

Estelle Geller (1909–1998)

I am Estelle (Trierweiler) Geller. I was born in Westphalia Township, Michigan, on October 16, 1909, to Peter and Elizabeth (Rademacher) Trierweiler. My great grandfather was William Rademacher. He was the first boy born and baptized in Westphalia. William's parents Franz and Maria (Bayer) came to Westphalia, Michigan from Heggen, Hochsauerlandkreis, Germany, in 1839.



My love for learning became apparent at a very early age. That love remained with me throughout my life.

My first years of education were at the Gross School, located on the northwest corner of Grange and Pratt Roads. This was 1.5 miles from my home. Then I attended St. Mary's school in Westphalia through the eighth grade. I was naturally left-handed, but the nuns made me switch to use my right hand to write. I worked very hard to have a beautiful penmanship, which helped me to win several county penmanship contests. There was no high school in Westphalia at that time, so I attended Portland High School for two years. I then went to St. Mary's in Lansing for my last two years of high school. I graduated in 1927.

Then I went on to Western State Teachers' College in Kalamazoo where I received a Provisional Teaching Certificate. In 1931, I was awarded a Life Certificate of Teaching. My first teaching position was in the one-room Gross School where I had started my formal education. My beginning salary was \$95.00 per month.

I married Herman J. Geller in 1935. Together, Herm and I worked to build the Geller Funeral Home business in Westphalia. We strove to serve the area residents with compassion and professional dignity.

I also coached the girls' basketball teams at St. Mary's High School from 1948 to 1952. The teams were undefeated for four years, racking up 38 straight victories. The quick ball handling of those young ladies was an art form. Like Herm with his teams, I challenged the girls to look out at the larger world and challenge themselves to be part of it.

When the Korean Conflict began in 1951, Herm and I initiated a community service project in the form of a weekly letter to the area men who were called to serve in the armed forces. Our first letter went out in February 1951 to twenty-four of our native sons. By the time we wrote our last letter in April 1954, 121 of our young men had been called to serve. The letters were a commentary on our family, the town, the parish, and life in general. Our goal was to keep the “boys” abreast of the goings-on at home. They are a mini history of Westphalia at that time. The Westphalia Historical Society and the VFW Post in Fowler each have a set of these letters for anyone who wishes to reminisce through those years.

While I had retired from teaching in 1936 when I became a mother, it was not my last time in the classroom. In 1954, Father Aloysius Miller and Superior Sister Adelaide asked me to teach the second grade at St. Mary's School. I was assigned fifty-two students, and I taught that grade level for seven years.

When St. Mary's High School in Westphalia closed in 1962, I was hired by the Pewamo-Westphalia School Board to teach English and Latin in the high school. A highlight of those years was a trip to Europe with the Latin Club to experience the culture of that continent. One of my goals as a high school teacher was to pass on to the students my love for learning and to help them realize it is a life-long process. After several years of classroom teaching, I became the librarian at PW. My second teaching career ended when I retired from PW in 1974.

I received a Bachelor's degree from Michigan State University in 1959. In the late 1960s, I earned a Master's of Library Science degree from Central Michigan University.

Besides helping run the funeral business, raising four children, teaching and coaching, I was active in many St. Mary's parish activities. I also helped establish the Westphalia Historical Society and was an editor of the Westphalia's 150th anniversary book *Of Pilgrimage Prayer and Promise*.

After retiring, Herm and I were able to travel extensively, an activity we both enjoyed. The final years of my life were dedicated to taking care of my husband, Herm.

I passed to eternal life on February 26, 1998, and am buried here in St. Mary's Cemetery, Westphalia.