

## Beloved Teacher, MTG Alum Annamae Smaha Dies



Annamae Smaha, 1972 graduate of Mother Theodore Guerin High School and long-time teacher at Mother Guerin and Guerin Prep High Schools, admitted to her own students in 2003 that when she was a Guerin student she spent her fair share of time in the offices of Sister Frances Alma, principal, and Sister Charlotte, assistant principal.

Annamae made this confession in her acceptance speech as the recipient of the 2003 McManus Award, established to recognize outstanding alumnae. “Even then, girls rolled their skirts, wore too much make-up and got into trouble. Even as she was wiping off my blue eye-shadow, Sister Charlotte was trying to teach me how to conduct myself.”

Annamae then quoted Sister Charlotte, “Women with class didn’t wear blue eye-shadow during the day or roll their skirts.”

Annamae reflected on this. “They were trying to teach me how to present myself to the world; to be a woman people would take seriously.”

Annamae Smaha, a woman who people took seriously, died Monday, June 23 after a valiant two-year battle with cancer.

Known for her upbeat personality and her willingness to “tell it like it is,” Annamae joined the Guerin teaching staff in 1977 right after completing a bachelor’s degree in political science from Loyola University. She took a medical leave from Guerin in 2006 after learning of her cancer.

During the years in-between she is believed to have taught every class that the social science department ever offered. She also taught math, algebra and geometry at Triton College and during summer school at Gordon Tech High School.

Annamae pushed students to learning beyond the classroom, urging them to participate in such activities as the National Youth Leadership forum, in writing letters to the president of the United States or in doing volunteer work at her own alma mater, St. Angela School.

In that same speech at the time of the McManus Award, Annamae reflected on her years at St. Angela and the impact those years and the Sisters of Providence who were part of that experience had on her. “I remember Sister Edwardine, who had a degree in business administration; unheard of in those days. One sister had been a missionary in Latin America. One young nun, armed with only a pointer, a pitch-pipe and a big rosary around her waist, in a room with 50 to 60 kids—teaching, pushing, prodding—working her heart out to prepare us children to be someone, to strive, to achieve, to make our own way in the world. ...From those experiences I, too, learned ‘everything I needed to know.’ That a job worth doing is worth doing well, that one person can make a difference.”

That Annamae made a difference in people’s lives was obvious in the outpouring of support following the news of her cancer. More than 400 people attended the Chocolate Lover’s Benefit held in March 2006 in honor of Annamae and in memory of her friend and colleague, Marilyn Hejnosz ’67, another Guerin graduate turned Guerin teacher who had succumbed to cancer just prior to the event.

In a note she sent to the school following that event, Annamae wrote, “Thanks, too, to all who have worked toward fund raising for Marilyn and me. We were both so humbled and overwhelmed by people’s kindness.”

The conclusion of Annamae’s McManus award speech speaks volumes about her own sense of purpose and her ability to retain a positive view of life during her own illness. She told the students, “There is no way that your parents or I can explain to you what lies ahead—life’s trials and tribulations, its crucibles and exhilarations that await you. All we can do is hope we have taught you ‘everything you need to know.’ We hope we gave you a sense of compassion and service—not just to be a ‘do-gooder’ or a ‘bleeding heart’—for when you feed the poor, you become enriched; when you nurse the sick, you gain strength; when you bury the dead, you honor their lives. We hope you’ve learned that helping the weak makes you strong, that fighting for lost causes makes you hopeful, that curiosity and critical thinking make you aware. We want you to go out and live your lives to the fullest, to experience all that life has to offer, to make your mark on the world—to have it all.”

Annamae is survived by one brother and four sisters, three of whom graduated from Mother Guerin High School: Mari Smaha Sherwan '67, Naomi Smaha Calandra '69 and Elizabeth Smaha '73.

A **wake** will be held Sunday, June 29, from 3 to 9 p.m. at River Woods Funeral Chapel, 205 S. River Road, Des Plaines. The **Mass of Christian Burial** will be celebrated Monday, June 30, at 11:30 a.m. at St. Edna's Catholic Church, 2525 N. Arlington Heights Road, Arlington Heights.

*Cards may be sent to Annamae's family in care of Guerin Prep High School, Attn: Janis Ryan, 8001 W. Belmont Av., River Grove, IL 60171.*