

Irene Therese Gumbleton

I was born on a snowy day, Dec. 27, 1928, in our house in Detroit. I am the fifth of nine children to Helen Steintrager and Vincent Gumbleton. I had seven brothers and one sister, so sports involvement came naturally. We all attended Epiphany Grade School, staffed by the IHM Sisters. Since my dad's three sisters were also IHM Sisters, we were introduced to religious life very early. My childhood was very normal—we prayed, played a lot, fought or argued at times and enjoyed life and family. Often, in the summer, we spent Sunday afternoons watching the Tigers play baseball at Briggs Stadium.

Influential in my call to religious life was the undercurrent of growing up with three aunts who preceded me in religious life and a brother who also explored it. The sisters at Epiphany, Immaculata and Mercy College inspired me, and at a very early age, I had always wanted to teach. On my first day, I was in awe of everything and probably had not realized what I was getting into. Giving up sports, the physical exercise and competition I had always enjoyed, was the most challenging thing for me.

A vivid memory is that we were assigned charges; when finished, we were free to do "whatever." Since I always ended quickly, I had time to say my prayers and study. To keep me from "whatever," I was assigned to the sewing room—habits, veils, etc.—for the whole hour. No more free time!

I have always enjoyed my mission experiences and the sisters with whom I lived. However, on Aug. 7, 1952, at the beginning of our yearly retreat, I might not have felt exactly that way when I received my first mission assignment. When I turned my ticket over, I discovered I was being missioned to St. Boniface School in Detroit. The school was situated in an area known as Skid Row. I confess, being a native Westside Detroiter, I was scared stiff. I don't think I slept one night during the eight-day retreat, but I prayed a lot.

While I enjoyed all my missions, I am most grateful for being able to serve the people of Corktown, Detroit, for 27 years as a principal and teacher. During this period, we were one of the first schools to introduce a non-graded program allowing students to learn at their own level of competency. I appreciated the IHM community's support in enabling me to serve at Most Holy Trinity.

Over the years, I've had many opportunities offered to me, such as yearly retreats, lectures and liturgies, which assisted me in growing more deeply in God's love. I have treasured my time in the community. Now that I'm retired, as I look back on the many wonderful years I've had, I thank God every day for the blessings he's bestowed upon me, including the many incredible women who have been my mentors, sisters and friends. I am blessed!

