

Sister Vincentia Kaefenstein, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Jan. 18, 2017

Mary Ann Miles Bidra, Former Clarke Student (Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM)

I am speaking on behalf of my brothers and sister: Jack, Terry and Michael Miles, and Catherine Miles Wallace. Vinnie, as we Miles kids knew her, was a best buddy and frequent traveling companion of our aunt, Sister Mary Carolanne Miles, BVM, who died in 2002 at the age of 89. Sister Vinnie was especially attentive to Sister Mary Carolanne after she suffered a stroke several years before she died. She was often a guest in our home and we remember her fondly. At almost 103, she has certainly earned her way home to heaven.

Jackie Powers Doud, Former BVM

I lived with Vinnie in Des Moines, Iowa. Such a lovely person. May she rest in peace.

Sister Susan Rink, BVM (Michaela)

I was a city student at Clarke College, now Clarke University, in Dubuque, Iowa. When it was time to go home, I often went out the front door. Lo and behold, there was Vinnie coming home from a day at St. Anthony school. She looked meticulous. You never would have guessed that she had spent a whole day being a principal, superior and teacher. In the 1980s, Vinnie and I worked together in the biology department at Clarke. Vinnie taught bacteriology. When you saw her, she never had a hair out of place. She wore a spotlessly white lab coat. It looked like no bacteria would ever get near her. She was loved by the students and she was a great person with whom to teach. Thank you, Vinnie.

Sister Kathleen Antol, BVM

Speaking of bacteriology, when I first went to Clarke in July 1984, immediately after the Clarke fire in May, I was assigned to teach bacteriology or microbiology. I loved that subject, but I knew the student laboratory was a very difficult prep. I had never met Vincentia, but she immediately took me under her wing. She took me to the prep room and showed me the easiest way to prep that laboratory with the cultures, the plates and all. I was amazed.

Because the sisters' bedrooms burned during the fire, there was no place to live at Clarke. I went to live at Vista Clarke at the Visitation Convent with the emeritus sisters from Clarke. Vinnie had just retired and I was taking her place. It was a very interesting house; it was the retired sisters and myself. Vinnie and I had bedrooms across the hall from each other. We became friends because we were the youngest sisters in the house. I was 40 and she was 70! We remained fast friends through the years. As Sister Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM (Clement Mary) wrote to me via an email, "You had a wondrous relationship." Yes, we did. I am very grateful for that. Vinnie was a friend like no one could imagine. She was an amazing woman, a very holy, religious woman and BVM. Hopefully, she rubbed off a little on me.

One of the things I remember and know about her was that she was a little bit ahead of the times. She lived mindfulness. I used to say to her, "Don't you ever get upset?" She would say, "Well, everything that happens, God sends. So you just accept it and be happy." Of course, that's a hard lesson to learn. Something else I remember—Vincentia was a card shark. In that house, there were regular Saturday night bridge games. I was not a card player myself, but I would sit and watch her shuffle and deal a deck of cards like a croupier in Las Vegas. I was amazed. I used to tease her about going to Las Vegas to make a lot of money for congregation. She would just laugh with that laugh of hers. Vinnie, thank you for your

friendship through the years. Thank you for being you to so many people in this room and elsewhere. We love you and know that you are in the arms of God.

Sister Mary Lou Ann Doerring, PBVM

Sister Vincentia shared this part of her call to religious life with some of us. She told about her father bringing produce and goods to the sisters. She was either nine or ten and she went along with him. Another Sister Vincentia answered the door and put her hand on the shoulder of this little girl and she said, "You are going to take my place."

When the time came for her to receive her name in religion, she was hoping to get the name Vincentia, but another classmate had a brother named Vincent. They were right beside each other and she thought, "Oh, I'm not going to get that name." As she heard the sister beside her receive a different name, her heart lifted. The name that came to her was Sister Mary Vincentia. She was pleased and smiling when she told that story. She said, "I hope somebody tells this at my wake."

Marilyn Wasmundt, BVM Associate

I was an eighth grade student at St. Anthony when Sister Mary Vincentia was my teacher. I have three memories of that year. One was when one of the boys was horsing around and his elbow went through the fire alarm. The whole school was up and out of the building. Sister Vincentia was running up and down the halls to find out where the fire was and who set off the alarm. He came forward. There was no fallout from that. Sister was very calm and everyone went back to class. Sister simply made a statement. He didn't get into any trouble. That impressed me.

Then, on April Fool's Day, everyone was pulling April Fool jokes. At the end of the day, Sister said, "The boys may leave; the girls will stay." We all said, "What?" My friend broke a pencil in half and threw it up to the front of the room. Sister just started to laugh and said, "April Fool's."

Finally, Sister always used huge words we didn't understand. She would say a sentence and we would all just look at her. She would write the word on the board and say, "If you don't know it, find out what it means." I told her later when she was here, "I continued that with my children and my grandchildren." About three years ago, my six-year-old grandson was working in the garden with me. He was talking and talking and talking. I said, "Austin, you are so philosophical." He just looked at me. I said, "I'll explain it to you someday."

John Enright, Nephew-in-law.

A whole bunch of years ago as a young sailor in California, I meet a wonderful girl, Dorothy Hahn, who is sitting next to me today and is my wife of 48 years. What that permitted me to do was to meet four wonderful sisters: obviously Dorothy's mom Ursula, Aunt Jeanne, Aunt Marg, and Aunt Lil. Over those years, Lil and I became very good friends. My wife and I would pick her up and bring her down to the Hahn reunion in Grand Mound, Iowa. We played a lot of cards together and, yes, she was quite good. We were playing 500 and quite often, she would try to bid two spades. We would have to get her back on track. She was really and truly a lovely lady. I am a better person for knowing her. I will miss her.

Sister Eileen Healy, BVM

This is Sister Vincentia's practical nature story. When I was in pastoral care at the Motherhouse, I frequently drove sisters to wakes and funerals. I was driving Vincentia once in what must have been spring because I think we were having a tornado. We were driving down to Davenport when the storm just came up from out of nowhere. We were near Andrew, Iowa. My knuckles were white on the

steering wheel. I didn't want to say, "I think we should turn around and not go to your niece's wake." Instead, she said to me, "I think this storm is too bad. We should turn around and go home. I'll call them from home." She really wanted to be with her family, but she saw the danger. We went home and she called the family at the funeral home so they wouldn't worry about her. I always think about how practical she was.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM, Mount Carmel BVM Life Facilitator

Shortly after Vincentia passed, several of the aides were sharing stories about Vinnie. One of them who has known Vincentia for a long time told us that she named one of her granddaughters Lillian, Vincentia's baptismal name. She told me that she could always talk with Vincentia. She said, "Vinnie always had the right words, the right tone of voice and the right look in her eye."

Sister Margaret Mary Cosgrove, BVM

I met Vinnie when I first went to Clarke in 1975. I moved to Dubuque from a mission we had in Wahiawa, Hawaii, the pineapple capital of the world. It was a rural area and very multicultural. We taught Samoans, Hawaiians and Haoles, and military children; it was very diverse.

I moved from there to Dubuque, which was not diverse; it was a very difficult adjustment. I was asked to work in the business office to learn the job and possibly take over for the treasurer who wanted to retire. I remember several things from that time.

One was that almost every night you could go to the large community room in Margaret Mann Hall and there would be two or three tables of bridge. Everyone was always welcome to play. Even though I didn't know any of these sisters, they always made me feel welcome. I hadn't played bridge since high school so my skills were rusty and they were excellent players. But they were very patient and taught me how to play. Every Friday night there was another group of four, including Father Barta, who played bridge until well after midnight. Sometimes, when one of the regulars couldn't be there, I was a sub. That was a lot of fun.

I was at Clarke for less than 10 months when I was named the treasurer and CFO. I did not know a debit from a credit. I had no experience, but I was the person chosen to do it. It was a very difficult time. Clarke was in some financial difficulty, the budget wasn't going to balance, and I had to present it to the Board of Trustees.

Behind the scenes, there were a number of women, and Vinnie was one of the primary persons, who always quietly supported me and helped me understand that whatever I needed would be given to me to do that job. I have always appreciated that quiet, loving, behind the scenes support that was so typical of Vinnie.

Sister Mary Ellen Caldwell, BVM (Eugenio)

I lived with Sister Vincentia at Clarke and we became good friends there. She was wonderful to live with even when we lived at opposite ends of the dorm as dorm counselors, not one of my favorite jobs, as I recall. The last few years, I have had the privilege of taking care of her correspondence. I have an insight into how much she was loved by her family, which is a very large, loving family, and the tremendous impact she had on students. Students that she taught more than 50 years ago were still writing to her and indicating how important she was in their lives. That really is something important.