



Sharing of Memories of Virginia (Justinian) McCaffrey, BVM

Caritas Studio, Dec. 18, 2020

Katherine Keating, BVM

We are great for playing games here at Mount Carmel. One card game we play in the evening is poker. Virginia has been playing years. She was a quick learner and not only that, she often was a winner. We played with nickels. Last month Virginia called me and said she would like to turn in her nickels to the poker club. She sent over a bag. The bag weighed four pounds. She wanted the poker club to share the nickels. So when we start playing again—whenever that is—you do not need to bring any nickels. We will be using Virginia's. However, be ready to count your share—more than half a pound to each poker player! Thank you, Virginia, for sharing your nickels with us.

Anne Kendall, BVM

In the 1980s, regional representatives did not have cell phones. They were happy to have recording devices on their telephones. Thus none of us had to immediately respond to calls from the sister. There were 189 people in Region I in the states of Iowa, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and California. There was a need for me to unwind after a lot of travel to visit BVMs. This is when Virginia McCaffrey came into my life.

I had gotten to know Virginia when she came to North Hollywood on weekends to be with the BVM community at St. Charles. In the course of our conversations, we came to a knowledge that we both liked watching horse racing and a \$2 bet was no more than a hamburger and French fries. Our leisure activity together was born. During the racing season, we would go off to Hollywood Park or Santa Anita every once in a while for a relaxing afternoon. The highlight was the day that we won the daily double. She chose the horse in the first race and I the second. It paid the huge sum of \$36. In the years ahead, we often recalled our wonderful afternoons with the horses and the relaxing leisure time we had together.

Mary Jean Ferry, BVM

Words that come to my mind when I think of my dear friend Virginia have already been mentioned. She was so much fun to be with, so excited, so interested in everything, and so faithful as a friend. I, too, remember playing cards with Virginia. She just loved those pennies. Kate is right; when she got to Mount Carmel she was excited about the nickels. Someone mentioned Notre Dame but didn't mention that every Saturday she wore her Notre Dame T-shirt. Her biggest sport was the LA Lakers. They had a team player Shaq O'Neal. I have to say the size of this man because it's important. He was 325 pounds and over 7 feet tall. The LA Lakers ran four different editions of their paper on Shaq O'Neal. The first week, his head took a full page spread. The next week his upper body. The following week the lower part of his body. Finally, his legs and his big feet. Virginia had the pages on her door outside her room. Shaq covered the whole door. My room was adjacent to Virginia's room. Every time I opened my door, I was face to waist with Shaq O'Neal.

A few weeks ago at Mount Carmel, Avis gave us a talk in which she kept mentioning, "We are walking each other home. We are walking each other home." I felt that I walked Virginia home. I wasn't able to go down and be with her, but we talked on the phone often. She would always mention her longing and her desire to die. She was more than ready. I could always hear the anticipation in her voice. When we had her Rite of Committal, I remember looking a long time at her shrouded body in the box. So quiet, so still, no breathing. I mentioned the

part about not breathing to Teresa Caluori, BVM. She said so beautifully, “Oh, she is breathing with all the earth, with all creation.” Then I thought of heaven and the word *ruah*—*spirit*. In heaven, it’s all about breathing and moving. When I think of you Virginia today, I know that you are live and breathing your breath upon us. We love you so much and we are missing you.

Joe McCaffrey, nephew

Aunt Virginia—educator, saint, and special lady. Between birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Saint Patrick’s Day, Halloween, wedding anniversaries, and pretty much all other occasion, Aunt Virginia must have sent hundreds of celebration cards and made numerous phone calls to share her presents and presence to help appreciate special moments with me and my family. And I am just one nephew! She wanted to know about what was happening in our lives, tell us about some current event around the convent, and would keep us up to date on the Notre Dame games. One time I asked her if God really cared if Notre Dame won or lost. She told me that she did not know if God was concerned but His Mother sure was!

She enjoyed a round of cribbage or poker. She would often bring her favorite See’s dark chocolates to share with the gang of players. During her time visiting family, I noticed she was an avid newspaper reader and would keep us current on the news, often during a round of cribbage or scrabble. With her conversation and her snacks, the event became a party and family time became more enjoyable and memorable than winning a Yahtzee or Scrabble match on any given evening.

With a twinkle in her eye and her ready smile she was my reminder that God is good! She was a special lady here on the earthly realm, and I believe she is now celebrating, conversing, and playing with the angels and saints. I will pray for Aunt Virginia’s intercession to help remind us all of God’s goodness and to save a place for us at the heavenly game table. Love you, Aunt Virginia.

Ralph McCaffrey, nephew

Virginia was truly faithful in many ways. Like “Old Faithful,” we could almost set our clocks by the timeliness of her daily phone calls to our home—which was shortly after supper for her, and about 4:30 p.m. for us in California. Mostly she would call daily to chat with her brother, Keith, while he was with us. Even when Keith could not verbally respond, and even after Keith passed, she continued to call daily. Sometimes we would miss the phone ringing, or we would miss the call for some other reason. However, that never stopped Virginia from letting us know how she was doing by leaving a voice message. She would start by saying, “Hello. This is Virginia, in Dubuque . . .” Moreover, I remember her closing the conversation or message with kind and thoughtful expressions of love and gratitude, saying, “Know that I love you, and that you’re in my prayers.”

Virginia was also faithful at remembering and sending our family members’ birthday cards, which usually included a little cash, and a note to enjoy something special. She was very thoughtful and generous in that way. She was also very encouraging to all of us, even at encouraging her grandnieces to consider joining the convent as a vocation. Although, that has not come to be—at least not yet.

I know that we will all remember Virginia for her smile and cheery attitude, and also how she shared her time and energy with others. Along with that, my wife and I will remember Virginia when we go out to the golf course. When Virginia headed back to Dubuque years ago, she gave my wife Cathy a set of golf clubs that she no longer needed. Cathy hits the ball pretty well with those clubs. We will be thankful to Virginia for all the gifts she shared with us during her lifetime, and especially when the golf ball flies into the heavens for a nice shot, and when the ball falls into the cup after a nice putt.

Ralph and Cathy McCaffrey, nephew, and Dorothy McCaffrey, sister-in-law

Thank you, Sister Virginia, for your life of service to others and to the Gospel message. We will miss your phone calls and messages of your and your community’s assured prayers for the family and others. We are grateful that

your long life was one of faith, good health, and optimism. May you be welcomed by all your loved ones who have gone before you. Requiescat in pace.

Guy McCaffrey, nephew

I am one of five McCaffrey boys who knew our aunt, Virginia McCaffrey, BVM, as "Sister Virginia." This struck my wife, who is not Catholic, as strange. So my wife Carol always called her "Aunt Virginia," and this would bring a chuckle to our aunt, for Carol is the only one who called her "Aunt." And Carol did adopt our "Sister Virginia" as an aunt. Maybe strengthening their bond is the fact that Carol never had a blood-relative aunt because both of her parents were single children. Or maybe it is because Carol and I never had children of our own, and this fact created some sympathy for another whose life path did not include offspring.

Sister Virginia was the only sibling of our father, Keith. Keith was six years her baby brother and the two were very close throughout their lives. When Sister Virginia was assigned to live in Pasadena, we saw her often, and almost always Sister Virginia would be with us for Christmas, and she would always have a gift, however humble, for each of her nephews. One year—Christmas of 1978, I think—she gave us all matching scarves. The five of us—Joe, Ralph, Guy, Pat, and Dave—dutifully and happily lined up by age for a picture, proudly sporting our aunt's gift. That picture currently adorns our fridge and brings a warm memory of Sister Virginia and my brothers whenever I have a chance to look at it. And the scarf, though now showing its age, still resides in the closet with the two other scarves I own. I never could bear to part with it, and I suppose I never will. It's like holding on to a little piece of my aunt.

I will miss her laugh, her wit, her piety, and her generosity of spirit. But I know it was her time to pass and that she was ready to go, and I truly am happy for her. Sister Virginia (if not already there) is well on her way to Heaven, and now with the Lord, and her mom and dad and brother Keith. If I could ask one more favor of her, it is this: Dear Sister Virginia, please continue to pray for those of us whom you have now left behind. I cannot help but believe that a petition from someone as thoroughly good as our aunt would not continue to bring grace into our lives. God bless you, Sister Virginia.

David McCaffrey, nephew

Dear Virginia, the word of your passing shocked and stunned me. I miss you greatly already. I am so grateful that we had a chance to speak with each other so recently. Now I know you were saying your goodbyes. We were all blessed that you were able to talk to us all before you left this world. I will carry your memory with me: you are unforgettable. I will miss teasing you and being teased by you. We had so much laughter together. My wife, Kimberly, is still shocked that your nephews would speak to a nun so teasingly. "But she is my aunt, my dad's big sister," I would tell her. And let's be honest, you more than held your own against your nephews. We had such laughs, didn't we?

Please tell Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa "Hi" from me. What a reunion you all must be having! Thank you for being you and giving me, my wife, and my children so much love. My memories of you are plentiful and pleasant. I also want to thank you for being such a good role model for my daughters, especially Kylie, your goddaughter. You showed them through example that a woman should be strong, resolute, caring, loving, and equal in all regards to her male counterparts. A father could not want for a better lesson taught to his daughters.

You were a blessing beyond words to all of your family. Please keep the prayers going for me and my family. Thank you for being you and, until we see each other again, all my love. Dave.

Kylie McCaffrey, goddaughter

Hello, I've been told to email you a reflection of my Great Aunt Virginia. Hopefully I can articulate clearly the love and respect I have for my godmother. When I think about my short 25 years on this planet, I often reflect on which adults exemplify what it means to be a genuinely good person. I am so fortunate to have my great aunt to be an example of faith, family, and joy. A smiling woman leans back in her chair, hands clasped, she leans back in

and patiently explains to me, a 6-year-old, the rules to Kings in the Corners or whatever card game piqued our interest that day. We chuckle together as I make a play that impresses her.

Later when she retired and moved away, a phone is passed to me at a family party and I am greeted by a loving hello and a listening ear. A quick conversation before the phone is passed to another cousin or uncle just as eager to share the "I love yous" and general updates. She was always with us in spirit as we joined hands to pray or sat to play the card games she taught us. Her calls were moments to look forward too, a reminder that someone so awesome was thinking of you, hoping for you, praying for you, happily watching you grow. My love for her and gratefulness that I even got to know her is overflowing. I truly feel special to be her family.

Julie O'Neill, BVM

Virginia and I ministered together for 10 years at St. Anne's School in Santa Ana, Calif. When I moved in 1976, we agreed to keep in contact at least one birthday card each year. We decided to see how long we could keep one card going back and forth by writing just one simple sentence each year. I bought the first card which had lots of space for writing and that card lasted a good number of years as it traveled back and forth in the state of California. When there was no more room for messages, we purchased card number two, then card number three and card number four. Sometimes the card got lost or sometimes it was late, but our record was pretty amazing. When I retired to Mount Carmel in 2009, we realized that we no longer needed to mail a card to each other, but just walk down the hall and put it in each other's mailbox. Imagine my surprise two weeks ago when Virginia called to tell me that she had been cleaning some papers and discovered our birthday card for 2017. She wanted to apologize that it was indeed quite late. "Not to worry," I assured her as we chatted happily without realizing it would be our last conversation. I will miss receiving the card each September and miss sending it to her each February, but not as much as I will miss her. Now she is with me and all of us forever in the Communion of Saints.

Margaret Sannasardo, BVM

Virginia was my fifth grade teacher at St. Vincent School in Chicago. This was her first mission and even as little fifth graders we knew she was young and new at teaching. However, she won us over with her kindness and gentleness and we all loved her. Even though we were a motley group of Chicago kids, she was always fair and steady. She later told me when I visited her at Mount Carmel how scared she was and how different Chicago was to her home surroundings in the LA area. I loved Virginia because she was always her own person. She was a gentle woman and I miss her. But I know she is rejoicing in bliss of eternity.

Ashley Kurt, niece of Sister Anita Therese Hayes, BVM

Sister Virginia will always hold a special place in my heart. I remember when I first met her while attending Clarke. She had a special way of connecting and after the initial meeting I felt like our relationship grew each time we would connect. She was the best about sending emails to check in and birthday greetings. I remember her love for the Los Angeles Lakers and Shaq. Her smile and laugh could light up a room. I'm so blessed to have been paired with Sister Virginia as my prayer partner, not only through college, but through life. Visiting Mount Carmel won't be the same without her there. Heaven gained a good one!

Mary Anne Hoope, BVM

Virginia was a gracious and thoughtful woman. Though she was the pray-er for Laurene Brady, Jackie Cramer, and Irene Lukefahr when they were in Ghana, she always remembered me as well. Though the sisters returned to the States, she still remembered me in Ghana. In fact I received a beautiful birthday card this year from her. When I visited her at Mount Carmel, she exuded peace and told me how grateful she was for everything.