



SISTER MARY MILDRED MC CLAIN

May 15, 1928 - September 19, 2006

She spoke to us often of her two older sisters: Cecilia, the oldest, known in earlier years as Sister Mary Lawrence; and Mildred— “My sister, Mildred, works at Notre Dame.” We heard this declaration frequently throughout the football season. To which a first-time listener would ask: “How can there be two Mildred’s in one family?” The questioner would then be informed that Patrick and Agnes McClain actually named their youngest child Mary Patricia when they welcomed her into the family on May 15, 1928. She took her sister’s name as a Sister of Charity, but really, to all who knew and loved her, she was “Mae.”

Following graduation from high school, Mae worked at Royer’s Department Store, where she made many good friends and was the life of the party. Her girl friends delighted in dressing her up for the dances they attended. Ceil described her as the beautiful blond “Twiggy.” And all of us can attest that she retained her love for parties to the very end.

Mae brought her sunny disposition and joy for life with her when she entered the Sisters of Charity on September 8, 1950. Sister Mary Mildred was the fifth oldest in the group of 28 who relished being known as “the Holy Year” group.

When I entered the following year, I was assigned to the dormitory on fifth admin where Mildred was the senior novice. My very first night I learned how kind and compassionate she was. The lights were turned out at 8:15 and Mae, in the alcove next to me heard sniffing. She came over and said gently: “Praise be to Jesus, Miss Wilson. Don’t cry....after a while you won’t be homesick.” And throughout the rest of our years together we enjoyed many a laugh at my response: “I’m not crying, Sister, I have hay fever.”

She was tolerant as we 18 year olds adjusted to life in the convent. I certainly wanted to please her and so when it was my turn to clean the dorm, I took the lidded container of holy water that sat on top of her stand, emptied the water, cleaned the container and refilled it with a fresh supply of holy water. Sometime later, probably wanting a little pat on the head, I told Mildred of my good deed. Imagine my embarrassment when she informed me gently that the container was where she soaked her partial denture overnight.

Mildred’s kind and gentle nature were hallmarks throughout her life. Whether teaching business education in high school, working in the treasurer’s office at Seton Hill College (now University), or directing the religious education programs at St. Paul parish in New Bern, North Carolina and later Infant of Prague parish, in Jacksonville, North Carolina, Mildred was loved and respected by those whose lives she touched. I’m told that she knew the name of every Seton Hill student who came to the college treasurer’s office when she worked there. And those who participated in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in New Bern knew that they were being accompanied on their journey by a woman of love and faith.

Mildred was only nine years old when her father died at an early age from meningitis. It is thought that the death of a parent may contribute to insecurities and anxieties in a young child.

Perhaps this explains the many anxieties that Mae had to confront throughout her adult life. She credited Sister Ellenita with bolstering her self-confidence to the point that she could accept the presidency of the Tri-State Business Education Association and later serve as a member of the Advisory Council at Robert Morris University. I find it interesting that the year she was president of the Tri-State Business Education Association, she chose as the theme of the annual conference, "Preparation for an Age of Uncertainties." Mildred endured many uncertainties, even to the end of her life. But she never complained nor did she speak ill of others, even under the most trying circumstances. Indeed, she practiced to a high degree the virtue of charity.

Mo and Brian, I hope you know that you and your sister Marian were the light of Mae's life. She delighted in every visit, prayed for you, and rejoiced at your successes.

Mildred would be humbled by the presence of so many friends who made the long trip from North Carolina to be here. Your friendship is a wonderful tribute to the "fun nun." Father Tom Davis, pastor of Infant of Prague in Jacksonville; Father Ernest Ruede, pastor of St. Paul's in New Bern, where Mildred served for twelve years; Sister Susan Armbruster—principal of St. Paul's school in New Bern and Mr. Thomas Donahue, who with his wife, Pat, (now deceased) welcomed Ceil and Mae into their home on numerous occasions.

Last evening at the vigil, it was confirmed that Mae knew how to make friends. We are blessed to have known her.

In the penitential rite at Mass we hear the words: "Let us ask God's forgiveness, for he is full of gentleness and compassion." I've heard these words in a special way each day since Mae died, for I believe her life was one lived with gentleness and compassion, and in this way she was the reflection of our creator God. There is much, much more that could be said about this gentle woman. But she will be remembered in a unique way by each of us, who have come to celebrate her passage into life eternal.

Mildred, may you feast unceasingly at the heavenly banquet for all eternity!

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Patricia Mary Wilson
September 23, 2006*

