

Remembering George Ellen Brannick, IHM
July 3, 1926 – Dec. 5, 2025



It would be enough if all we said was that Sister George Ellen, called Aunt Lou by her beloved family, was a red-headed Irish girl from Jackson, Michigan, whose bright blue eyes bespoke fun and mischief. Blessed with good health, deep faith, intelligence and creativity, she found goodness and beauty everywhere. She gloried in her title, Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She loved and was loved. And God was her very best friend.

She was born Mary Louise Brannick in Jackson on July 3, 1926, to loving parents Thomas and Mary (Hanlon) Brannick. Her parish and school were St. John; her siblings were Thomas, Patricia and George.

Encouraged by her high school teacher, Sister Emily Joseph, Mary Lou entered the IHM Congregation. The year was 1944 (when preparations for the 100th anniversary of our founding were underway). Sister pronounced her vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience as a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on Jan. 2, 1947.

She spent her whole life as an educator, beginning in Bloomfield Hills, then Flint, Mount Clemens and Ann Arbor. Sister loved teaching primary grades, loved children, was excellent and beloved.

In 1959, Sister was missioned to St. Alphonsus Liguori School in San Leandro, California. It was the first airplane ride for Sister and her four companion Sisters. They landed in Salt Lake City, Utah, where, for some unknown reason, they were told that three of them had to step off the plane. Following negotiations, two of the three were allowed back on the plane. This would leave Sister George Ellen alone, not knowing what to do and not a penny in her pocket. Sister Germaine Detlof got off the plane to stay with her. Eventually, the two Sisters were squeezed into a small, overcrowded mail plane. That plane would land seven bumpy times, delivering mail in the mountains between Utah and California. A trip never to be forgotten.

Sister was so happy when, in 1962, she was able to choose to return to Jackson, to St. John School. There, she taught grades one, two, five, and six for over 30 years, and spent six more years serving as the school office assistant. During this time, she was able to assist her ailing father and enjoy being close to her mother. Bill Divine, her principal, wrote that she was “the best example...of what a model teacher is all about.”

Retiring from school in 2000, Sister volunteered in the parish. She helped her brother, who had supported her dear friend, Sister Vivian Karas, through cancer treatments. Sister George was so humble and self-effacing; she always felt she had few talents, but

Sister Vivian described her as “gentle, caring, impeccably neat: a lover of family, birds, music and her vocation.”

Sister remained a giver of service throughout her entire beautiful life. Her ability to enjoy all that was human in her studies, teaching and friendships endeared her to those around her. She loved whatever she did. Surely her joy revealed the deep inner connection of her spirit with our loving God.

By 2007, it was time to retire to the Motherhouse, where she hoped to “grow closer to God and serve her sisters with love.” Sister delighted in prayer, painting, driving, visiting the room-bound, assisting in the wheelchair section of the chapel and passing the mail with dear friends, Sister Regina and Sister Jane Arthur. Distributing the mail was a wonderful opportunity to know and befriend staff who became beloved friends.

What a blessing that she and Sister Regina were able to companion each other in prayer, conversation, presence and all that is wonderful about friendship as they rode into the sunset of life.

Over the years, a plethora of cards, letters and visits from her very attentive family, former students, colleagues, so many people whose lives she has touched, sang her praises as a gentle soul with a caring heart, encouraging words, a warm smile and helping hands.

In 2020, Danielle Price Nowlin, a former sixth grader, finally completed an assignment that Sister had given her many years before: creating a “Book of Beautiful Things” for her. It reads:

What is beautiful can exist anywhere, everywhere.
We find beauty and even create it
just by looking for it
by seeing it where it hadn't existed before,
or where it is in bud but has yet to bloom.

When we are beautiful to others,
those seeds, those sparks grow into light
that reflects through the days, the years,
the decades, a lifetime and back onto us.

Sister collected lots of quotes and wrote her own words of wisdom:

My ideal day should include:

- Prayer - timeout to chat with God, reading a psalm or a book that quiets your mind, body and soul.
- Going to work with a joyful spirit.
- Being thoughtful toward everyone through the day and evening.

- Accepting the struggle with faith; not feeling sorry for yourself.

I want to be a gentle, simple person, who did not hurt anyone, and was in tune with God and the Church. I best relate to the Lord as my friend, my best friend. I feel His presence in the beautiful things in this world, in kind people, in my Church, my Community, in nature, in poetry and music. I tell Him everything. He helps me face sorrow and hardship.

Looking back over the long life of 99 years of our dear Sister George and dear Aunt Lou, it is clear that she was one of the most integrated people among us. She moved along, you might say, with the tide. Whatever or whoever came along needing her attention, she was there and aware ... her good nature so evident.

Nephew Gary prayed a blessing to her over the speaker phone the afternoon of the day on which she died:

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." *Numbers 6:22-27*

If she were here (and she is), Sister would want to say how much she loves everyone and how grateful she is for the tender love and kindness shown to her by family, Sisters, students, colleagues, health care staff, housekeepers, support staff, everyone. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Written and delivered by Sister Loretta Schroeder, IHM, with notes from Sister Patricia Aseltyne, IHM. Dec. 15, 2025