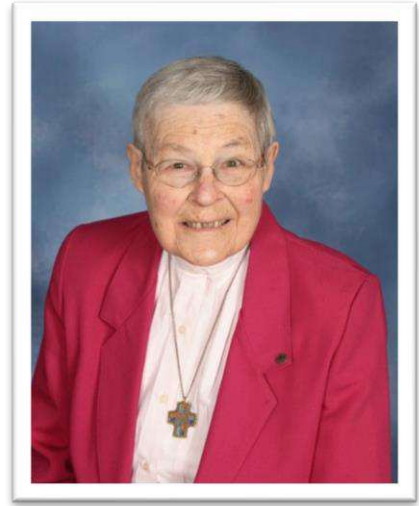


Remembering Bernetta Booms, IHM July 10, 1927 – Oct. 4, 2023

Harriet Matilda Booms was the oldest of 10 children born to Joseph and Dorothy (Scholtz) Booms on July 10, 1927, on a small farm 7 miles from Harbor Beach, Michigan. Harriet's mother was the organist and choir director at the parish church. Her father was a Huron County Commissioner and a farmer. As a young child, she became vividly aware of the preciousness of life, sharing her parents' joys and griefs. Harriet was the oldest of eight girls and two boys. Margaret, who joins us today and virtually, Shirley in Arizona and Audrey in North Carolina. Those greeting Sister Bernie in everlasting light are Helen, who died at birth; Ronald, who died at eight months old; Magdalene, who was baptized by her father and died in infancy; John, who died at age 32; Stella, who died in 2018 and Catherine, who joined the IHM community but left during temporary profession and died in 2019.



Living and growing up in the country was appreciated for outdoor activities: playing house in the woods, ice skating, tree and barn climbing and jumping into hay and straw. All the Booms' girls had plenty of learning and exercise, helping their father with barn chores of milking cows, shocking grains, bailing hay, feeding cattle, picking berries and digging potatoes.

Sister Bernie later wrote:

Grade school years were unique. We walked a mile to our one-room schoolhouse that is, one room of about 40 children of all grades and for me, the same teacher through my eighth-grade graduation. At about age 12, I was reading a book given to me by my mother. I experienced one of my first and lasting impressions of who I am, in the truth and power of the Word, 'Know you not that you are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you' 1 Cor. 3:16.'

Harriet did not plan to attend high school because there were no school buses. On the first day at Harbor Beach High School, the principal called offering an opportunity with a family wanting to host a young lady to work for room and board while attending the school. Harriet's parents agreed and Bernie chose Our Lady of Lake Huron High School and met the IHM Sisters for the first time. This was a major adjustment for her with only Saturday evenings and Sundays at home and at school, it would be one class per room and city living.

She missed her family so much. This is how she put it,

Since I worked, there was little opportunity for interaction with classmates or participation in outside activities. One autumn day at the class exchange, I was crying. Sister Martina questioned me. I told her I was not coming to school any

longer because I'm going home. She seemed to understand. With a word of comfort, she said, 'You're lonesome. I know how it feels.' And then she added, 'The Sisters think you have a vocation as a sister.' There it was, striking a note in my mind and heart. Yes, as a child that was what I would be — a sister. Little by little, it was clear and this focus continued. Somehow, dances and parties were not life-fulfilling. Jesus, my Shepherd, was guiding, inviting, drawing me to other pastures.

In the summer of 1944, Harriet and her parents were invited to Monroe for Reception and Profession on August 15. Some months later, Sister Verita Scofield helped Harriet write a letter requesting entrance to the community and other sisters helped her with preparations during the year. So it was; Harriet, her parents and a few IHMs drove to Monroe on Homecoming Day during the Centennial year of 1945.

In her autobiography, Bernie wrote about her formation days in Monroe and that she did not experience loneliness like the others, as she had already had her turn! She loved the gardening activities under the direction of staff Jerome Van Develde ...beans, apples, strawberries, just like at home, but with a different family. She also enjoyed time for walks, baseball and picnics. Her family could not always join her for the special days in formation. Her mother could not attend her Reception in 1946 because her first and only brother was about to be born. Another disappointment was on the day of the first vows in 1948 when freezing rain prevented the family's attendance. Bernie wrote about her final vows, "My memory... was so very special in my heart, mind and being. My life now totally and forever for/with Jesus, my Beloved, one with me, shepherding me on my pilgrim journey."

Bernie began teaching in the Novitiate with grade four at St. Joseph, Monroe, with Sister Mary Joel (Elza Lazlo), then grade two with Sister Florent Gillet (Agnes Crowley). Teaching was difficult for Bernie; perhaps it was difficulty maintaining classroom order, she does not say. She referred to this time as her 'No. 1 failure.' From St. Joseph, she moved to her only Detroit assignment, four years at Blessed Sacrament; from there to Fenton.

A dramatic change came in August 1957 when Bernie was assigned to Santa Teresita, Santurce, Puerto Rico. This was a dramatic change for her in language, culture, climate and no orientation to Spanish language preparation. She wrote, "Again I came to know failure: trying to learn names, pronunciations and the faces of two classes of each grade one, two and three." The next year fared better in teaching grade seven, where the students could understand and communicate in English.

In August 1962, Bernie was moved to Convento de la Merced and La Merced in Cayey. There, she was impressed by how people experienced the transformation of the Cursillo movement, becoming involved in worship and living and spreading the Good News. During 15 years in Puerto Rico, she experienced significant changes on the island with new quality roads through the mountains and independent driving transportation when Sister Helen Smith's brother gifted a General Motors Carry-all van to the sisters in Cayey.

Around 1970, Father Hilarion Summers, a priest from Spencer, Massachusetts, passed through Puerto Rico, opening Bernie's desire to be one of the sisters for the home he was

building for the poor, aged and homeless people in Mt Rodney, Grenada. His vision was that the sisters were to be a charismatic, prayerful presence with the residents of the home. "After 15 and a half years in Puerto Rico," she wrote, "this ministry was a dream for me; I don't believe I ever desired anything more." But she had to wait because they needed someone to replace her in school. On Founders' Day 1972, Sisters Mary Simeon Krancz, Marie Crepeau, Theresa Kreitz, and Father Summers arrived in Grenada. Bernie was with them in spirit and hopeful to join them later.

Tragedy struck one month later, December 14, when the sisters and all others grieved the death of Fr. Hilarion by sudden drowning—a tremendous loss to all who were part of the dream. The dream did come true when Sister Rose Graham offered to accept Bernie's teaching position. The home, named "Father Hilarion Home," opened in 1973 and the ministry continues today. Bernie wrote:

If I were to say what drew me the most forcibly, it would be the prayer and presence ministry and the utter simplicity of life; living more like the people we were among. Having already experienced the simple living of farm life in my childhood — lamps, food, isolation, recreation, walking, communication — these would not be a problem for me and they weren't! I truly loved and continue to cherish happy memories of Grenada. The days were filled getting to know the residents, sharing life in love and simplicity, and praying and singing together.

Through the years, the sisters became more involved in ministry in St. Patrick's Parish, about a mile away. There, Bernie prepared mothers for infants' baptism, children's classes for First Communion and Confirmation and weekly delivery of Eucharist to shut-ins in the mountain areas. The pastoral ministry revealed her gifts to her and working in Charismatic renewal expanded her experience. At that time, Bernie was working with Sister Marie Leone Bohmer and Vicky Nelson, a laywoman.

During the late 1970s and into the 1980s, Cuba began a hidden, yet perceptive presence in the island's government and there was some Communist indoctrination. The sisters grew more careful in their speaking and activity. Both Sisters Leone and Bernie decided it was time to return to Michigan. Bernie wrote: "Grenada and the people continue to be a part of my life in memory with love, care and prayer. God was so real to them. They would talk to 'Papa God' as friend and companion in their life's journey."

So it was that Bernie returned to the Motherhouse in March 1982. She began a ministry in transportation for over 20 years. First, she was a driver, then was oversight of the entire transportation operation, managing volunteers, drivers, schedules and services for the growing Health Care Center. Sister Bernie also coordinated, quite pastorally and professionally, the Sisters' funeral services in the Motherhouse for many years. She visited the sick, took sisters to lunch in the dining room, was active in the Charismatic prayer group, was a faithful Armchair Activist and did many thoughtful, generous things to make life pleasant for others.

Bernie wrote: "Time for liturgy, prayer and reading is especially appreciated; desiring to

deepen my life in Jesus each new day. My life is hidden with Christ in God. Therefore, I trust to become all that I am called to be."

Written by Roberta Richmond, IHM
Delivered by Elaine Aldridge, IHM, Oct. 7, 2023