

Remembering Evelyn Booms, IHM
Aug. 13, 1934 – May 6, 2021

It was mid-summer when, on Aug. 13, 1934, Evelyn Booms entered the family of Wilfred Booms and Estella Essenmacher Booms; her older sister, Marjorie; and her brother, Gerald. She was followed by five other siblings: Joann, Sheila, Charles, Dennis and Harry. Her sister, Sheila, died in 1991. Sheila's daughters formed lasting, strong relationships with Evelyn after their mother's death.



The Booms family was of German heritage and lived on a small 120-acre family farm within a mile of St. Anthony Church in Helena, Mich., (outside of Harbor Beach). Both her parents came from large families and she found herself surrounded both geographically and emotionally by aunts, uncles and cousins. She also enjoyed some "city cousins" who visited regularly during haying season. The nearness of her relatives and of her church were significant in her life. Evelyn remembered a childhood with responsibilities but with adventures and loving concern for each family member.

Her early education took place in Ashmore School, a one-room country schoolhouse where Miss Amanda Learman was her only teacher from kindergarten through grade eight. Classes were small and children frequently learned from listening in to upper classes when they were finished with their own work. Most of the Ashmore students were relatives and almost all were from Catholic families.

Evelyn remembered that, when she was in seventh grade, the Huron County 4-H agent came to the school to assist in starting a 4-H club. Evelyn felt that the 4-H Club experience became very important in her life as it introduced her to a world beyond her home and school when, as she put it, "That group of giggly girls became confident participants in county and state programs." (That same 4-H agent later said of her when he heard that she was entering the convent, "Evelyn will do well with whatever she does.")

She attended Our Lady of Lake Huron High School, the Catholic high school in Harbor Beach where the IHM Sisters taught. She was already familiar with them because IHM Sisters had taught catechism at her country church in Helena but becoming a nun had never been in her mind. She did remember later, however, that her father had said of her, "that one is going to be our nun."

Near the end of her senior year, Sister Ann Loretta noticed that Evelyn was "stewing" about the possibility of becoming a nun and invited her to visit the convent in Monroe. While there, she met Mother Theresa and, on the same day, was measured for the postulant garb! On returning home, she surprised her family by announcing that she was going to enter the convent. From a class of 24, she was one of three graduates (including Mary Ann Grates) who entered the convent, each in different communities.

Early in the postulate, the writings of St. Augustine were read as part of the meditation and she subsequently requested his name as part of her religious name: Sister Marie Augustine.

Her first teaching position was at St. Mary of Redford, followed by St. Charles in Coldwater, Mich. From there she moved out of state to St. Monica in Mobile, Ala. This was followed by a move to become principal for six years at Our Lady of Assumption in Albuquerque, N.M.

While in Albuquerque, Evelyn was introduced to the Charismatic renewal. She considered that this movement gave a positive and enriching dimension to her life.

Shortly after arriving in Albuquerque, Evelyn accepted an invitation to the school board for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. When the position for superintendent of schools for the archdiocese opened, she was asked to consider that position. The board president invited her to dinner to talk about the position and her response was "If you want to take me out to dinner, that's fine; however, my thought now is 'No.'"

But Evelyn reconsidered. She eventually said, "If you still want me, I feel I should say 'Yes.'" In serving as superintendent, she oversaw three high schools and 21 elementary schools in Albuquerque and in the mountains and outskirts of Santa Fe. During that time, she worked on a committee to form the New Mexico Association of Non-public schools and then served as its first president.

After seven years, she felt called to do something totally different and became rector for three years at Pasquerilla East Women's Residence Hall at Notre Dame. She also began taking courses in spirituality, spiritual direction, centering prayer and dreamwork. Her inner artist was awakened during that time, especially with photography and sketching.

After the exciting experience at Notre Dame, she became the coordinator of St. Mary Conference Center. During her five years at the Conference Center, she took classes in spiritual direction and received training in *Healing the Inner Child* workshops. She also directed Charismatic retreats for priests and religious as a team member and later as director. She facilitated days of recollection for a variety of groups.

After those years, Evelyn was given a year for personal renewal during which she went to Sangre de Cristo Renewal Center in Santa Fe and to the Desert House of Prayer. These sacred places helped the inner artist escape from what she saw as her timid self. The Desert House became a favorite haunt for her. There, Evelyn the administrator become Evelyn the artist, the poet, the healer, the contemplative.

Upon returning to Michigan, she attended meetings for the formation of Kaleidoscope: IHM Resources and was given an office in St. Basil Parish. She was asked to provide programs in spiritual direction there, which led to working full time in adult spirituality. While at

Kaleidoscope, she also became involved with coordinating the archdiocesan appeal for retired religious. For 20 years, she procured speakers to make the appeal for funds for this need in parishes throughout the archdiocese. Many IHMs remember that call inviting them to speak at a parish.

Evelyn next started, along with Rose Mary Ala, the Heart of Jesus Prayer Center on the grounds of St. Margaret of Scotland parish in St. Clair Shores, Mich. She served as spiritual director there but was also available for workshops on *Inner Child*, photography, centering prayer and community of faith, as well as six- and eight-day retreats.

Sister Evelyn happily recalled her years in the IHM community, saying, "It's been a blessed time for me. Never a dull moment." She sometimes wondered how she came to be called to the ministry of inner healing since her own childhood experience was so positive and wholesome. She pondered that perhaps her background prepared her to be a symbol of unconditional love and the basic goodness of life.

In January of 2015, she retired to the IHM Motherhouse, evidencing her typical gratitude for everything. She loved her room in Liguori but when it was time, she peacefully and calmly decided it would be better for her to move to the Memory Care unit.

In her commitment form for 2014-15, she wrote, *In my personal life, I trust that having a contemplative stance will help me adjust to living with the symptoms of Parkinson Disease. I am in a time of transition.*

The dreaded Parkinson's moved rather slowly at first but eventually she needed more skilled care. Her contemplative spirit accepted all in a beautiful way. In her *Book of Life* page, she had written over and over again, "Thy will be done." She lived that attitude with such grace, even to her final days in hospice. Staff loved her to the end and would stop by on their break for a few minutes with Evelyn.

One of the last things she said to me was simply "I want to be free". And she is free!

After all she had done with her beautiful life, she said in her later years that she carried within herself an "image of a little farm girl". Everyone loved that girl!

Written and delivered by Jean T. Booms, IHM
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