

Sister Mary Avita dedicated life to teaching

MARY AVITA, Sister

By Tom Gavey *etell p.10*

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For thousands of students Sister Mary Avita was the embodiment of separate school education in Belleville.

The former St. Michael's Academy teacher, 88, died Wednesday at the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul Motherhouse in Kingston.

She was in her 64th year of religious life and she dedicated 43 years of her life to teaching.

The bulk of her teaching career was spent at St. Mike's, instructing students in Grades 7 and 8. She also taught at St. Peter's School in Trenton.

"She was strict but fair. She was a lady who enjoyed a good joke," remembers Jack Ryan, who was principal at St. Michael's during part of her tenure.

He says teaching mathematics and grammar were "her forte".

Sister Mary Avita (Beatrice Elizabeth McGuire) retired from teaching in 1974, but stayed in Belleville until her health began to fail in 1988. It was then she moved to the Motherhouse in Kingston.

Sister Marian McCallum, a member of the Sisters of Providence and a teacher at Nicholson Catholic College, says health problems didn't keep the sister from helping others.

"When she was able to she drove to visit seniors and other shut-ins. Then, when her eyesight failed her she ministered by phone. She kept in touch with the elderly."

When Msgr. J.P. Sullivan suffered a stroke it was Sister Mary Avita who tirelessly worked with him, eventually helping him to regain his speech, Sister Marian adds.

In her younger years the sister was a fine softball player and she retained her interest in sports in later years.

Sister Mary Avita was born in Strathcona, Ont. and is survived by her sister, Mrs. Jack (Betty) Lye of Corbyville. She was predeceased by her parents, James Patrick and Mary Agnes McGuire and five brothers and two sisters. Sister is also survived by several nieces and nephews.

The vigil service was held Thursday evening and Funeral Mass was celebrated today in the Chapel of Mary Mother of Compassion at Providence Motherhouse at 10:30 a.m.

Beatrice Elizabeth McGuire
Mary Avita, Sister
Bel - Brog (collective)