

Sister Mary Frances Shafer, BVM (Francis Edward)
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Date

Sister Gail Fitzpatrick, OCSO (Read by Sister Teri Hadro, BVM President)

Dear BVM Sisters, please accept my sincere sympathy on the death of Sister Mary Frances. As soon as I heard that she had gone home to God, I wanted to write to you all. Soon after our sisters arrived in Dubuque to found Mississippi Abbey, Sister Mary Frances offered to teach theology out here. It was a wonderful gift coming soon after the Vatican Council. She was a very enthusiastic teacher and we appreciated her classes enormously. Sister Mary Ellen Caldwell, BVM (Eugenio) was also a treasured gift to our community in those early days. So we remember Sister Mary Frances with love and gratitude. May she receive a full measure of God's gift of love and light. I write this for Mother Rebecca and all your Trappistine sisters.

Sister Mary Ellen Caldwell, BVM (Eugenio)

Sister Mary Frances told this story about herself. The first five years after her profession, she was sent to a different mission every year. This distressed her mother who interpreted it as a sign of incompetence. She wrote to Mary Frances's sister, S.M. Faber (Sister Ann Mary Shafer, BVM) and said, "Do you think there's ever anything that they'll find the baby is able to do?" I think that is such a wonderful story.

One of the things the baby was able to do was to teach in Wichita where we taught together at Mt. Carmel country day school. It was a boarding school so we had a lot of teamwork. We were very young and were able to do that. Later, we taught theology together at Clarke University. We shared an office and in that office we engaged in many vigorous theological discussions the like of which I have not had since. She liked teaching theology. I think it was one of her favorite things to do.

Later on, we were privileged to have her join the Constitutions committee when she finished her term as president for not only her theological expertise but also her experience in leadership that provided many valuable insights. These last years as she was struggling with her illness, I would frequently try to distract her from the pain by asking her to pray for someone in particular. When I did that, she would turn to me and say with great enthusiasm, "Oh, I will!" I suspect she is still willing, so let's keep her busy.

Sister Judy Callahan, BVM (Eugene Mary)

Two of these experiences happened in the Joliet Diocese where we both worked at the pastoral center. They indicate characteristics of her. Most of the people who have lived with her know her musical love. She would break into song at any moment. We went to the Messiah and, of course, she was singing along with the chorus on stage. I said to her, "Do you see all these people around here?" She said, "Yeah, isn't it beautiful?" "Look, they came to hear them, not you!" She could take it with a good sense of humor.

On her serious side, her dedication and love for the community was evident in the hard work she put in as personnel director. It was at a time when the technological age was surpassing her skill to keep up with it. She had to get people to come in and help her. I saw a lot of tension and stress in her. One day on a Saturday afternoon when she was slaving over this stuff, I asked her, "Mary Frances, why are you doing it?" She said, "The community needs the money." I said, "No, the community needs your skills more than it needs the money." That's when she started thinking about coming to Mount Carmel to help with the liturgy and use her skills that way.

The final short story happened here at Mount Carmel. It's a wonderful line if you want to remember this; it comes in very handy. One day as the sisters were coming out of the Mount Carmel Chapel, I was not present for whatever happened in there, they were all buzzing about it. I said to her, "What are they all talking about, Mary Frances? What happened in there?" She said, "Oh, I can't remember. It happened too recently."

Sister Bernadette McManigal, BVM

As Mary Ellen mentioned, the family wondered what the baby could do. When I lived with Mary Frances in Joliet, she would frequently go home with me to many McManigal parties. They all remember her very well because she taught them how to play "May I?" and "Oh, Hell!" When I called recently to tell them how poorly she was doing, they said, "We think of her every time we pull out the cards."

Peggy Vicars Magner (Former Student)

I am so grateful to be here today to hear all these wonderful stories. My stories go back to Pontiac, Ill., where she was my eighth grade teacher. She taught 45 of us and we were quite a handful. We thought we knew everything; some of us still think we do! She was wonderful. She taught us to diagram a sentence so completely. We loved what she had to teach us. I think the biggest thing I remember is that when she taught us religion, and she loved teaching religion, she taught us about limbo. We were not buying limbo at all; we argued with her. What I loved about her was that we were 13-years-old and knew nothing, but she let us argue, she let us talk and she let us think. That was so important.

I would be finished except that my relationship with her continued when I went to Clarke University. She was very instrumental in helping me get into Clarke and building me up at Clarke. At one time, I was heading to the library because I knew she wanted me to be there, but there was something else very educational going on. She said, "Peggy Vicars, where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to the library," thinking I would get a lot of her appreciation. However, she said I should be going to the other thing. She said, "Don't let your studying get in the way of your education." I remembered that.

I just finished 46 years in education. I used to come back here when I was working for Keystone Area Education Agency. I would visit with her and pick her brain. I would wonder, "*How did you make this work? How were you able to teach that many children so effectively? How did you do it?*" She talked and told me stories and I wrote things down because she really was incredible. I just finished teaching a math methods class at the University of Northern Iowa. Our first day, I asked the students to write down the characteristics of their best teacher ever. They do a nice job with that, but then I get to talk. I tell them about her because she was the best teacher I ever had.

Sister Margaret Mear, BVM (Jacoba)

I knew her in Pontiac, Ill, but she never taught me since she came after I completed grade school and was in the public high school. She ran Our Lady Sodality and got all the girls together every week. That's how I got to know her very well. When I was a second semester senior, I decided that God wanted me to be a nun. I was horrified! I went to her and said, "I want to be a nun." After she picked up her jaw from the desk, I said, "I can't decide between the Maryknollers and the Franciscans at the hospital (where I was working)." She said, "Well, are you good at languages?" I said, "Oh, no!" She said, "Well, God probably does not want you to be a Maryknoller then." She said, "Go visit the Franciscan motherhouse."

I went and I didn't like it at all so I came back to her and she said, "Why don't you join the BVMs?" I said, "Are there more of them than the eight of you here?" "Oh, yes!" I took her word that this was a good community and came here. She was right—it's been a good community. I have many stories about her

because she was always there for me. The funniest thing was when we were deciding about the habit—to keep it, to go to secular, what to wear. She said, “If I thought God wanted me to, I would wear a bikini.”

Sister Margaret Mary Cosgrove, BVM

I think Clarke was one of Mary Frances’s favorite missions. While she was at Clarke, she was asked to become part of the formation team. One of her first assignments in that role was to serve as the director at the Scholasticate in Chicago where our sisters lived while they were studying at Mundelein College.

This was in 1968 and the church, the world, and the congregation were all in turmoil. It was not a very pleasant place to live as young women were trying to sort out whether or not to stay in religious life. Some of the sisters older than us were also trying to figure that out. It was a time of a lot of tension and unkindness. Mary Frances came to live there with us. She was able to turn around the atmosphere. It became more than a building and more like a home. It still was not a perfect place, but her special touch changed the lives of a lot of the BVMs living in Chicago at that time.

Sister Mary Ellen Zimmermann, BVM (Ellenmae)

I met Mary Frances for the first time in the mid 1960s when she was principal and superior in Pontiac, Ill. She was visiting at Annunciation in Chicago where I was missioned. I remember the scene vividly, but don’t remember the rest of the visit. It was a nice evening. She was out on the front steps and talking. She was so vivacious and so happy about whatever the topic was that it impressed me a great deal.

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM (Mercedie)

I do not have a specific story to share, but more of a statement of affirmation and gratitude. When I came back from New York to Dubuque to serve at Marian Hall, and other areas of community service, Mary Frances was so absolutely understanding and supportive that I shall be eternally grateful for her presence in my life.

She gave me many ideas and also challenged me. She could ask a question that came out of the blue. I would think, “*Oh, my lord, what shall I do with that one?*” She helped me become a better person. She also had a wonderful sense of humor. She shared many fun stories especially when I was trying to serve as a regional. She was running around Montana and I could not keep up with her or with Sister Deanna Carr, BVM (Bernita). I just got the impression from her about what it really is to be in ministry, to serve people, to listen, and to accept them as they are. I am always grateful to Mary Frances.

Sister Eileen Healy, BVM (Patrick Ellen)

When Mary Frances came back to Mount Carmel in 1999 to be liturgist, I remember her walking up and down the corridors. She not only sang as she walked; she danced as she walked. No matter what else was happening, and sometimes there were tense times too, and just like at the Scholasticate, she was a leaven here. She would walk through the corridor singing and you couldn’t help but smile and know that everything would be just fine.

Sister Therese Mackin, BVM (Jeremy)

Mary Frances and I were colleagues at Clarke University. I was the dean of students so I had a number of problems. Mary Frances would visit with me about one problem or another. She would always help me get over the difficulties. I am forever grateful to her for all she did for those students.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM

Mary Frances told me this story many, many years ago. Apparently, there was a big age gap between herself and the next oldest sibling of ten children. It always made her think that she had been adopted. She went to her mom to talk about it and said, "Mom, am I adopted?" Her mother said, "Why in the world would we adopt you when we have nine other kids?" Several weeks ago when I was visiting with Mary Frances, she said to me, "I want to go home." I said, "Where is home, Mary Frances?" She said, "Kansas City. I want to be with my mom and my dad and all my siblings." I just try to imagine what joy she and her entire family are experiencing now.

Sister Eleanor Craggs, BVM

I first met Mary Frances as a postulant. She and I were destined to become pew partners. Some of you may remember that in those days the tallest were always in the front pews and the smallest were always in the last pews. We never quite understood this, but Mary Frances and I were in the front pew. We had a great discussion between us. "Are you going to sing alto or am I going to sing alto?" "Well, I don't know. Do you know alto?" She said, "Yes, I know alto." I said, "So do I." We finally decided that she would sing alto and I would sing soprano. We both made it through the novitiate. The next time I saw her was sometime in the 1980s when she was president of the congregation. I was in California and she came to visit the houses there. I happened to see her and said, "How are you?" She said, "I'm still an alto."

Sister Therese Frelo, BVM (Ann Carmelle)

Mary Frances loved to sing. I can recall when I was in the ministry office for six years. My office was across from her office in the BVM Center. She would be in there working and humming away. She had a wonderful voice and was able to harmonize when we sang. I loved to sit next to her because I also harmonized and was sure that I was on.

One day we had to go to Chicago for a meeting. We decided to go in the same car. I said, "I'll bring some music." So I brought all these tapes. We got in the car for the three-hour drive. We never stopped singing from the time we got in the car until we hit Chicago. We went to the meeting and then got back into the car. We sang all the way from Chicago to Dubuque. She loved to sing. I'm sure when she got up to heaven, she started a BVM choir. Someday I will join you, Mary Frances, in that choir. Everybody in that choir will be very happy because we will know all the words and will not have to practice.

Sister Paulina Sullivan, BVM

I grew up in Kansas City with Mary Frances. Part of our day was gathering people as we walked along to school because we had no cars. We sang all the way to St. Aloysius. She loved to sing and people loved to sing with her. It was a very, very good education.

Sister Therese Jacobs, BVM (Therese Carmelle)

Mary Frances visited the west when she was president. I happened to be in Oregon at the same time and we were going down to the San Francisco area. We chose to drive along the ocean. It's gorgeous—the road is beautiful, the waves are wonderful! Of course, we were singing all the

way. Every song I wanted to sing, and I know many songs, she also knew all the words. Eventually, there was a spot where we could get off the road and go down to the beach. We went down, took off our shoes and walked on the sand. I still think we were singing. It was a wonderful day. As everyone has said, she loved to sing, and she always knew all the words.