Sister Jane Irene Hutton, OP
1926-2019

A music lover, a reader, a puzzle-doer, someone who worked at living simply, and a woman who was faithful to prayer: this was how Sister Jane Irene Hutton was described after her death by Sister Rosemary Asaro, Holy Rosary Chapter Assistant, at Sister Jane Irene’s wake service.

Sister Jane Irene was born Irene Jane Hutton on October 31, 1926, in Chicago to William and Irene (Beck) Hutton. Bill, as he was called, was a Chicago native who worked as a certified public accountant, first for the Chicago World’s Fair and then for the largest bank in the city at the time, the Northern Trust Company.

“I remember how hard he worked and provided for the family. … He would work as a cashier during the day and audit the books after the bank closed,” Sister Jane Irene said in her life story. “He would get home very late each night but I can still see my mother sitting near the window looking for him to be coming up the street so she could have a hot meal ready when he walked in the door.”

Irene, for her part, was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, of French parents who had come to the United States before World War I. She worked as a nurse in a doctor’s office when she first came to Chicago, before she married Bill. “She was a gentle person and a wonderful cook,” Sister Jane Irene said of her mother. “All our meals were great family affairs.”

The couple had two children in all; the oldest daughter was named Edmar. At some point after Sister Jane Irene was born, the family moved to nearby Hinsdale, Illinois, where the two girls at first attended a one-room schoolhouse in which all eight grades were taught by the same teacher. Later on, both siblings would attend St. Isaac Jogues school, staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

She went on to Hinsdale Junior High School but in 1940 the family moved back into Chicago and she transferred to St. Cyril School. As she was preparing to graduate from eighth grade, she developed bronchitis and then pneumonia, and doctors told the family they should move out of Chicago.

“We were California bound when World War II changed our plans,” Sister Jane Irene said. Instead, Bill remained in Chicago at his job but the rest of the family went to Florida. She attended St. James High School in Orlando for a year until her mother found the Florida climate too difficult for her, and so they returned to Chicago and Sister Jane Irene spent her last three high school years at the Congregation-administered Aquinas High School.

She came to Adrian to attend Siena Heights College (University), majoring in home economics. In her junior year Sister Ann Joachim, a member of the Siena Heights faculty, began to talk with her about entering religious life, telling her she needed to start thinking about what to do with her life. That Thanksgiving, Sister Jane Irene was home on vacation and “on the 63rd Street streetcar I told my mother I wanted to give religious life a try,” she said. “She was surprised and said, ‘Tell your father.’ Dad said, ‘Go for it!’”

She did, entering the Congregation on January 31, 1949. “After Christmas vacation I became a postulant, and dressed as one I went back to classes,” she said. “What a surprise to my friends.”
Sister Jane Irene received the novice’s habit and her religious name that August and graduated from Siena Heights in June 1950. When her canonical novitiate year was completed, she was assigned to St. Augustine School in Detroit and spent 1950 to 1954 there. Her father died during her time there, in 1953, and her mother died in 1960.

Her next assignments took her to St. Mary Star of the Sea, Chicago (1954-57); St. Louis Bertrand, Oakland, California (1957-58); Sacred Heart, Pensacola, Florida (1958-60); Little Flower, Hollywood, California (1960-61); and St. Mary, Georgetown, South Carolina (1961-62).

From that point on, she was in Florida for the rest of her life in active ministry, teaching at St. Joseph, Miami Beach (1962-63); Assumption, Jacksonville (1963-1965); Our Lady of Lourdes, Melbourne (1965-1968); St. Mary, Fort Walton Beach (1968-69); and Our Lady of Lourdes, Melbourne, a second time (1969-73) before embarking on a new ministry in religious education and parish work. In that capacity, she served at St. Anastasia and St. Mark the Evangelist, Fort Pierce (1973-83); Holy Cross, Vero Beach (1983-84); and again at St. Mark the Evangelist, Fort Pierce (1984-99).

It was during her years at Our Lady of Lourdes that Sister Jane Irene met Sister John Baptist Dowd, who spent nine years there as teacher and then superior. The two remained close friends and in community together until John Baptist’s death in 2008.

When the pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes, Father Peter Dolan, was sent to Fort Pierce in 1972 to establish St. Mark’s Parish, he asked Sister John Baptist to come with him and help set up the religious education program. She, in turn, asked Sister Jane Irene to accompany her there. The pair were joined the next year by Sister Clare Daniel Watson.

Initially, the new parish held Mass at the local Knights of Columbus Hall and at St. Anastasia Parish, until the church building was constructed in 1974. Sister Jane Irene ministered at the parish for a total of twenty-five years, interspersed with her year in Vero Beach, and earned her religious education credentials in both the Diocese of Orlando and the Diocese of Palm Beach.

Finally, in 1999, Sister John Baptist decided it was time for her to retire and return to Adrian, accompanied by Sister Jane Irene. The two of them resided together in an apartment in Regina and Sister Jane Irene got involved in a number of activities including being a camera operator for events in the chapel, sewing for Sisters, serving refreshments after wake services, sorting mail at Regina, and serving as the Holy Rosary Chapter delegate to the Mission Council. As Sister John Baptist’s health necessitated, Sister Jane Irene cared for her until her death in 2008.

Sister Jane Irene’s own health went into decline after that and she moved into Maria in 2011. In addition to her physical difficulties, she gradually experienced memory loss.

She died early in the morning of June 24, 2019, aged ninety-two and in the sixth-ninth year of her religious profession. Fittingly, it was the Feast of St. John the Baptist, and just three days after the anniversary of death of her longtime friend and companion – who herself had been waked on June 24, 2008, on her namesake’s feast day.

“I can only imagine the grand reunion with family and friends,” said Sister Rosemary at Sister Jane Irene’s wake service. “Be at peace, Jane, surrounded by all that is peace and beauty.”

Following the funeral Mass on June 27, for which Sister Joella Miller preached the homily, Sister Jane Irene was taken to her final resting place in the Congregation cemetery.
From left: Sister Jane Irene, left, with her good friend Sister John Baptist Dowd, November 2005; Celebrating Sister Jane Irene Hutton’s Jubilee with the Holy Rosary Chapter, June 2009, are, from left: Sisters Dorothy Worthy, Joan Sustersic, Mary Pat Dewey, Jane Irene, Lorraine Pepin, Reta Drexler, and Lila Watt.
Celebrating Sister Jane Irene Hutton’s Golden Jubilee in June 1999 are, from left, Sisters John Baptist Dowd; Denis Marie Talbot; Jane Irene; and Helen Beck, her cousin, of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.

From left: Sister Jane Irene Hutton, left, with Sister Jean Aufderheide at the cathedral in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, September 1994; Sister Jane Irene celebrates her 70-year Jubilee with Sister Noreen Burke, May 15, 2019.
Members of the 1999 Golden Jubilee Crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Geraldine Megel, Magdelaine Hill, Thomas James Burns, Grace Flowers, Madeline Mary Dervin, and Aileen McClain, and front row, from left, Sisters Anastasia McNichols, Helen Edward Duncan, Jean Marie Jeziolkowski, Frances Barfield, Dorothy D’Haene, and Jane Irene Hutton.