

School Sister of Notre Dame remembered as professor, poet and inspiration

School Sister of Notre Dame Maura Eichner, a member of the College of Notre Dame's class of 1941 and a professor of writing there for 50 years, died Nov. 15, after a long illness.

She was 94 and died at Maria Health Care Center at Villa Assumpta in Baltimore.

Members of her order remembered Sister Maura as a woman who inspired generations of students with a love for poetry, literature and writing.

Sister Mary Ellen Dougherty, a former student, said: "She was like a poem in motion. Her presence communicated something greater. It intimated the transcendental, even when the conversation was about the mundane. She was graceful and articulate, with always the right image and phrase to clarify her point. She was quiet and spectacular at the same time. Students were universally moved by her well-crafted classes."

Sister Maura's students won many awards in national writing contests sponsored by The Atlantic Monthly, Lyric and other magazines. In the 21 years of Atlantic's student-writing contests, Sister Maura's students won 297 awards, including nine first-place honors.

She was also a prolific and distinguished poet, having more than 350 poems published in literary magazines, journals and newspapers including America, The New York Times, Yale Review and Commonweal. Many of her poems were collected in eight books, including "Initiate the Heart" (1946), "The Word is Love" (1958); "Walking on Water" (1972), "What We Women Know" (1980) and "Hope is a Blind Bard" (1989). Her work was also recorded for the poetry collections of Lamont Library at Harvard and for the Library of Congress.

She was the recipient of several teaching awards, among them the Theodore

Hesburgh Award for Contribution to Higher Education in 1986, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) Award for Distinguished Teaching in 1985, and the Achievement in Literature Award from the women legislators of Maryland in 1986.

A native of Brooklyn, N.Y., Sister Maura entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1933 and professed first vows in 1936. She also taught at St. Mary's School in Annapolis and at Notre Dame Preparatory School.

"Words alone cannot express the power of Sister Maura's influence," said Mary Pat Seurkamp, College of Notre Dame's president. "She ignited the minds and hearts of countless women leaders who carry her spirit of excellence, passion and faith into the world with unbounded hope. Notre Dame's graduates – past, present and future – are her legacy to the world. We will miss her."

Sister Maura is survived by three sisters, Marie Bluff of East Meadow, N.Y.; Madeline Haudberg of Elmont, N.Y.; Theresa Murphy of New Hyde Park, N.Y.; and two brothers, Walter Eichner of Garden City, N.Y., and Andrew Eichner of Setauket, N.Y.

A viewing for Sister Maura was to take place Nov. 19, from 3 to 5 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. at Villa Assumpta, 6401 North Charles Street in Towson. A Christian wake service will be held at 7:30 p.m. A Mass of Christian burial will be held Nov. 20, at 10 a.m. at Villa Assumpta, with burial in the cemetery at College of Notre Dame.

The Sister Maura Eichner Endowed Chair in English was established in 2004 to honor the work of Sister Maura as a poet, teacher and mentor.

WHERE TO DONATE

Donations (made payable to College of Notre Dame of Maryland) in memory of Sister Maura may be sent to the Office of Institutional Advancement, College of Notre Dame of Maryland, 4701 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Md., 21210.