

Sister Frances Ann Schaeffer, BVM (Louis)
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Dec. 26, 2016

Chuck Schmidt, Nephew, New Jersey; read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM (Lucian)

My earliest memories of you, Aunt Fran, were as a young boy, when you would take Jill and me sledding in the Iowa snow and when you taught us how to swim. You were a really fun aunt! I was about 11 when you went to Mount Carmel to begin your life as a [BVM] sister. It was the grandest place I had ever seen, and I realized what a special thing you [were] doing. How wonderful to devote your entire life to God, and what [a] wonderful sister you were. You touched the lives of so many young school children with your talent and love.

In recent years, Jan and I so enjoyed our lunches together at the Hotel Julien, where we last saw you this past summer. Now you have completed your life of love and service, and gone home to be with God and your beloved parents, brother and sister. I look forward to our eventual reunion there. Until then, please rest in peace, dear Aunt Fran.

Mary Lawson, Niece, Florida; read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM

I am very grateful for my Aunt Fran who was able to come and care for my mom, Fran's sister Catherine, when she was in hospice and dying in 2006. Fran was a wonderful, caring, loving woman to all of us. She was a great comfort to my mom and dad and each of us.

Cecilia Darling Donatus; former BVM, friend; read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM

When I was about to make first vows, [Frances Ann] was most welcoming to my family . . . She welcomed my CSJ (Sisters of St. Joseph) sister, Sister Frances Margaret, as if she'd known her for years. I will never forget her kindness and generosity. My sister passed away in 2010, so maybe they will meet in passing and rekindle a friendship.

Karen Carden, Chattanooga teacher; summary read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM

Karen has kept in touch with Frances Ann during the 13 years since Frances retired. Karen is now the director of the Montessori program that Frances began at Our Lady of Perpetual Help school over 30 years ago. Karen could not say enough about Frances's training and mentoring for herself and her sister, who was also a teacher early in the program, saying how valuable it has been for both of them.

BVM Associate Coordinators: Nancy McCarville, Grace Mendez, Kimberly Emery, Lori Ritz; read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM

We know that Frances Ann's enthusiasm and happy spirit always accompanied her . . . In the past year, she offered to accompany an associate candidate in discernment. She was a perfect companion for Suzie Wright. Recognizing and encouraging Suzie's gifts, Frances Ann prepared a wonderful orientation for her. [During an associate event] on poetry honoring Mary Frances Clarke, Frances Ann offered her teapot lamps . . . and highly encouraged us to serve the hot tea in genuine teacups! [For] the zest she added to our associate program, we are deeply grateful.

David Deans, Grand-Nephew

I have a letter that my mother, Jill Schmidt Dean, wrote that I would like to read to you.

Our Fran was a selfless, loving and spiritual person who dedicated her life to serving the Lord. She was also my mentor as I traveled along that spiritual journey myself. Fran was fun. A favorite memory of mine was when she took us sledding down a steep hill outside of our house. She yelled, "All right everybody, pile on the sled." And boy did we! We all got on the sled. Chuck was on first, then me, Jack was on top of me and Fran was on the very bottom. We sledded down the hill, crashed into a big snow bank at the bottom and flew off. The kids were laughing. Fran got up. She was a little bit sore, but she thought it was a lot of fun too. Fran was also an anchor for us when our mother Catherine was sick and in hospice. She came and helped us with 24-hour care. She moved back to Iowa and pretty much ran the household. Not only was Fran a help to us, but she also brought laughter and stories and a wicked card game. Recently, my husband John and I, along with Dave and his wife Shawna, visited Fran around Thanksgiving. We are so thankful for that time spent with her. Fran will be missed. I really enjoyed my phone calls with Fran. I would give her virtual hugs over the phone. Peace be with you, Fran.

Brian Schmidt, Grand-Nephew

I am the grandson of Fran's sister Catherine. Like her sister, Fran always had a smile on her face and kind words for me. When I would see her, she was warm, gracious, and humble. Whenever we talked, she was happy to talk about her ministry and what God was doing through her. She also made me feel like she really wanted to learn about me and know what was going on in my life. That was more interesting to her than talking about herself.

Our family moved away from Iowa to the east coast when I was still relatively young. We didn't see Aunt Fran all that often, but occasionally she would send a letter to my sister and me and sometimes a gift like a cross, small figure, something to remind us of our faith and let us know that she was thinking about us and praying for us. It meant something to me at that time; it means even more to me now. When I was a kid, I often felt that the world revolved around me, so, of course, why wouldn't she be thinking about me and sending stuff to me?

Now I look back and know how many people she cared about and that she was busy doing God's work. Yet she took time out to touch our lives even from afar. In the years since our Grandma Kate passed away, it was comforting to talk to Fran and feel closer to Grandma through the stories and the connection and bond that Fran and Grandma had. That bond included some contentious games of Scrabble and some controversial "triple word scores."

I remember having a conversation with Aunt Fran some months before Grandma Kate passed away. Fran told me that she felt that the time was near, that Grandma was going to go home to be with God. Although it was sad that our time with Grandma was short, it was comforting to hear the way that Fran explained it and to have the knowledge that God had a plan and an

appointed time to call Grandma home. Now God has called Fran home and Fran and Grandma are together with God. That gives me comfort.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM, BVM Life Facilitator

Fran was a member of our house council for only a few short months, but she was a woman who listened to the concerns of the sisters. She spoke her wisdom at council meetings. She spoke her truth with love. I think we will miss your wisdom, pretty lady. Keep on praying for us.

Sister Mary Janine Wolff, BVM

Many of you know that I usually have a camera in my pocket. I was with Frances Ann through her three months of intensive chemotherapy. There is a picture on the table at the chapel entrance of her with a hat that looks like New Year's Day. It wasn't New Year's, but it was a new start for her. She was told that morning that she had finished her three months of chemo. There's another picture of her in a very pink, ruffled blouse. That goes back to her niece Jill. Jill came visiting one time and had on that blouse. Frances Ann just loved that blouse. Because of the kindness that she learned from family members, especially from Frances Ann, Jill went home that night, took of the blouse and gave it to her the next morning. She treasured that blouse.

Sister Mary Brigid Hart, BVM

I am a set member with Frances Ann. When I saw the sewing box outside the chapel this morning, I thought, *Oh, isn't that neat! That is who she was.* She started as the sewing room novice and I happened to be in the laundry. What it recalled for me was a time rather recently when Archives wanted a modified habit, the habit after the box. Although we started in the box, when she was called back to Mount Carmel to make habits, the modified habit was what she made. There was much detail of fabric, starch, and plastic to get this habit perfect. One day I came down the Marian Hall corridor and I thought there was a BVM still in full habit. Here there was this wonderful habit for the Archives on a mannequin. It was very much "alive" because of Frances's patience, detail and kindness.

Sister Catherine Jean Hayen, BVM

As we have been using masks and gloves to prevent the spread of the flu, I, too, am reminded of the three months of Fran's chemo treatment when we visited her with masks and gloves worn by her and us. I am always amazed how hope-filled she remained during that time. I treasure her many, many ways of service: the Mall in the Hall, sewing, mending, altering clothes, and the making of cards with folded designs. But mostly I am grateful for her loving smile and laugh. Having lived with Fran for 10 years at St. Paul in Davenport, and our rich sharing during our monthly trips to Prairiewoods Spirituality Center in Hiawatha, Iowa, for nine months for our S.E.E.L. (Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life) retreats, only deepened my love and gratitude for her faith, friendship and love. I miss you, Fran, but rejoice for you.

Sister Joan Newhart, BVM (Joan Michael)

Fran and I literally saw eye-to-eye. She maybe had an inch on me. So it was with a special graciousness that she responded to my frequent pleas to shorten a pair of slacks I brought

home from my Christmas vacation. Love you, Frances, but this is a request: please send me a seamstress.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM, Coordinator of Support Services

Last year as we helped a sister move from Caritas Center to Marian Hall, she had an absolutely gorgeous purple linen jacket, but the lining was in shreds. She so loved the jacket that I took it and had Sister Diane Forster look at it. Frances Ann also looked at it. In the end, she did the most incredible job of reconstructing a lining for that jacket.

What I have here in my hand is the note that she sent back with it. She wrote, "I had 'much' help with this relining – buying the fabric and thread (Sister Diane Forster), making and cutting the pattern and the material (Julie Wessels from Activities), pressing the seams (Sister Mary Alma Sullivan), advice (Sisters Pat Perko and Diane) and lots of prayers (Sister Donna Schauf). Thanks for your patience. Frances Ann." She was so proud of it. We were so thrilled and so was Sister Ann Marie Dolan whose jacket is now whole because of Frances Ann.

Sister Therese Jacobs, BVM (Therese Carmelle)

I lived with Frances in the 1970s and even before that I knew her parents. Her father was a great craftsman. Every year he would prepare the dining room to look like Bethlehem. She had the talent of her father for beauty and construction. Today is the feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. In the commentary from *Give Us This Day*, it says, "The door to heaven is quite low and only the humble will get there." Frances is surely there. What a humble, loving woman. I miss you too, Frances. God bless you.

Sister Patricia Fitzgerald, BVM

I got to know Frances here at Mount Carmel. As many of you have experienced, every time she saw me, she'd say, "Hello, pretty lady." At first, it really bothered me, because . . . Well, you all know! But I thought a lot about it. She was getting all the fun out of this. I was going to get some fun out of this too. So every time she called me and said, "Hi, pretty lady," I'd reply, "Hi, gorgeous!"

Suzie Wright, BVM Associate

I am the candidate who spent the last year working with Frances Ann to become an associate. She was an incredible blessing to me from the very first day I met her at an associate retreat. I had great joy getting to know her and hearing the stories of how she loved working with the small children in the school systems, all the work she did for the Mall in the Hall, even walking through the BVM history and sharing stories about life and community. It was such a blessing. I am grateful for her.

Sister Kathleen O'Sullivan, BVM (Donall)

I was going to say something about Frances Ann's kindness, but I've come up with another word and it is tenderness.