



Mother Augusta Collins, O.S.B. '69

Mother Augusta Collins is being recognized for her remarkable academic journey at Archbishop Williams High School and beyond, as well as her lifelong dedication to faith, education, and service as a Benedictine religious at the Abbey of Regina Laudis.

“Nancy” Collins grew up in a close-knit Catholic family in Milton. Her devout parents instilled in their five children the importance of faith, education, and service. They made significant financial sacrifices to ensure their children received Catholic schooling, a testament to their belief in the transformative power of faith-based education. Nancy’s two sisters, Susan ‘67 and Cathy ‘71, also attended AWHs. Her brothers attended Boston College High and Catholic Memorial, respectively.

Nancy thrived academically during her time at AWHs. She was a two-year member of the National Honor Society, and served as NHS Vice President as a senior. She earned the Certificate of Eminent Merit, Maxima cum Laude, in the highly-competitive national Latin examination, and was recognized for her outstanding performance on the National Educational Development Tests. Nancy was also an active participant in sports – cheerleading and tennis - and clubs and activities including the Ski Club, the French Club, English Society, and the school newspaper, the Mitre. Her classmates recognized Nancy’s warm and generous spirit, voting her junior Prom Queen and then honoring her as “Most Spirited” and “Friendliest to Underclassmen” with their senior superlative “Willy” awards. Moreover, respected as she was popular, Nancy was also elected to serve and lead her class on the Student Council.

Mother Augusta recalls fondly, perhaps in a prophetic way, “the wide spectrum of intelligent, serious, fun, athletic and creative students at AWHs, and how they were all gathered together in a Catholic institution formed and informed by faith.”

She credits AWHs with fostering her intellectual curiosity and strengthening her faith, and was particularly inspired by the Sisters who taught at AWHs, describing them as role models of selflessness and dedication to education and Christ. Indeed, their example subtly planted the seeds of her own vocation, though at the time she did not envision herself entering religious life.

Among her favorite teachers were Mr. Dever, whose creative English instruction encouraged deep thought, and Sister Paul Mary, who kindled her love for geometry. She also recalls how Latin class with Sr. Philip Joseph - notorious for her technique of seating students according to their latest grade - ignited a passion to perform well after an early placement in the last seat in the last row! Today her fluency in Latin serves her well in monastic life.

Notwithstanding the strong competition and her challenging course load and schedule, Nancy graduated from AWHs 16th in the Class of 1969. She matriculated to Connecticut College, where she majored in English and graduated with honors in 1973. She recalls a pivotal moment while writing a paper on William Butler Yeats when she realized her ability to gather facts and craft a compelling argument - a skill that took shape during her years at AWHs and would become foundational in her academic pursuits and her calling to service in religious life.

In 1975, Nancy joined the Abbey of Regina Laudis in Bethlehem, Connecticut, embracing a calling to a life of prayer, service, and stewardship of the land. Her early years at the Abbey were marked by challenges and growth. She learned to work the land—a skill entirely new to her, as she fondly recalls her mother noting that she had never even mowed the lawn at home!

In 1987, after 12 years at the Abbey, Mother Augusta pursued graduate studies at the University of Connecticut, earning a Masters and Ph.D. in Agronomy. Her literally “groundbreaking” research on nitrogen cycling in grasslands garnered national recognition, earning her the “Outstanding Graduate Student Award” from the Northeastern Branch of the American Society of Agronomy.

Embracing her life as a Benedictine Sister, Mother Augusta eventually became the Novice Mistress in 1994. As such she was responsible for mentoring new members of the community, as well as managing the Abbey’s extensive farm operations. This included overseeing 450 acres, operating machinery, managing a beef herd, growing and harvesting hay, and caring for an orchard and vineyard. This new chapter in her life was a testament to her adaptability and commitment to service. Today, she remains deeply committed to teaching others about sustainable farming and land stewardship, while continuing to integrate faith and science into her work.

Now, with the benefit of hindsight, Mother Augusta notes the importance of being ready for the unexpected as part of her calling. “Finding myself as a member of a monastic community is a constant reminder to expect the unexpected. Our faith was so strongly reinforced in high school as part of the fabric of everything we did or thought, that amazingly I found a way to continue to live in that mystery by becoming a member of a monastic community.”

Reflecting on her unique journey, Mother Augusta attributes much of her success to the values instilled at AWHs, commenting, “Today as our world grows more virtual, challenging all young people to know who they are as men and women—created in the image and likeness of God—our Monastery and its commitment to knowing the truth and operating out of love is more important than ever before.”