

Remembering Sister Pauline (Marie Anita) Gorham

Sept. 1, 1923 – Oct. 18, 2012

I would like to begin the remembering for Sister Pauline, a gracious, courageous, independent IHM, with her life in her own words:

On Sept. 1, 1923, I was the fourth child born to Patrick and Florence Gorham. They were expecting a boy who was to be named Paul. When this healthy girl arrived, all were very happy and I was baptized and named Pauline. By 1930 our family was complete, three boys and three girls.

My parents had moved from Canada to Port Huron, Mich., and that is where the six of us grew up. We all attended St. Stephen School and were taught by IHMs. I enjoyed school and was fond of my teachers. I appreciated the good education I received.

We lived across the street from the convent, so we often saw the sisters outside of the classroom. If they needed someone to run an errand, one of the Gorham kids was always available. I took many trips to the meat market.

We had a happy home with lots of give and take. These were the Depression years. We had what we needed, but probably not all we wanted. In later years I wondered how my parents could afford school tuition and books. We didn't have the entertainment of the TV and video games, so we learned how to be creative in our activities. We spent time outdoors and I developed a love for reading.

Sister Amanda was my ninth grade homeroom teacher. I kept in contact with her through my 10th and 11th grade years. I prayed rosary novenas so I would know God's will for me. When I was in the 11th grade, I confided to Sister Amanda my desire to be an IHM. We prayed and talked. She suggested I enter the postulate after the 11th grade and complete my senior year at St. Mary Academy. So I did. It came to be a decision I found very difficult and I had regrets.

Relatives on my mother's side of the family included three priests and two St. Joseph nuns. My father had one sister who never married but was a housekeeper for priests most of her life. When I discussed my intentions of going to the convent, my parents were happy but not of my leaving so early.

On Sept. 8, 1940, one week after I had turned 17, I entered the postulate; spent a year completing my high school education and learning how to be an IHM. After making my profession on Aug. 15, 1943, I stayed in Monroe and taught 60 first and second graders at St. John's. I had no teaching experience but Sister Rita Ann was a tremendous help.

Some of my future assignments were Dearborn, Emmett, Flint, Hall of the Divine Child, St. Mary, Mt. Clemens. I was scheduled to return to Mt. Clemens for my third year, but a change was in the works. I was sent to St. Matthew, Detroit, and the Sister whose name I don't recall, replaced me. At this time, Sister Rose Estelle was the principal of St. Stephen, Port Huron, my

hometown. She was asked to join the Northwest Province team. She accepted and I was asked to replace her. It was an interesting experience returning to my hometown.

Proposal C was a big issue at this time. We campaigned to obtain funds for parochial schools. It failed to pass, so after two years the pastor and the archdiocese decided to close the school. The pastor asked me to stay on and work in the parish. I did so for one year but my heart was in the classroom and I wanted to return to teaching. (Sometime later, the pastor asked me if parishioners were mad at me for closing the school. I said, "No, I didn't close it, you did!")

Nativity School in Hollywood, Fla., was looking for teachers. I was asked to join them. After a very cold winter and a St. Patrick's Day blizzard, I happily said, "Yes!" I ended my ministry in Florida after 27 years, having ministered in Hollywood, Miami and Naples. They were the most enriching years of my life. I prayed I would know when it was time to return to Monroe. As the beautiful hymn prays, "All my treasures I have left on the sand there and will find other seas."

I returned to Monroe in June 2000 and lived in Norman Towers for three years. In July 2003, I moved to the Motherhouse and took up residence in Liguori Main. My health is basically good for my age. However, my legs could stand some repair.

As I look back on my life as an IHM, I find no extraordinary events. What I strived to do was the ordinary ones extraordinarily well. Only God has the answer to that. My life has been blessed with a great family and IHM friends. I received more than I gave.

In the IHM Book of Life, in a testament to her deep faith and trust in God, Pauline chose Margaret Powers' work, *Footprints*, which ends with, "My precious, precious child, I love you and will never leave you. During your times of trials and testing, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then I carried you." And that is how Sister Pauline Gorham saw her life.

And how about the rest of us, her companions, during her IHM years? What did we see? A gracious, courageous, independent woman, a welcoming presence who loved her Liguori room. IHM visitors to Florida will recall how warmly we were welcomed by Sisters Pauline and June and how we noted the love and appreciation of their parish and neighborhood community for them.

A great, loyal friend, who loved her newspaper, enjoyed many happy times, and loved a party, especially if wine and cheese were being served. She enjoyed a special friendship with Sister June Denne. When June's health began to slip, their roles as helper changed somewhat as Pauline took many a painful trip up to second floor Health Care to visit her dear friend.

A person who was private, practical, sensible, down to earth, solid, just herself all the time. A gentle soul, very kind, thoughtful, with a wonderful sense of humor and an amazing memory for jokes, a great teacher.

Pauline was a lover of family, especially her last sibling, Margaret, who had become a kind of matriarch of the family and was very good to Pauline. Sister was so sad when her health did not allow her to attend Margaret's funeral last year.

A person who, for many, many years, suffered without complaint from her swollen feet, she rose above well-meaning comments, even criticisms, of her determination to be independent in her later years as she walked the long road to the dining room, or insisted on doing her own laundry. When asked if she was in a lot of pain in her hands and feet, she would just reply, "Well, it depends on the weather."

When she was hospitalized last week after a fall, who could have known that we would be here today and that very early, on Oct. 18, around 2:30 a.m., when the world was still in darkness, Sister Pauline would awake to see that her hands were straightened, her ankles and feet strong; the shackles of pain and infirmity gone, her spirit soaring in complete freedom into the presence of the Lord she had loved and served so faithfully and so extraordinarily well.

Somehow it doesn't seem right to wish her "eternal rest." How about "eternal joy"?

Sister Loretta Schroeder, IHM
Oct. 22, 2012