Sister Mary Ellen Gleason, SC  
Entered eternal life on September 3, 2020

In Sirach, Chap. 6, we read that a faithful friend is a sure shelter and one who has found one has found a rare treasure. Mary Ellen was that treasure for me for more than fifty years. I first came to know Mary Ellen when I was missioned at De Paul High School in Wayne – she was already there and was one of the math teachers. I had come to De Paul from a very small high school at the Cathedral parish in Paterson and De Paul was a formidable place with over a thousand students at that time. We quickly became friends and as they say the rest is history. Mary Ellen and I would live together again in Morris Plains in the 1980’s for three years or so.

Mary Ellen lived life fully and enjoyed it greatly. She loved going to Gloucester, to Eastern Point, the Jesuit Retreat house on the North Shore of Mass., for her annual retreat, in fact, within the last month, she told me that she wanted to sign up for a retreat this Fall. That time apart was important to her and she would return refreshed and ready for the coming months. Part of that trip also usually involved visiting some of her family – her sisters-in-law, Carol and Joan, and her nieces and nephews. She looked forward to that very much. She spent many of her holidays with her niece Molly and her family where other members of her brother Dick’s family would also gather. Then on her way from Molly’s she would plan on visiting the Gleason family in Connecticut - her sister-in-law, Joan and Joan’s children. She would come back with stories of what was happening in their lives and be bursting with pride at their accomplishments. She maintained regular contact with her sister Kathy’s daughters, Allie and Jenn, also. Family was central for her amid everything. She had 16 nieces and nephews, and 28 grandnieces and nephews and she could name them all and spoke of them with much love.

Her nieces, Denise and Kathleen were especially attentive to her when she was hospitalized this past November coming to visit her at the hospital and then at home. Denise was able to come a few times during this recent hospitalization.

I learned one thing from Mary Ellen’s life card that I was totally unaware of – she played the clarinet and had had three years of music - she kept that a secret – at least from me and I suspect others in the community!

Her obituary tells the story of her work, her time as an educator, her work as the Director of Novices for the Congregation and then her long career as an Archivist, first for the Congregation for six years, then 10 years for the American Bible Society in New York and finally at the College of Saint Elizabeth for 19 years. This was a ministry that she thoroughly loved and she did such wonderful work at each place.

At the College she was a co-Founder of the Women’s Center with Carol Rogers and Sister Kathy Flanagan. The Center hosted lectures, gave a Catholic Women’s History Award annually, and gathered interviews of significant women and produced a book on 100 Women who had been connected to the College of Saint Elizabeth.

There is a ministry that she did as a volunteer which is not listed on her life card, but it was so dear to her. She ministered for a good number of years as a hospital chaplain for the Psychiatric floor at Barnabas Hospital in Livingston. One evening each week, she would go and do a Bible study with those who wished to attend. She completed all of the work to become a certified hospital chaplain and kept her certification up for many years.
All of the above reflects her work life, but she was so much more than that. She was a proper Bostonian for sure, she could be formal in her manner, she could be, I'll say it politely, determined, and she was definitely private. She was truly a woman who loved deeply, her family, her religious Congregation, especially her Band members as we say – those who entered with her in 1954, and her many friends, a number of whom go back to her youth, with whom she had maintained contact. Every other year or so, her high school friends (from Sacred Heart, Newton Centre) would have a reunion and she would share the many stories that were told there. Her friends were many, but there are a few I would like to mention with gratitude. Sister Grace Reape had entered with Mary Ellen and they became fast friends – a friendship that endured for these 66 years. In recent years, I knew not to call on Sunday evening because there was a sacred hour that couldn't be interrupted – as she and Grace would connect by phone because neither was able to visit in person. Sisters Beverly Ornes and Patricia Codey who were so attentive to her especially in this last year; Sisters Ellen Farrell, her Councilor; Sister Helene Hicks (from our Office of Healthcare) who walked this final journey with her and gave her support throughout; and Aileen Jackowski – a woman whom Mary Ellen taught at De Paul and who has remained a life-long friend. It was Aileen who spent these last days with her as her caregiver.

As I reflected on Mary Ellen’s life, I was struck by her ability to enjoy simple things – just to go out for a ride was enough for her. She especially enjoyed going out to eat and no meal was complete for her without a dish of chocolate ice cream! Just to have someone stop in for a visit was a joy to her – especially in this last year. She was an avid sports fan especially of football and basketball. Her loyalties in football were split though between the Giants (whose summer camp was at Fairfield University when she was studying there) and the Patriots.

I will miss her frequent calls. She would say “Hi, Maur- what’s new? All is good here”.

I know ALL IS GOOD for you now, Mary Ellen.

We bless you, Mary Ellen and thank you for who you were and for all you did for so many. You are truly worthy of the name you bear – Sister of Charity. Be at peace.

Sister Maureen Shaughnessy, SC