

Sister John Thomas Hackett, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Dec. 16, 2016

David, nephew living in Japan; Read by Diane Forster, BVM (Lucian)

My wife and I live so far away; we were only able to see her occasionally. With each visit being only a few days, time was precious which didn't mean there was a flurry of activity, but rather the awareness to enjoy sitting quietly together, or talking about great ideas and things of no consequence. Even over distance, her loss is still felt.

Margaret Day Schmidt; Read by Diane Forster, BVM

She was my favorite teacher ever, freshman Latin teacher at Our Lady of Peace (OLP) High School in St. Paul, Minn.

JoAnn O'Connell, BVM (Coman); Read by Diane Forster, BVM

John Thomas and I taught Latin at OLP and I had her as a teacher. I am grateful to have been able to visit John Thomas often at Mount Carmel. Someone notified me last week that JT wasn't doing well so I drove in for a short visit with her last Wednesday. I am so grateful that I had a chance to pray with her. I will miss being with John Thomas when I come each month for my cluster.

Helen Wolkerstorfer, BVM (Edith); Excerpts read by Irene Lukefahr, BVM

(E-mail): I had known John Thomas for so long that she has somehow incorporated into my being as a BVM. There was so much to be admired about her as a person. I feel fortunate to have known her.

(Christmas card): My dear John Thomas, we've had a long and rich association going back to Our Lady of Peace days. Thank you! Thank you for your excellence as a teacher. I so clearly remember your political conventions. I am grateful for our community meetings and prayers at LaSalle High School and happenings at St. Patrick and your joyful presence at Mount Carmel. It is high time that a little bit of the many blessings you are, are acknowledged. Love, Helen.

Bill Hackett, Nephew

When she decided she wanted to travel abroad, go to Ireland, she needed to get a passport. To get a passport, she needed to have a birth certificate. Unfortunately, when she ordered her birth certificate, all it said was "Girl Hackett" on it. She had to go through quite a bit of red tape in order to get the passport. My father was her younger brother. We always had Sister come to Sioux City, Iowa, for Thanksgiving. I had a lot of frequent flyer miles so I always got her free tickets so she wouldn't have to take the bus. At the time I think she was living in Cedar Rapids because she was teaching at LaSalle High School. When I started to book the airline tickets, they actually wanted to know her real name. I always knew her as John Thomas, so I had to find out her real name. It's Anna Bernice. That's what I've been using along with her birthday of Jan. 22, 1922.

One other story. I went to the University right out of high school. That was in 1971. I ran into a guy who was in my rhetoric class by the name of Jerry Field. He was talking about this nun who was a real disciplinarian at LaSalle. On further inquiry, I come to find out it's my aunt. One day I got her side of the story. They were having a retreat. Jerry and his friends went to his house which was near the school to listen to music. She told the priest about it, but he didn't want to take action. So she walked over to the house and knocked on the door. There's Jerry and there she stands right in front of him. You can imagine his shock. The poor guy, he couldn't get away with anything.

Steve Marriott, Nephew

For the last few years, geographically I've been her closest living relative so we did come to visit Sister when we could. My most recent visit was in October when Sister and I were going to drive north of Dubuque and look at the leaves. The leaves were fine, but the weather didn't cooperate; it was gray and rainy. But we still had a wonderful time. We went up to Pikes Peak State Park and then to McGregor and had a lovely lunch. While we were talking, Sister revealed to me some of her mischievous nature. I am the one that bought the conductor and engineer hats for the railroad which are to stay here for the children to play with. The whole idea was to entertain the children when they come.

When we were on this trip, we had a discussion. Unfortunately, I was not able to make good on a promise. She said that it would be fun to have a tattoo. We talked about it. Something Irish—a Celtic cross. "Well," I said, "there are temporary tattoos that come in all shapes and sizes. Maybe I could get you one of those." Of course, it was more for the enjoyment of the scandal than actually wanting a tattoo. Unfortunately, I was not able to locate anything Celtic. Before I could make good on that, she became ill and passed away. I really would have gotten that for her and I'm sure she would have put it on. She was a lovely lady and she will be missed a great deal.

Carolyn Farrell, BVM (Lester)

I knew Sister John Thomas during three stages of my life and probably in three stages of her life. In the early 1970s, I was what you would call a "young sister." We were in the BVM Senate which was just beginning to operate. John Thomas was a parliamentarian even though she was an elected senator. In those days, the minutes were run by Robert's Rules of Order. She was wonderful. I paid close attention to John Thomas and others to catch on to Robert's Rules before they were dismissed years later. In those days, John Thomas was one of those strong, quiet, knew-she-meant-business kind of person. That was my experience in the 1970s.

In the 1980s, I was a regional representative so I visited people in this area. John Thomas was now teaching at LaSalle and also a cook. I experienced her hospitality there. Once again, her personality, strength and commitment had not changed a bit. I got to know her then as a friend and colleague and it was fun.

Then about 10 years ago, I came back here and was the director of the Roberta Kuhn Center which provides enrichment opportunities for those age 55 and up. Now John Thomas went to

this class at the Roberta Kuhn Center that was really all about politics and issues of interest. She was the faithful BVM. The rest of the class was a group of talkers—men and women from off-campus who really were committed to activities and politicians. John Thomas loved it; she was there until last year. It just showed me the richness of John Thomas's life and her ongoing desire to learn more, experience more. A great role model for me. Thank you, John Thomas.

Marie Corr, BVM (Dona)

When I came back to Mount Carmel about 14 months ago, John Thomas was one of the first people to reach out to me. That's because she knew I had come from Montana. She told me so many fun things about loving her days in Butte, teaching up in the mountains. I have always appreciated her sweetness, her gentility, her constant, quiet, calm presence.

Regina M. Qualls, BVM

John Thomas was a member of the National Election Board up until it dissolved within the past two years. She was serving into her nineties on that committee. She was the oldest, I believe, the oldest BVM serving on a congregational committee. I was so impressed with her. She came to every meeting so well prepared. She had read the material, had very good questions, and very thoughtful suggestions. She was so interested in the process and she wanted to contribute. I used to think, she could be sitting in her room reading a good book, but here she is still a very active participant in BVM life. I was very indebted to her.

Tom Walsh, Former Colleague

As Henry the Eighth said to his fifth wife, "I won't keep you long." Condolences to all the Hackett family and friends and specifically to the BVM family. My friendship with Sister John Thomas began at LaSalle High School where I was also a Latin teacher. It seemed appropriate to say something in Latin. Being a Marine Core medic in the Korean War, what's more appropriate than "Semper fidelis?" She was always very faithful. But if you prefer, the Coast Guard motto "Semper Paratus."

She was always prepared in the classroom and elsewhere. In a classroom situation, it's very difficult as a Latin teacher. Sometimes you have to flunk a student. I would ask Sister John Thomas, "What should I say to my student when I tell him he's getting an F?" She said, "Well, simply tell him we don't grade any lower than that at LaSalle."

She was special. Was she perfect? Probably not. I remember one time when she shared with me, she said, "You know there are 586 sins in the Old Testament. I haven't missed a one." She was more than a teacher. She was also a great cook. I remember sharing with Sister Mary Janine Wolff and Sister Charmaine LeMaire in their small home near St. Jude where I also was a parishioner.

It is truly unique to memorialize the most significant aspect of our Christian faith. Her life, her suffering, her death, her resurrection. I think John Cardinal Neumann said it best. "Fear not that thy life shall come to an end, but rather that it shall never have a beginning." Surely she had a beautiful beginning some 94 years ago as those flowing waters of baptism initiated her into the

Christian community. Now the God of scripture and later the God of Eucharist asks that you and me accept the final earthly demise and farewell. In faith, there are no questions. Without faith, there are no answers. We do believe that all the ties of friendship and love through our lives do not end in death, but continue on into eternal life. Be surely we do not need to enlarge her in death beyond what she was in life—simply a beautiful teacher, one who touched eternity.

I can't help to think of the hundreds of students who will greet her in eternal life, including my own aunt, Sister Mary Jocile Valiere, BVM. She was one of three aunts who were BVMs. Yes, I have a long illustrious background with the BVMs. I thank them now again. I remember so vividly my kindergarten teacher Sister Mary of the Divine Heart (Kathryn Marie Reynolds). She liked me so much that she made me valedictorian of the kindergarten class two years in a row. Thanks to her, she elevated my IQ to what it is now—double figures. I thank all the BVMs for teaching in the classroom par excellence. I should probably end with a Latin quote. "E Pluribus Unum," the motto of the United States. She was "one of many." May Almighty God bless her.

Mary Janine Wolff, BVM

I lived with Sister for the last 20-some years, maybe more. People have brought up three or four things that I would love to tell more stories about. One is her love of the students, her love at LaSalle. It was a small school. She knew every one of the students. She knew most of their parents because she may have taught them earlier. One time she was walking the halls after school and these three or four fellows came in. She said to them, "May I help you?" They were startled that she was going to help them. One of them said, "I'm here to see my cousin." "What is your cousin's name?" He gave a name. She said, "You have the wrong school. There is no one by that name in this school." Well, they were going to give her a hard time; they were there for something else. She just talked quietly with them. All of a sudden the whole group just turned and walked out the door. John Thomas turned around to discover the full wrestling team.

Therese Jacobs, BVM (Therese Carmelle)

John Thomas taught six of my nieces and nephews in Cedar Rapids at LaSalle. They lived right across the street from the school. They were always tempted to be late, never early. Sister John Thomas knew their parents too. She was their favorite teacher, but there is no doubt that she kept them in line, learning, focused, certainly on track. She was a great woman. On the last birthday she celebrated, my sister-in-law and I took her out to lunch. We had a lot of fun. She had fond memories of the kids and they have very fond memories of her. Thank you, John Thomas.