

Kathleen Cox RSCJ
April 30, 1930 – February 12, 2012

Kathleen Cox was born on April 30, 1930, the first child of Rose Harding and Joseph Cox. Her father was a seaman who met his future wife on a stop in London. Before bringing her to the United States as his bride, he had to pass muster with her family—she was the youngest of twelve! Married in England, they moved to New York City, where Kathleen and her sister Joyce were born. In fact, they lived just two blocks from the old Manhattanville campus on Convent Avenue. Both were educated by the RSCJ who staffed Annunciation School for girls, and Kathleen went on to Father Young High School, which prepared students for the Pius X School of Liturgical Music at Manhattanville. She used to say that she “couldn’t carry a note in a bag,” but she made herself useful at Father Young School by carrying *Libers* (liturgical chant books) and doing other non-musical jobs. She had vivid memories of her childhood in this small, close family, and wonderful stories of the remarkable RSCJ who taught in these schools. Although she knew her vocation by the time she finished high school, she worked for eleven years at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company before entering.

Kathleen was received into the Society by Reverend Mother Agnes Barry in 1959; Mavie Coakley was her mistress of novices at Kenwood. She made her first vows in 1962 and spent a year in the “black juniorate.” In 1963 she left for Newton Country Day School, where she taught the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades and became head of the lower school. While living in Newton she also began studying for her B.A., which she received from Newton College in 1971.

Kathleen was professed in Rome in 1967. On her return to the U.S. she went to Stone Ridge in Washington, D.C., again teaching in the Lower School. In 1971 she moved to Stuart Country Day School in Princeton, where she spent nine years as a lower school teacher and, from 1976-80, as head of the lower school.

In 1980 a wonderful opportunity opened up to spend two years in England at Woldingham, working in the boarding school. How she loved those years! Not only did she grow close to the English RSCJ, she also met her many English relatives. On her return home she kept up a close correspondence with these new friends. If this sounds like a familiar refrain, that is the truth — she was a wonderful, faithful letter-writer throughout her life, right up to day before her death.

Kathleen had a special love for young children, and was a gifted teacher in many settings — years in Network schools interspersed with years in inner-city schools in Washington and New York. She was attuned to the learning differences among young children; parents sought her guidance and set great value on what she accomplished with their children. She took advantage of opportunities like NAIS workshops to continue her own formation as an educator. As an English friend wrote, “She knew how to engage and hold children on a firm but supple rein, and her humour and warmth endeared her both to them and their parents.”

In 1997 Kathleen moved to New York City, to the 51st Street community in “Hell’s Kitchen” on Manhattan’s West Side. She joined the staff of St. Aloysius School, an innovative and exciting Catholic school in Harlem, as an assistant in the library. The pillars of

the 51st Street community were Sisters Eileen McDonnell and Ana Ospina, who were pastoral ministers at Sacred Heart Parish, traditionally Irish but now home to a burgeoning Hispanic congregation. Kathleen was also deeply interested in everything that touched the life of the parish. When Eileen and Ana had to move to Kenwood because of their health, their landlord lost no time evicting the rest of the community. Kathleen was invited to join the 49th Street community in 2001. Eviction was a common story in those years as gentrification took hold of this once-undesirable neighborhood. It was no surprise, then, when the 49th Street community met a similar fate. The miracle was that an affordable apartment opened up just three blocks away. In 2003 the community of four (Kathleen, Mavie Coakley, Joan Kirby and Judy Garson) moved into a light, bright, newly renovated, handicapped accessible apartment on 52nd Street. This was to be her last home. Following Mavie's accident in 2006, Kathleen spent days, weeks and months caring for her beloved mistress of novices, arranging her school schedule so that she could be at home when needed.

All Kathleen's gifts came together in these years: as a friend, as an educator, as a caregiver for the sick. She kept in touch with students who were now mothers and grandmothers, even as she befriended new colleagues at St. Aloysius. "I'm only a sub-scrub in the library," she would say, but somehow everyone, from preschoolers to teachers to Jesuit Volunteers seemed to know and love her!

Kathleen's death was sudden and unexpected: a massive heart attack at home on the morning of Sunday, February 12th. She had not felt well the day before, and "took the morning off" to rest; when she emerged at noon, however, she had a pile of letters stamped and ready to mail. News of her death spread quickly, and heartfelt messages began to pour in. Her wake the following Thursday was crowded. Her family brought beautiful pictures; friends and colleagues came — not just from New York, but from Princeton and Boston. Her funeral on Friday filled Sacred Heart Church — family, RSCJ, neighbors, and so many teachers from St. Aloysius that they had to close school! The celebrant was George Anderson, SJ, a friend from Washington days who has lived many years in New York. A teacher's husband who is an opera singer sang; someone remarked that this was probably the only funeral that had "When the Saints Go Marching In" as the recessional! Later that day we accompanied her body to the Kenwood cemetery, where she joined the company of so many who were dear to her heart.

The tributes that poured in — the numbers who came to her wake and her funeral — the messages that continued to come in the weeks following her death — all would have astonished her! Many appeared on the RSCJ website, highlighting her gifts as an educator, her warmth and love, and her faithful friendship over the years. Sr. Margaret Dennehy, with whom she worked at St. Aloysius, simply posted this poem by Langston Hughes:

I loved my friend.
She went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began--
I loved my friend.