

Barbara Cooper, RSCJ
November 19, 1922 – September 5, 2009

Sr. Barbara Cooper was born in New York, NY, on November 19, 1922, the only child of Julian Nelson Cooper and Mary Kathryn Cooper (née Elder). From her earliest years, her personality was full of strength and determination. This strength was surely a family trait. Barbara grew up in New York City where she attended the Convent of the Sacred Heart, 91st Street for twelve years. After graduation in 1940, she was enrolled at Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart from which she graduated in 1944 with a B. Mus. Degree, having majored in Music and minored in Psychology.

In September of that year, Barbara entered the Society of the Sacred Heart at Kenwood Convent in Albany, New York. Rev. Mother Gertrude Bodkin was the Mistress of Novices at that time. During Barbara's time in the novitiate, Rev. Mother Agnes Barry replaced Rev. M. Bodkin as Mistress of Novices. In later years a friend asked Barbara how it was that she entered the Society. Barbara replied, "Because I knew that it was a call from God! Isn't that what happened to you?" In February, 1953, Sr. Cooper journeyed to the Mother House in Rome for her Probation under the direction of Rev. Mother Zurstrassen for whom Barbara held a life-long affection. Rev. Mother Zurstrassen's wisdom and compassion remained strong influences on Barbara throughout her life. On July 31, 1953, Barbara pronounced her Final Vows in the Mother House chapel.

Sr. Cooper's years of ministry in Sacred Heart Schools began in 1947 at Grosse Point in Michigan. In subsequent years until 1960, she taught Elementary Classes in French, Music, Religion and Math in Sacred Heart Schools in New York City and returned for a year to Grosse Pointe to teach Middle and High School classes. During these years, she also studied for an M. A. degree in English and History which she completed in 1958. Later, her love of learning and her interest in research led her to pursue a degree in Library Science at Columbia University which she received in 1963. Between 1960 and 1973, Sr. Cooper served as Cataloguer and Librarian as well as Latin teacher at Manhattanville College and then as Reference Librarian at Newton College of the Sacred Heart in Newton, Massachusetts.

In 1973, Sr. Cooper went to England to teach for a year at the Sacred Heart School in Woldingham, Surrey. Upon her return, she became Librarian and teacher at Stuart Country Day School in Princeton, NJ. She returned to Woldingham for two more years in 1981. On leaving England, Sr. Cooper ventured to Sweden where she studied at a Swedish language school. She wrote that there she "made many wonderful friends, especially among the Iranians and Pakistani." Her love of history and architecture enticed her adventurous spirit to travel abroad: England, France, Sweden, the Holy Land and anywhere she was invited, especially accompanying students. Returning to the U.S., she received a one year grant as a researcher of the Jesuit Maryland Province Archives.

Sr. Cooper spent the years from 1986 – 1993 in parish ministry in Washington, DC and Maryland. Her work in parish ministry heightened her knowledge and experience

of the critical needs of those who were powerless to change their circumstances. That, combined with her daily prayer and meditation, impelled her to become personally involved in Social Justice issues. Consequently, in 1993, Barbara began her work in Prison Ministry as a literacy educator at the Somerset County Jail in New Jersey. She spent thirteen years there bringing to this service all her energy and her educator's gifts of mind, heart and spirit. In 2006, Barbara reluctantly moved to Kenwood. Long walks on the Kenwood grounds were a source of enjoyment for her and on those walks, she would be sure to stop by the cemetery to visit the grave of her Aunt, Mother Frances Elder.

After a year at Kenwood, Barbara joined her RSCJ sisters in the community at Teresian House. Her dementia increased, but Barbara remained fully engaged and fully alive to the present moment until the end of her life.

Sr. Cooper was fluent in French and knowledgeable in Latin, Spanish and Swedish. She had great interest in her family's genealogy which she researched extensively. The DAR counted her among its members. The breadth and depth of Sr. Cooper's intellectual acumen, her thirst for knowledge, her passion for research, her varied cultural interests, her capacity for love and compassion and her deep faith and spirituality were hallmarks of this "Renaissance Woman."