

The Artistry of Sister Berta Hummel

The artist behind the world-famous M. I. Hummel (R) figurines was born Berta Hummel on May 21, 1909 in Massing an der Rott, Germany, a small town in what was then Bavaria. Berta was the third of six children born to Adolf and Viktoria Anglsperger Hummel. Berta was somewhat of an artistic child protege and began drawing sketches and postcards even before she started to school. Her nickname 'Little Hummel' or in German 'Hummele' means 'little bumblebee.' The bumblebee was Berta's early trademark and was used on many of her drawings, sketches and paintings.

When she was six little Berta Hummel was enrolled in the Catholic Volksschule being operated by the Sisters of the Catholic Order of Notre Dame. It was also known as the Armen Schulschwestern. Since World War I was already in progress these were difficult times, especially in Bavaria. This intrusion on little Berta's early childhood was to rear it's ugly head again towards the end of her short but productive life.

Berta's father Adolf recognized Berta's God-given talent and he was careful to nurture and guard it. So did another important player in the development of Berta's artistic talent, Sister Theresilla. In 1921 Berta, then twelve years old, entered Simbach Girls Boarding School run by Englischen Fraulein nuns. Graduation from Simbach came in 1926 and Berta's art instructor, Sister Stephanie, suggested Berta attend the Academy of Applied Arts in Munich, Germany. Berta started this training at the age of eighteen in 1927.

Munich was a large cosmopolitan city while Berta was a small town girl. This change was both invigorating and stimulating. Two of the new friends she made in Munich were to have a profound effect on Berta's spiritual life as well as her career. These artists also happened to be Catholic nuns. Sisters Laura and Kotska were studying at the Berufsfachschule or art school for teachers. Religion was a central focus of Berta's home life and her two new friends strengthened the affinity Berta had for ministering to others. She graduated from the Academy in 1931 at age 22 and entered the Franciscan convent at Siessen, Germany. After two years as a novitiate Berta took her vows on August 22, 1933 and became Sister Maria Innocentia.

Berta was an accomplished artist, published and widely recognized by the time she was 21. She continued to pursue her artwork at the convent in addition to her other duties. By 1935 Maria Innocentia had entered into an agreement with Goebel Porzellanfabrik at Oeslau near Coburg, Germany to produce three dimensional M. I. Hummel (R) figurines from her artwork.

The Nazi regime was flourishing in Germany in 1933 when Maria Innocentia took her vows. Because of their anti-religious bias few food or medicine items reached the convents, monasteries or abbeys. Sister Maria Innocentia contracted tuberculosis which was misdiagnosed. Berta survived World War I and Maria Innocentia survived World War II but only barely. The gentle little artist who captured the purity and innocence of childhood for posterity died at Siessen at the tender age of 37 on November 6, 1946.

It's interesting to note that a number of companies have received many millions of dollars while Berta and her mother Viktoria never received a dime in profits or royalties. (Verlag Ars Sacra, Verlag Emil Fink, Goebel Porzellanfabrik, Schmid, Ebelling and Reuss and the Roman Catholic Church to name a few.) Berta wanted "her children" distributed to the widest possible audience, not only the wealthy. During her lifetime she published several small books of poems with her artwork as illustrations. We hope our attempt to duplicate her effort is a fitting memorial to God's Little Bumblebee, Sister Maria Innocentia (Berta) Hummel. Thank you Berta and may God continue to bless your work. You captured the most important part of God's Creation, His little children.

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