



Sister Seraphine Herbst

Sister Seraphine Herbst cherished life's little surprises. When she retired from Holy Childhood in 2009 after 50 years, news of her retirement spread quickly. "I got a letter from one of our boys who graduated, wishing me well on my retirement," recalled Sister. "It was written on a sheet of paper ripped out of a notebook. He wrote 'good luck on your retirement. What are your plans?' It meant so much to me, that little note, and something I never would have expected from him. It was a nice surprise."

The note was not a surprise to Dan Meyers. Meyers, former President of the Rochester AI Sigl Center is also a former student. Sister Seraphine was his kindergarten teacher at Sacred Heart Cathedral School in Rochester over 55 years ago. "Very lucky people remember the way their teacher made them feel about themselves and the important things in life," said Meyers. "I remember as if it were yesterday," he recounted. "She had 50 plus special little ones each morning and made me feel like I was the only one."

Believing in children and focusing on their strengths were hallmarks of Seraphine's personality. She taught at St. Mary's School in Elmira, Sacred Heart and St. Monica's in Rochester before going to Holy Childhood as a teacher in 1959. "My heart was filled with anxiety when I was transferred to Holy Childhood," recalled Sister Seraphine. "I felt my life would never be the same." And it wasn't. Her impact and vision moved the school forward tremendously. School of the Holy Childhood was started in 1946 by Sister St. Mark McMahan, a teacher and Sister of Saint Joseph. Sister St. Mark realized some children didn't do well in the traditional classroom, but excelled in other areas such as crafts. Wanting to give these children the best foundation for a happy and productive life, she came up with the idea of a school that would focus on the vocational as well as the academic.

When Sister Seraphine came on board, Holy Childhood was just a small school in the city of Rochester. Under her guidance and leadership the school grew into a multi-faceted agency, now located in a former elementary school building in the Rush Henrietta school district. Sister Seraphine was named Executive Director in 1962 and held that position until she retired in 2009. She is credited with implementing the Jimmy W. Wilmot Adult Day Training program which includes the Special Touch Bakery and the Woodworking shop. Sister Seraphine also started the school's Helen H. Heller Health Clinic which cares for the physical and psychological needs of the students and the physical education and recreational programs for children and adults, including a pool.

Sister Seraphine credited much of Holy Childhood's success to a strong staff. "They are very creative and ready to do any job that is going to help a child," said Sister Seraphine. Her board members were also loyal and dedicated. Tom and Barbara Clark met Sister Seraphine over 30 years ago. Their daughter Amy has Down Syndrome and attended Holy Childhood. Tom Clark was also a Holy Childhood board member. Clark pointed out Sister Seraphine's ability to create important relationships in the community. "Sister Seraphine strongly supported community exposure and participation in Special Olympics. Our daughter Amy clearly thrived in this environment, enabling her

to read, write and comprehend at an acceptable level and participate competitively in several athletic venues.”

Holy Childhood currently serves children ages 5-21 and adults from 39 area school districts. Many of the students move from the children’s program to the adult program and are with the agency for 30 to 40 years, a fact that always made Sister Seraphine proud. “When our children come I don’t know what to tell the parents to expect because it is always a surprise,” recalled Sister Seraphine. “We didn’t think that once they entered the adult program they would continue learning academics, but they have and they have matured beyond what we thought was possible. They are always surprising us!”

Throughout her years at Holy Childhood, Sister Seraphine always found strength in the support of others. She often remarked, “I have lived with so many wonderful women in community, especially those at Holy Childhood. Working, living and praying together has been a great gift to me during these years.”

As the community bids farewell to Sister Seraphine, we say, “We love you,” and hear her familiar refrain, “I love you more.”