

## REMEMBERING SISTER MAUREEN NOLAN

10-20-01

Sister Maureen Nolan was a lively, extroverted, enthusiastic person. She loved life. Her family, I.H.M. Congregation, friends, career in education and her God all fed her vitality

Maureen Elizabeth Alvina Nolan was born on January 20, 1922 in Bay City, MI. She was the second child and first daughter of Patrick Thomas Nolan and Elizabeth Mae Cavanaugh. She had an older brother, Thomas. Mr. Nolan had come from Co. Mayo, Ireland in 1905. Mrs. Nolan was from Bay City, MI. Maureen described her father as a "poor, bashful, lonely" immigrant from Ireland. He owned a wallpaper and picture framing store in Bay City. It was here that he met Elizabeth Cavanaugh. They were married in 1918. Maureen's mother was an RN and had cared for her widowed mother until she married Thomas.

The small family moved to Detroit, MI in 1923 where Mr. Nolan worked for the Dodge Motor Co. For a brief time they lived in Saint Vincent Parish there. Then they purchased a home on Beldan Street in Saint Gregory Parish, Northwest Detroit. It was here where Maureen grew up. In 1925, a third child of Thomas and Elizabeth, Gerald, died of spinal meningitis. Eventually, three more children were added to the family, Marjorie, Patricia and John.

Maureen had a special fondness for her father and was very proud of her Irish heritage. It was a thrill for her when she was able to travel to Ireland and make connections with her relatives in Co. Mayo.

Maureen began her school days at Saint Gregory School in September 1927 and graduated from there in June, 1939. In her Junior year the choir director, Sister Marie Helen Milliken, asked her if she ever thought of being a "Sister". At that point, Maureen was not interested! It was on December 8th during Maureen's Freshman year at Marygrove College in Detroit, MI that Maureen was deeply moved by the "beautiful services" in the Marygrove Chapel. By Christmas of that year, 1939, she had decided to enter the I.H.M. Congregation!

Maureen entered the Postulate on June 29, 1940 and writes that she had an "extremely happy life" On January 2, 1941, Maureen was Received into the Novitiate and given the name, Sister Mary Caelan. Her most poignant memory of the day, she writes, was seeing her father leave the Motherhouse in tears. This was only the second time she had seen her father cry. "Dad, don't cry!", she encouraged. He responded, "You are where you want to be. We are going home to an empty house!" She was touched that the house would feel "empty" because SHE wasn't there!

As a Novice, Maureen taught, for a brief time both at Saint Hugo's in Bloomfield Hills, MI and Saint Michael's in Monroe, MI. Her first "full-time" assignment was to Saint Matthew's in Detroit, MI in August, 1943. Maureen was an elementary school teacher and principal for twenty-one years. In 1965 she experienced a "major move" to Port Huron Catholic High School in Port Huron, MI. to teach high school English. She remained in her **beloved** Port Huron until her retirement to the Motherhouse in 1991.

A year after Maureen began teaching in Port Huron, Port Huron Catholic High School was purchased by the Port Huron Public School System and called Port Huron Central. Maureen wrote that she chose to remain with the Public School System in order to give the transferred students she had known, some stability in their new environment. Then in 1984 Maureen, recognizing her limitations, decided that it was time to retire from her teaching in the High School. At that time, she was invited to teach English part-time at Saint Clair Community College in Port Huron, MI. Maureen enjoyed the reputation of being a very fine teacher of English, among our best!

When Saint Stephen's Convent was no longer available to the I.H.M. Sisters working/living in Port Huron, Maureen moved into a very small, simple, frame house in the city close to Lake Huron. During a House Warming given her by her fellow-teachers at Port Huron Central, it was dubbed "Nolan's Nunnery". That name stuck to her little home for all of the many years Maureen resided there.

In 1991, Maureen was asked to move to the Motherhouse and work in the Infirmary Diet Kitchen. After a brief time in the Diet Kitchen, Maureen continued to be of service at the Motherhouse as a driver and/or companion.

Maureen wrote that in her retirement years her prayer life was better than ever before. "Somehow there is such an ease, a closeness and a peace that comes over me when I sit down to pray", she recorded. She continued, "I have used the prayer of Cardinal Newman, 'Radiating Christ', for many years. I can honestly say that it has grown so much into my prayer-life lately that every time I read it, I feel it deeply in every fiber of my being and I move into the marketplace firmly determined to be a reflection of the presence and the light!"

Maureen had many deep friendships. She made it a point to keep in touch with persons who were important to her. Since she associated very closely with the Adrian Dominican Sisters in Port Huron, Maureen called herself a "Blue Dominican"! She was also very thoughtful of her mentally challenged sister, Marjorie who lived in a Group Home in the Detroit MI area and often spend vacation and holiday times with Maureen. Maureen was also an advocate for Marjorie in the Mental Health System, so that Marjorie was provided all the services available to her.

For leisure, Maureen loved to play cards with friends and/or go shopping with them. She was intentional in making arrangements with her buddies just to have fun. Being the English specialist that she was, Maureen also found joy in reading.

Maureen was a fine seamstress and made most of her clothes. She dressed in the latest fashion and invariably appeared fresh and lively. One friend said of her, "I always felt better for just having met her."

During her final years, Maureen suffered from dementia and was unable to communicate although she seemed aware of what was happening around her. What a suffering this must have been for this very extroverted person who was so skilled at communication. Yet, in her disability she was docile and easy to care for. At the time of Maureen's transition to life with God, she had endured

the loss of most of her immediate family. Her only living sibling was her brother, John.

Maureen has been a great gift to the I.H.M. Congregation! She has taught us how to relax and have fun. She has taught us to cherish close relationships and to respect our professions. She has been a witness to us of faithfulness to our commitment to the Congregation, the Church and to God. Everyone who knew Maureen has been refreshed by her life with us.

Patricia A. O'Donnell, I.H.M.  
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