

Remembering



Barbara Joan Nicewander, CSJ

April 21, 1934 ~ April 6, 2017

As a teenager, Barbara Joan Nicewander often announced, "I'm going to get married and have a dozen kids." Little did she realize that in the years to come as a dedicated teaching Sister of St. Joseph she would nurture hundreds of children.

Born on April 21, 1934, in Indianapolis, Indiana, our Barbara was the second child of Alan Richard and Agnes Elizabeth Nicewander and was baptized Barbara Joan, (ala Joanie), on May 5, 1934. Her brother, Dick, was two years older than she. They did everything together. Young Joanie inherited her mother's spirituality—a graced awareness and trust in God and in Mary his mother.

In 1938, the family moved to Los Angeles where Dick and later Barbara enrolled at St. Columbkille's School. In early 1941, the Nicewanders welcomed another daughter, Jeannie. Having baby Jeannie at Barbara's First Communion Mass on May 25, 1941, gave her much happiness. In 1945, the family moved again, to Hawthorne, California where

Barbara completed her elementary education at St. Joseph's School. It was there in early 1948 that Barbara Joan Nicewander and Joan Hagen began their lifelong friendship. In September 1948 the two girls began high school at St. Mary's Academy. There, Barbara and her friend Joan first met the Sisters of St. Joseph. The two girls also came to know another student, Anna Mae Gillet. The three became close friends and in later years were dubbed "The Three Musketeers." Barbara's art teacher, Sister Jeanne Marie Reid, encouraged this gift in her resulting in numerous pastels and sketches through the years.

Following graduation from St. Mary's Academy (SMA) as a blue tie of 1952, Barbara entered the CSJ community on September 15th that same year. With a number of her SMA classmates, including Anna Mae and Joan, Barbara experienced the surprises of being a postulant. Perhaps the biggest surprise was the birth of another sister, Janie. During the next few years two more girls were born, Josie and Jenny.

Sister Anna Marie, the former Anna Mae, remembers Barbara saying that with her three younger sisters it was like having another family. On March 18th, 1953, Barbara began the novitiate being given the name Sister Barbara Joanne. She made her First Vows on March 19th, 1955, and that September was missioned to St. Ferdinand's in the San Fernando Valley. Early that fall, Barbara was asked to switch to St. James Academy, Del Mar, California. For the next four years Barbara taught middle grades and discovered that she absolutely loved teaching.

Barbara earned a California State Lifetime Teaching Credential in the early 1960s and in 1962 received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in History, followed by her Master's Degree in 1974. Because of Barbara's enthusiasm and energetic presentation of subject matter, her students came to love both Barbara and what she taught. Bob Carney, one of Barbara's students at St. James and a CSJ Associate today, traces his appreciation for learning to Barbara's passion as an educator. Last summer, while at Carondelet Center, Bob visited his former teacher who taught for him three consecutive years. Afterwards, he told Sister Joan Hagen: "Sister Barbara Joan instilled so much in me and provided the guidelines for my life. I dearly love Barbara."

After St. James School, Sister Barbara Joan ministered at eight other elementary schools in California and Arizona, her last at St. Jerome's in Los Angeles.

In recognition of her teaching, Barbara was awarded both local and national accolades including:

In 1989 and 1993 being named Westchester/LAX Teacher of

the Year, in the year 2000 awarded the prestigious Valley Forge Freedom Foundation experience, being included not just once but several times in the Who's Who among America's Teachers.

Through the years as a CSJ, Sister Barbara celebrated her Final Vows in 1960, her Silver Jubilee in 1978 and her Golden Jubilee in 2003.

A highlight of her 55 years of teaching expressed in Barbara's own words: "Serving as Student Council Moderator for 25 years." In 1986-87, Barbara participated in a sabbatical at Mount St. Joseph's in Cincinnati, Ohio, a program which enlivened her in both body and soul.

Throughout her teaching, Sister Barbara had the gift of balancing academics with cultural appreciation. Former principals, faculty and students may recall Barbara's school productions which included *The Mikado*, and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Barbara often told of one young boy, a stutterer, desiring to be in a school play. Sensitive to each child, Sister Barbara told the boy that if he memorized his lines he could audition. This he did, was chosen for the part and at the performance spoke his lines perfectly. No faltering whatsoever! His Parents' moment of pride. "Moment", Barbara added "because his impediment resurfaced when classes resumed."

Barbara also introduced her students to good literature including *To Kill a Mockingbird* which was made into a movie starring Gregory Peck. Through the pastor, Father James Cavanaugh, Mr. Peck visited Sister Barbara's eighth grade classroom, interacted with the students and autographed their copies of the book. Barbara's signed

book held a prominent place among her treasures.

Barbara looked forward to "The Three Musketeers" summer vacations in Del Mar, Morro Bay, Cambria and Solvang.

Barbara's favorite outing was to watch the boats at Marina Del Rey, followed by a spaghetti lunch. One day last fall, Dick, Jane and Josie took Barbara on a grand excursion to her favorite sites, followed by lunch at the Redondo Pier. Barbara's sister, Josie, shares that with any visit home Barbara always brought joy, happiness and fun to family.

While close to all her siblings, Barbara had a special love for Jenny who was born with Down's syndrome and given a short life expectancy. Jenny, however, with love and support, lived to her 50s-- and even learned a trade. Barbara often recounted Jenny's coming home with her first paycheck and emphatically announcing, "Dad, put this in the bank."

In June 2012, Barbara made retreat at Carondelet Center, a retreat that was to be a transition for her from St. Jerome's Community to Holy Family Community. Barbara herself seemed unaware of memory changes obvious to others. At peace eventually, Barbara spoke about having the best room in the house with its view of the mountains and the Getty. Barbara appreciated having quiet time for reading and prayer, for her art, for writing poetry and for watching movies. In these retirement days, Barbara lovingly named each person in family photos and rearranged her treasured favorite saint statues, her lighthouses and her

unicorns. Often she commented, "I miss my kids. We had fun." Although a self-described introvert, she enjoyed lunch with friends. Many of us recall her saying, "I don't have to shop; I don't have to cook; I don't even have to wash the dishes."

Last August on learning of incurable cancer, Barbara responded, "I've lived a good life and I want to play it out that way."

Sister Barbara often talked to God in the words of her favorite psalm:

"One thing I ask of my God, this I seek.

To dwell in the house of my God all the days of my life."

On the morning of April 6th God heard Barbara's prayer and called her to her heavenly home. She is now united with her parents and her sisters Jeanie and Jenny,

Rest in peace, dear sister and friend. ✠

Written by Sister Joan Hagen, CSJ

