

Remembering Eva Schoell, IHM March 27, 1929– March 7, 2024



In many ways. Eva was connected to the IHM Congregation from her earliest childhood. She wrote, “In one sense, you might say I have always been a part of the IHM community.”

Her family home, at 410 West Elm Avenue, is located right next to the IHM campus. As young children, Eva and her two sisters helped Emil VanDame, the IHM flower gardener, to shell tulip bulbs, dead-head daisies and place tulip bulbs in the rows he dug.” Emil's flower garden abutted the Schoell property. Emil had been the gardener at the old Motherhouse on the River Raisin. He moved with the community to the new campus in 1932 and lived above the Powerhouse with several other male employees. Mrs. Schoell invited Emil for dinner every

once in a while and served his favorite meal. On hot summer days, she would invite Emil into her kitchen to have a bottle of cold beer.

Eva and her two sisters attended St. Mary Academy as day students from the first through twelfth grade. At the time when Margaret, the eldest, was ready for first grade, the Academy only accepted boarding students. Nonetheless, Mrs. Schoell wanted her three daughters to attend the Academy. She went to Mother Teresa McGivney, the principal and requested that the girls be admitted as day students. Mother Teresa agreed to the request. Eva, her younger sister Dorothy and Margaret, as well as other Monroe girls, attended the Academy.

Eva often spoke of how grateful she was for her loving parents. Her father, William Schoell, a native of Cincinnati, was employed as an engraver at Consolidated Paper Company in Monroe. He had a wonderful singing voice and directed the choir at St. Mary Parish, Monroe, for almost 50 years. Eva undoubtedly inherited his gift for music.

Her mother, Eva May Hoffman, was from a well-known Monroe family because her father owned Hoffman Millinery in Monroe. Reflecting on her childhood, Eva was always grateful for how her mother encouraged creativity and how much her mother's love of nature influenced her. When reflecting on her life, Eva wrote:

I will always remember our Sunday afternoon drives in the country. One particular occasion left an imprint on my life. As we were driving on a country road, my mother said to my dad, “Stop the car so they can listen to the crickets.” That has left a lasting imprint on me to take the time to listen, to see, to experience God in creation.

Eva's mother was also gifted in music. All three of the Schoell girls were given the

opportunity to take piano lessons. Eva shifted to the marimba in high school. As postulants, we, her classmates, were fascinated by the zest, feeling and skill with which she played "Begin the Beguine" on the marimba.

Eva's decision to enter the IHM Congregation resulted from a question posed by Sister Ann Francis Bodley, one of her high school teachers: "Did you ever think of coming across the campus?" Years later, Eva explained, "It started me thinking. It was God's way of calling me." She also pondered the quotation in an old-fashioned frame that hung outside the Academy's little chapel, "If today you hear His voice, harden not your heart."

Eva entered the postulate in June 1947. She received the name Sister Mary Neumann when she entered the novitiate on Jan. 2, 1948. She continued taking music lessons in the novitiate and, while still a novice, was sent to Immaculata High School (Detroit) to teach studio music and choral. She spent five years at Immaculata and, as you would suspect, was greatly loved and admired by the students.

In 1950, when the IHM Congregation initiated the Sister Formation Program, young Sisters stayed at the Motherhouse to complete their bachelor's degree before becoming teachers. As a result, most IHM music teachers were assigned to fill in as teachers in elementary and high schools. Beginning in 1954, Eva taught grades five through eight in three different elementary schools for 10 years. Undoubtedly, she also taught music and directed choirs as well.

During the years following the novitiate, Eva spent summers studying. She received a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College with a major in music and education; then, she received a master's degree in music from DePaul University (Chicago).

In 1964, Eva was assigned to St. Mary High School in Lorain, Ohio, where she taught, directed the choral and served as principal. Three years later, when the area's Catholic high schools merged to become Lorain Catholic High School, Eva became the first principal. She loved every minute of the next eight years. Her gentle, prayerful presence made a deep impression on the faculty and students. One of her students became Father Mark Hobson.

In 1975, Eva's ministries took her on new paths. Sister Mary Kinney asked her to join the Visitation House of Prayer Community on the Monroe campus. She was there only one year when she was elected provincial superior of the Southeast Province. Her visits to local IHM communities always included time for prayer, with Eva accompanying the singing of hymns on her autoharp.

When her six-year term ended, Eva spent a year at the Jesuit retreat center in Wernersville, Pennsylvania, to receive training as a spiritual director. This became her principal ministry for the next 12 years, first at the Mercy Retreat Center in Madison, Connecticut, and then at Visitation House of Prayer. She then became the coordinator of Crawfton, the IHM house on Lake Erie near Kingsville, Ontario.

From 1995 to 2006, Eva, assisted by Sister Mary Lou Theisen, made Crawfton a welcoming home for IHMs, parishioners and friends seeking a place of rest, recreation, reflection and appreciation of the beauty of nature. Eva and Mary Lou were also actively involved in St. John parish in Kingsville where Eva often filled in as organist. During those years, Eva continued giving spiritual direction and retreats to sisters, priests and laypeople. She created a "weaving retreat," which she gave more than 20 times in many places.

In 2006, when the IHM Leadership Council decided that it was necessary to sell Crawfton, Eva and Mary Lou came to the Motherhouse. Here, Eva continued her retreat ministry in various ways and spent much time visiting Sisters in the Health Care Center. Eva's gentleness, kindness and prayerfulness touched the lives of everyone who knew her - IHM Sisters, students, faculty, retreatants and friends.

Eva continually expressed gratitude for everyone and everything in her life. She was especially grateful for her wonderful parents. "My mother and father were great persons who inspired me in many ways for which I am grateful."

She was also very grateful for her sisters, Dorothy and Margaret. Dorothy, who continued living in the Schoell family home, taught for 40 years in the Monroe Public Schools. She was always so good to Eva, taking her to Midland to visit Margaret and her husband Gus, sending flowers and candy for special occasions, treating Eva to meals at Dorothy's favorite restaurants, and supporting all the concerts and other events at the IHM Motherhouse.

Lastly, Eva was grateful for her call to the IHM Congregation, "My vocation to become an IHM has been a great gift. I am grateful for the many opportunities I have had because of being an IHM. I will always treasure my calling."

Written by Mary Jo Maher, IHM, July 2010
Delivered by Camille Brouillard, IHM, March 13, 2024