

Sister Gracita Daly, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Jan. 20, 2017

Sister Helen Emerson, BVM (Read by Sister Jeroma Day, BVM)

Gracita and I have been friends for more than 50 years. We first met at St. Anthony in Davenport, Iowa, where Gracita was the superior and principal and taught seventh and eighth grades. I experienced her as kind and energetic, eager to have the students learn. As a superior, her kindness and humor gave us a relaxed and happy living situation.

As we moved on to different missions, we continued to keep in touch. I visited her when she was in New York and she gave me a wonderful tour of the east coast. We also spent a day touring Washington, D.C. When I was in Chattanooga, Tenn., Gracita came to visit me and now it was my turn to be the tour guide. When Gracita's sister died, I went to St. Louis, as she planned the funeral and took care of all the business that had to be done. When I was taking care of my dad in Bloomington, Ill., Gracie came to visit me.

She was my mentor and supported me in good times and bad. She taught me how to drive and how to play scrabble, bridge and many card games. When Wright Hall was being remodeled, 10 of us had to move out, so Gracie and I accepted the hospitality of the Felician Sisters. Every day we'd travel back and forth to keep up with all that needed to be done at Wright hall. There is a picture of Gracita at the dumpster throwing away the cartons that some of the furnishings came in.

Fifty years takes in a lot of history but it is here at Mount Carmel that our friendship deepened. Gracita was filled with joy, peace and gratitude. "We have wonderful community," she would say. "I am so blessed. I've had a wonderful life." Gracita loved the river. I would take her out for a ride and we'd sit in the car overlooking the river. She remembered the time when she and her sister walked across the icy river from their home in Burlington, Iowa, and into Illinois—a great adventure for them.

She loved Grandview Avenue in Dubuque, Iowa. It reminded her of how they used to drive her sister Mary to Clarke University. As we drove, Gracita would exclaim about the beauty of the blue sky and the fluffy, white clouds and the different shapes of the trees and the fall colors. "God gave us a beautiful world to live in. Every night I thank God for this marvelous world. God must be tired of hearing me say that," she remarked. I said, "I think that is God's favorite prayer. I think God says, 'Say it again.'" It was a blessing to be with her these years. She was always thankful and reminding me, "Take good care of yourself."

I sadly noticed her slowing down. "I have no zip," she would say. "I have no get up and go." Then she'd add, "I am blessed to be as well as I am. I get wonderful care." Gracita was grateful for everything. Last Sunday morning, a wonderful thing happened. Jesus came to Gracita and said, "You saw my love in all of creation but you have not seen or heard what I have ready for you." Suddenly, Gracita's "get up and go" returned and she zipped right into Jesus' arms.

Michelle Head, Niece

My cousin Steve Daly, my husband Clarence Head, and I represent Gracita's seven nieces and nephews, 14 grandnieces and nephews, 11 great-grandnieces and nephews, and 13 spouses. This is our tribute to a well-loved aunt.

As the family of Sister Mary Gracita Daly, we wish to honor her today as a truly holy woman, an inspiring role model, and a cherished member of our Daly family. Only one of us was born before Eleanor, as we always called her, joined the BVM community. In her early years in the convent, we visited her in Chicago and Davenport, Iowa, with our parents and our Grandma Daly. We grew to love our Aunt Eleanor and looked forward to her visits home every other year.

As we grew and visitation rules changed, we could always depend on Aunt Eleanor, whenever she was able, to attend our baptisms, communions, confirmations, graduations, weddings and family reunions. She was always a source of inspiration and joy at every family gathering. We enjoyed her stories about her BVM sisters, her work as a teacher and principal, her years in administration at Mount Carmel, and her many acts of service to so many people. She, Sister Pat Griffin (Michael Ellen), and Sister Helen Emerson (Clare Ann) enriched our home when our children were growing up, creating a special bond with them and attending many special events in their lives. These memories we will cherish always.

When Eleanor moved to Mount Carmel a few years ago and could no longer travel, we came to her. Every year in the fall, we tried to come to Dubuque from all over the country to visit our Aunt Eleanor. When she turned 90, we had a wonderful birthday party for her with many pictures and memories to hold dear in our hearts. We would like to thank all the BVM sisters, especially Sister Helen Emerson, Sister Pat Griffin and Sister Edissa Szczepanski, for making us feel so welcome at our visits with Eleanor. It had been a great comfort to us knowing that she was always in such kind and loving hands here at Mount Carmel.

We honor our Aunt Eleanor today as a beloved member of our family and thank her for all the love she has shown to all of us throughout the years. She is a wonderful example of a Christian woman and her legacy will be the good works that each of us will continue to do in the world through her example and memories. We wish to thank you, her BVM sisters, for all the love and support that you have been to Eleanor since she entered the community at age 17. You are truly her family too. We expressed our deepest condolences and hope that her spirit will bring you peace and happiness.

Steve Daly, Nephew

I'm the son of Mark Daly, Eleanor's brother. Actually, Eleanor had two older brothers. Hugh passed away a long time ago in 1958. There are a few stories I have heard a few hundred times at family reunions. I thought I would share with you more about Eleanor's childhood.

Eleanor was born in 1924. Somewhere around age five or six, as the story goes, her brother Hugh was peddling a bicycle with my dad on the back and Eleanor sitting on the handlebars. They were hanging onto the streetcar going up the hills in Burlington, Iowa. I don't know how they came back down the hills. What could go wrong with this picture?

Our grandmother was Grace Daly. A little neighborhood girl couldn't pronounce Grace so she called my grandmother Missy. The name Missy has stuck in the family ever since. Back when Eleanor was a small child, Missy was rather sickly. The boys were put in charge of taking care of Eleanor, which sometimes included smoking out behind the garage. We never did hear a story that Eleanor partook in that.

Anyway, when Missy would ask Eleanor if she had a good time and if the boys were good to her, she replied, "Oh, yes, the boys were good to me. I had a good time." There was a steep hill behind St. John school in Burlington. The boys and Eleanor would slide down this hill in the winter on a homemade sled made out of trash can lid. At the bottom of this hill was the city dump. They would pick up all the "good

stuff” and take it home with them. I can remember one time, when I was about 6 years old, having a family dinner with Eleanor and another BVM sister at our house. It was back in the days of the old habit. I piped up and asked Eleanor if she always ate with her hat on. I never lived that one down. I just wanted to take this time to thank especially Sister Helen Emerson and Sister Pat Griffin for all the care and attention they gave our Aunt Eleanor. Thank you so very much.

Mary Ann Trekas, St. Odilo Parish, Berwyn, Ill. (Read by Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM)

Hello everyone. Along with my husband Tony, we had a wonderful friendship with Sister Gracita. We met in 1986, saying hello after Mass, and got acquainted. I talked to Gracita about Tony just entering the church through the RCIA program. She was anxious to meet him. It was the start of a very good friendship. Tony and I joined her in the RCIA program for many years. After listening to her speak to the class, I became aware of my own prayer life. I told Gracita that I was distracted while praying. Gracita guided me to a spiritual focus that I still have today. She would mail us, as she would say, “a shot-in-the-arm” prayer reading to keep us both focused. In recent years, we kept up with her through Sister Helen Emerson, also a good friend to us. Rest in peace, dear friend. We will miss you, but pray to you now forever. To her family and her BVM sisters, our deepest sympathy.

Tony Trekas, St. Odilo Parish, Berwyn, Ill. (Read by Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM)

Dear Sister Gracita, thank you for being with me along the way after my conversion to the Catholic faith. I am so grateful that God brought you and the other BVM sisters into my life. It was so enjoyable being your helper in the RCIA program at St. Odilo. I would tell the people in the RCIA program that I could always use the extra help. You will be greatly missed. I will keep you and all the BVM sisters and associates in my prayers. God bless you.

Brother David Kalenski, FSC, Chicago, Ill.

Imagine 65 years ago, a little guy with curly hair walking into Sister Gracita’s classroom for the first time. I looked up and saw the scary old habit, but she had that twinkle in her eye that she never lost. She was a wonderful, wonderful teacher. The sisters at Blessed Sacrament have always meant a great deal to me. Sister Carol Loras Pilmaier was my second grade teacher. When I tell kids that at school, they look at me and say, “Boy, you’re really old.” I am forever grateful to Sister Gracita for her energy, her love of teaching. That’s what got me to be a teacher. Every BVM I had had that same desire, that same sparkle, that same energy. I thank all of you for what you have done for us. I am truly appreciative. I saw a quote somewhere. I don’t know who wrote it, but it goes: “A truly great teacher is hard to find, difficult to part with, impossible to forget.” I will never forget Sister Gracita.

Sister Kathryn Lawlor, BVM (John Laurian)

I’m going to tell a story about another student at Blessed Sacrament that Gracita often talked about. One day the sisters had blueberry pie for dinner. She went out on the playground and called the children to come in after recess was over. One of the students had written a note and was passing it to another student. She said, “Bring that note up to me.” She opened the note and it said, “Why does Sister have blue goo on her teeth?”

Sister Jane Rogers, BVM (Jananne)

I would like to share an experience I had with Gracita at Holy Family in Chicago. I had 51 eighth graders; Gracita had the seventh grade and we did departmental classes. I have to tell you this joke so you can pick up on our experience together. Somebody had jumped out of a high-rise building. Every floor the jumper went by, the person would wave in and say, “Everything’s all right so far.” When we would exchange classes, we would stand outside the door as our students would switch rooms. We would

wave at each other, whirl a leg at each other, and give the sign "Everything's all right so far." She was wonderful, a wonderful heart. She taught me a lot, even a few tricks with scrabble. I'm deeply grateful for the life she has given to me. Thank you, Gracita.

Sister Anita Therese Hayes, BVM

Gracita entered the community back in 1941. She became one of the members of the Set of 1941. We were a very close set. We enjoyed each other from the beginning and we kept in touch with each other throughout the years. A long time ago, we started having breakfast on Friday mornings. That's when we took care of all the things happening in the world and in the community and with everybody else.

Gracita would always say, "I'm the youngest of the set." And she was; she was 17 when she entered. She had the first birthday in our set after we entered. She would always remind us about that. We had a great time meeting on Friday mornings, seeing how each one of us was getting along. There were 34 when we were professed, now we're down to three. We will miss Gracie; there's no doubt about it. We will always remember that you were the youngest one of our set and a very, very special person.

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

I worked at Marian Hall several summers. One of the earliest summers that I worked here, a sister passed away. The family came and they were quite distressed that their family member had passed away. I listened to Gracita talk to that family. I have admired the strength, the courage, and the realistic approach she took with that family in their distress and even their anger at the passing away of their sister. I admire that kind of strength.

Sister Mary Angela Buser, BVM

Back in the early 1970s, I was going to St. Francis Xavier in Kansas City, Mo. We needed some more BVMs to begin the REACH program. It was challenging. Gracita volunteered to join us and taught eighth grade with departmental in seventh and eighth grade. I was very grateful to her. After a year or two, she was asked to come here to Marian Hall to be administrator. She did a wonderful job. I wasn't present for that, but I admired her for it. After that, she accepted another challenge, going to St. Thomas the Apostle in West Hempstead, N.Y., which I loved. I had been there 15 years and she carried on the work. I believe she was the last BVM principal there.