



**Sister Monica of Jesus and the Mother of God
(Bernice Eileen Schrott)
1932 - 2005**

Along the border of Stoystown, PA in a small mining town of Somerset County, Bernice Eileen Schrott was welcomed into this world on July 30, 1932, by her mother, Catherine, her father, Francis and two siblings, Francis Karl (Sonny) and Catherine LaVerne.

A quiet person, devoted to his wife and family, her father was a payroll clerk in the mining office on the far side of town, while her mother was fully occupied as a faithful wife, a caring mother, a good cook and tidy housekeeper.

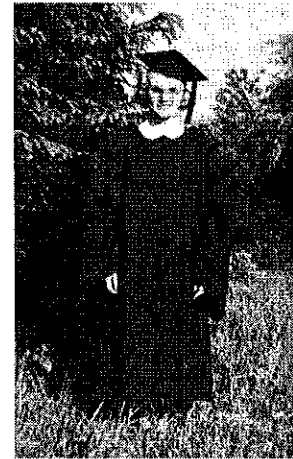
In a delightful autobiographical sketch of her childhood years, Bernice describes many happy memories of simple country living in the 1930's. Summers held unforgettable delights of swimming and fishing with other children and snowy winters were filled with days of sled riding down nearby hills and frequent visits with their grandparents.

Due to the distance from their parish school and church of St. Peter's, she and her sister LaVerne attended Sunday school to prepare for their First Communion, which they received together. Inseparable as they were, this delighted them both. Being a poor parish, there were no floral arrangements on the altar for this special occasion, so the girls proudly decked themselves out with huckleberry blossoms on top of their white veils.

After Bernice's third grade in the Kantner public school, the family moved to Johnstown, PA where the children continued their grammar school education at St. Joseph Parochial School and were taught by the Franciscan Sisters.

While in the sixth grade, Bernice suffered from pyelitis and was unable to finish the school year, while her mother provided excellent home care to prevent her from a very lengthy stay in the hospital. Although Bernice was healed, during a local epidemic the following year, she fell prey to a severe case of scarlet fever. Once this passed, she enjoyed better health for the rest of her school years, although her very timid nature remained a source of personal suffering. Despite these health setbacks and her timidity, Bernice received the American Legion Highest Average Award at her eighth grade graduation, just as LaVerne had done the year before.

An excellent student at Johnstown Public High School, Bernice was chosen as a member in the National Honor Society and also tied for first place in a class of 650 graduates. Following graduation, she worked as a stenographer in a legal office for three years.



It was during this period that Bernice gradually realized that God was calling her to Carmel. After praying for a long time that God would enlighten her to know what He wanted her to do, one day she obtained a vocation booklet in the back of St. Joseph's Church. With no intention of seeking a place for herself, she took it home to read. While perusing the contents, she thought, "If I were to enter religious life, what Order or Congregation would I choose?" Soon she came to the page entitled Contemplatives and in the list saw Carmelites. "Yes, she thought, "if I were to be a religious I would be a Carmelite." Then suddenly it wasn't "if" but "I will become a Carmelite!"

Upon informing her parents of her desires, she was told to wait until her brother returned from active service in the Korean War. Shortly after his safe return, nothing more stood in her way, so she soon wrote to the Prioress in Loretto Carmel seeking entrance.

On March 21, 1953, Bernice entered as a future extern sister hoping to be accepted later as a choir nun since there were no openings at that time. As her time for First Profession neared she knew that there was an opening and expressed her desires to become a choir nun, having doubts about remaining an extern. As a result, it was decided that she should leave. Although this was painful for her, she left, only to seek readmission on December 8, 1956 with a real decision to remain as an extern sister. Finally, the day of First

Profession arrived on March 20, 1959. Sr. Monica of Jesus and the Mother of God however, was chosen in 1961 by Mother Marie Bernadette to be one of the founding sisters in Latrobe, PA. So it was in 1965 that her religious consecration became final. It was here in Latrobe, that Sister Monica very faithfully continued to answer the door and phone and care for the small gift shop for the remaining 44 years of her life.



After the inspiring Sacred Triduum of Holy Week and a glorious celebration of Easter and the two free days following, we expected to return to our normal schedule on Wednesday morning, March 30. However, God had other plans! As Sr. Monica was washing up for Morning Prayer, she suddenly collapsed on the floor. Finding her there, two sisters helped her get to her room and put her to bed. Shortly after, it was decided she needed to be taken by wheelchair to our van and on to Emergency at our local hospital. Fortunately, it was not busy at the time and Sister was quickly ushered into a vacant cubicle. Nurses and doctors came in a steady flow with questions and took her for blood work, x-rays and several other tests all morning. Later in the day it was determined that she needed to be admitted.

The next eighteen days were filled with daily news of test results and plans for more, finding several areas of concern. However, cancer became the real problem and plans were being made for surgery in Pittsburgh followed by chemotherapy treatments in Latrobe. Soon that idea had to be abandoned. One final test was conclusive. Sr. Monica's abdominal fluid was filled with ovarian cancer, a silent killer for so many women.

On Thursday, April 14, the doctor called to inform us that her time was short, one or two days at the most. All during these trying days, the sisters had been visiting her and making their farewells, but now it was imminent. Shortly after dinner the entire Community arrived at the hospital to spend the rest of the day visiting and praying with her. Sr. Monica had remained so peaceful and grateful for every kindness during all those days of testing with the accompanying physical discomfort, the poor results, the changing of rooms to various floors, and now that she knew her death was near, she edified everyone by her serene acceptance of that as well. Having a special devotion to Mary, Sr. Monica had kept a small wooden rosary constantly twined around her left hand, although she'd been too weak to pray it.

As the day faded into evening, Sister was still quite alert though needing oxygen for each breath. Some Benedictine priest friends stopped by to bless her. She had received the Anointing of the Sick a few days earlier. Each day we made sure she received Holy

Communion and one morning one of the Benedictines delighted her by offering Mass in her room. Sr. Monica had told us, some days before, the priests she had chosen as celebrant and homilist for her funeral and she also invited each priest who visited her to concelebrate at her funeral. Then she chose the hymns we would sing but gave us the choice of the readings.

Until late Friday afternoon, Sr. Monica remained alert but very weak, then gradually slipped into a coma, as predicted. Several nurses expressed surprise that she still held on to life all day Saturday. At least one Sister kept vigil each night until early Sunday morning when she peacefully breathed her last. It was Good Shepherd Sunday, and upon hearing the news, one of the nuns remarked; "Jesus came to take His little lamb home!" It was also World Day of Prayer for Vocations, so we entrusted our need for new vocations to our newest friend in heaven, Sister Monica.

The viewing in our chapel took place on Tuesday, April 19, and the Funeral Mass was celebrated on Wednesday, April 20. So many, many people came to pay their last respects to this dear, quiet friend, recounting their stories of how Sr. Monica had helped them and prayed with them throughout the years. The day of the funeral was beautiful and most of the people remained after the burial for the luncheon and continued recounting their many fond memories.

All of this was such a fitting tribute to one who was so faithful to God for so many years. Although Sr. Monica was only 72, she lived a very full life of prayer and sacrifice. She will surely continue to intercede for all of us still on our life's journey, until we all meet again in our heavenly homeland!