

Sister M. Esther, CSC

(Judith Ann Black)

July 23, 1939 – December 19, 2022

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Mary Ann Uebbing, CSC, who read them at Sister Esther's funeral on January 12, 2023.

Sister Esther Black, or Judy, as known by her family, was a quiet person with treasures of humor, compassion and many talents. I became friends with Judy when I was 13 years old as a high school freshman. The saying "Birds of a feather flock together" proved true as I also was quiet. The two of us found a third quiet friend, Dee. This trio of friendship continued until December 19, 2022, the day of Sister Esther's death. I continue to have frequent contact with Dee, a widow, now living in California.

Sister Esther's family home was directly across the street from St. Theodore parish in southside Chicago, where the Sisters of the Holy Cross taught in the elementary school. The Black family rendered many services to the sisters, such as driving and shopping. Through Sister Esther, I came to know the Sisters of the Holy Cross, a community I had never heard of before. Visits to her family home also meant visiting the sisters, who made a deep impression on me, a key factor in discerning my own vocation. To this day I am so grateful for God's providence working through Sister Esther.

Due to family needs, the Blacks moved to Pueblo, Colorado, and then to Lisle, Illinois, during the last years of high school, which limited my contact with her to letter writing. She kept one of my letters all these years, giving it to me only recently.

In our early years in high school, the two of us got involved in the school's Catholic Action programs. We did volunteer work at the Catholic Guild for the Blind. She took the initiative to teach herself

Braille and encouraged me to do the same. Years later, we were both assigned — at different times — to teach at Holy Redeemer School in Evergreen Park, Illinois, where a section of the building was a school for the blind. The blind children joined the sighted children in our classrooms. Having learned Braille was of great advantage in helping these children and in correcting their spelling tests. This was another movement of God's providence. Thank you, Sister Esther!

In high school I discovered Sister Esther's musical talents. She played the piano and was a violinist in the orchestra. She also had an athletic flair with bicycling, badminton and volleyball.

Although we arrived at Saint Mary's from two different Illinois cities, we walked through the front doors of Augusta Hall, then known as Saint Mary's Novitiate, on August 1, 1957. We became part of the Queen of Peace band or class, some of whose members are present here today.

After the formation years as a Sister of the Holy Cross, Sister Esther was a primary teacher for 11 years in Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin. Later, with a graduate degree as a school psychologist, she spent the next 17 years successfully serving in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend doing diagnostic testing of children from kindergarten to grade 12. Often, she discovered learning disabilities or related psychological challenges and gave professional support to both parents and teachers, who were most grateful to her.

As a teacher, school psychologist and aunt to many nieces and nephews, Sister Esther's compassionate love of children remained with her all her life. In her later years, she frequently expressed concern for "the children."

During the years of working in schools, Sister Esther developed a hobby which surely pre-dated Ancestry.com. She laboriously searched family records and the archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints here in South Bend. She even assisted others in researching their families' histories. She leaves a treasure with her family.

In 1991, her mother had a debilitating stroke. Sister Esther moved to her family home in Lisle, Illinois, to care for her mother until 2003, when she died. During this time, many of Sister Esther's hidden talents became evident: nursing care, compassionate bedside manner, cooking, sewing, making dolls, crocheting and knitting, singing, reading. It was a very blessed time for both of them, deepening the mother-daughter bond. She also was Aunt Judy to so many nieces and nephews whom she fondly loved, supporting them in their many achievements. She was very grateful for this opportunity.

Following this sojourn at home, Sister Esther moved to Saint Mary's and began another long and fruitful ministry as sacristan in the Church of Our Lady of Loretto. A sacristan is a silent presence in the background, behind the scenes, but her hand was visible in her artistic skills. The altar cloth we had for Advent was her last sewing project. Her sense of beauty was so evident in her floral arrangements and displays. Though soft-spoken, she loved welcoming the many visitors to the church. She enjoyed giving tours of the church, relating its history, and explaining the very meaningful mosaics in its interior. How much she endeared herself to the novices who would assist her in decorating the church for Christmas and Easter.

One of her tasks as sacristan was to keep the archives of activities related to the Church of Loretto. With her keen interest in historical records, she knew the value of carefully recording the many events occurring in the church.

From childhood, Sister Esther loved everything about "church" and had a great love of the Blessed Sacrament. How fitting that her last active ministry was giving 17 years of faithful and generous service as a sacristan.

Toward the end of her ministry, Sister Esther's health issues contributed to her beginning to show signs of being unable to keep up with her own standards of being a sacristan. Her friends and coworkers

in the Liturgy Office miss Sister Esther's lifelong knack for playful teasing, humor and creative storytelling, as well as the ability to laugh at herself.

A simple gesture of her writing a letter of sympathy was a source of great consolation to Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, whose mother had died suddenly many years ago. Since that time there has been a special bond of friendship between the two.

Sister Esther was indeed a gift to us—a quiet, gentle and compassionate presence of someone close to God.

May she rest in eternal peace with God, whom she loved and served so well, and may we experience her intercession behind all the scenes in our lives.