

In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Sarita Genin, SSND



Birth
May 6, 1915

Baptism
May 16, 1915

Profession
August 10, 1934

Death
June 21, 2012

Burial
Notre Dame of
Elm Grove Cemetery
Elm Grove, Wisconsin

*Precious and blessed is
the death of the faithful
before God... for
they die in union with
their dear Jesus, in the
grace of God, in peace.*

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger
Foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame
Letter 11, September 10, 1831

Sister Mary Sarita Genin, 97, died on June 21, 2012, but she had been telling people for the last couple of years that she was 100 years old! She was born on May 6, 1915, in Evansville, Wis., to Joseph and Barbara (Ferstle) Genin. Baptized ten days later and given the name Helen Barbara, she was the third youngest in a family of seven children. Four years after little Helen's birth, the family moved to Madison, Wis., eventually settling on a farm located on the outskirts of the city.

When Helen started school, she attended the neighboring one-room public school. For third grade she transferred to Holy Redeemer School in Madison, where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She was especially influenced to enter the convent after eighth grade by Sister Justinia Junkersfeld. She completed her high school studies at the motherhouse in Milwaukee and upon reception into the novitiate August 8, 1933, she received the name Mary Sarita. She professed her first vows on August 10, 1934.

Sister Sarita began her many years of teaching at St. Mary School, Grand Rapids when she was a second-year candidate. All together she taught grades three through eight for 45 years, 16 of which she was also the principal. Her ministry of teaching spanned a spectrum of schools, from big city ethnic schools to a smaller school in the country: St. Benedict, Blue Island, Ill., 1931-32; St. Mary, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1934-35; St. Joseph, Peoria, Ill., 1935-41; St. Ambrose, Chicago, 1941-46; St. Augustine, Milwaukee, 1946-59; Holy Trinity, Milwaukee, 1959-65; St. Anthony, Milwaukee, 1965-66; St. Vincent de Paul, Oshkosh, Wis., 1966-69; St. Peter, Chippewa Falls, Wis., 1969-79.

In addition to her service as an educator, Sister Mary Sarita was one of 678 School Sisters of Notre Dame from across the United States who participated in "The Nun Study," a longitudinal study of aging and Alzheimer's disease to determine the causes and prevention of Alzheimer's disease, other brain diseases, and the mental and physical disability associated with old age. All of the participants agreed to donate their brains upon death for neuropathologic studies.

Through the years, a number of Sister's students have stayed in touch with her. At a recent visit, a couple of gentlemen remarked that when her brown eyes began to sparkle, they knew that she meant business. Although she was demanding of her students, they really appreciated what she did for them. During her years at Holy Trinity, she was challenged with meeting the special needs of the children of Hispanic families. Fifty years ago, she and the sisters took on the challenge of creating ways for the families and students to learn English and skills necessary for a successful life.

After her years in the classroom, Sister Sarita was called to work in the administrative offices of the province in the archives department (1979-1992). She was as exact in this work as she was in all of her years of

continued

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teaching. It was at this time that she became a dear friend of Sister Cecil Rickert, who also worked in the province offices. Some years after retiring, the two friends began a new teaching adventure. In partnership they took on the task of helping the sisters living at Elm Grove how to become computer literate. Every week they spent hours in the computer lab, coaching the sisters in whatever ways they wanted to use the computers.

Later, taking time to develop artistic ability, they each also began painting beautiful scenes with water color — some of which decorate the walls at Notre Dame of Elm Grove. Sisters Sarita and Cecil were both transferred to Our Lady of the Angels on September 8, 2011.

Sister Sarita will be missed for her unique, snappy, and honest self. We are grateful for all she has done to bring students to their best selves, and for giving us, her sisters, an example of self-gift in community life.

A visitation and wake service were celebrated June 26, 2012, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial at Holy Family Chapel, Notre Dame of Elm Grove. Sister Mary Sarita Genin is survived by her brother William Genin, other relatives, friends and the SSND Community.

By Sister Mary Elise Zettel, SSND