



REMEMBERING SISTER MARY (EUSTACE) KAYATIN

April 21, 1918 to Feb. 3, 2006

Sister Mary Kayatin was for the most part quiet and unassuming. Except for telling about her work she seldom revealed her inner self. It seems fair to say that in letters that she wrote the true spirit of her life was expressed. When her sister, Sister Julia died she wrote to a friend expressing her deep acceptance of God's will, how near she felt to God during Julia's illness, and about the joy that was awaiting Julia in eternity. Also, other letters possessed a tone of her love for God and a deep love for others.

This quiet unassuming manner is evident in her early childhood. It, too, has an aura and a secret. Sister Mary was baptized in Coal Center, Pennsylvania on April 28, 1918. It is from this record that we surmise she was born in Coal Center. Her birth certificate states she was born April 21, 1918 but mentions no city. Her parents Fonan Kayatin and Mary Kis were immigrants from Hungary and settled in this coal mining city where her father worked in the mines. From conversation we learn her father died when she was three, and she was ten when her mother died. Mary was the youngest of eight children; Sister Julia (Florian, IHM) was the eldest; followed by Steve, (the one who used to give us candy) James, and John. Sister knew there was also a set of twins and another baby girl in the family, but they seem to be a mystery. There are no records that reveal their names, but the family affirms they died in infancy. Sister spent many hours and vacation time searching civic and church records for a clue, but none was found.

It seems that after Fonan died the young family was cared for by a Catholic Agency. The children visited their mother, but never really got to know her. After she died, they grew up in an orphanage, and Mary eventually became part of the "Holy Family" children here in the Motherhouse in Monroe

Julia, her sister, had entered the IHM Community and Mary wanted to enter after graduation, but Mary was advised to see how other people live first. She worked as a nurse's aide until she entered the Community on June 15, 1938. She received the name, Sister Eustace. Sister Cecilia Campbell and Sister Bridget Mullane both remembered that Mary was the oldest of the group in the Postulate and she was always ready to volunteer and help them when ever she could. They wondered how it was that she knew so much about the Convent. Her story came out about living with the "Holy Family" children and then they knew.

In January 1941 Mary pronounced her first vows and her final vows in 1944. Her teaching career began in 1941 in Emmett, a place she often spoke of lovingly. It seems she stayed on the outskirts of Detroit, ministering in Port Huron, Roseville, Mt. Clemens, Chicago, Jackson, and Battle Creek.

Mary taught at St. Philip School in Battle Creek for four years then entered the Public School System in 1970. At this time, she became the first teacher in the Battle Creek Public School's Adult Education Program. For twenty years she loved, respected and encouraged this older student body to discover its hidden gifts which would create a life worth living.

Mary was a tremendous motivator for her grade school, high school and especially for her adult education students. Her greatest contribution to education, she tells, is the affirmation of other's gifts. "Affirming students," according to Mary, "motivates them to love learning because of the joy of satisfaction that comes from self-discovery."

During this same period Mary took her teaching skills to Calhoun County Jail where she offered classes for three years. "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" the inmates asked. But Mary looked at them for what they were, not as criminals or inmates. She taught during the day in the Adult Education program in Battle Creek, spending three nights a week teaching in the jail. Her program enabled four prisoners to receive diplomas and twelve to graduate with high school credits. Mary's prime concern was to show that someone was interested in them.

For the year 1972-73, representing the poor of the county, Mary was elected Secretary of the Legal Aid Society of Calhoun County. For the year 1979-80 she was awarded a certificate of recognition and appreciation. Mary was highly spoken of by the students as a well-trained, dedicated and understanding teacher. She was not only an outstanding teacher, but also a kind and true friend, never too busy to give a helping hand, a word of encouragement and counsel even for personal problems.

On May 9, 1990, the Battle Creek Enquirer wrote about Mary: "This woman is a teacher" quoting her, the paper continued: "I hated to see Friday come because I couldn't get back into the classroom until Monday." Mary's motto was TGIM: "Thank God It's Monday." All her teaching years she looked forward to Mondays. "If you really love something, it never becomes a chore or a drudgery. How well she deserved the 1990 award from the Michigan Department of Education for being the Adult Education Teacher of the Year for Region Six which included Calhoun County and five other counties.

After retiring from the Public School System, Mary continued to keep busy. Sister Jane Johnson said, "Some might say she was a workaholic because she never wanted to stop a job until it was successfully completed." Those words were so true when Sister began working at Watervliet. She enjoyed working with nature, and when she was asked to be caretaker for Watervliet, she was in her glory. The home in Watervliet was situated on a bluff on Paw Paw Lake with many rooms, a big yard, and opportunities galore for improvement. Of course, she was doing her ministry work all week, but the weekends and free days belonged to the Lake. She found out how big a tree would grow and the best place to plant it. The soil had to be perfect so bags of soil were brought in before the flowers were planted so it would be colorful all summer. She managed to get poison ivy twice while she pulled weeds from the bank leading to the lake—but it had to be done. The yard was beautiful!

During the winter months the inside of the house was attacked. Mattress covers and blankets were washed, curtain adjusted, and walls dusted. Ceiling fans were installed as an added luxury for the summer months. When the days got warmer, she invited the Sisters in the area to help with windows and screens, then she served a delicious dinner as a "thank you." A car accident that injured her leg brought an end to the challenge that Watervliet had become.

Thank you, Mary, for your labors and all the joy that you provided for the Sisters and others that visited this house on the Lake.

Mary didn't drive after the accident, but did that stop her? No. She had bus schedules for the city of Battle Creek and wherever she had to go, she knew how to get there. The people on the bus became part of her ministry. A half-way home was on one of the routes where she saw young men getting off and on the bus. A loaf of nut bread or a dish of cookies was given to them. The pastor and assistant at St. Philip Parish were delighted with blueberry pie and nut bread. One day a week and whenever a worker couldn't come, Mary worked in the St. Vincent Room sorting clothes and providing for the poor. Sister volunteered at St. Philip Parish and brought Communion to the homebound and those in the Hospital. Josephine Karas said, "Mary ran circles around her when it came to work."

Sister Mary not only had bus schedules for Battle Creek, but for Scranton, PA; Huron, Ohio; and Windsor, Canada, and probably other places, too, where her family lived. She loved each one, and as you know she tried to keep each of you on the "straight and narrow" track. She often mentioned how lucky she was to have you. Thank you for bringing so much joy into Mary's life.

For thirty-nine years Sister Mary served the people in Battle Creek, and when Mary finally came to the Motherhouse in July 2005 she continued serving. She discovered Sister Margaret Rottach was in need of help in the sewing room, so that became her charge. She loved to go to a friend's farm in Lawton even though it meant hard work. She packed books and dishes, and did some cooking, but she was happy doing this labor.

Mary, we saw all your activity and work. God saw it, too, but He also saw into your heart the dynamo of your energy. There He saw your deep faith, your spirit of service, and a willingness to do His will as a child with no parents, and as an IHM Sister. Your final days after your stroke were also quiet and unassuming. We love you Mary not for what you did, but for who you are.

February 7, 2006

Sister Josephine Karas, IHM

Sister Antoinette Ruedisueli, IHM