

Obituary of Cecilia “Grace” Springer – April 7, 1931 to April 5, 2021



Cecilia Springer, 87, talks about how a nun abused her when she was a teenager at the Notre Dame School of Manhattan. (Howard Simmons/New York Daily News)

Cecilia Springer, also known to her friends as “Grace,” was born in Manhattan on April 7, 1931 to her Jewish father and Catholic mother who owned a family home on West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. She was an only child raised in the Catholic faith at home and Blessed Sacrament Parish on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. She attended Notre Dame Academy, founded and administered by the Sisters of Saint Ursula, on West 79<sup>th</sup> Street. After high school graduation, she attended the College of Mount St. Vincent, Riverdale, the Bronx, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Discerning that she had a religious vocation, Cecilia entered the Sisters of Saint Ursula in 1952, a religious community founded in France whose mission was to educate young women. The Sisters’ retreat house on the Hudson River in Dutchess County, “Linwood,” is known to many

Catholics in the New York metropolitan area. Cecilia taught second, fifth and eighth grades for twenty-two years as a Sister of Saint Ursula and then worked in community affairs through the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, educating many in the tenets of social justice and serving as a prison minister through the late 1970s until the mid-1980s.

She also left the Sisters of Saint Ursula and lived the rest of her life as a single lay woman, devoted to her parish of St. Francis Xavier on West 16<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, its adult choir, and all its social justice causes. Unfortunately, her support of her parishioner friends' justice causes was not reciprocated when she requested parish support for her childhood sexual abuse claim against a religious sister. Victim/survivors often journey alone or with a few advocates and supporters.

During a three-year sabbatical in the late 1980s, Cecilia traveled to Italy and France and then returned to New York City to work for the Share Program whose purpose was distribution of healthy food at low cost for underserved communities in Harlem and the Bronx. She also worked for FECS (Federation Employment and Guidance Services), helping Russian immigrants with medical training and finding work in the United States. After retiring, Cecilia tutored young children and substitute taught at a parochial school in Forest Hills, Queens. She also began to become involved in the movement to assist victims of sexual abuse and their families, for she was a victim/survivor of sexual abuse by her high school Sister Principal.

Cecilia participated in successful efforts to pass the Child Victims Act in New York State in 2019, and as her health deteriorated, she endeavored to hold the Archdiocese of New York and the Sisters of Saint Ursula accountable for the sexual abuse she endured. She died on April 5, 2021, two days before her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and the same day that the callous and calculated Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, and the Archdiocese of New York, and the Sisters of Saint Ursula objected to the taking of her legal deposition in a timely emergency. She died without receiving the justice she deserved. May she rest in peace.

“Cecilia has left a legacy of kindness, respect, and dedication to causes of justice,” said her attorney, Mitchell Garabedian of Boston, MA.