

Faye McFarland, IHM
Nov. 3, 1940 - April 30, 2024

Today, we gather to celebrate the life of our Sister Faye McFarland, IHM, a native of Port Huron, the eldest daughter of Dorothy and Norman and loving sister of Gail.

As an IHM who entered in 1958, Faye had the experience of being formed by some of the greatest IHM educators. In that long blue line of educators, she, too, became a great one. Not as some might describe great, but as a woman in the lineage of women who live the values of humility, simplicity and zeal; and a woman who came from a mother and grandmother who were strong, independent, problem-solving women. A woman described by those who knew her well as witty, kind, self-effacing. Above all, Faye was an IHM teacher. A teacher who was at home in the urban environment of Detroit, where she taught for over 20 years and at St. Edward on the Lake, where she taught and volunteered even longer.



Faye said only a few words on her page in the *IHM Book of Life*: “I admire those who can fly.” These words were framed by pictures of a butterfly and someone in a hang glider. She included several pictures of her children at St. Cecilia’s, captioned with the words, “I spend my days helping others soar.” This was truly her life.

Though Faye spent her last years near the shore of Lake Huron, she was equally at home in the urban environment. She was part of the community who lived at St. Cecilia’s, where just a year earlier, a sister had been shot and killed in her convent room by someone shooting from a drug house across the street.

This was in the early 70s and Faye was living with our classmate and mutual friend Marge Sweeney, who, given the right liquid refreshment, could tell a hysterical story of when she (Marge) returned late one night to find that Faye had locked her out. Marge could not convince her that she was truly Marge, knocking on the door and pleading to come in!

Her move back to Port Huron was set in motion by the need to help her sister, Gail, care for their mother, Dorothy, who was suffering from Alzheimer’s disease. Dorothy was a strong woman who found her own way in the world when she and Faye’s father divorced during Faye’s high school years. The daughters were devoted to their mother and resolved to care for her at home in appreciation for the woman who modeled resilience and compassion. Her parents’ divorce was a painful event in the lives of both girls, who tried not to judge their father, who seems to have bequeathed to them a love for seeking knowledge. Gail reports that Faye was reading at age three, partly due to their father’s reading her poetry every night.

My earliest memory of Faye is when she came to IHM almost a month after the rest of us on the first Sunday of October 1958. At the time, it was a community custom to have the first Sunday of the month as a retreat day, a day of silence—I mean total silence.

And so, when Faye arrived, we were not officially talking, not even to welcome her. I still remember how she came into the dining room and sat down as we were all silent. To make matters worse, as we were sitting there wondering if we would be able to talk because of our new arrival, we were served something that looked like our first serving of french fries since we

had entered-- only to discover, as we took our first taste that they were definitely not french fries, but rather some foreign vegetable that some of us had never eaten before, later identified as eggplant. We made much of this in the ensuing years, saying the fact that Faye stayed past the first day was a sign that she truly had a vocation.

Faye entered in silence, and perhaps this was her preferred language. She was a woman of few words but a woman who deeply appreciated nature and communicated that to her students. She often took the children of St Cecilia's neighborhood camping and at St. Edwards On the Lake, helping them learn about and appreciate all the natural beauty of the surrounding environment.

When she came to St. Edward's, she first noticed the silence—a silence different from Monroe, a silence of absence of bird song. Having read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, she sounded the alarm that pesticides had probably driven off birds and other wildlife. Faye set out to restore the environment and found a community in Lakeport receptive to being green.

Before she was taken from this life, her last communication with a classmate was a card saying she was praying for the Sister during Chapter and that there was a bonus in that not only would Sister receive Faye's prayer, but since she was working with students who always like to pray for special intentions, the Sister was getting a bonus prayer from students. Faye invited her to check out the creative and smart students of St. Edwards on the school's website.

Let us reflect for a moment on Faye's life as we listen to the words of a song on the environment by the Carolyn McDade Great Lakes singers.

O Beautiful Gaia

Let ours be a time remembered
for the awakening of a new reverence for life
Let ours be a time remembered
for the firm resolve to achieve sustainability
Let ours be a time remembered
for the quickening of the struggle
for justice and peace
Let ours be a time remembered
for the joyful celebration of life

O beautiful Gaia
O Gaia calling us home
O beautiful Gaia
Calling us on

O Great Lakes waters
O Manitoulin
O grandmother sturgeon
O blessed creation

Faye, we thank you for joining us in October of 1958, for being a gifted teacher, and for all your years teaching God's children to care for the Earth. We invite all who were Sister Faye's students to carry on the great work of teaching young ones and caring for our Earth.

Written and delivered by Barbara G. Stanbridge, IHM, Class of 1958, on May 3, 2024.