

# *Sr. Patricia Burns, O.S.M.*

*(Sr. M. Michael)*

*Born November 10, 1924*

*Entered Eternal Life*

*April 27, 2008*



Sr. Pat left us so quickly that it's still difficult to grasp the reality of her death. On Saturday afternoon, she enjoyed popcorn and pop while watching an Abbot and Costello movie with the community. After dinner on Saturday, she fell and hit her head. Before 10:00 that night, her doctors were telling us that the bleed in her brain was so extensive she might not survive the night. She died at 9:30 Sunday morning. It was a blessing for her, but one that still leaves us a bit stunned.

The last time I talked to Pat was this past Thursday. She sent word that she wanted to see me so I went up to her room. She told me that she still had money in her vacation fund, but she was sure she wasn't going to need it anymore so I should put it in the community retirement fund. I told her I thought we should wait a while; that she just might still have one good trip left in her. As things turned out, we were both right. She didn't need her travel money anymore, and she did have one good trip left.

All her life, three things were extremely important to Sr. Pat: family, friends, and being Irish.

Patricia J. Burns was born in Chicago, Illinois on November 10, 1924 to Nora O'Rourke Burns and Michael Burns. She was the youngest of seven children. One of her brothers, Thomas, and all four of her sisters, our own Sr. Mary Brigetta, Anne, Lenore and Catherine have already died. Pat always spoke of Sr. Brigetta as her role model in religious life, and she was so faithful to her during Sr. Brigetta's many years of illness. For some time now, Pat and her brother, Ed, have been the only two left in their immediate family. She loved Ed dearly, and looked forward to their regular phone conversations. She was also so proud of all her nieces and nephews, and their families. The bulletin board in her bedroom was filled with family photos. The great thing is that her love and pride in them was definitely returned. They visited Pat frequently, and, on any special occasion, we could always count on a good showing from the Burns clan. They all had a wonderful time celebrating Pat's 60<sup>th</sup> jubilee with her last September. On St. Patrick's Day, Ed and his son, Michael, flew into Omaha in the morning, took Pat to lunch, and flew back to Illinois the same day. Pat was absolutely delighted.

Wherever Sr. Pat went, she made friends. Her students, their parents, and her colleagues on the faculty loved her. She taught in both elementary and secondary schools in Massena, Detroit, Omaha, and Sioux City. She also served as assistant principal at Immaculate Conception in Sioux City, and principal at St. Juliana's in Detroit. I spoke on the phone to one of her former students from Detroit. This woman said she would always be grateful to Sr. Pat for helping her through her difficult adolescent years. She described Pat as understanding, non-judgmental, warm, loving and fun. Not a bad rep for a teacher! I think it's safe to say that, here in Omaha, Holy Name and Roncalli were the two schools dearest to her heart. For her jubilee last year, Steve Foral, one of her former Holy Name students who later taught with her at Roncalli, wrote

Pat a letter which she saved. Steve gave me permission to quote directly from his letter.

You were for me the teacher that every kid deserves... You were funny, strict when necessary, understanding and supportive. Your classroom was a good place to be... As I moved into high school, "Sr. Mary Michael" was always there to listen, to encourage, and to motivate me... Who knows the number of students for whom you are the one who made all the difference?

So many of the friends she made during her teaching years stayed in touch with her, and a phone call or a visit from one of them was the highlight of her day.

As for being Irish, well, if you were with Pat for even five minutes, you would learn that she was very proud of her Irish heritage. One time she gave me a card with an Irish proverb that read, "As you slide down the banister of life, may the splinters never go in the wrong direction." When I thanked her for the card, she said she almost gave me a different one, but thought better of it at the last minute. In the end, she gave me that one, too. It said, "Here's to you, and here's to me. I pray that friends we'll always be. But if by chance we disagree, the heck with you and here's to me!" Pat had sparkling eyes, a great smile, and a wonderful sense of humor. She claimed every one of those characteristics could be attributed to her Irish background.

Pat had spunk. There's no denying it. One of her escapades during the week after Easter is a perfect example of that. We had many jelly beans around the house, but those precious black ones were in short supply. In fact, second floor simply ran out of them, and they were Pat's favorite. She wasn't supposed to leave the floor without assistance, but, one night, she ventured downstairs to the dining room to see if our supply of jelly beans was any better than theirs. Unfortunately, she got caught because she fell and couldn't get up. A few minutes later when Sr. Zita came around to turn off the lights, there was Pat, flat on her back on the dining room floor. Now, had I been in her position (literally and figuratively), I would have made up a good story to justify my predicament. Not Pat. She simply confessed to her craving for those little licorice-flavored candies. I have a lot of respect for an 83-year-old woman with bad legs and feet who ventures down two floors in the middle of the night in search of black jelly beans! That's spunk!

#### *Sharing of memories by others*

It seems fitting that we should conclude our memories of Sr. Pat with an Irish blessing.

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face, and rains fall soft upon your fields.  
May the smile of God light you to glory,  
and may you be held, forever, in the palm of God's hand.

Ginny Silvestri, OSM  
Servants of Mary Provincial