

What the Sisters Mean to Me

Sister Michaela Byron

*CST graduate 1948; Taught Home Economics at CST from 1952-1991;
President of the College of Saint Teresa, 1985-1989*

In the fall of 1974, I was a freshman at the College of Saint Teresa. I was from a suburb of Chicago where I had attended a large public high school. There were just shy of one thousand students in my graduating class. The counselors were taxed by so many students, that I had been making my schedules for years without their help.

My plan was to be a nurse, so the curriculum was just about set with few opportunities for electives. I thought this to be true until I met Sister Michaela. I expected a short visit. Instead, she listened as I responded to her questions of my favorite classes and teachers in high school. She advised me to explore liberal arts classes in those areas. My very favorite classes at CST were those Shakespeare classes I took from Sister Emmanuel Collins.

It was my good fortune to be brought into Sister Michaela's world. She was small in stature with a slight build. We were about the same size. Her persona and her physical space communicated a quiet gentleness. She spoke very softly, so that, while in her presence, one had to be very still and listen carefully. She was a very thoughtful person and expected me to put some thought into preparing for our meetings. She always greeted me with a very kind, soft smile and it was ever present at the end of our meetings. She was firm about goals and planning, but even that firmness was communicated with a parental type of kindness.

I missed her quiet ways when I went to Rochester for my junior and senior years, but I took her lessons with me. By her example, she taught me how to quiet myself so that I could listen carefully, organize myself, develop goals with plans on how to attain them, and to smile gently when interacting with others. This skill set served me very well as a practicing nurse for thirty-four years and naturally was woven into my everyday life.

In May of 2012, our paths crossed again at the Centennial Celebration of Saint Mary's University. She represented the College of Saint Teresa as the past President, and I had been informed she would be attending. She was seated on a sofa in a very large room, when I sat next to her and introduced myself. She of course looked the same. It was the same gentle smile. I had to sit very close to her as she still spoke very softly and she held my hand as we chatted. She spoke with a sadness about our

dear college long closed by then. I told her how I was at that time on the Alumnae Board. As always, we ended with a soft smile. I am very grateful for that last encounter, and even more grateful for the life lessons that began in the fall of 1974.

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