

Sister Eileen Chamberlain

Entered eternal life on March 11, 2016



We knew her in different ways; we knew her by different names. We knew her as a beloved sister, a cherished aunt, a companion in the Company of Charity, a loyal friend, a marvelous teacher, a respected colleague. We knew her as Eileen, Aunt Eileen, Sister Eileen Chamberlain, Sister Rebecca Louise, Becky Lou and just plain Ei.

However we knew her; by whatever name we called her - Eileen was a woman of integrity. She knew who she was and she owned who she was.

Eileen always made clear what she stood for by her words and actions. She was always gracious in her dealings with everyone. Everyone was treated with the same dignity and respect. Yet, when she saw injustice she addressed it. Eileen was willing to speak the truth to power regardless of the consequences even if that power was the Archbishop of Newark.

We knew Eileen as a welcoming presence wherever she lived or worked. Sister Margaret Shorten relates that when she arrived at the door of Immaculate Conception in Montclair, Eileen greeted her with the words “Margaret, you are an answer to prayer.” She also relates how helpful Eileen was when Margaret first started teaching at Immaculate Conception in Montclair. It was quite a leap to go from teaching fourth graders to teaching adolescents in high school. Eileen was there to encourage, support and advise Margaret.

We knew her as loving and generous. Eileen devoted countless hours to the work of CROP. CROP is the acronym for a Christian organization dedicated to alleviating local and international hunger. In her quiet but ever so efficient manner Eileen collected, tallied and sent the money collected from the annual walk to the CROP headquarters. Only a few people knew that Eileen devoted herself to this task for 31 years. Even here at the Villa during her first year she organized a CROP collection. An award for her work here at the Villa can be seen in the front hall near the elevator.

We knew her as a loyal and supportive friend. One has only to remember her enduring friendship with Bernadette Debs. Bernadette worked for a governmental agency in Jersey City to address drug and alcohol addiction. Whenever and wherever she could Eileen would be at Bernadette’s side helping to present programs and activities to end addiction. Bernadette’s sudden death was a terrible cross for Eileen. But as with all the other adversities in Eileen’s life she met the challenge and moved on. She was truly a valiant woman.

Eileen came to the Sisters of Charity by way of the College of Saint Elizabeth. No one seems to remember the reason for her choice of the college but we have all been blessed by that choice. It was there she met another lifelong friend and mentor, Sister Eleanor Maria.

Eileen's life in ministry was devoted entirely to education. Most of her time was spent teaching history at Immaculate Conception in Montclair and Saint Aloysius in Jersey City (or as we referred to it - Saint Al's down the hill). For a short time at Saint Al's Eileen was the Vice Principal and an invaluable help and support to me. Whenever former students would gather or speak about Eileen she was universally praised as a marvelous teacher. History in her class was not a dull, boring recounting of dates. She taught her students to know not only facts but to understand the context and meaning of events and their consequences. Those students remember how she could hold the class' attention and lecture at length without a single note. One student put it this way – “You felt you were right there for the American Revolution and the signing of the Declaration of Independence.” Her students also recount that she was a “no nonsense” teacher but they knew she cared about them.

Eileen was the cherished sister of Jeanne and Mary Lou. Unfortunately, she lost her sister, Jeanne, when Jeanne died at an early age. Her nieces remember how Eileen and Mary Lou did their best to fill the void left by their mother's death. Eileen was present at Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, weddings and all family events. And she always sent Christmas presents.

Eileen was a seasoned traveler. Very often Bernadette Debs and Eileen would visit family in Blue Point, Long Island; Wisconsin, and Virginia. One of the last trips Eileen took was a trip to Williamsburg with her sister, Mary Lou, and her nieces Alice, Theresa, Kathy, and Lorraine. Eileen and Mary Lou had not been there since their childhood. The group toured the town and had the best time with lots of laughter and reminiscing. They ate their way through Williamsburg with Eileen enjoying her favorite –a Manhattan with dinner. While they were in a bookstore, they found a series of books called the *Williamsburg Saga*. She and Mary Lou had read the series as teenagers. They bought the books, and then traded them back and forth in the mail and had their own private book club discussing and remembering them.

And now Eileen has made her last trip home. I am reminded of the words of Saint Paul - She has fought the good fight; she has run the race; she has kept the faith; she has received the crown of righteousness from the Lord, whom she served so faithfully.

Sister Gloria O'Brien