

The "Flying Nun..."
The "Singing Nun..."
...From Belmont

Sister Barbara



A MOMENT OF PRAYER - Sister Barbara Sullivan takes time for prayer at Sacred Heart Convent, the Motherhouse of The Sisters of Mercy. Sister Barbara was the first nun to run for, and be elected to, a political office in North Carolina. She is a member of the Belmont City Council. (Photo by Dwight Frady)

by DWIGHT FRADY

Sister Barbara Sullivan is one of those rare, unforgettable people you meet along life's way.

In her office at Sacred Heart Convent, the Motherhouse of The Sisters of Mercy, Sister Barbara discussed her life. It was an interview filled with philosophy, nostalgia and wit.

Part of her wit: "My life is an open book. I doubt if anybody wants to read it." "My life is also historical. Or, hysterical."

Sister Barbara was the first nun to run for, and be elected to a political office in North Carolina. She is a member of the Belmont City Council.

She is full of energy and always on the go. Some call her "Belmont's Flying Nun." Because she plays the piano and sings, some call her "The Singing Nun."

And yet, Sister Barbara considers herself fortunate just to be alive today.

Thirteen years ago this past March 11, she became a "cancer statistic," as she puts it. She had several operations. It was serious. She recovered.

"I've also had a couple of back operations," she said.

"But you know, all of the adversity in my life has helped make me a better person."

"I had a wonderful home life. We had so much love. That's why I want to give it back. I have discovered, however, that people have to let you love them. It is so hard to reach some."

"As for my battle with cancer, I just feel that God gave me another chance. He left me here for a purpose. I have a desire to aid others."

"I've traveled a great deal during the past nine years." Although born in Mississippi, Sister Barbara was raised in Charlotte.

Sister Barbara's sister, Mrs. Ann Hackney, lives at Sherbrooke Drive in Charlotte. The number one person in Sister Barbara's life was her mother, the late Julia Jamison.

MADE RECORDING

"Before she passed away in 1972, I made a recording for her. I sang and played the piano on a record I made especially for her," said Sister Barbara. "My mother enjoyed it so much. It made me very happy too."

"I enjoy piano and singing. Mostly, it's church music. However, I like classical and semi-classical

music too."

Sister Barbara said that serving on the city council in Belmont was extremely exciting for her.

"I get to meet more people," she said, "and I enjoy serving the people. I certainly have no more political aspirations. I just want to serve the community."

"I don't think people realize the hours of work City Manager Carl Howie and everybody else on the council puts into their work. I have a lot of admiration and respect for every person on the council."

"Belmont's such a wonderful place in which to live. It's especially beautiful in springtime."

In addition to serving on the Belmont City Council, Sister Barbara is active in many other organizations.

She is in her second term on the Diocesan Board of Education of Charlotte.

She was reelected to the Board of Trustees of Sacred Heart College.

She was recently appointed to a three-year term by the Gaston County Commission to serve on the advisory board for the Gaston County Council on Aging.

She is on the advisory board of "Highlights For Children" magazine.

In 1966, Sister Barbara

LIVING TODAY

MIRROR-HERALD

was named Supervisor of Schools for The Sisters of Mercy of Belmont.

REGISTERED NURSE

A registered nurse, Sister Barbara has been in Belmont since 1949. There were interludes at other places. She was the operating room supervisor at St. Joseph's Hospital in Asheville in 1952-53. She was with Mercy Hospital in Charlotte in 1950-51, then again from the fall of 1953 until 1956.

"I was in and out as either an orthopedic, medical, or surgical supervisor," she said.

"Going back in my life, I didn't have a Catholic background," she said. "I was only 12 years old when I attended St. Peter's in Charlotte and was baptized a Catholic."

"At that time, my mother said, 'Barbara, don't get any ideas, about becoming a nun.'"

PIANO AND VOICE

"I attended Salem College in Winston-Salem for two years. I studied piano and voice. I didn't want to make it my profession. I just enjoyed it."

"I applied at Mercy Hospital for nurses training in the Cadet program in 1944. My mother was in the Air Force. In fact, my entire family was in the service during World War II."

"I chose to go into the Navy at Chelsea, Mass. I applied for my commission in 1947 and it came through in 1948 in Washington, D.C."

"I was in training as a nurse from the years 1944-47 at Mercy. I was a student at Sacred Heart in the fourth, fifth and eighth grades. While in the seventh grade, I joined the church."

During 1944-47, I was closest to the sisters here. I was somewhat of a 'rascal,'" said Sister Barbara, smiling. "We had some good times. I've lived a good life."

Sister Barbara said she wanted to go into the Navy badly.

"While at Chelsea, I began to become more and more attracted to both the Navy life and the Religious life."

"I was active in both. It (the Navy) was a regimented life, but I was active socially. I think the regimented life I led helped me in my final

decision to enter Religious life.

"My group was preparing to leave for Guam and Tokyo in 1949. It was, in my case, 'either-or.' I was discharged from the service in August of 1949."

"I know I would have stayed in the service if I had gone to Tokyo. I had talked with Mother Superior six months before for spiritual direction. Incidentally, I did a lot of skiing in New Hampshire around that time."

HAS NO REGRETS

"I took the plunge into becoming a nun. I have absolutely no regrets. I was 24 years old when I entered. I've led a full life," said Sister Barbara.

"There were 12 of us received in 1950. We were Postulants for a year. We received our white veils in 1950, our temporary vows in 1952, then our perpetual vows in 1955."

"I think the movie 'The Sound of Music' really told the true story of the nun. Maria, played by Julie Andrews, had time to think about it. It's not something you're rushed into."

Sister Barbara lived and worked in Washington from 1970-72. She traveled extensively during that time.

Prior to that, she did her masters work at the University of North Carolina in 1965. She became a Tar Heel sports fan then.

She has corresponded with Dean Smith, Tar Heel basketball coach. In the NCAA Tournament last year, she mentioned to Smith in a letter: "Don't let those Irish (Notre Dame) beat you on St. Patrick's Day."

Smith wrote her a nice letter after the season had been completed.

"We had a lot of funny times at UNC in '65," she said.

"We wore our old habit back then. We virtually invaded the campus. We were put into a men's dorm. There we were, a bunch of nuns."

"We would get the funniest calls. Guys would call and ask for dates. One of the sisters had to say three times one night, 'This Is SISTER Mary.' The phone went 'bang' when the caller got the message."



AT THE PIANO - Sister Barbara Sullivan at Sacred Heart Convent, sits down at the piano. Sister Barbara, a member of the Belmont City Council, is an excellent piano player and singer. Music plays a big part in her life.

"I was in a class with 15 men - 14 men, a nun and a black lady. They thought it was against our vows to be spoken to. I think we woke up a lot of folks while we were there," she said with a grin.

Sister Barbara loves people. She especially loves children.

"My sister has three of them," she said. "I think today's kids are wonderful, just as they were so many years ago. We used to have some glorious times going to the Knights of Columbus Tournament."

LOVES BASKETBALL

"It was a basketball tournament for our young students. I eat and sleep basketball and it really hurt when Carolina lost to Penn in the Eastern Regionals

recently in Raleigh.

"I remember one year when we won the state championship in the Knights of Columbus Tournament. I was in the lead car going down to the tournament in Greensboro."

"It was a case of 'follow that nun,' since I was supposed to know which way to go. We got on a one-way street in Greensboro and everybody followed me."

"I turned right around on that one-way street, and so did the cars that followed."

"Tom Knowles, who had a son playing on the team, said, 'boy, a nun can get away with anything, can't she?'"

"Some of today's youngsters have it a little tougher. Some can't cope with peer pressure. There's a lot for us to teach and a lot

for them to learn by their parents and their teachers at school."

"I've got a lot of hope and faith in youngsters. I see something to give them ... basic faith and values for the life system."

"They must see the leadership and examples in us. We must be the good influence."

Sister Barbara, who went from nursing to education after two back operations, says she never wants to get away from music.

"Music fits into the pattern of my life," she said. "It's very rewarding."

Call Sister Barbara "The Flying Nun."

Call her "The Singing Nun."

But call her, if you want her in proper perspective, "one of Belmont's most beautiful people."



WITH THE CHILDREN - Sister Barbara Sullivan, who loves children, is shown with a couple of Sacred Heart Grade School children as they prepare to watch a film. In front is Shannon Rumlfelt, who is in the first grade. Behind Shannon is Paco Aizcorbe, who is in the fourth grade.