



Sharing of Memories of Catherina Walsh, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Oct. 7, 2021

Sister Carol Marie Baum, BVM

Good Morning! I wish to share a few personal connections through the years as to how I came to know and love my interactions with Catherina Walsh. My first recollection is the time I stayed overnight with Catherina and Paulina Sullivan in the Quad Cities before flying out to an LCWR meeting in early 2008–9. It was during this short “getting-acquainted” period that conversation led to thinking about moving to Mount Carmel. The ministry and presence of these two women have left an indelible mark on the parish as well as the community as their work and connections were what motivated them every day to do what they could to be of service — to any one whose path they crossed.

Once the move to Mount Carmel took place, Catherina and Paulina made it home in no time. What I wish to share regarding Catherina is the tangible love and care I saw her give unstintingly to Paulina daily as health continued to make it more challenging for Paulina to stay engaged. Catherina was her confidant, friend, and steady rock as days became more difficult. There were times when it was just being together that brought both comfort and peace. Catherina was always there for her.

On a more personal note, it was when our paths crossed that was a gift. Catherina never missed an opportunity to say “Hi” or “What are you up to today?” She would even from time to time ask for an accounting of what was on my to-do list with a wry Irish quip and smile. Presence was something that Catherina brought into any meeting – whether planned or just by chance. Her kindness, great little chuckle, and interest in everyone she met is a reminder to me of how our planned or by-chance meetings change us forever. Thank you, Catherina, for *you* and how you were a genuine gift. May we, too, be a presence to one another. God speed!

Mike & Mary Alice Walsh, Brother & Sister-in-Law

Our sister/sister-in-law wore every inch of her name proudly; her name spoke volumes about what was paramount to her! Sister Mary Catherina Walsh, BVM was a born and bred Dubuque Irish Catholic who cherished her faith, her family, and her friends.

She was, first and foremost, a faith-filled sister. And with that moniker, came her love of and commitment to God and her congregation. Sister. A simple word but it describes the very essence of her being. The addition of the name Mary and BVM completed what she had longed to become. She became part of a community of faith.

Secondly, she was a Walsh and with that came a myriad of family obligations and traditions. Oh my!! She was Irish to the bone! Certainly on St. Patrick’s Day, but also year-round, Sister followed Notre Dame and any other Irish related event or story. The Walshes, after all, were said to be descended from the Kings of Ireland. And to be a Walsh from Nevada Street, Nativity Parish, in Dubuque, Iowa, was the cherry on top of being Irish royalty, or so they say. Walsh is the sixth most common surname in all of Ireland. And to make her “Irishness” even more emphatic, her mother’s maiden name was Ryan – the fourth most common surname in Ireland! Sister’s family was of utmost importance to her. Even her religious name Catherina was in memory of her sister who died at the age of seven in 1950 – Sister’s entry year to the congregation. When it became vogue for Sisters to return to their

birth names, Sister Mary Catherina declined. Her beloved Kathy would live on with her into eternity. We still called her Jane, but in “Jane’s” heart, she was Catherina.

And of course, her friends. Who were her friends? The thousands of children she so positively impacted by her dynamic teaching; this vibrant community of amazing women of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary; her dear Sister Mary Paulina, BVM; the parishioners of St. Dorothy (Chicago), Corpus Christi (Fort Dodge, Iowa), Sacred Heart (Rock Island, Ill.); the Native Americans and military families of Wyoming and South Dakota, her classmates at Nativity, Visitation, and Clarke, especially the teammates who knew Sister’s abilities so well. Her friends numbered in the tens, maybe hundreds, of thousands.

This was our Catherina to a “T!” But, wait! Something extremely important to Sister has been omitted!! Where would we classify her love of sports, especially the Cubs?!! That left-handed batter, that sharp shooting guard. Why, just about any sport she touched, she mastered. Sister’s athleticism enabled her to participate and excel in various sports.

Her love of those Cubbies led to her making the acquaintance of a nurse named Joanne Rosario who worked on site at Wrigley Field and was almost always able to get game tickets for Sister and her friends. After a brief stop at a side window near the Wrigley box office on Addison Street and calling out for Joanne, Sister’s crew would be admitted to the venue and were entertained for a day at the park. And she finally got to see a World Series pennant come back to the North Side of Chicago in 2016. Fly the W!!

Sister, on home visits, played baseball with me, her younger brother, while in full habit on hot summer days in our backyard on Nevada Street. And of course, her companion was asked to join the games. Always a companion on home visits.

She could quote batting averages, records, players from every era in most sports, whether professional, collegiate, or local. Sister watched a lot of sports on TV, to put it mildly. The beauty of her vast knowledge of sports gave her a perfect segue to touch her students and win them over to her way of thinking. They loved her for it! And they learned.

These are but a few of our memories of our dear Sister Mary Catherina. We’ve just scratched the surface. The prayers, love, laughter, compassion, and support are some of the intangibles that made Sister so special in our hearts. All were unwavering. When we asked for prayers in difficult times, Sister Mary Catherina rallied her BVM Prayer Warriors to join in our request for favorable conclusions. Don’t forget us, Sisters; we still need you now more than ever! And of course, we will always have our Angel in Heaven cheering for us . . . and the Cubbies. May the angels come to greet her and bring her to eternal joy and peace.

Jim E. Walsh Family

Our memories: Her contagious laugh and great sense of humor. Coming back during the summers for cookouts in the backyard and then participating in the kids’ baseball games. We loved watching her run the bases with her veil and habit flowing behind her. Sitting around her, listening to her stories about teaching and the many states she lived in.

Steve Schlueter, Nephew, Son of Bob and Ellen (Walsh) Schlueter

One thing that stands out for me regarding Sister Mary Catherina, revolves around *Sports Illustrated* magazines. I’ve been a subscriber for over 40 years. When Sister would make it back to visit, usually 5-6 times per year, she always asked me to save the issues. I would then give them to her. She would take them back to school in Rock Island, Ill. and set them out for her students to read. She always said they looked forward to the next batch of magazines. This went on until she retired and moved back to Dubuque and Mount Carmel. She will be missed. Thanks for taking such good care of her during the past few years.

Dave & Judy Walsh, Godson

Sister Mary Catherina Walsh was devoted to God, her BVM community, her family, parochial education, her students, her beloved Cubbies and Sister Paulina. She was the perfect balance of wisdom, wit, humor, and concern for others. I can still hear her hearty laugh! Even though she spent years of teaching away from Dubuque, Iowa, she was a frequent visitor at most family functions, and showed a special interest in all her nephews, nieces, great nieces and nephews and their children. She knew everyone and their interests. I also had the good fortune of calling her my "Godmother."

When we lived on Stetmore Street, Sister would pitch whiffle balls to us in the backyard. Then after dinner she would tell us all about the train rides to Rapid City, S.D., and Casper, Wyo. At nine years old that was impressive!

Catherina was a great role model of her Christian faith life, dedicating herself to service, education, and prayer, putting her charisms into action. Sister provided Judy with an easy transition into her role as pastoral counselor, affording her insights into community life and assisting her with developing wonderful relationships within the BVM community. As a friend and relative of Catherina, she was already accepted, welcomed, and encouraged. We are grateful for our cherished memories of Catherina's love, service, fidelity, and thankful for her BVM family. Death has no hold on her as we release her onto the arms of her Salvation.

Kathy Barrett

I became friends with Sister Catherina when she was assigned to Jordan Catholic School in Rock Island, Ill. She taught social studies and I taught English. We taught four years together. She took over my classroom when I had a heart attack. We enjoyed each other's company. I continued to teach for twenty-one more years at Jordan. She and Sister Paulina moved back to the Motherhouse in Dubuque. We would visit and have lunch with her. As my health continued to fail, we could not visit as often.

Thank you for all your prayers and messages for my kids. My two boys have four children apiece, eight grandchildren altogether. I will continue to pray for her and all who live at Mount Carmel Bluffs. May the Virgin Mary, the sisters and all the angels continue to pray for them.

Sister Emelyn Malecki, BVM

Catherina and I became very close friends after our set member, Sister Maurine Fitzgerald, died. When the set was going to gather, my car would find its way to Rock Island, Ill., so that Catherina and I could do the mailing. I would often go to Rock Island to visit, and our friendship has continued through the years. I am grateful for the brief visit we had at the Diamond Jubilee celebration. I am forever grateful for the gift she was in my life.

Terri Sacco

My education with the BVMs started when I was a student at St. Joseph Academy in Des Moines, Iowa. Little did I know at the time that my education from the BVMs would continue as I began my first teaching position at Jordan Catholic School in Rock Island, Ill., in August 1979. It was then that I first met Sister Catherina Walsh and Sister Paulina Sullivan. They were two of the finest women I have ever met. They became my mentors —not only in teaching but also in how to conduct oneself professionally and most importantly they helped me to grow more deeply in my faith.

Sister Catherina was the seventh-grade social studies teacher, and I was teaching eighth-grade social studies. The first week of school, I had a parent tell me I had some big shoes to fill. That was an understatement! I never could have filled her shoes; Sister Catherina was one of a kind! She was an outstanding teacher. She had command of her subject and of the classroom. She also had the admiration, love and respect of the students, staff, parents and everyone that she met. No one was a stranger to her. I can recall walking with her through the halls of Mount Carmel after she retired. Everyone we passed received her genuine smile, a nod, or wave of her hand, as well as a warm greeting and often an exchange of words that would leave Sister Catherina and the other person chuckling.

As everyone knew, Sister Catherina was also a lover of sports. One of the many fond memories I have of her happened on a Saturday afternoon in the fall of the year. I had gone to school to work in my classroom and Sister Catherina was also working in her classroom. I went up to say "hello" only to find her sitting at her desk grading papers with the television in front of her desk watching a college football game and a radio on her desk listening to a broadcast of a Chicago Cubs game. She could tell you what had transpired in both games as well as the score and I have no doubt that the papers were graded accurately. Her love of sports was shared with her students too. Sister Catherina often attended the sporting events of her students. She not only encouraged them in the classroom, she cheered them on in the other areas of their lives. She truly loved her students, and they knew it. Even today when I see her former students and I mention that I had visited Sister Catherina, they always get a big smile on their face, ask how she is and then they go on to share a fond memory they have of her.

Sister Catherina was a "prayer warrior" too. Whenever someone needed prayers, I would call her with my request and she would say, "I'll get that on the board." I used to tease her that she had a direct line to God because our prayers were always answered. Years ago, Sister Catherina introduced me to the Novena to St. Rita; she told me that was her mother's name. I continue to pray that Novena to this day and St. Rita never fails me.

Sister Catherina started out as one of my fellow teachers and my best mentor. I owe my success in teaching to the support I received from her. She eventually became my boss, and I could not have asked to work for a better person. She rejoiced with me when good things happened, she gave advice when asked, and she grieved with me when I suffered a loss. Through all the years though she became my dear and faithful friend. I will always cherish that friendship and the many memories I have of her and of my visits with her when she moved to Mount Carmel. She lived her life serving God and I am certain she is now receiving her reward in heaven. May God bless you, Sister Catherina.

Sister Kathleen Mullin, BVM

When Sister Catherina moved to Mount Carmel, people who had connected with her at St. Joseph School and parish, Jordan Catholic School, and especially Sacred Heart School and parish, all in Rock Island, Ill., were dismayed. She had taught, mentored, helped, and socialized with so many. Some kept in touch with Catherina and thought she might live "forever." I remember her hospitality to BVMs: her gatherings with one or several of her set mates, the cluster reflection days every December with Monsignor Ambrose Cunningham presiding at Mass and a meal with vibrant conversation, the welcome extended to a Senate committee. Visiting with Catherina in her near-the-chapel room at Mount Carmel or on the phone was always soul enriching. Surely, she is joyous about her new home and being with all the special people in the heavenly community, yet Catherina understands our dismay at her sudden departure.

Sister Angele Lutgen, BVM

Catherina and Paulina Sullivan lived at Sacred Heart Convent in Rock Island, Ill., during (and after) their teaching tenure in the Jordan Catholic School System. They were a part of the cluster of BVMs that included the Quad Cities, Iowa City and Cedar Rapids sisters. Catherina and Paulina graciously hosted the December cluster gathering which included a talk, Mass, renewal of vows and a meal.

When I moved here in 2008 as the support services coordinator, I met up again with Catherina who was living in the Motherhouse and her good friend, Paulina, who was in a room on the second floor Marian Hall. I don't think a day went by without Catherina visiting her friend, either in-person or on the phone. Catherina was a loyal, caring friend to Paulina. It was an honor for me to have known them!

Sister Diane Forester, BVM

Catherina and I often met on our way to and/or from visiting our good friends at Marian Hall. We would ask how each was faring and what was today's happening. Catherina talked about Paulina and would often laugh when Paulina was being crabby, sending her away, and then calling her a bit later to come over. Of course, Paulina had

no idea what she had said or when. I think there were days when Catherina made three trips over to see her. I enjoyed our exchange each time we happened to meet.

Sister Nancy McCarthy, BVM

I never really got to know Catherina until I moved to Mount Carmel and worked on a committee with her passing materials and other communications to residents on different floors. She was so committed to this work and so well organized, but always reminded us in a very nice way when it was time to do our job. She was one of the most pleasant people I've ever met – always a smile and a cheerful word and so sincere too. When we moved to Vista and were neighbors on a short corridor, I got to know her better and so enjoyed seeing her often in the hall as well as in dining room and chapel. In fact, for a long time we've been sitting next to each other in back of chapel, so I've been feeling only 'half there' since she died. Thank you, Catherina, for the lessons you taught me on how to age more than gracefully.

Lynn Chapman, former Mount Carmel Liturgist

I remember Catherina and Paulina folding many, many, Mass and prayer service programs over the years. They were my "go-to girls" for programs. I think it gave them time to visit while being of service – such beautiful friends!

Susan Quade Nolte, Friend

The world for me is a lot less bright. She was a real motivator. She and Sister Paulina Sullivan have helped me so much in life. I can never repay such a debt. She reminded me to always move forward, do my best, and pray. I will miss her.

Cindy Poe

I am so sorry to hear about Sister Catherina's passing. I knew when I saw the envelope from the Sisters of Charity that it probably contained that kind of message. Having received the letter today, October 7, I know my memory won't be shared at her service, but I wanted to send it anyway.

This sweet woman was my elementary teacher, 6th grade at St. Anthony's school in Casper, Wyo. She was the perfect teacher for a girl that age. I liked her then and grew to love her over the years to come. I was sent away to an all-girls school for high school and did not want to leave my family. Sister Catherina knew this and began writing to me. She never stopped! We shared letters through my college years, my family years, my teaching years, grandchildren—basically every facet of my life. She always lifted my spirits, and I know her continuous prayers helped me in everything I accomplished. I am 72 now and still vividly remember her in the classroom; she greatly influenced my decision to teach. She was a very special person in my life, and I will miss her. She was truly my friend, and I am so blessed. My love to all her other friends!

Paul Polichio

I received your letter regarding the passing of Sister Mary Catherina. God Bless her.

Around Labor Day of 1961, my older sister, Lolly, was going into the 8th grade, and gave me the inside info. "You got a new one, Catherine or something. She's young." It was to be Sister's first year of many —giving through teaching at Saint Anthony School, in Casper, Wyo. She had been assigned what must have seemed like the entire baby boom – a class of 55 exploding uniformed seventh graders.

Lolly was right. Sister Mary Catherina was young . . . and beautiful. I was awestruck like Michael Corleone in the Godfather. I had the biggest crush on her. I'd never been ambushed by my emotions before. One of the natural troublemakers, I'd double down to get her attention. She could handle it. She could flash lightening anger. Justice was meted out swiftly. Never any hard feelings. We both knew who was right and who wielded the hammer of Thor. She knew how great I thought she was. She was graceful, sensitive, and kind to me. She'd have me sweep

the convent patio when constant wind trapped heavy dust and empty trash cans and beat erasers. I loved doing things for her and being around her. She made it a great year.

When we came back for 8th grade, she'd escalated to 8th grade. I was ecstatic. There were 108 eighth graders and they'd divided us into A and B classes. I was the dumbest dude in the A group. But SM Catherina had put me there. She had faith in me. She made it a great year.

I was shipped off to boarding school in the 9th grade but excitedly visited her at Christmas and in August every year. She meant so much to me. The last time I saw her, I hugged her. We stayed loosely in touch by Christmas cards. Sister would write a big letter about her students and what she was up to and keeping me up on my former classmates. She was always concerned about my relationship with God and the Blessed Mother.

Time passed. At the end of 1981, I was going through an excruciating divorce, drinking, driving dangerously, and lost in despair. Nowhere to turn. Then, I got maybe the best idea I ever had. "Call SM Catherina." I told her about the divorce, cried and asked her to pray for me. She listened and said, "I'll do better than that. I'll have the whole convent pray for you!" She must have; for in a few days, I washed up on the shores of AA. I'll be sober 40 years soon. It's been a great life. Thanks to God's Holy Spirit flowing through the BVMs and SM Catherina in particular.

We stayed in touch over the years . . . a letter here, a phone call there. I kept trying to get her to admit I was her favorite "of all time" student. She said I was tied for No. 1 – probably with 1000 others!

She loved being a Sister and the life she'd chosen. I said to her once, "You really believe this God stuff, don't you?" "I bet my life on it!" A few years back, I asked her, "Sister, after the life you've lived, you cannot believe in purgatory, can you?" She hemmed and hawed but the feeling I got was that she didn't think she would be quite worthy yet. Not worthy? God, I loved her!