

# Neerology

Julia Shank, Affiliate  
1936 - 2015



Julia Mueller took her first breath in late spring on 16 June 1936. She was welcomed by her parents and five siblings as the newest and youngest addition to a German-American Catholic home. The Mueller family was a mix of four boys and two girls, and they lived in a modest home on the Eastside of Detroit in the 6 Mile and Gratiot area. Faith and family would be the two guiding stars for Julie throughout her life. Seeing to the Catholic education of her two daughters, Linda and Diane, was a top priority for Julie, even though the expense was daunting. Julie's niece, Kristen Wilkins, remembers how Julie tried to keep her family together through the efforts she made to gather her clan for family reunions at Kensington Park and the hosting of the annual Christmas party for all.

Julie Shank came to work for the Province of St. Joseph in 1976. She was hired as a personal secretary by our public relations director, the late Bill LaForte. At the election of Ronald Smith in 1978 as provincial minister, the secretary to the provincial, Barbara Lupo, opted to retire, leaving the position open. In the search for a new secretary to fill the position, the spotlight shined on Julie who had proved to be a wonderfully competent, collegial and caring employee. Bill LaForte fought valiantly to keep her in the public relations office, but to no avail. So began her amazing interaction with the friars of the Province of St. Joseph as provincial secretary, until her retirement in 1999.

There are many tender stories about Julie's service in the provincial office that are not just work related. Co-worker and friend Brenda Boatman recalls how she would bring in all her Christmas packages for Julie to take home and wrap; how she would share tried and true cookie recipes that never turned out the way Julie made them. The memories of sharing together life's difficulties and Julie's attentive listening to them seemed to make the troubles less. Julie would bring all concerns to her faithful friend, St. Jude. A lighted candle in front of his statue in her office meant that a novena was in process.

Working conditions on the second floor of the friary were not ideal. It was cramped quarters. The provincial's bedroom and bathroom were located on one end of the floor and a small office for two on the other end. The filing system necessitated a walk upstairs to the bat infested attic; there may have been a few screams by the secretaries, but there was never a complaint. The morning and afternoon coffee breaks taken in the friar's dining room provided a small recompense because it involved getting to know the friars and experiencing their playful banter.

Julie brought tremendous organizational gifts in her professional role as provincial secretary. She hammered out thousands of letters on a typewriter and later on a shared computer. She attended our chapters as the first laywoman to do so and proved to be an invaluable asset.

Julie's ability to keep her work confidential was legendary. Many friars would attempt to extract information from Julie; information that they had no right to have, and Julie always sidestepped their questions feigning ignorance or surprise. All the friars delighted in the efforts of some to try to be in the know, but it only resulted in her famous eye roll and a sigh of exasperation.

Throughout the history of our province, we have been guided, supported and sustained by our lay employees and volunteers. They always have in the past — and continue in the present — to make us better Christians by their example and dedicated work. They grace us with their love and patience and call us to live what we promise. They are God's fidelity to us. Among so many luminaries, Julia Shank shines brightly in our memories and in our province's history. We are all better for her presence to us and among us. In recognition of her amazing gift, she was affiliated to the Province of St Joseph on 19 September, 1999. She died on 2 July 2015.

~ Daniel Fox