

Nov. 22-26, 1969 **Remembering Amy**

By Tom Bodle

In August, 1990 Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School was formed from the merger between Villa Angela Academy and St. Joseph High School. The Ursuline nuns had established their presence on the shores of Lake Erie on the east side of Cleveland in 1874. Over several decades the Ursulines provided several educational institutions. Eventually, a girls high school would emerge as their priority. St. Joseph High School was founded in 1950, about one and a half miles east of VA on Lake Shore Blvd. By the 1960's, the burgeoning Catholic population in eastern Cuyahoga County filled both schools beyond capacity. Although separated by gender, the fabric of the two schools was intricately intertwined. The majority of students came from working class families with traditional Catholic family values. Most attended Catholic elementary schools where nuns were the prominent educators. By the late 1980's the civic and cultural environment changed. Cuyahoga county was losing population. Local factories and businesses were closing. The student population was changing, more students from public schools and fewer Catholic students as well. With a waning student base, it was unfeasible to maintain two separate high schools. The merging of VA and St. Joe into a co-ed school was a natural solution. The "VA girls" and the "St. Joe boys" would become the young men and women of Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School.

An historical seed, planted long before a merger was conceived, emerged during our senior year of 1969. Amy Sambula became the first "lady Viking."

Amy was the daughter of George and Joan Sambula. She along with her four younger siblings moved to the northeast part of Cleveland in 1963. As a middle school student, Amy missed her friends from her Pennsylvania home and struggled with adjusting to her new neighborhood. Amy focused on her studies and on music, learning the trumpet, as she tried to adapt to a new school and new class-





mates. She also took her faith commitment seriously, regularly attending Masses at her parish, Our Lady of Perpetual Help on nearby Neff Road.

In 1966, Amy entered Villa Angela Academy as a freshman. By this time her personality had grown to the point of making friends and at VA she flourished as a teenager who loved her school, her friends and her faith. As most teens at the time she listened to the Beatles, dated and continued to be an excellent student. By the time Amy became a senior, her classmates described her as “a loyal friend,” “a leader,” “a true Christian,” “a spreader of Christ.” It was Amy’s spirituality that really stood out. She not only practiced her faith, but enacted it through prayer meetings and service activities. Many of these meetings and activities were shared with students from St. Joe. In a witness to a Presbyterian group in October, 1969 Amy defined religion. “It is the belief that God lives and works in and through me by my own choice...as a Christian I yearn to understand self by realizing God’s presence in me and in others.”



Amy’s affable nature, love of God, love of friends and love for Villa Angela were reasons she was elected student council president her senior year. She was the ultimate “VA girl.”

Amy’s love of learning and talent as a musician would make her a “St. Joe Viking.” Mike Pausic, our band drum major, recalled that Amy worked in some science activities bringing her into the building. Amy’s excellence as a trumpeter caught the attention of the VA band director, who wished for a larger platform so Amy could excel. Viking Band director Norm Novak brought her into the stage band and the orchestra, where as described by Pausic, “she fit in seamlessly with the instrumental program. She earned her place in that number!”

The autumn of 1969 had been an exciting time at St. Joseph. The euphoria of triumphant football and cross country seasons coupled with memorable homecoming events still permeated the Viking halls the fourth weekend of November. But on Sunday November 23rd the headline news would shock our class, our school and our neighborhood. On the Plain Dealer front page read, “Model Girl Slain on Sidewalk Near Home.” Amy Sambula had been killed by a senseless shooting. On November 22nd, 50 years ago, Villa Angela and St. Joseph High Schools watched a leader, classmate, friend and remarkable woman of faith cross the threshold of Heaven into the waiting arms of the Blessed Trinity.

The students and faculty at Villa Angela were stunned. An entire community mourned. Long lines of consolers passed through the doors of Jakubs funeral home. The funeral was held on November 26th, the day before Thanksgiving. That day was sunny but cold. Villa Angela students formed an honor guard along Neff Road to the doors of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Hundreds of others stood with them from St. Joe and the neighborhood. All of the girls wore white gloves and their school uniforms to honor their student council president as the hearse arrived

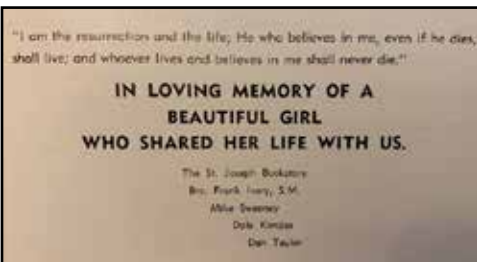


for the funeral Mass. The Mass was one for hope, for redemption and thanksgiving for the gift of Amy. Not a dry eye was to be found on Neff Road that day.



The memory and legacy of Amy would not be buried that day with her body at All Souls Cemetery. She was in the hearts of her classmates as they completed their senior year and graduated. On the one year anniversary, a scholarship had been established at Villa Angela in her memory. On the twentieth anniversary of her death VA held a special memorial service. AMY SAMBULA was spelled out in a presentation by the principal, each letter being assigned an attribute displayed by Amy. School mates sent reflections on their remembrances of Amy. Jacki Trost, Amy's classmate who completed Amy's term as student body president had this reflection, "She had a charisma that drew people to her and that charisma was imbedded in the peace she possessed."

In 2003, Villa Angela-St. Joseph incorporated the Amy Sambula scholarship as a permanent part of its "Founders Day" celebration. On that day the school honors the Marianist tradition of William Chaminade and the Ursuline tradition of St. Angela Merici. Scholarships are presented in the names of those "bricks" which have built Villa Angela, St. Joseph and VASJ. Amy, with her legacy, is one such brick. Now fifty years after a senseless death, a meaningful life is remembered and a scholarship is given "to a female student who demonstrates spirit, drive, enthusiasm and love of VASJ. She must be a leader to inspire moral leadership in others."



One life, seemingly taken too soon, inspires VA girls, St. Joe boys and VASJ Vikings. "God lives and works" through Amy to this day and into the future.

