

IN MEMORIAM



Sr. Barbara Jean Backs

BORN: July 1934

ENTERED CONGREGATION: August 30, 1951

DIED: October 31, 2021

For her 50th Jubilee, Sister Barbara Jean wrote, "Already in the fifth grade I began thinking about sister-teacher. In my mind they couldn't be separated, which was rather surprising since I went to a public school and never had sisters for teachers." BJ, as she is referred to by her Sisters in our congregation, loved teaching and spent many years teaching primary age children. Not only children, however, but she also taught adults, anything from teaching them to read to hiking and backpacking skills.

In July 1934, Sister Barbara Jean was born at home on the family farm in Montezuma, Ohio to Joseph and Agnes Backs, the 11th of 13 children. She was named Agnes Ann Backs. Though she was named after her mother, while growing up her family called her Ann. Barbara Jean wrote that growing up on the farm was a delight where she learned to love animals, plants, flowers, and in general the outdoors. She said that it was great to grow up in such a big family. Over the course of her life, she had a great love for her family and always looked forward to her family gatherings.

While BJ began thinking of being a sister-teacher in the fifth grade, she embarked on that process by leaving home after the eighth grade to attend the preparatory high school of the Sisters of the Precious Blood in Dayton, Ohio, Fatima Hall. When she was twenty years old, she professed temporary vows and received her first teaching assignment. In 1957, she became a finally professed Sister of the Precious Blood.

Sister Barbara Jean loved teaching. She spent many years teaching primary school, in North College Hill, Ottawa, Dayton, Fort Wayne Indiana, St. Joseph

Missouri and in Heartland Wisconsin. She returned to Ohio when the school in Wisconsin was closed and she began a longer stay in her teaching ministry in Ottoville Ohio.

While in Ottoville, Sister BJ would make a deep and lasting influence on her students and on the families of Ottoville. She began a program for those with learning disabilities and a separate reading program for grades seven through twelve. In her summers she spent time at Central Michigan University learning how to become a reading specialist known as a Reading Clinician.

News of Sister BJ's passing along with her picture was shared just days ago from our Sisters of the Precious Blood social media pages on an Ottoville social media site intended for people who grew up in Ottoville. There are countless number of comments, growing by the day, from her former students and fellow teachers and parishioners remembering what a great and beloved teacher she was.

Other training and education Sister Barbara Jean received for her ministry of teaching was a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education from the University of Dayton and a Masters Degree at Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee with a specialization in reading.

Not only with children but also with adults, BJ would put her specialty in reading to use. She would help adults here in Dayton at the Brunner Literacy Center learn how to read. It was shared that one particular adult who came to the Center and who seemed beyond hope from his life circumstances, learned to read through BJ's gift of reaching disabled learners. As a result of his time with BJ, he gained confidence, improved his personal appearance, became employed and returned

to bring Barbara Jean her most favorite thing, a box of candy.

Not only did Sister BJ teach reading, she taught hiking and backpacking survival skills. She literally taught best practices on how to store and hang belongings and supplies so as to keep the bears away. These were serious hikes and backpacking expeditions in Michigan, Glacier National Park in Montana, the mountains in Colorado and California. Some of our Sisters have fond memories of BJ teaching them these survivor skills on their extended hikes.

In addition to her gift of teaching others, Barbara Jean had the gift of beautifying her surroundings with various types of artistic endeavors. Whether it was designing the weekly bulletin board at Salem Heights, doing crochet, coloring or carving wood, BJ would bring the gift of her artistic ability to others for their own enjoyment. She also did this with food. One of her latest and more memorable creations was a fudge Christmas tree, a recipe and visual she created in her mind and brought forth into reality for all to enjoy.

All this is to say that Sister Barbara Jean lived in a spirit of generosity of giving for others. She had an adventurous spirit and would sometimes succeed through sheer determination in overcoming limitation, especially physical limitation. When she could no longer do that, her one last act of generous service was to donate her body to science for the edification of all.

Bless you on your way, BJ, as you continue your generous service in eternal life with God. May you continue to enjoy teaching others to read, hike, and backpack their way through heaven. Amen.

— Sister Marla Gipson