

## **Sister Gloria O'Brien, SC**

Entered eternal life on May 2, 2024



Everyone here today knew and loved Gloria, and we are here today to celebrate her life. A life she loved dearly. Certainly, her life was not trivial. She was a great Trivial Pursuit player and a constant winner. Everyone wanted to be on her team. Today, I'd like to bring up some trivia about Gloria that some of you may not know.

Gloria was the only child of Mae and Frank O'Brien, who were raised in the Vailsburg section of Newark. Gloria attended Sacred Heart Grammar School, where we had about 100 students in every grade level, which meant there were about 33 students in each of the three classes for every grade level. Some of our fellow students are here today.

We were all recycled yearly, but I was rarely in her class. We made our Confirmation in the fifth grade in 1952.

Gloria became a prominent player on the CYO basketball team in grades six, seven, and eight, along with some of our longtime friends who are here today. All the students knew who the smart kids were, and Gloria was surely one of them. Our eighth-grade graduation was in June 1955, with 99 graduates.

We started at St. Vincent's Academy High School in September 1955. During her time there, besides being an excellent student, she was a member of the basketball varsity team, Sodality, glee club, a yearbook photographer, the debating team, and, of course, the Honor Society. Under her photo in the yearbook, there is a caption, "mathematically inclined." That was an understatement.

During an event for parents at Saint Vincent Academy in 1957, Gloria's father, Frank, met my mom, Ethel. Lo and behold, they had graduated from St. Aloysius Grammar School in the downneck section of Newark together in 1914. They had not seen each other in 43 years and somehow recognized each other. Little did they know that their two daughters would become lifelong friends.

Following our graduation in June 1959, she entered the Sisters of Charity in August. She excelled in her college courses and at graduation, became a teacher.

During her teaching career, she mentored and tutored many students, helping them to thrive in their academic careers at Marylawn and several other high schools. She was a born teacher and loved learning herself and sharing her knowledge. She was also a devoted Dodgers baseball fan.

She continued her education, and after five summer sessions at Notre Dame University in Indiana, she graduated with a Master's Degree in Math. She loved ND and her summers there learning all that calculus and trigonometry.

You probably did not know this, but she was a birding enthusiast, and while living at Marylawn Convent in South Orange, she maintained several bird feeders in the large backyard. She would send me photos of the beautiful birds she would find at her feeders.

In the late 1980s, Gloria spent a spring semester on a sabbatical in Brussels, Belgium, attending Leuven University. While there, she traveled to several European countries on her Eurail pass. John and I visited her for a few days in Brussels that spring and when we were saying goodbye, she asked me if I would take home her winter boots since she no longer needed them there and they would be very heavy in her suitcase. For the rest of our European travels, I had her large, heavy winter boots in my backpack. I felt like I was carrying her around with me!

She was very interested in Tiffany art and glass and would go to NYC as often as she could to see museums and exhibitions of the works of the Tiffany Glass Company. While living at Marylawn, she suspected that the large, beautiful stained glass window at the top of the wide staircase in Marylawn Convent was possibly made by Tiffany even though it was not signed.

When she knew Marylawn would be sold, she contacted Antiques Roadshow and a well-known owner of an antique shop on Fifth Avenue. Representatives came to Marylawn to scrutinize this window and, sure enough, it was an early work by Tiffany that was never signed, and it was made especially for the Graves Family, who were the original owners of the mansion that eventually became the convent for Marylawn High school in South Orange. A collector from California came out to see this magnificent piece of artwork, bought it and had it carefully removed from the wall casement, and shipped it to his home in CA. The community benefitted financially from the sale of this Tiffany window. I asked Gloria if the Sisters of Charity rewarded her in any way for all her research and determination, and she enthusiastically said, "They gave me a Kindle".

She truly loved her weekly summer sojourns to Long Beach Island at Maris Stella, where she would share a cottage with one of her best buddies, Sister Marie Russo, SC. She especially enjoyed sitting on the back porch there, looking out on Barnegat Bay and attending daily Mass in the Chapel by the Sea. She always brought salt water taffy and fudge home for some special friends. Gloria and Sister Marie and Sister Pat Beaumont enjoyed Sunday car rides to various parts of New Jersey and always celebrated their birthdays with an outing and lunch.

Gloria's life changed drastically in April 2017 while attending the Good Friday retreat. This very independent, determined Sister of Charity, who was still teaching at Kean University, had a stroke that left her right side very compromised. She became a dependent Sister of Charity who could no longer teach, drive, or go where she pleased.

She spent four months at rehab and worked fiercely to become as strong as she could so that she would be able to come to the Motherhouse here as a resident. She was determined to do it, and she did. She continued to improve her physical strength by joining the local Y in Madison and going twice a week via rides from Hank and others, to whom she has been very grateful these past years.

She learned to write with her left hand to continue sending birthday and Christmas cards to friends. She absolutely loved living here with her Sisters in Christ and visits from her friends in Christ. She would tell us how good the food was and how the kitchen staff made all the holiday dinners very special.

These past few months were difficult for her. Although we will miss her very much, our faith assures us that "eye has not seen, ear has not heard what God has ready for those who love Him." Gloria gave Him her life. She is no longer in distress. She has seen the face of God and can now watch over us. Thank you all for being here to help celebrate her joyous life.

Maureen Testa  
Sister Gloria's dear friend