# SISTER ELLEN WILLIAM JOSLYN
## 1915-1980

*She was born into a south side Chicago Irish Catholic family, Columbanus-bred and raised by a dear father, a loving aunt, and four big, devoted brothers.*

In this concise statement, Sister Marie Urban Schwartz gave the life story of Sister Ellen William Joslyn, as she would want it. Most likely, she would say, "Now, that's enough about me!"

Her parents, Ellen Harrington and William Joslyn, were Chicago-born of Irish parentage. She, the last of their five children and the only girl, was born on January 17, 1915, and named Dorothy at her baptism in St. Columbanus Church. She was in the sixth grade at St. Columbanus School when her mother died, leaving her with four older brothers and a sorrowing father. Relatives offered to bring her up in their home, but she could not bear separation from her five men. Nor did they want to give her up. Happily, Aunt Mayme Joslyn agreed to live with them. Though she gave up a lot when she took her chance with that lively brood, it was more than returned as she watched them grow into an affectionate, cohesive family, and heard people say, "Aunt Mayme is the queen in that household."

After her graduation from eighth grade at St. Columbanus, Dorothy was sent to Mercy High School. Her ties, however, had been knotted early with the Adrian Dominican Sisters, and she could hardly wait to be one with them. According to her nephew, Father Jim Joslyn, she went to Sister Leonita Noetzel, then the principal at St. Columbanus, for counsel when she was in the junior class. Sister advised her to wait until after her graduation. Her father, however, would not allow her to go even at that time. Consequently, she took a business course and went to work for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

She worked there six years before her father would give her up. Father Jim spoke, in the homily, of his Aunt Dorothy's patience, calling it an active, not a passive, patience. During the time she waited for her father's blessing, she kept busy in parish and other activities. Her home was open, where friends could freely come. Her father, Aunt Mayme, and her brothers cherished her.

Nonetheless, she was determined to go to Adrian; and, after she passed her 25th birthday, her father gave his consent. Sister Leonita helped her to prepare for entrance on August 24, 1940.

One of her contemporaries recalled:

*She was so lonesome that bets were on that she wouldn't stay. Every time she spoke, we heard "Aunt Mayme, my father, William, Harold, Wallie, and Neil."*

Barry College, Miami, Florida, opened its doors that September, and she was one of the six postulants sent there to study for a year. In the summer, she returned to Adrian, and prepared for her reception on August 12, 1941, in which she received the name Ellen William for her parents. At the close of her canonical year, she pronounced her vows (August 19, 1942), and took her first teaching assignment at St. Ambrose in Detroit.

In that era, 24 sisters lived in two small houses connected by a breezeway, a tidy setup for pranks. The reminiscing of sisters from that convent is hilarious. Though not an initiator of the fun, Sister Ellen William was a sturdy supporter of it–always remembered for her irrepressible, but quiet, laughter. During that time, the Joslyns became friends of all the sisters, for they visited often.

When she was in her sixth year at St. Ambrose, she was uprooted in January of the new year and sent to Presentation, a new school just opening on the west side of Detroit. Her sadness at leaving St. Ambrose was challenged by the pioneering and the excitement of a new scene. Her enthusiastic letters from there extol the supervisors, Sisters Rose Norine Gauthier and Leonita Noetzel, for their marvelous assistance.

In May of her first semester, "just when she was falling in love with the place," she received a surprise: an appointment overseas to Colegio San Antonio, Guayama, Puerto Rico. There she taught fifth grade during the year, and studied at the University of Santo Domingo during the summer.

In the month of May, in her fourth year there, Aunt Mayme made known her father's critical illness, so she was sent to Chicago to spend the summer near him. Her new assignment for the school year brought her to St. Gabriel in Detroit, and she remained there after her father's death in December. At the end of five years, she received another surprise: the appointment to St. Clement in Romeo, Michigan, as principal-superioress. Others would not be surprised. Her reputation as an even-tempered, sensitive, and competent woman was widely known by that time.

Her hospitality was radiant. Many of us who were missioned in Detroit and surrounding places delighted in her autumn invitation to come for the abundance of fruits and vegetables that the people of Romeo were bringing to the sisters from their orchards and farms–and we waited for the spring invitation to come for a picnic.

But, more, there was a deep compassion in her, an instance of which was brought to light when Sister Shirley Boettcher felt bound to reveal an incident from her own history in what was a blunt prayer of thanksgiving to God for Sister Ellen William who, through understanding, feeling, and kind listening had saved her from rashly leaving the Congregation.

When her term ended at St. Clement, she was assigned to Ascension, Harvey, Illinois. One special blessing here was her free time with Aunt Mayme, and the being with her in her last illness and death.

At the end of three years at Ascension, she was appointed principal-superioress at Our Lady of Loretto in Hometown, Illinois. This was the period during which superiors were vanishing, but she stayed on ten years as principal, and then went to Queen of Apostles in Riverdale, Illinois. In the course of the years, three of her brothers died, and only Neil was left to her. The Joslyn clasp tightened the more.

While teaching at Queen of Apostles, she suffered a severe heart attack, but her desire to keep going longer gave her enough recuperative power to visit the sick and the elderly in the parish.

More than four months ago, she was stricken again. During this long suffering in the hospital, she went down to death many times while still alive. This was a time of active patience–mentioned by Father Jim. She wanted to live and to do, but she was allowed no more than to be.

During most of this time, she had no voice; her eyes communicated for her. But she had always spoken with her eyes. As Sister Marie Urban said:

> *They softened, widened, sparkled, tantalized, and ordered according to the occasion and her feelings.*

Many have expressed admiration for Sister Ellen William, but this excerpt from a letter written by Sister Ruth Ann Stiglitz, one of her beloved "crowd," to the other members of her profession "crowd" seems to sum up what she was to so many people.

> *I was thinking about Sister Ellen and praying for her and to her. While I was praying for the hostages at Mass last Friday, and for my own work, I felt very comfortable asking Ellen to intercede for all of us. I began to think about who Ellen was. She has to be the most beautiful person I have ever known: never one to speak without charity, and always a good listener. If she had a temper, she never showed it, she was always a lady. Kindness and goodness personified, she was everyone's friend. . . . We are so fortunate to have a saint in our "crowd." We were blessed by her presence, and we are now being blessed by her absence, our intercessor.*

Regardless of the esteem she had from all sides, Sister Ellen William had to come to death herself. She, conscious during long suffering, must have been drawing from her deeper life, most likely ascending at times to Mount Thabor and descending back to earth–with a thump. She would tell us, perhaps, that she was catching a glimpse of the Mystery and going through her own purification in making herself ready for the fullness of life that was hers on October 29, 1980.

