

Sister Frances Dolan, BVM (Franciscus)
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, May 23, 2017

Kimberly (Kaczor) Theobold—Told by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM

I received 10 memories to share and will intersperse them. I will start with one from Fran's days at Mundelein College from Kimberly (Kaczor) Theobold, who entered Mundelein in 1976 as a music major. She had a little fact that not many people know—that Sister's parents owned an opera house in Chicago. Fran was accompanying her father by the age of eight. She and Sister Louise French were lifelong friends from an early age. "Sister Frances was an incredible teacher and advocate and she was so funny! I can remember many lessons where we laughed and laughed."

Sister Susan Rink, BVM

The reflection that I am going to give is not from me. It's from Dee Dee Keena. Most people here know that Dee Dee Keena is really Sister Agnes Marie Keena, BVM. That's all that Fran would ever call her. She thought it was a disgrace to call somebody "Dee Dee."

Sister Agnes Marie (Dee Dee) Keena, BVM (Richard Agnes)—Read by Sister Susan Rink, BVM (Michaela)

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." These words were proclaimed at our Christmas Cantata each year at Xavier HS in St. Louis. Fran was our music teacher. Of all the wonderful productions we did, I always looked forward to the Cantata. Before each Cantata, Fran would remind us that there is someone in the theater who will be inspired, and perhaps have a change in heart, when he or she hears the words of scripture proclaimed in words and songs.

I was principal for 38 years. Every year the students presented a Christmas Cantata. The last 15 years, it was presented by children age K through five and, in my opinion, was the most enjoyable and inspiring. I rewrote our high school Cantata to be proclaimed and sung by young children. Each year, Fran was very much alive as these young people prepared for their special night. I always told them about Sister Franciscus and how she would gather us together to remind us that someone in the theater would be inspired by our proclamation of the gospel and singing of the songs.

The Cantata began with a solemn procession of the children walking into a darkened church with candles. Each year they proclaimed the scripture in words and in songs, not only in English, but in French and German. I would call Fran the night before the Cantata and ask for her prayers. Of course, she told me, "It will be fine." The last few years, I would send her a DVD of the Cantata. Believe it or not, I hesitated to do so since I knew these little children were not always on key. But their faces were truly joyful and touched the hearts of many people. Fran always appreciated receiving those DVDs.

Fran, you no longer walk in the darkness of failing health. For the hundreds of children *and* adults who were inspired by the many Christmas Cantatas, I thank you and pray that as you enter into eternal life, you hear the voice of God say, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased."

Timothy Powers, Friend

Our family had the privilege to know Fran upwards of about 50 years. One of the earlier memories she shared with me was tied to the story of her mother deciding one day that her daughter was going to drive the car. She wasn't anywhere near old enough. Nowadays she would have to be in the back seat, probably with a booster. With the assistance of a book under her backside, she could just barely see between the dashboard and the steering wheel. Her mother had the confidence and the lack of fear. They drove to wherever they were going. I remember her saying something about the looks on people's faces as they saw this young person driving this car. I just think about her mother giving her that freedom to experience something and having the confidence to do something like that. Nowadays we would be thrown in jail for something like that. I think that it reflects part of her character and something I've seen growing up with her in our family.

She was Aunt Fran to us, basically, a duet of Aunt Fran and Aunt Louise (French). Wherever one went, so did the other. There was Fran driving the vehicle and her "mother" Louise telling her what to do, maybe not with as much confidence as Fran's mom. In our childhood, she was there for births, baptisms, first communions, weddings, everything. Fran and Louise were always present. It was the grace, the love and the generosity, and all those parts of someone's character considered positive and an inspiration to someone. I want to think that that has given me something to aspire to in terms of my character.

When I was growing up, I was looking to her and Louise and all of the adults that were important in our lives. They were always there in terms of the milestones and celebrations. It made a part of me that is positive and blessed, to look at other people as individuals, to look for the good in them and to cherish whatever it is in them that makes them special. She promoted and inspired that. Even though someone passes on, a part lives on in us in whatever parts of our character that were formed by him or her.

In a situation where I may act or react, I say to myself, "How would Aunt Frances or Aunt Louise act?" I try to err on the side of kindness and patience. Of course, sometimes with children, that's not easy. With the thousands of students that Aunt Frances, and all of you have had, it contributed to her ability to be very patient, kind and loving and to understand that inside that rock there is gold to be found if you take the time to chip away at it. On the part of our family, I have to say that we loved her and appreciated every moment with her. We will miss her.

Sister Mary Agnes O'Connor, BVM (St. Agnes)

Being born in Pasadena, Calif., to a very religious Irish Catholic family who believed in education, I was enrolled in St. Philip School in the 1940s. In first and second grade, I was not aware of the tremendous gift that Franciscus had. I recall the Christmas Cantata in first and

second grade that was performed across the street from the school at Pasadena City College. My parents were so impressed with that music that they purchased a used upright piano. They thought and hoped that I could become a musician. My very first piano teacher was Fran when I was in third grade. I have very deep memories; you have said so many things that I could repeat. I am so grateful for her presence in my life.

Gabby Powers, Wife of Timothy Powers

I first met Fran in April of 1986. Tim had asked me to marry him over the phone since I was in Germany and he was in Chicago. I decided to make a trip to Chicago to see if I wanted to come over, get married and live here.

Of course, I was introduced to Fran and Louise. Right away, they took me under their wings, made me feel very comfortable and welcomed. I was struck by her kindness and generosity, and the genuine interest she took in me. I realized later that she took a genuine interest in everybody that she met. Meeting her and Louise helped me make the decision to move here, get married, and become part of the Powers family.

I remember Fran driving around in her Buick. They were a big part of our children's lives; they were like a second set of grandmothers. They would take them out on countless trips to Chuck E. Cheese, followed by trips to the toy section at Target. Both of my children have very fond memories of Louise and Fran. I am very fortunate to have met them and to be part of the family.

I remember when I was pregnant with Julia, I was about 10 days past my due date and getting a little anxious and worried. Fran and Louise said, "Let's go out to lunch." We did and Fran said, "Gabby, why don't you have a glass of wine to help you relax a little bit." I took her advice and had a glass of wine. Lo and behold, that night I went into labor. Thank you, Fran, for helping things move along.

Sister Mary Jo Keane, BVM (Martin Mary)

I lived in the same building with Fran for a number of years. I think people don't know that she was like a Uber driver, but she didn't make any money on it! Anytime I mentioned that I wanted to go on a trip, she took that Buick to the gas station, filled it up, and was at the door when I was ready to go. She did that for a lot of people in the city.

Sister Karen Mary Conover, BVM, Former Student

I was a student at Bishop HS in Santa Barbara, Calif. When I was a sophomore in 1962, Sister Franciscus came to teach and work her wonders at what was an almost brand new school building. She was an energetic and creative music teacher and promptly began her signature productions. She had written a Christmas Cantata [already referred to by others here], and, although there was really no theater or stage, only a gym with a semi-stage, she whipped the glee club into fine form and hung a scrim curtain in front of the tableaux. I can never celebrate Advent without the strains of one of the pieces from that Cantata, "The O Antiphons," wafting through my memory. For spring musicals, she rented the prestigious Lobero Theater, scene of

all the performances by celebrities who came to Santa Barbara. It must have been an enormous task, financially and in every other aspect, for which her boundless energy was surely a match.

One of my classmates, **Neta McClellan Knightley**, wrote, "Sister [Frances] was and always will be a very important part of my life. She watched over me as a mother, and what fun we had together on shopping trips." I am sure they revolved around securing things for productions and visiting different schools.

Prior to her coming to Santa Barbara, Frances had been at St. Paul in San Francisco for two years. **Associate Marilyn Highlander-Pool** told me this story about the production of "Brigadoon." "Pat Murphy Ormsby had the female lead, and in the motion picture her character smoked, and Franciscus wanted Pat to smoke too. It was scandalous! However, the funny part about that was [that] Pat was already smoking, and her parents didn't know it. So she had to pretend when Franciscus—who knew *exactly* what she was doing when she lit the cigarette, puffed on it, inhaled, and put it out—showed Pat how to do it. Pat didn't "catch on" right away, because she thought Sister loved teaching her how to do it. [The production] was such fun and, of course, a *huge* success."

Mary Frances Schneider-Belsha, Former Student

I met Sister Frances when I was 13 years old at Holy Angels Academy in Milwaukee. I like to journal. This past Mother's Day I was journaling quite a lot about Sister Frances. The word "mother" has been coming up in different ways. I have to say that for sure Sister Frances was the mother of my soul.

My mother and father gave me a great gift by sending me to Holy Angels Academy. It was an amazing birthplace for anybody with any type of creativity. We girls thought that we had many different mothers, but for me, the best mother was Sister Frances. She told me that I had a great voice and I believed her. She had me singing everything and I did it. We went from *Oklahoma* to *My Fair Lady* to *Song of Norway*. In all of those productions, our lives were filled with music and beauty. She had endless energy. When I was a young woman, she was still in her habit. She would walk around like a ballerina lifting her skirt on those risers. I would think, *Oh my, she's kind of an angel*. She did daring things and she expected us to do them too. She'd say, "You have gifts and you must put them into the world." As she was dangling out of her French windows on the fourth floor of Holy Angels in the spring, messing around smelling the apple blossoms, she'd say things like, "You see, there must be a God." Woah!

There were many amazing, wonderful memoirs. I did get to "keep" her because I was working on my doctorate in Chicago when she became a professor at Mundelein and Loyola. She continued to teach music so I could continue to have voice lessons at her apartment with Sister Louise. It was always so much fun! They were wonderful! Using her gifts for liturgy, she planned and put it together for my wedding with my late husband Cy, and also played and sang. It was such a magnificent liturgy; you had to listen to the music! In the reception line after the service, an elegant man came up to me and said, "Who is that woman on the organ and piano?" I couldn't even answer him; he kept on talking. "Her voice, her energy with music!" He didn't

wait for an answer, but ran over to her and asked her for a date! Fran was so elegant; she never said, “Oh, by the way, I am a nun.” She just accepted his glowing praise and said, “No, thank you.”

As I think of her as mother and a wise woman in the formation of my life, I know that I was loved and my gifts were loved. I was given permission, actually *orders*, to live that creativity in my life. It’s my hope and prayer that we will be able to still feel that grace of Fran in our lives when we think of her and when we share our hearts’ desires with her. This woman, for sure, was a saint.

Sister Mary Anne Bradish, BVM (Leslie)

Fran was my teacher from 1949–51, piano teacher, and glee club instructor. I talked with one of my friends who was a classmate from kindergarten through twelfth grade. I said, “Betty, do you remember Franciscus?” She said, “Just like yesterday.” Fran made an impression on all of us. I don’t need to reiterate what has been said. She also made an impression on me in the last two years while she was on the fourth floor memory care unit. She caressed your hands as you held hands with her. She just shared loved completely. Thanks, Fran!

Joseph Nemmers, Former Student—Told by Anne Marie McKenna, BVM

Joe Nemmers was in the Class of 1973 at Carmel Catholic HS in Mundelein, Ill. He had originally joined the mixed chorus because he thought it would be a good place to meet girls. Then he learned that Fran was quite the disciplinarian and wanted perfection. At the 25th class reunion, he told her “she was the toughest instructor I ever had, and that included grade school, Carmel, college, and even the U.S. Army. She just winked at me and said, ‘But of course.’”

Mary Frederick—Told by Anne Marie McKenna, BVM

This story came from Mary Frederick around 2003, probably when Fran was at Wright Hall in Chicago. Mary’s mother very much wanted “When Irish Eyes are Smiling” at her funeral. The priest was adamant that that song could not be used. A mutual friend put her in contact with Fran to do the liturgy and music for the funeral. This is Fran’s genius: she used “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” after the priest walked out the door, but while the coffin and the family were still leaving church. Her ability to make things work for people was quite wonderful.

Shirley Young O’Reilly and Kathleen Young Flowers, St. Louis—Told by Anne Marie McKenna, BVM)

Any of you who had Fran as a HS teacher will identify with a quote from the Young family who attended Xavier HS in St. Louis. “[This] helped me for the rest of my life. As you walk onto the stage, stand up tall, head high, and say to yourself, ‘I am a poised and graceful woman.’” I see looks of great familiarity.

Mary McDevitt, St. Louis—Told by Anne Marie McKenna, BVM

A visual image: There she was “sitting on the piano bench beside me, pence-nez glasses on the bridge of her nose. [And in the] choir loft [I’m] watching, [that] she played the organ with her feet!”

Liz Hannon, San Francisco—Told by Anne Marie McKenna, BVM

Liz Hannon, whom Franciscus encourage to use her musical talents, said, “I have tried to be for my students what she was for me.”

Brenda Beaumier, Milwaukee—Told by Anne Marie McKenna, BVM

Brenda Beaumier from Holy Angels Academy in Milwaukee remembers Franciscus bringing the Angelaires here in the 1960s to sing for the sisters.