



Sister Theodora Furniss, SC

(Sister Margaret Ellen)

Entered eternal life on July 29, 2020

As we began to share the news of the passing of Sister Theo, our Mother Seton Facebook page and our Alumnae Facebook page lit up with hundreds of loving comments! From years of living and working with Theo and evidenced in those comments, we see here a woman of many talents and interests.

Alums remembered her over her 55 years of service to our school in so many capacities – some even surprising us! Sister Theo taught Mathematics and Physics (I was one of her students) and we know how easy it is to teach math and physics, but her real ticket to heaven was teaching Behind the Wheel! Many alums commented that they were so grateful that Theo taught them how to drive – here are a few of the best comments:

- Wonderful memories of Drivers Ed. She asked me if I would mind if Father Loreti came with us for the next lesson. I said ok with me, but why Sister Theo? Her response, “The way you drive I need him to be available to give me my last rites.” From that moment on without saying a word we giggled every time we saw each other.
- I have so many great memories of Sister Theo. My kids love hearing stories of my behind the wheel hours with her and how my first time driving she had me go straight onto the Parkway! I think I screamed on the acceleration lane! I absolutely adored her! RIP, Sister Theo. May all your roads to Heaven be clear.
- Loved Sister Theo, heard she was 96! God bless her! Never forget skidding into the back of her car on 35 in Mantoloking summer after graduating (due to wet oily macadam not my fault, really)! Tina and I got out of the car and I said, “fancy running into you Sister”. She wanted to strangle me, but hugged me!

These touching stories make it easy to see what a profound and loving impact she had on our students.

Of course, alums remembered her as a great teacher and mentor, from moderating the Basketball Team and the Chess Club, to her years moderating our annual school musical. Theo worked hand in hand with Jack Duffy, our Director, building sets and preparing the girls for the show. One alum commented that Sister Theo was a great dancer who taught her how to Jitterbug!

Several alums shared that they were passengers on the bus route that she drove for several years morning and afternoon! Others recalled her popcorn machine as she sold popcorn at the plays and at Bingo. Her most recent contribution to our school was running our bookstore (AKA our candy store) during the lunches. She often knew each girl’s favorite treat. She staffed this store up until did we closed for COVID.

Our alums loved her so much that on her 95th birthday she received over 100 cards and balloons and a cake in school! Sister Theo was inducted into the Mother Seton Hall of Fame in 2014.

Our Art teacher told us that Sister Theo liked to paint. A few years ago, not using them any longer, Sister Theo gave this teacher her acrylic paints. We know that Theo liked to sing. She was in the Scola of the Sisters of Charity and always wanted to join any new choirs of sisters. This lovable math teacher could sing, dance and paint and drive!

Theo was active in many Sisters of Charity activities. She was a faithful member of her Mission Reflection Group and Charity Alive. She participated in every Assembly she was able to attend. She was very active on the Villa Committee often heading up the St. Patrick's Day party. Her main LOVE was volunteering at Maris Stella! Every year, she would pack up and leave with Abbie or later with Agnes Lucy on the day school closed and would not return until the day after Labor Day! While there, Theo would volunteer in the kitchen cooking and serving meals, riding her beloved John Deere cutting the lawns, playing Scrabble or Bocce Ball on the beach for hours by day and card games at night. She, like myself, was not fond of losing any of these games! A few years ago, she was honored together with Sister Agnes Lucy and Sister John Mary, for her many years of service to Maris Stella.

Sister Theo was an active member of the Mc Coy Club – this was a group of people who raised money for Jesuit missions. She had mission collections in our school and continued to leave a donation jar at her candy store. Theo also belonged to First Friends attending not only meetings but many rallies in Elizabeth and Newark seeking justice for immigrants.

As an alumna of St. Al's Academy, Jersey City (and member of its Basketball Team), and later as a teacher at St. Al's High School, Jersey City, Sister Theo continued to attend reunions at both schools.

Sister Theo's family was very important to her. She was so proud of her three brothers, John who was a Jesuit priest, and Frank and Benedict (known as Deb). Theo invited them to Mother Seton each year in early June for a picnic and again to Christmas Eve Mass! Her two nieces called her every day – Maryanne from New Jersey and Florence from Alabama. They were so very close to her often visiting her and sending her packages.

For many decades, in our convent, Sister Theo did the food shopping, as well as cooking and baking. Whenever children visited our house, Theo would always find some special little gifts or candy for them. The nieces and nephews the sisters who lived at Mother Seton reminded us of these treats. Her mind remaining active, she continued to do puzzles and Sudoku even in these last years.

We all know that Theo was a DOG lover. Our three Tara Setons (Irish Setters) were very special to her. She took great care of them and they listened to her! One summer when she went to Maris Stella, we recorded her whistle and played it when we wanted Tara to return to the house. It worked!!

Theo was a very prayerful woman often seen in our chapel. Her favorite prayer was the Memorare; whenever we needed special prayers, we would ask Theo for a Memorare and her prayer for our special intentions was answered. She was the most powerful Memorare pray-er I ever knew. Whenever we would go anywhere in the car, Theo would pray the Memorare even if we were only going across the yard to school – we often arrived there before she finished the prayer!

Thank you, Theo, woman of prayer and many talents and interests, for your many faithful years as a Sister of Charity. You will live on in the memories of so many. We close with the words of another alum:

“May all she leaves on this side, be comforted by cherished memories.”

Sister Jacquelyn Balasia, SC
Sister Mary Anne Katlack, SC