

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER BRYCELYN EYLER February 19, 1943—May 23, 2021



Sister Brycelyn, born February 19, 1946, was the last child in her family. She had a brother Tom and two sisters, Sara and Anna Marie, who was named after her mother. Tom's wife, Carolyn, is here today with her two sons, Tom and Kevin. Brycelyn has another nephew, Sara's son Charlie.

Brycelyn was very close to her father, Clarence Bryce, and was named for him. Her baptismal name is actually Clarice Brycelyn. Brycelyn confided that she learned how to pray from her father, asking him what he said to God after communion. He told her just to tell God about her day and what she was thinking and feeling, to just talk to God.

Early on, Brycelyn showed an understanding of people and the place of rules. Her mother fudged her birth certificate so that Brycelyn started school a full year early and her mother could return to work. Her mother actually worked for my father at Joseph Horne's. Sometimes Brycelyn would suggest that she take the next day off from school to help at home. Her mother readily agreed, and Brycelyn would return to school with a duly signed absence note.

Someone noted last night that in the novitiate Brycelyn often returned to bed after breakfast, which was unimaginable. But at the end of her canonical year Brycelyn was hospitalized for nearly a month. If she had missed one more day, she would have had to repeat her canonical year, something similar to repeating boot camp. When asked why she hadn't said anything about how she felt, Brycelyn said that everyone complained about being tired, and she thought they all felt the same way she did. Perhaps for the same reason, Brycelyn had a different attitude

toward our required prayers. She thought the prayers and practices learned in the novitiate were goals to be attained—as possible!

Brycelyn earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Seton Hill University, a master's degree in education as a reading specialist from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and certification in administration from Loyola College, Maryland, and from Pennsylvania. Even as a young child, Brycelyn wanted to be a teacher. Her dream was realized as she spent years teaching in schools in the dioceses of Pittsburgh and Greensburg, and the Archdiocese of Baltimore. She was an elementary school principal at Sacred Heart, Glyndon, Maryland; Conn-Area Catholic; Aquinas Academy, Greensburg; and St. Therese, Munhall.

As teacher and principal, Brycelyn was able to identify a person's strong points and both recognize and encourage them. She supported many new teachers and fellow administrators, and her advice was valued. She also understood weaknesses and was a fair disciplinarian, enabling her to run a good school with a culture of love.

When Conn Area Catholic needed a new principal, the pastor specifically requested Sister Brycelyn. He knew her by reputation and was concerned about the school. But he was surprised that the results of the standardized tests, taken that first October, already showed improvement. Brycelyn found out that the students were not taking the tests seriously and blended sternness with the promise of extra lunch recess if scores improved. They did—immediately!

One of Brycelyn's most memorable experiences was her trip to Poland in 2005 with 120 Catholic educators, joining a group of 18,000 from all over the world in the *March of the Living*, to actually visit the death camps, especially in Krakow and Warsaw, to remember the millions of Jews who were killed at the time of World War II. Brycelyn brought the fruits of this experience into the classrooms with the hope that the students would be further inspired to show love and respect to their neighbors.

Brycelyn described the rewards of her education ministry by saying that her work was life-giving and instrumental in bringing her closer to God

though students, faculty, staff, parents, and all who influenced and inspired her every day.

Brycelyn served two terms as Provincial Councilor for the United States Province. She was responsible for ministry and, appropriately, for social justice.

Brycelyn loved gadgets and was happy to show you the latest acquisition, usually from Ollies, Big Lots, or the Dollar Store. I remember she bought a battery-powered fan that hung from a cord around her neck and provided a welcome breeze on hot days. She also bought this bag, which, according to her, has a million uses. She also gave me this star. Brycelyn loved Christmas.

Brycelyn was fond of the maxim—action begets motivation—and found that if you can make yourself do an unwanted task for ten minutes, you often surprise yourself by being still at it in an hour. But no matter how busy life got, Brycelyn tried to take time to enjoy life. She often quoted a 13th Century Persian poet, who advised, “If you have two loaves of bread, sell one to buy hyacinths to feed thy soul.”

On another occasion, Brycelyn shared this wisdom from a workshop she attended—how do you know when your expectations of your friends are too high? The answer—when they don’t meet them! As a friend of Brycelyn, I appreciated that answer. Our friendship continued despite long periods when we didn’t see or hear from each other. When we got back together, everything was the same. I think that quiet acceptance was true for Brycelyn’s other friends as well. We feel loved.

Mother Seton asks, “Who can bind a soul that God sets free?” After too many years confined to her chair, Brycelyn now enjoys the true freedom of the sons and daughters of God—and is enjoying more than hyacinths.

Funeral Liturgy Reflection

Sister Patricia Laffey

May 26, 2021