



Birth

June 5, 1917

Baptism

June 6, 1917

Profession

August 3, 1937

Death

June 28, 1917

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

In Loving Memory

Sister Mary Louise Van Straten

Sister Mary Louise Van Straten was born Charlotte Marie Van Straten on June 5, 1917, in the Town of DePere, Wisconsin, now known as Ledgeview. Her parents, Louise De Cleene and Peter John Van Straten, were also born there. She was taken to St. Mary's Church the next day to be baptized.

She wrote in her autobiography, "I experienced God's love for me, from my earliest years, through the love of mom and dad and others in the family." She had two brothers: one the oldest in the family and the other the youngest. In between were six girls Mary Louise was the youngest. She grew up on a farm, "We did work hard at times, but even those times were turned into fun by singing together or making a game out of our work. My dad also made a swimming pool for us from the creek in back of our house. So we younger ones all learned to swim. We also had many celebrations with other relatives. A special one was the Fourth of July when we kids got all the ice cream we wanted."

She attended Catholic school and was nurtured by the deep faith of her family. She wrote, "I believe I heard God's call to the religious life because of the deep faith of my parents. Living on a farm and enjoying all the beauties of nature were also a help. I can recall many a time when I had to go alone to get the cows. I would think about God and talk to Him at that time. Another factor was a prayer that Mom had hanging in the kitchen where we could not help but see it. It was a prayer to know one's vocation and I memorized it and said it every day."

She had four sisters who were also SSNDs: Hilaire, Jositha, Petronia and Mary Conrad. Sister Mary Louise made the fifth and they referred to themselves as "sister sisters." She noted that she found it difficult to talk to her parents about her call to religious life, but, they supported her. She professed first vows in 1937. She received a degree in history with a minor in English from Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, and in 1974 she earned a master's in mathematics from Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa.

Sister Mary Louise spent 40 years teaching in a classroom. She began with teaching elementary school, including 10 years at St. Michael in Milwaukee from 1937 through 1947. Later teaching roles in Wisconsin took her to Green Bay, Madison and Glen Haven, where she devoted nine years to students at St. Mary. She served as a teacher in the Diocese of La Crosse throughout the 1960s, and returned to Green Bay area schools during the 1970s. In 1978, Sister Mary Louise began four years of full-time ministry as coordinator of religious education at All Saints parish in Gladstone, Michigan. She followed with seven years' service as a full-time secretary at Sacred Heart Grade School in Appleton.

She writes of her favorite in her autobiography, "I loved all the missions where I worked, but Glen Haven, Wisconsin, was my favorite because it was in the country. The scenery was beautiful. I will never forget the day God decorated the bare trees with glistening ice and the sun shining on them.

continued

In Loving Memory



*Sister Mary Louise
Van Straten*



God also spoke to me in the greening of Spring and the many colors of the bluffs' Autumn leaves."

She retired to Notre Dame of Elm Grove in 1989. She served as sacristan for 14 years. She also joined the Justice and Peace Commission. Sister Mary Louise gained a reputation as a person who was knowledgeable about issues of peace and justice. She wrote in her Jubilee reflection, "I kept up with current issues, especially those affecting the environment and people who are poor and marginalized. Through reading, researching and attending educational programs, I shared what I learned on issues by emailing sisters and posting information on the convent bulletin board. Besides writing letters, concerns and needs are shared with God through ongoing individual and community prayer. In 2001, I helped to implement the For Whom the Bell Tolls ministry at Notre Dame of Elm Grove. This organization tracks people scheduled for execution in the U.S. Each day that there is an execution, sisters gather in prayer at 3 p.m. to remember the person being executed, the victim(s) and their families. Also, prayers are offered for an end to the death penalty as the Caroline Bell tolls."

Sister Mary Louise celebrated her 100th birthday on June 5, 2017, in a community celebration with a packed room of sisters, staff and several generations of family in attendance. She had been planning the party and what she wished to share in the weeks before the celebration. She reflected on religious life, her "sister sisters" and life on the farm. Sister Mary Louise was also a jubilarian celebrating 80 years in 2017. She wrote in her jubilee reflection, "The best part of being a religious woman is being able to live with other women who share my values and help me to grow daily into Christ-like living. Even if I could do nothing, my very being is my doing. I give praise to God just by being who I am."

Sister Mary Louise Van Straten died June 28, 2017. She is survived by nieces, nephews, dear friends and the SSND Community. Preceded in death her parents, five sisters and two brothers.

This remembrance is compiled from SSND archival information.

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**School Sisters
of Notre Dame**
Central Pacific Province

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THROUGH EDUCATION