

Remembering Jean Ann Campana, IHM
June 8, 1947 - March 2024

“My Life: a marvelous, gifted facet of a wondrous creation!”

In these beautifully poetic words, Sister Jean Ann proclaims her joy and appreciation for the gift of life as she begins her page in the “IHM Book of Life.”

Both of Jean Ann's parents, Louis and Victoria (Dedo) Campana, were born in Caspian in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and it was here they met. Louis had earned a metallurgical degree in engineering while living in Caspian. He was later hired by Buick Motor Company in Flint. Vicki was studying at a beauty school in Kalamazoo, where she subsequently took a position as a hairdresser. The two were married in Kalamazoo and began their life together in a small apartment in Flint. Soon after, they moved to a two-story house on Avenue A, where they raised their family.



Jean Ann was born June 8, 1947, joining older brother James and then came younger sister Janet. Jean Ann stated that she had been blessed with a Polish and Italian heritage. Her family strongly believed in life, prayer, work, play and people - all dedicated to the reign of God's justice, peace and love for all. She attended St. Michael School, Flint, and graduated after completing Grade 12. Private piano and organ studies nourished a love of music that continued to enrich her throughout her lifetime.

Jean Ann was strongly influenced by the warmth and interest of her IHM teachers at St. Michael's in the 50s and 60s and took great care to mention the names of all those who taught her during her school years. She entered the Postulate of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters on Sept. 6, 1965, then a community of about 870 women whom she described as "committed to holistic spirituality, solidarity with the poor, the role of education in transforming unjust structures, and the special role of women in today's Church and world."

Jean Ann was received into the Novitiate and given the name Sister Cecilia. She kept this name for a very short time, then joined many other IHM Sisters who returned to their Baptismal names following the close of Vatican II. Just 10 days before Jean Ann became a Novice, Sister Margaret Brennan was elected President of the IHM Congregation and Sister Mary McDevitt became the Directress of Novices. This change in leadership, Sister Jean Ann always insisted, contributed to the exceptional opportunities for growth and appreciation for theology and the Documents of Vatican II that she received during her Novitiate. On June 29, 1968, Jean Ann made her first profession of vows and finalized her life-long commitment June 8, 1974.

Sister Jean Ann was an exemplary student, earning her bachelor's degree, Cum Laude, from Marygrove College in 1970 and her master's from the University of Detroit in 1975. In time, she received a certificate in spiritual direction and retreat work and took special courses and seminars in liturgy, music, pastoral theology, management and lay spirituality.

Her first ministry assignment, in 1970, took her to St. John School in Fenton. Later, she served as a member of the pastoral care department at St. Vincent de Paul, Pontiac and Saint Augustine House, Oxford, as well as St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Pontiac. Eventually, her ministry took her to Milan, Tennessee and Florence, Alabama.

Jean Ann was an energetic biker, often biking 15-20 miles daily with great enjoyment and ease. It was on one such occasion on Feb. 4, 1988, while she was bicycling across O'Neal Bridge in Florence, Alabama, that she "received serious head and leg injuries when she was struck by a car driven by a person whose license was suspended and was under the influence," so stated Capt. Jack Carr of the Florence Police Department in his report to the *Evening News*. This was life-changing for Jean Ann. She had sustained traumatic brain injury in addition to broken bones and internal injuries. Following surgery, she remained in the intensive care unit for six weeks until coming out of the coma.

During this time, Celeste Schoppy, ministering in Alabama, visited Jean Ann often. Patricia A. O'Donnell, her dear friend, coached her while family and friends supported her with their prayers and love. Jean Ann's father was faithfully at her bedside much of the time, as was Sister Celeste.

Jean Ann remained in acute rehabilitation for many months, which were full of uncertainties, disappointments, successes and moments of falling back. When she returned to Michigan, Judith Bonini was her air-flight companion.

The skills of medics and therapists of all kinds were ever present throughout these many months, and Jean Ann made a slow but constant improvement. "Through my training and experiences," she later wrote, "I have learned that a negative thing at its outset can often turn out to be positive. Creating this change depends upon one's approach, attitude, prayer and reflection and the support of others. This change is evident in my own life."

Jean Ann left a small booklet entitled: "After TBI: The New Me," which she wrote in 1996 with the assistance of Lisa Jane Hardman, a clinical psychology senior at St. Mary College, Notre Dame, Indiana. Jean Ann's purpose in writing was to share her new awareness about TBI (traumatic brain injury) with other survivors of such injuries, their families and friends, therapists and aides. Jean Ann maintained that "the painful loss involved in an injury such as mine is transformed when I can see the value of it as a growth experience for me. It is further transformed when I am able to see someone else, in a similar situation, benefiting from my experience."

Recuperation took many years. As her health and mobility gradually improved, Jean Ann worked as a therapeutic recreation aide at Healthwin Hospital in South Bend, Indiana. She was also a generous volunteer at Flower Rehab Center in Sylvania, Ohio.

After moving to Norman Towers in 1998, she taught Religious Education classes for developmentally challenged adults at St. Mary Parish, Monroe. The connections became life-giving experiences for her and the students, and they pointed to Jean Ann's persistence and resolve to realize a full recovery. She very successfully carried out her belief that a good attitude can turn even a catastrophic accident into an opportunity for meaningful ministry.

In 2004, Jean Ann retired to the Motherhouse. She had the distinct joy of visiting Ireland with her friend, Pat O'Donnell. She joined her St. Michael High School classmates in Flint as they celebrated their 50th graduation anniversary—all thanks to Sr. Loretta Schroeder, who provided transportation.

When the deaths of each of her parents occurred, she was able to attend their funerals with the assistance of her sisters in community. Jean Ann keenly felt the loss of her mom and Dad among the many other losses she had already braved her way through.

For many years, Jean Ann was one of the lectors at Sunday Liturgy in the Motherhouse Chapel and made the most careful preparations.

She was a dedicated armchair activist who spent hours on her computer, concerned about and responding to the current issues of the day. At times, she also gave friends a little nudge to act on some particular issue: "I just signed my name to this," she would write. "You might like to do so, too."

Jean Ann kept in touch by computer with her sister Janet, who lives in Germany and her brother, Jim, who lives in Lansing. Throughout her life, she consistently acted on her conviction that she had been gifted with and worked at a good philosophy of life. She was very grateful for the spirituality, sense of values, and determination to make a difference in her life that her parents and the IHM community had instilled in her.

She often expressed appreciation for the retreat opportunities and theological education provided to her by IHM. One such experience that Jean Ann especially treasured was the opportunity to make the 19th Annotations of Ignatius Loyola at Columbiere Retreat and Conference Center under the spiritual direction of Sr. Peggy Schmidt.

In later years, Jean Ann found a way to use her well-developed listening and communication skills, counseling and spiritual direction. She felt a special sensitivity to those suffering from illness, grief and loss. So, often from her room in Health

Care or while on her scooter, she reached out to others with a word of encouragement or hope.

As she aged, the effect of her injuries became more apparent, but this did not deny Jean Ann's ministry of reaching out to people. Whenever or wherever you met her, you always were introduced to whoever else was present. Sometimes, she shared what she knew of their story. Mary Ann Markel recalled a moment when she happened upon Jean Ann and Marietta Murphy pushing each other around in their wheelchairs.

Jean Ann stated in her IHM Book of Life page that she believed she could be characterized by three words: determination, dedication and joy. As we reflect on her life today, we see how well these three words befit her. We respect and admire her ability to meet with grace and dignity the complexities her life journey mapped out for her. How true were her own words describing her life: "A marvelous, gifted facet of a wonderful creation!"

Written by Marie Gatza, IHM, aided by Jean Ann Campana, Dec. 2010. Updated Sept. 2015. Delivered by Judith Bonini, IHM, April 5, 2024