

Sister Margaret Frances, S.C. (Mary Bridget Coogan)

Born 10 October 1907; Died 25 January 1995 Age 88

Prepared by Brother Jim Coogan, F.S.C.
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Mary Bridget, born at Fayette City, PA., was the fourth child of James F. and Margaret C. Coogan. Preceding her in the family line were John Patrick (1 June 1900), Francis Joseph (4 April 1902), Margaret Mary (21 April 1905) and followed by James Andrew ((22 January 1913).⁷⁸ She was baptized at St. Edward's, Fayette City, PA. November 8, 1907.



Her decision to enter the Sisters of Charity was not an easy one. Her mother strongly objected to her making this move and it was over her objections that she did so. Sister often recalled how on visits her mother would plead with her to return home. It was only on her deathbed that Mrs. Coogan, seeing her daughter's resolve, gave her final blessing.⁷⁹

Early recollections of Sr. Margaret Frances (affectionately called "Aunt Mary") are easy to come by since her visits to our home were special occasions. Always accompanied by a companion, as was the custom in those days, she brought either pastries or candy - she never came empty-handed. Part of the awe surrounding these visits was the fact that she was a nun dressed in the traditional habit. We had been taught to show these persons the utmost respect.

Visits were regular but not frequent as the Sisters were limited on the time permitted to be away from their convents; there were also other family members to be seen. When Aunt Mary was able to come, and this was often on a Sunday, mother would go all out! First, there was lunch and later a fine dinner. Mealtimes were extended, as there were much conversation and family matters to be discussed. Part of these visits was the fun was to pick up the Sisters (none had cars) at their places of residence and then to return them home. Since she taught in various locations around the city, this provided a liberal geographical education of Pittsburgh. Her longest tenures were at Swissvale, Wilkinsburg, and Sacred Heart in Shady Side. Jack recalls that Sister also served at St. Kieran's in Lawrenceville, Holy Innocents in Sheridan, and Resurrection in Brookline, John the Baptist in Bloomfield, St. James and at the Cathedral in Greensburg. On her first assignment at St. Kieran's in 1927, she borrowed her 8-week-old nephew John to play Baby Jesus for a school Christmas pageant.

As very young kids, we enjoyed trips to Seton Hill, Greensburg, where on the broad lawns of the college, there were magnificent swings and with just a little effort, they could be put to flying. Bill remembers how we enjoyed trips to the large dairy barn to check out bulls and cows. Sometimes, we even got to the kitchen for a cookie. Proud of her family, Sister trooped us to the inner sanctum of the convent where we met the Reverend Mother Superior. She kept a supply of candy in her desk for just such occasions.

⁷⁸ "Sister Margaret Frances" **Coogan-Family Scrapbook (CQFS)** Vol. 2 p.4

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.5

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Family Photo, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, 1950

With the Second Vatican Council in the mid-Sixties, visits by religious became less restrictive and overnights allowed. Sister enjoyed these opportunities and came to our home more frequently as other family members died off.

As to temperament one would have to say that Sister Margaret was of a pleasant disposition, quick to laugh, and often to exclaim, “Oh, mercy” when told of some of our childhood antics. Her memory was phenomenal so much so that at times we hoped she would not recall certain events that had happened! For most of her life, Sister Margaret taught basic piano specializing in the Curtis method, one that called for a special positioning of the hands. As often as she visited, we never heard her play a single note on our piano.



Fiftieth Anniversary, St. James, 1975

Sister Margaret Francis Coogan, S.C.

One notable quality for which all of us can be most grateful to Sister for was her great devotion to the maintenance of family connections. Not only did she endeavor to keep peace among her own siblings but also she extended her interest overseas by maintaining correspondence with Aunt Eliza, the sister of her mother. In addition, through that association she kept in touch with the Feechan's (another of the Callahan girls) who at one point lived at Fayette City but had returned to Scotland when Mr. Feehan had become ill. From these contacts, extending over sixty years came our knowledge of Lizzie and Tom Feehan, Pat and Ellen Burns. This gave rise to a visit to Scotland in 1965 when John Coogan returned to his birthplace, Wishaw, to find it quite as he remembered it from the time he had left it in 1904. These contacts have resulted in the exchange of numerous visits that have served to form a connectedness to roots and a heritage that was all but lost save for the interest and efforts of Sister Margaret Frances. It was also she who copied out the original genealogical papers without which it would have been virtually impossible to track what was to become a very extensive family tree.

Along similar lines, her devotedness to family ties inclined her to sustain correspondence with an extended branch of the family that had moved to Detroit from the Pittsburgh area after 1914. This separation went through considerable strain over the years as mentioned in the biography of James F. Coogan. Through her persevering efforts and visits to the Detroit area in the Forties, these families made a reciprocal visit to Pittsburgh. This contact remains to the present through vastly extended lines of relationship.

In addition, Sister Margaret nurtured contact with distant relatives of the Feechan's who returned to this country settling in New Jersey and Delmont, PA.

Throughout the years, Aunt Mary had bouts of ill health from one cause or another. Finally, and with regret, she retired to her community's infirmary at Assumption Hall in Greensburg where she died after a relatively brief illness, clear of mind to the last. Her death came on January 25, 1995 at the age of 88 in the seventieth year of her religious profession. In attendance at her funeral were a large number of nieces and nephews even to the second generation. Burial took place at the community cemetery, Seton Hill, Greensburg, PA.⁸⁰



⁸⁰ Ibid. 12-18