

# Teacher helps students blossom in life

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — One October night a few years ago, Sister Mary Borromeo Povero, RSM, found a former student standing at her door.

Two years earlier, Sister Borromeo had learned that the student was involved with drugs, and had reported her to authorities at Our Lady of Mercy High School in hopes of obtaining help for the girl. "She was madder than a hatter at me (after I turned her in)," Sister Borromeo recalled.

So when the student appeared on her doorstep that October night, Sister Borromeo did not know what to expect. "She threw her arms around me and said, 'If I'd known then what I know now, I would have done things differently,'" the sister recalled.

One of the joys of teaching, Sister Borromeo added, "is seeing people blossom. It's seeing them begin to achieve their potential."

This fall, Sister Borromeo — now 70 years old — will begin her 49th year of watching "people blossom" and "achieve their potential."

During a teaching career that began in 1942, Sister Borromeo has introduced thousands of students to Latin, Italian and French. She has led students on numerous trips to Europe and Montreal, Canada. And along the way, she has touched their lives.

This year, Sister Borromeo has been recognized for the effect she's had on her students. She learned this past spring that she is



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
Sister Mary Borromeo Povero, RSM, will begin her 49th year of teaching this fall.

being honored as one of the teachers selected for the inaugural edition of *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*.

Sister Borromeo was nominated for the book by 1989 Mercy graduate Lisa Berrittella.

Explaining the nomination, Berrittella said that of all her teachers at Mercy, "(Sister Bor-

romeo) took more interest in my work. She took more interest in what was in my life."

As a teacher, Berrittella reported, Sister Borromeo was "strict."

"You knew what she wanted, and she didn't want anything else," Berrittella said. "But it wasn't strict in a bad way. We weren't afraid of her. She was open to the students."

Sister Borromeo is herself a graduate of Mercy, a member of the class of 1938. When she decided to become a religious, she was attracted to the congregation, she said, because "I liked the

spirituality of the Sisters of Mercy."

Along with the decision to become a sister, she also decided early in life to become an educator. "I always wanted to be a teacher," Sister Borromeo explained. "You can have an influence on a person. Hopefully, the effect would be positive on a person and on a person's life."

Such was the effect Sister Susan, one of Sister Borromeo's teachers, had on her during her days as a Mercy student. "She was a wonderful person," Sister Borromeo stated. "She was a real support to the students. We could go to her with our problems and she would help out. Sometimes I think that's more important than being a good teacher."

At Nazareth College, Sister Borromeo met another teacher who had a major influence on her: Sister Raphael, who taught Latin.

"Translation was never my strong point," Sister Borromeo acknowledged. "She'd have me read and say, 'Very good, dear,' then read the way it was supposed to be."

"I've tried to treat my students the same way," she continued, "not to embarrass them when it's an outrageous rendering."

Sister Borromeo pursued a double major in Latin and Italian at Nazareth College. She had taken Latin for four years at Mercy, and discovered that she liked it.

She decided to major in Italian as well because of her family background, and because she thought Mercy should be able to offer the language, but at the time, "there was nobody qualified to teach it." Ironically, Sister Borromeo did eventually introduce Italian classes to Mercy, but not until more than 20 years later.

After graduating from Nazareth, Sister Borromeo entered the Mercy Congregation, and took her perpetual vows in 1946.

Her teaching career began with a year at Mercy (1942-43). After her canonical year (1943-44), she taught for two years at Aquinas Institute, returned to Mercy from 1946-1951, spent two years at St. Ann's in Hornell and three years at Holy Family in Auburn. She taught at Notre Dame High

School in Elmira from 1956 to 1965. In 1965, she returned to Mercy, where she remains to this day.

In 1969, she finally inaugurated Italian classes at Mercy. She also taught French (in which she earned a master's degree) and Latin. In addition, she served for many years as chairwoman of the high school's foreign languages department.

That same year, she also began to take students on trips to Europe and Montreal. Since then, she's put 10 visits to the Old World and 19 sojourns across the border under her belt.

The trips were were beneficial not only for her students, but for Sister Borromeo as well, she acknowledged. "I remember the first time I went over," she said. "I was teaching French at the time, and I said, 'Here I am. These things are real.' It made the teaching of the French so much more alive."

Sister Borromeo also spent a year studying in Rome. "All that I taught and read about, I was able to walk upon and gaze upon them," she recalled. "That was terrific."

The trips with students finally came to an end in 1987, but teaching still remains part of her life. This fall, Sister Borromeo will teach the two classes of Latin the school still offers — a far cry from the days when enough students were interested in the language to fill up to five sections of Latin 2 alone.

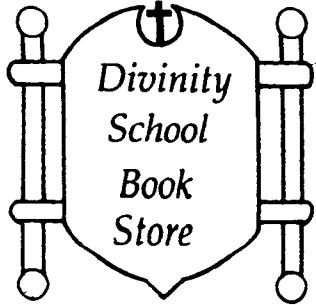
She looks at the declining interest in the language she loves with some sadness. "I feel badly that more students are not drawn to it," she said.

Such regrets, however, will not put a damper on her efforts as a teacher, as moderator of the Mercy High School Alumni Association or as the foreign languages chairwoman. It's a full schedule for anyone, surely, but especially so for someone of her age.

Sister Borromeo seems more amused than troubled at the thought. "I can't believe that I'm 70 years old," she remarked, smiling.

And she will continue to try to have an influence on her students.

"I have said many times that if I've helped any one student in the course of the year, it's been worth it," she concluded.



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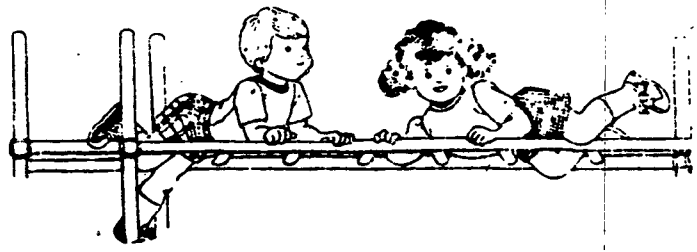
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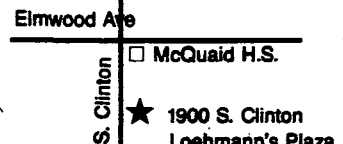
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