

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

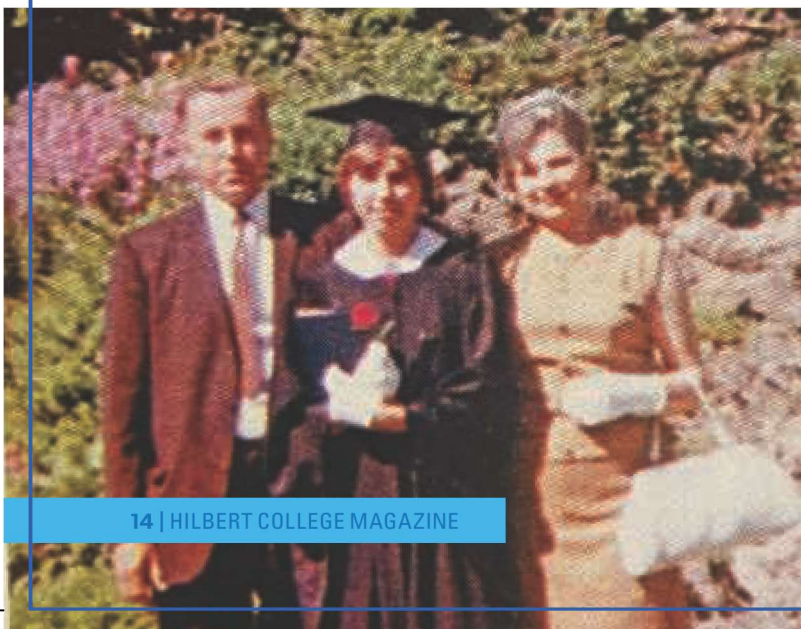
Class of
'66



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Anne Marie Milazzo (Parucki)





WHEN HILBERT WAS IMMACULATA: A family from the beginning

It was 1957 when Sisters Edwina Bogel and Edmunette Paczesny led the opening of Immaculata College, originally as a teacher training college for fellow Sisters in the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph congregation. In the summer of 1964, they put an ad in the local newspaper to recruit for the first class of lay students.

“It was just a little ad, buried inside the paper,” recalled Anne Marie (Parucki) Milazzo, a member of the class of 1966.

At the time Anne Marie was trying to decide between another private Catholic college in the Buffalo area or waiting on college to join the workforce. It was also a sad time in her family, following a car accident that had claimed the lives of her maternal grandparents, and her family needed each other for support. But the little ad spoke to her so Anne Marie and her mother went over to visit the little college within a wing of the Motherhouse, nestled among an apple orchard.

Sister Edmunette, Dean of Students, listened to Anne Marie’s story and talked with her mother at length. “As we were leaving, Sister Edmunette said, ‘You’re coming, right?’ And I immediately said, ‘If you’ll have me!’” And just like that Anne Marie began her higher education path at Immaculata College alongside 11 other students, many of them young sisters.

Together they embarked on a liberal arts education, studying botany and zoology with Sister Christine; educational psychology, Spanish, and metaphysics with Sister Edmunette; as well as theology, math, sociology, American History, and macroeconomics.

“I learned more there in two years than I did in four years of high school,” said Anne Marie. It was, she added, excellent preparation for the bachelor’s in Social Work she would later earn.

“Everything was so positive there, being among the sisters was so upbeat,” recalled Anne Marie. Immaculata (Hilbert) College was a warm family atmosphere from the beginning.

She and her classmates, including the young Sisters, would wander the orchard chatting, eating lunch, and munching apples. Sometimes they simply played; because many of the young women hailed from other states, they found themselves teaching each other new, carefree ‘children’s games,’ according to Anne Marie. The student lounge, a downstairs room, was the often-smoky scene for many deep discussions and even a few rogue ear-piercing sessions. The bookstore was little more than a supply closet run by Sister Virgilia.

In winter, everyone ate together family-style at long tables downstairs, often enjoying cookies baked by the Sisters. “They treated me like their own,” said Anne Marie. “The Sisters became family to all of us.” The bonds grew deeper for Anne Marie. Under the prayer and support of the Sisters, she saw her mother begin to emerge from her grief. Sister Edmunette became a mentor and spiritual advisor, later doing a reading at Anne Marie’s wedding and becoming godmother to her son.

Though some of the young sisters invited her to join the church, Sister Edmunette and the other faculty Sisters pushed Anne Marie to be more independent, encouraging her to go away from home to finish her college education. Which she did, attending Marygrove College in Michigan and returning to Buffalo’s Baker Hall for her undergrad field experience, serving as a pioneer of sorts. After her wildly successful stint gaining the trust of the boys cared for at Baker Hall, who saw her as big sister, the agency would go on to hire their first female social worker.

After graduating, Anne Marie worked throughout western New York, teaching parenting classes, performing school intake tests, providing group counseling for hospital systems in Rochester and Batavia, and settling in at the Caledonia-Mumford school district southwest of Rochester. She also earned her Masters of Social Work from Canisius College after marrying her husband Paul and while working and raising two children.

All the while, she kept in touch with the Sisters.

“They were my teachers and friends – and still are,” she said.

As a way to carry on and pay forward the loving support she received from the Sisters, Anne Marie said she recited the Prayer of St. Francis (the patron saint of counselors) every morning of her career. Lord make Me an instrument of Your peace
Where there is hatred let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness joy.
O Divine master grant that I may
Not so much seek to be consoled as to console
To be understood, as to understand.
To be loved. as to love
For it's in giving that we receive
And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it's in dying that we are born...
To eternal life.

Nowadays, as Anne Marie keeps a positive attitude in the fact of health challenges, she looks for the little miracles of life as she has since her Immaculata days. “It’s part of what [the Sisters] gave me, too,” she said.

In honor of her Immaculata family, Anne Marie now serves on the Hilbert College Advisory Council. “Sisters Edwina and Edmunette worked so hard to make their dream come true and I’m happy to be a little part of that legacy,” she said.

Today, she has a vision to add to the College’s programs that support students and families in need, like the people she served throughout her career. She does it also in honor of her parents and grandparents, all of whom showed Anne Marie how to care for others.

For current Hilbert students and her fellow alum, Anne Marie has this to say:

“Remember the Prayer of St. Francis and live it every day to carry on the Hilbert tradition, wherever you are. That deep love and support never goes away, so stay involved at Hilbert. You will get back so much from the people there.”

