

Eulogy for Mary Ella Provencher

12/17/2022

On April 29, 1946, Raymond and Genia (O'Brien) Provencher welcomed Mary Ella, their first child. Her parents also welcomed two daughters: Peggy and Denise and three sons: Terrence, Michael and Marc.

Mary Ella's love for her family was palpable. As the family expanded, so did her love and joy. Marc, her kid brother, who had Down's syndrome, had a special place in her heart. Theirs was a special bond. How Marc loved his Lala, and she him! While Mary Ella was in the hospital, she dreamed that she was walking and dancing. Someone asked, "Did you see Marc?" "No", she replied, "I knew it wasn't heaven."

Mary Ella received her elementary education under the tutelage of the Sisters of the Assumption at St. Paul's School in Barton, Vermont, and her secondary education at Barton Academy. After working a few years, Mary Ella entered the novitiate of the Sisters of the Assumption in Petersham on October 2nd, 1965. Because Mary Ella was in her sister Peggy's bridal party, she entered a few weeks after her companions. On the way to their honeymoon, the newly-weds drove her to Petersham where she finally joined the other postulants.

Thus began Mary Ella's journey to March 25th, 1968, when she said YES to God's unfolding will for her. With Mary, our Lady of the Assumption, she staked all on God to reveal the Father's love through education. Remaining faithful and steadfast, she made her perpetual commitment on March 12, 1977, in Barton, Vermont. While Mary Ella was pronouncing her vows, the train went by and tooted. Her father had worked for the railroad. Since there are no coincidences with God, Mary Ella knew that her dad was present.

Mary Ella continued to further her education to become a qualified and effective teacher and school administrator. Teaching was certainly Mary Ella's gift. Wherever and whatever she taught, she was a competent, dedicated and enthusiastic educator—an excellent teacher. She enjoyed her students, and they reciprocated. An avid reader and eager learner, she inspired these by example. Each day Mary Ella served as Vice-Principal in Lowell, she cheerfully greeted the children and their parents at the entrance. Fully present to them, she delighted in listening to their greeting and to their chatter.

Wherever Mary Ella served as Principal, she was out and about to encourage and to support the staff and students. She shared their sorrows and celebrated their joys.

Mary Ella was a private person, a woman of few words. Committed to what she said, she valued honesty and had no back door. She was determined and straightforward – freely and forcefully communicating where she stood on any given issue. Mary Ella was also fun-loving and enjoyed a good joke. Her quick wit and contagious laugh spread joy. She was a ray of sunshine. In her room, there was a hat tree with a variety of hats for different occasions. They were often conversation pieces. A green hat she wore on St. Patrick’s Day celebrated her Irish heritage – a source of pride for her.

Working for Social Justice was important to Mary Ella. She reached out to those most in need throughout her ministry. She participated in the Awareness Walks to call attention to the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable and for the need to respect and to preserve our common home. The message of the Prophet Micah was not only dear to her heart, but also a guide for her life. “The Lord has told us what is good. What the Lord requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble communion with our God.” Micah 6:8

Mary Ella was a lover of beauty and of solitude. The Green Mountains of Vermont and fields of blue lupine were not only a feast for her eyes, but also for her soul. The silence of solitude gentled her being, intensified her longing and deepened her prayer. She did not complain about being wheel-chair bound, but embraced the reality of her life knowing that God dwells there-in. She radiated joy here at Marie Esther and will be missed.

Mary Ella, we little knew that on December 8th, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, that God was going to call you home. God has you in God’s keeping. We have you in our hearts. As you experience the fullness of joy in God’s presence, please intercede for us until we meet again.

Sr. Rita St. Onge