for a year with the hope that her parents would come to accept her choice. Unfortunately, the acceptance didn't come at the end of the year, so Joan entered without their support on Aug. 15, 1949. Fortunately, within a few years, Joan's parents recognized how happy she was and they became very supportive. Her Dad began to carry a picture of her in his wallet and boast, "This is my daughter. She is a nun."

I would like Joan's own reflection to guide the rest of this Remembering, in the words of a poem she wrote in 1998 for her page in the *IHM Book of Life*, entitled, "My Religious Life."

***It began out of the habit
With the tug of God in my heart
And the bidding witness of women in blue.***

***I came – against all odds –
Supported by few, but by just enough –
To a postulate – still a pulsing memory –
Applying cutting tools to rough hewn desires...***

***To a Novitiate of another era
Fraught with limits and negations
But founded
On doing the truth in charity.***

***And to Mission Years
Of testing and rising consciousness
Catalyzed first by Sister Formation
And then by aggiornamento...***

Joan's initial years of teaching elementary school were challenging, and she was deeply grateful for all the years of assistance provided by so many sisters, and "relieved that I was not sent home!" The assignments included St. Raymond, St. Anne in Warren, and St. Francis de Sales. But she found her niche when she was assigned to Immaculata in 1959. She found the young women to be outstanding students. One of those students was Lorry Ash Kempf, with whom Joan remained friends throughout the rest of her life. Joan was the Yearbook Advisor and Lorry was on the staff during her junior and senior years. Lorry was inspired to choose journalism as her major at Marygrove College primarily because of Joan's influence. Throughout Lorry's professional teaching career and in Development at Marian, she would often receive encouragement from Joan. It was also during her time at Immaculata, that she and Dorothy McDaniel became close friends. In Joan's own words, "This was a gift of a lifetime."

In 1964, as Joan was finishing her master's degree in Theology at Marquette University, she was shocked to find out she was being assigned to Marygrove College. When she went to Marygrove, Sr. Mary Emil said, "We have you down for one of everything in the theology department, so we can find out where your strength is." Joan finished her coursework for her Ph. D and passed her comprehensive exams but was unable to finish her dissertation. In her typical self-effacing manner, she chose to leave Marygrove to make space for someone who had just finished his degree.

Her poem continues:

***Over maturing times
Gifts flowed from the struggle ...
Lasting friendships,***

***Intellectual deepening and expansion,
Moral discernment, emotional strengthening
Globalized and cosmic horizons,
And always, the sense of God
Now speaking, now still – yet somehow ever near.***

In 1980, Joan was invited to share her ministerial gifts in the field of religious education at St. Ephrem's, an experience she found deeply satisfying until 1985.

BUT THEN, CAME THE GIFT OF COMMUNITY SERVICE Beginning with her election as Secretary for the Northeast Province in 1985, Congregational Secretary from 1988 to 1994 and her continuing commitment to preserving IHM oral histories until her official retirement from the Archives in 2019, Joan was the quintessential communicator!

One of the most important consequences of Joan's frequent trips to the Archives during her tenure as General Secretary was the launching of the project to write and publish a feminist history of the congregation, *Building Sisterhood* which was published in 1997. This project was an unforgettable experience for all those involved, according to Joan, who coordinated the project. In 2014, I had the good fortune of serving with Joan on the committee that drafted the Inclusive Language Policy for the community.

Joan was a life-long learner, probing the topics of feminist thought, women's history, gardening, vegetarianism, nuclear power, climate change, animal welfare and even handwriting analysis. She said, "those interests have served a deep need to know and given me many special relationships."

Joan concludes her autobiography, written in 2020, with the words, "So often in the midst of community, I find myself asking, 'how could I ever be so fortunate to belong to this community among such amazing, holy, talented women? But I am still here. Thank you, God!'"

Listen to the last stanza of Joan's poem about her religious life:

***Gratefully
I celebrate
IHM Religious Life
Gifting,
Grounding,
Germinating still,
Godward, always Godward
With Gusto.***

After I volunteered to write Joan's last Jubilee biography, she asked me to write her remembering. It has been an honor and privilege to once again glimpse the life of this special person.

Joan, we are the fortunate ones to have been gifted with your presence and influence these 73 years. Let your motto become ours as well, Always Godward, with gusto.

Written and delivered by Margaret Chapman, IHM
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