



Remembering

SISTER MARY BRAUN, CSJ
JULY 6, 1933 ~ JUNE 3, 2020

LaVerne Rose Braun was born in Council Bluffs, Iowa two days after the Fourth of July 1933. Within a few days her parents, Raymond and Mary Joan Braun, brought her home to Lincoln, Nebraska to meet her brother, David. Two years later she and David welcomed James, the last of the family.

When new farm land was opening along the Pacific Coast, her father convinced his New York born wife that moving to California would be a new adventure for the family. He made a good choice. Soon he bought land for the family ranch in Franklyn Canyon now part of Martinez, CA. LaVerne and her brothers grew up and thrived in all the aspects of life as one of the "farm acreage families" not far from "in towners" as Sister Mary Ellen Kowalski explained were the terms used to designate where families lived. The distances were short and everybody knew everybody. The Kowalski family owned the Ford dealership; the Braun family owned the gas station next door.

Close knit Catholic families of Italian, Irish, Polish and English descent joined the early Spanish settlers. All went to the same church, St. Catherine of Siena. The Holy Family Sisters held catechism classes for the children in the homes, the barns and even in the fields until the parish school was built in 1949, when the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived at the invitation of the pastor, Msgr. Robert Falvey, the brother of CSJ Sisters Laurentine and Robertine. LaVerne was sixteen and the part-time secretary in the parish office when the sisters arrived. Soon LaVerne was helping in the school office for the Principal, Sister Mary Anne Bahner.

The first group of sisters mingled with the people and got to know everybody. LaVerne often said she was drawn to wanting to be with the Sisters because there was always much laughter and things were not taken too seriously.

After graduating from Alhambra Union High School she attended Mount Diablo College. During this time she told her parents she wanted to enter the convent. On February 11, 1952, she left her beloved Martinez to enter the postulate at St. Mary's Academy in Los Angeles. On the following August 15th she received the habit and the name Sister Raymond Mary. First vows were made August 15, 1954; final vows, August 15, 1959. Later she asked to be called Sister Mary.

She earned her BA with a specialty in Business at Mount St. Mary's College and a Secondary Teaching Credential. Her first six years of teaching were at St. Thomas School, San Francisco. The following two years she taught at Our Lady of the Valley School, Canoga Park, CA.

In 1962 she was surprised to be assigned to Mount St. Mary's College's Doheny Campus to set up a business program. This was quite a challenge, but she succeeded in offering business classes that complimented and added to the growing Associate degree program. Many of the graduates have given her the credit for preparing them with the skills that allowed them to succeed in pursuing careers in the business world.

From September 1964 until June 1985 she taught business classes in California High Schools staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph. She often said her most adventurous times were her nine years on the faculty of Cathedral High, San Diego, which in 1970, became co-ed University High adjacent to the University of San Diego. Again Sister Mary set up and became the chair of the Business Department. In 1973 she was one of nine educators to receive an award from the San Diego Industry Education Council for outstanding contributions to education.

She was teaching at Star of the Sea High School, San Francisco, when her brother, Jim, had a massive stroke and her father was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. From experiences of being with them, she felt called to hospital work. After completing the Clinical Pastoral Education program at Pacific Presbyterian Medical Center in San Francisco, she joined the Pastoral Team at Providence Hospital, Oakland, CA.

The experiences she had during her pastoral ministry were special to her. In her own words she said, "I have been able to support families during periods of loss and grief and was able to be present to many patients who wanted someone to be with them."

After leaving pastoral ministry and some sabbatical time, Mary returned to St. Catherine's, Martinez from 1990 to 1998 while working as office manager of the Rape Crisis Center in San Pablo, CA. During one year she showed her adventurous spirit as she prepared physically to ride a bicycle one hundred and sixty-eight miles to benefit the American Lung Association. At the finish line Sister Rita Francis wrote, "She did it and finished with a spirit of joy and childlike delight."

Her final years of ministry were spent in Concord, CA, residing with other sisters in the Chateau Senior Apartments while serving in various positions at the East Bay Services until 1916, when she continued as a volunteer.

Mary had many sides to her. At times she would be very quiet and thoughtful; other times she would be bursting with laughter. Many of her students remembered her fondly as one who listened to them and helped them through their teen-age problems. Her smile was the magnet that drew others to her. The seniors at the Chateau would stop to chat. She had lived so long in the area, it really was, as the song says, "a place where everybody knows your name." She had great compassion for those who were in desperate circumstances; sometimes "going the extra mile" that others deemed too far. That was Mary. She had to help. She maintained her own "friendships by phone" help line.

In August 2019 she fell and broke her femur. She had surgery and physical therapy rehab. Later a blood clot was discovered which sent her to another period of rehab. She made good progress while using a walker for her usual visiting at the Chateau.

On December 28, 2019, she suffered a massive stroke which left her paralyzed with little recognition of those around her. After hospitalization she was sent to the Walnut Creek Skilled Nursing Center. In a short time the Covid-19 pandemic directives closed all nursing homes to visitors. The check-up messages reported very little change during the following months until late in May when her condition changed and Hospice was called to attend to her care and comfort. On May 2nd when death was imminent, Sister Mina was able to spend the morning hours with her. In the afternoon with Sister Patrice assisting with Zoom, her brother, David was able to see her and say his last good-bye. Mary could not respond, but maybe she was ready to end her earthly journey as she died peacefully in the early morning of the next day.

Dear Mary, heaven is yours, "with a joy no one can take from you." (John 21:3)

Rest in peace.

~ Written by Sister Barbara Dugan, CSJ