

Hi,

I'm Irene; born on a snowy, wintry day, Dec. 27, 1928, in our house in Detroit. I am the fifth of nine children of Helen Steintrager and Vincent Gumbleton. I had seven brothers and one sister, so I became involved in sports at a young age.

We all attended Epiphany Grade School, staffed by the IHM Sisters. Since my dad's three sisters were also IHMs, we were introduced to religious life at a very early age. I think my childhood was very normal – we prayed, played a lot, fought or argued at times and enjoyed life and family. Mom was the homemaker. In the summer, to keep me busy, she taught me to embroider dresser scarves; I still make her favorite recipes. During the Depression, dad provided for the family and attended night school to earn his college degree. Oftentimes in the summer, we spent our Sunday afternoons watching the Tigers play baseball at Briggs Stadium.

My vocation was influenced by my brothers who explored religious life (one of them later became a priest) and the sisters at Epiphany, Immaculata and Mercy College.

My first day on entering, I was in awe of everything and, probably, had not really realized what I was getting into. The most challenging thing for me was that I had to give up sports and therefore, the physical exercise that I had always enjoyed.

I have always enjoyed my mission life 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 assignment.



When I turned my ticket over, I discovered I was being missioned to St. Boniface School, Detroit. The school was situated in an area that was then known as “skid row.” I confess, as being a native westside Detroiter, I was scared stiff. I don't think I slept one night during this eight-day retreat and I sure prayed a lot!

Aug. 17, my first day on mission, I arrived for morning prayers at 5:30 a.m. Within a few minutes, where was young Sister Irene but under the pew, out cold. WHAT A SURPRISE!!!! (We couldn't have coffee in those days.) The day went better after that though, as my brother Jerry and his new bride, Marian, came to visit.

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

The many opportunities offered to me by my community: yearly retreats, lectures, theology and liturgy, have assisted me in growing more deeply in God's Love. I have treasured my time in community and the many wonderful women who have been my mentors, sisters and friends.