



Mary Lou Jesionowski, 1929-2014

Made Extraordinary Sacrifices to Give Her Children Opportunities ...

As a mother, Mary Lou Jesionowski made extraordinary sacrifices to give her children life, love and inspiration. She passed away on January 21st at 12:30 a.m. at the Woodcrest Nursing Home in Decatur, Indiana.

Mary Lou was born on February 1, 1929, to Anthony and Emma Hillen in Cincinnati, the fourth of six children. She was an exceptional student who did well from an early age. Each year the Sisters of Mercy, who taught at her elementary school, awarded a full academic scholarship to Mother of Mercy Academy to an eighth-grade girl based upon the best score on a standardized test. Mother of Mercy was a prestigious Catholic Girls Academy. Mary Lou studied diligently and offered many prayers to God that she would do well on the test. She did very well but finished second to another student. A few months later in 1943 the name of the high school was changed from Mother of Mercy Academy to Mother of Mercy High School. The parents of the student who had received the scholarship did not like the new name and declined the scholarship. The prestigious scholarship then went to Mary Lou. The four-year scholarship was worth \$42,000 in today's dollars. Mary Lou loved to share that story with her children and highlighted its many life lessons about the power of faith in God, prayer, and academic preparation.

Mother of Mercy High School was located on the other side of Cincinnati from Mary Lou's home in Oakley, an hour and a half bus ride each way. Her four years at Mother of Mercy High School was a period of spiritual, academic, and personal development that she greatly enjoyed and provided lasting value for the rest of her life. She graduated in 1947. Following high school she was a student at the University of Cincinnati and worked for Trailmobile as a secretary. While dating the son of a wealthy developer, she met a Xavier University senior named Ben Jesionowski at a Catholic Youth Organization dance. She broke off the other relationship and turned to Ben. Her parents could not understand her choice when they decided to get married. Her father thought she should marry a fine German-American boy. Her father was also surprised that Ben had only \$200 in savings when in their fiscally conservative German community in Cincinnati, the young man should have at least \$2,000 saved. Ben's Polish-American parents could not understand why he wanted to marry a German-American girl. Mary Lou and Ben both knew what they wanted and were married six months later on August 26, 1950.

They both wanted to have a large family and were blessed with 11 children. All were treated

equally as a gift from God to be loved, nurtured, and given opportunities to succeed in life. She saw each child as an individual and worked diligently to nurture a special strength or skill that later manifested themselves in careers that built on the foundation that she had laid for each child. A child's lapses in judgment caused her to say to the child that "you need to turn over a new leaf". Both parents were very bright and excelled in school. It was understood, as their children were growing up, that academic excellence was both rewarding and important and that a college education was expected. When a child became worried or concerned, she expressed optimism that God has always taken care of our family and that "we will cross that bridge when we get to it".

Mary Lou, having been raised in the Great Depression, by fiscally conservative German-American parents, was frugal and well organized. Because the family of 13 lived off of one income, Mary Lou denied herself many material things. Mary Lou and Ben created a family environment that was poor in material things but rich in love for God and each other. As she lay dying, her children traveled from across the United States so that they could be with her. A child spent the night in the room with her for each night for the last two weeks so that she would be comforted in their presence and not die alone. She had to struggle just to get out one word. However, whenever a child arrived and gave his or her name and said "Mom, I love you", with great effort she would say "I love you, too".

Her children have held senior positions at major corporations including IBM, Navistar, Accenture and Harding Partners Architects. She was preceded in death by Ben, her husband of 63 years. She is survived by her children, Paul, Greg, David, Lee, Jim, Tom, Mike, Gail, John, Kim, and Stan; her sister Janet; 21 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Visitation will be from 3:30-7:30p.m. Thursday January 23, 2013 at Haggard-Sefton & Hirschy Funeral Home with Reciting of the Holy Rosary at 3:00 p.m. Calling also from 9:00-10:00 a.m. Friday January 24th at the St. Mary's Parish Hall.

A 10:00 a.m. Mass of Christian Burial will be held on Friday January 24th at St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church. Father David Voors will be officiating. Burial will be in St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be made to St. Joseph Daycare Ministries, Decatur, Indiana.

Haggard-Sefton & Hirschy Funeral Home online obit (accessed 3/26/2016)