



Wake Stories of Sister Joan Maga, BVM (Joanice)

May 5, 2018

Sister Florence Heflin, BVM

One of my favorite memories of Joan Maga was when we were scholastics in 1958. Our Set lived in Philomena Hall (now a parking area, I believe), but we had our meals in the Mundelein sisters' dining room. One Saturday afternoon, about eight of us were sitting around a table in the dining room—it was not a mealtime. Everyone was telling stories about our young nieces and nephews—the clever things they did and the funny things they said. When there was a lull in the conversation, Joan, who at the time had no nieces or nephews, piped up with, “You should see my dog do tricks.” It was a teachable moment for me.

Unknown

Sister Joan made the culmination of eight years at St. Bernard ES truly special. She gave us a superhighway to algebra and we made Super 8 movies too! Her great poise and presence were unmatched. It was a great joy to have the opportunity to reconnect with her during her last years with us. May she rest in peace and continue to teach us from her place beside God.

Rick Santo

Thank you, Sister Joan, for God's blessings to us in your gifts as teacher, coach, mentor, and friend to the many young minds and hearts you inspired and touched during your life. We will always remember you with love, gratitude, and respect.

Elissa Ferraro Hosseinzadeh, Teacher

On the day that Sister Joan Maga left us, and even before I knew that she was gone I saw this post on Facebook. “Death takes the body. God takes the soul. Our mind holds the memories. Our heart keeps the love. Our faith lets us know we will meet again.” So with love in our hearts and the memories in our minds we mourn the passing of Sister Joan's physical presence but she is not gone. Her life's purpose lives on in each of us.

My memories go back 45 years to my arrival at St. Bernard School as a fourth grade teacher. Joan's support and encouragement for me, and for the entire faculty, were wonderful gifts to each of us. Sharing God's love through her joy in the classroom, creativity as a teacher, her skills as a coach, and emphasis on sportsmanship were hallmarks of her professional life at St. Bernard School. We as teachers, while we shared a profession, also shared friendships.

Because of Sister Joan and Sister Dolores O'Dwyer, BVM (Wilmetta), St. Bernard School was a remarkable place to teach. It was a second home to teachers, students and their parents. Even if we were not sports fans or even knew anything about speech team, Sister Joan's leadership led us to volleyball and basketball games, and speech competitions. Often there were scores of parents, sisters and brothers, fellow students, and teachers at away and home games and competitions. Sister Joan's students benefitted from her guidance, counseling, and encouragement to be the best students and athletes they could be. The same thing was true in her relationships with fellow teachers. We spent time together at daily recess and lunches, quick hallway “conferences,” as well as faculty parties and dinners. As we laughed and chatted, Joan was always positive and it was a joy to be with her.

Thank you, Sister Joan, for the years of love and friendship. Our minds will hold the memories, our hearts the love, and, through our Catholic faith, we know we will meet again.

Kalbert Wu-Tang, Student

Sister Joan was an inspiration. She had a magnitude of spirit that was manifested through her voice, hand gestures, and facial expressions. She cared about educating her students here at St. Bernard and coaching her speech orators and volleyball and basketball players. But she didn't just care; she poured her *being* into her teaching and coaching, projecting a tough love and caring nature as her voice boomed across the volleyball court or when she chided us to *e-nun-ci-ate* during speech competitions. Yet, for all the times that she egged us on to be better and to reach higher, I never felt beaten down or belittled by her. It was as if she was an open conduit for the very voice of the Holy Spirit to encourage her students with healthy motivation and a holy conviction to *be* more.

One of the poignant stories that my father liked to share was that on one occasion he was attending a PTA meeting when I was in middle school. My mother was in the hospital, close to death, and he was obviously distraught. Sister Joan and Sister Dolores O'Dwyer took one look at my Dad and they agreed, "Mr. Tang doesn't need to be here tonight, does he?" She could see to the heart of the matter in order to give people what they needed. It was that sort of practical, intuitive, and timely care that I think of when I remember Sister Joan.

I was blessed to have known her as one of her eighth grade students. In later years, I would occasionally wonder what had happened to her, and through the providence of the Lord, I was so grateful to have been reconnected with her in her final days. Recently, my three sisters and I had the opportunity to visit Sister Joan at a skilled nursing facility and to remember our time as her students. As we were gathered around her bed, sharing our memories with her, I was struck by how this was a representation of her legacy. Here the four of us were standing around our beloved Sister Joan, and she was the one who had served to be a shining, sturdy, and precious stone in the very foundations of our formative years. She was a major contributor in helping us to be responsible professionals, parents, and yes, passable public speakers. She inspired us to be great, and now she has attained the ultimate reward in the presence of her Savior.

Frank Maga, Brother

We are gathered today with tears of sorrow and tears of joy. Tears of sorrow because the world has lost a good person who has influenced us all. Tears of joy because Joan is now and forever will be, experiencing the true love and happiness unobtainable on this earth.

We've heard the tremendous accomplishments from Joan's students, fellow teacher, and her loving community. To me the words that best describe Joan's life are protection, guidance, and comfort to the innocent and most vulnerable.

Indeed, being a protector started when she was very young. Problem with a bully? Whack. Problem solved. Joan loved all animals and always had pets—various dogs, cats, rabbits, chickens, ducks, and turtles. Well, almost all animals. Not snakes. Even the convent had their own kitty, Berno.

She attended Holy Family HS, where our mother taught creative art. Mom taught that every person has tremendous creative potential, which had a strong influence on Joan. Joan was not a "holy roller" and didn't walk around with a rosary or Bible. She was extremely well balanced in all areas of life: mental, physical, spiritual, social and family. She participated in Scouts, Mariners, and was fortunate to have an extremely fine group of friends.

While attending high school, Joan realized that the religious life was her calling. Dad's first reaction was "Hold on just a minute here. Let me tell you about that new car I'm going to get you." Well, that lasted about two minutes. Mom and Dad knew their daughter, her decision, and they proudly supported her.

Joan's philosophy was contrary to today's "whatever makes me happy." She believed that "the purpose of life is not to be happy, devoid of wonder, anguish, and pain. The purpose of life is to amount to something, to have it make some difference that you have lived at all."

She understood that, more important than genetics, you are who you are because of what goes into your mind and you can change who you are by changing what goes into your mind. She realized children are most vulnerable in that character is formed in their early years by their surroundings. Therefore, she ensured that they were immersed in the good, the clean, the pure, the powerful, the positive, and the love of God.

By powerful, we are not talking about bigshot politicians or the typical definition in today's context. We are talking about releasing the creative power, the natural God-given abilities built into every human being, the potential, the capacity to become a positive influence in life.

Did the students at St. Bernard's just happen to be born with exceptional skills in mathematics, speech, volleyball and basketball? No, they were born with the same potential as many others. The uniqueness of Joan was that she was able to unleash potential and direct it to unheard of accomplishments.

Joan loved kids. You would think that after a semester of teaching she'd like a little rest and relaxation, but, no. When not in school, she so loved her four nephews that she took them on trips to Disneyland, Knox Berry Farm, and such. At times she had to apply a little discipline when they were fighting over who's going to push the button in the elevator. She even had them camp out in the convent while they attended math camp.

Joan moved into the home that Dad built and in which she was raised. For years, she had a huge cross to bear taking care of our mother who suffered from Alzheimer's, until Mom passed away in 2003. Dolores O'Dwyer retired in 2004 after 36 years as principal and lived with Joan until moving to Mount Carmel in 2012.

Joan asked Mary-Lu Krajewski if she would like to share the house. It worked out great for both, going places and doing things together. Eventually Joan developed Parkinson's and became less and less able to function. Mary Lou took on the responsibility of attending to her needs, driving her to the doctor, ensuring she would take her medicine and cooking meals. Mary Lou became Joan's guardian, caring for her as mother would care for a daughter. Indeed, she was an absolute blessing, comforting Joan in the latter part her life.

Hebrews 1:14 defines angels as "ministering spirits" protecting, directing, and comforting people on behalf of God. I believe on May 9, 1937, the very month that Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany and the horrific horrors of World War II were in the wing, the Lord sent us an angel. Eighty-one years later, on April 13, 2018, Joan's work on this earth was completed. She had fulfilled what was commanded in the Lord's Prayer: "thy will be done." For her, no more pain, no more physical restrictions.

Now she is back in the arms of Mom and Dad. Can you imagine the love she must now be feeling with her grandparents, cousins, Dolores and Cathryn? Can you imagine the love flowing as she mingles with the saints, the apostles, and God's great angels? Can you imagine the feeling when she gets a big hug from our Blessed Mother? Can you imagine the tremendous love that is infused into her as she comes face to face with the source of all love—almighty God?

Unfortunately, we cannot come close to understanding the love she is receiving any more than a caterpillar can anticipate what it will be like to be a butterfly. We are still here on earth restricted to our finite bodies and mind. For life, we need food, clothes, buildings for shelter, and transportation to move us. Fortunately, life on this earth is but a niche in time. That means shortly, in eternal time, we really will see Sister Joan again; however next time, it will be forever.