



Sharing of Memories of Joyce (Joyce Mary) Rohlik, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Sept. 24, 2024

Chantal Dickson, Niece, Daughter of Mary Jean Lillibridge

My mother is the last remaining one of that generation. She is the middle child, one of five. She is also the one who was a little different from the rest. Mom wanted to travel the world and live overseas. That's exactly what she did the first opportunity she had to leave DeKalb, Ill., and her friends behind and travel the world.

Well, when it came time for me to go to college, my mother said, "You need to become Americanized." Much to my chagrin, I did not go to Paris University. I have lived overseas. I spoke different languages. We lived in Third World countries. All my friends were local friends. I was very different from all my cousins. So, my mother was very right to suggest I go to Orlando where my two aunts and my grandmother were. They took the job of Americanizing me very seriously. Joyce made sure I had a bicycle to go to school. I got my driver's license. I was 20 years old before I got a driver's license. As you know, she was an avid sports fan. She taught me about American football, baseball, and, of course, the beloved Orlando Magic.

When I think of Joyce, I think of all the love she shared with me. She accepted me for who I was. That's what she did in her ministry. She really loved others for who they were. She didn't judge them; she didn't judge me. When I think about her and reflect upon her life, what I take away is that universal love that she shared with everyone, the love that she exuded, the caring, that peace that came with it. I think it encouraged her to go on. Thank you, Joyce. For your example.

Mary Jean "Jeanie" Lillibridge, Sister

I am Joyce's last sister. After my husband died ten years ago, I spent every summer at the beach with her. Every morning, we went out swimming for two hours and then lay in the sun to dry. After this, we went to a Mass somewhere. We would go to different parishes. Every evening, we went out to a different restaurant for four months. We *really* enjoyed that. We would go out for happy hour too.

Since the last reunion at Paul's house a year ago, I haven't seen her. But with our iPhones, we texted back and forth every day. We kept up with what was going on in each other's life until her eyes got so bad, she couldn't see the texts. Then we would call each other, but my hearing is not so good. We struggled the last few weeks. We miss her a lot.

Paul Petitti, Nephew

I was fortunate to visit Joyce about a month ago. She was in pretty good spirits and was doing OK. She was telling me that her eyesight was failing and then told me a story. She knew the custodians who would come down the hallway. She said, "I always made a point to go out and talk with them." She said that one day she could hear the cart jingling, so she got up and went out into the hallway and was talking to the person. About a minute later, another sister came by and said, "Joyce, you're talking to a broom." She had a good sense of humor about that.

I have three other stories that I would like to share. Joyce liked sunsets. I am sure that Jeanie and Joyce saw sunsets in Florida. My mom lived in Florida also, about a mile away from Joyce's apartment. Joyce always asked

my mom and dad if they could go to the restaurant that had a fourth story rooftop right on the beach so you could see the sunset on the Gulf of Mexico. Apparently, my mom and dad always had a reason not to go. So, when we would come down to visit, mostly at Christmas time, Joyce would run up to me and said, "Paul, would you please take us all to The Hurricane so we can watch the sunset." She got to see a sunset at least twice the week we were down there. That was nice.

Another story involves this very room [Mary Frances Clarke Chapel]. Joyce told me this story when we were here for her Golden Jubilee. In 1961 when she came here, the rafters had cobwebs. Joyce was an avid baseball player. In fact, she played for a short time with the Rockford Peaches. She asked one of the sisters, "How do you clean the cobwebs?" The sister said, "We don't have a way to do that." She asked, "Do you have a baseball and a towel?" Joyce wrapped up the baseball with the towel. She said, "I spent the next four hours throwing a baseball through all the rafters until I got all the cobwebs down." I thought that was pretty neat.

I'll leave you with one last story. Joyce was living in Florida. My family lives in northwest Iowa. It was about two weeks before Christmas. I went to the mailbox and there was a Christmas card. Joyce had her return label on the Christmas card which was addressed to my name, "Paul Petitti." There was nothing else on the card. Nothing. I was shocked that this card found its way from Florida to northwest Iowa. I looked inside the mailbox for a sticker that might have peeled off. I didn't see any evidence of a sticker that might have been on the envelope. I took a photo of it and sent it to Joyce with the message, "Joyce, I have no other explanation than this is a Christmas miracle."

Patty Petitti Schmitz, Niece

My husband Rich and I live in Waterloo, Iowa. We used to come to visit Joyce. We tried to come once a month. Most of the time we made that. We have many fond memories growing up with Joyce. We always got together in Lake Delavan, Wisc., where her family owned a cabin. There were a couple of other families on this little street. We always had a lot of fun times there. My sister sent this memory. In 1975, when Joyce was still in Chicago, there was a group of nuns and a priest who came to visit. All the cousins, cousins from Ohio, cousins from California, all came together at Lake Delavan. A few nuns and the priest were having drinks out on the porch. They ran out of liquor, so they sent my sister and another cousin down to the log cabin tavern to pick up drinks. They had already called ahead and said that these are for the Rohlik family. My sister and cousin were carrying them back until they got caught by the police. They all went to the cabin and Joyce explained where these drinks were going. Joyce was embarrassed and her sister Tootsie was furious. My sister and cousin remember that day even though they were just little kids. Joyce always had the canoe out. She was so sports minded. We all learned how to canoe from Joyce. We went up there every summer and we learned something new from her. We will miss her a lot.

Sister Rosemary Surby, BVM

Joyce joined us in Mount Carmel Bluffs Gables, the care center here. The first few days she was wandering around the dining room looking for a place to sit. She would sit anywhere. She went up to the table and got a chance to introduce herself and find out who they were. Finally, she decided to sit with the six of us. She was just delightful. We had so much fun talking with her. She would sign up to take the van to places on a visit list. She signed up every time the van went out. We would laugh and say, "Joyce, where are you going now?" She would say she was going to a restaurant, maybe Mario's. "Where are you going tomorrow?" She would say, "Probably Walgreen's. I want to pick up some things." Joyce was so much fun. We enjoyed her gentle spirit and all the things that made her a loving person to live with and such a joy.

Sister Marie Greaney, BVM

In the second hurricane, her building was condemned. She was in the building and was being told she had to get out. She said, "I have to get my development papers. I can't leave without them." She was on the development committee. She went back in and got the papers.

Sister Emelyn Malecki, BVM

I never knew Joyce, but my aunt lived in Florida. She landed in the hospital where Joyce was chaplain. Joyce called me. I was so indebted to her because I didn't even know my aunt was in the hospital. I went to Florida and was able to meet Joyce in person. I appreciated her presence at my aunt's wake. It was just Joyce, myself, and a couple who knew my aunt. I was happy to meet her. She was a lovely, happy person.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

With Joyce being in Florida for so many years, many of us did not know her until she came to Mount Carmel Bluffs. Very soon she joined our cluster which is a lovely mixture of BVMs, mostly who live here on campus, and Associates. She always made such wonderful, positive interventions and sharing on the topics. She also was delighted to be able to go to the symphony. She was in my car. I was amazed when I read her obituary that she served in DeBary, Fla. My two great aunts and a great uncle who moved there many decades ago are long gone. At that time, it was a very tiny little settlement that was growing. I can't imagine what it would have been like if they had Joyce as part of their parish. I think of the impact her presence had in pastoral care, parish work, and hospitals. How wonderful her gifts of kindness, laughter, and gentleness. Thank you, Joyce for your gifts that you shared so well with us.

Marilyn Balaban, Mount Carmel Bluffs Resident

I lived four months with Joyce in Mount Carmel Bluffs Gables. I was at the table with her. We lived vicariously through her with all her adventures as she traveled around Dubuque. Joyce never missed a movie in the theatre. The screen was black to her, but she still enjoyed the movie and the popcorn. Thank you, Joyce, for bringing such joy to us.

Sister Mary Jean Ferry, BVM

There is an empty seat right here because this is where Joyce always sat for Mass. It was hard for her because she had to use a flashlight. She was embarrassed by that, so she tried to hide it all the time. When we didn't have music, she was so disappointed. Right before Joyce died, when she wasn't even seeming to be aware, I said the "Hail, Mary" with her. When we got to the very end, she mouthed the very last part "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen." Those were the last words I heard from her.

Sister Ann DeNicolo, BVM

Colleen [McGinnity] and I were fortunate enough to live with Joyce during her last years in Florida. I have a few stories to tell. First, anybody who knows Joyce knows that she loved your cats. People who love cats are special people. They have unique gifts. Joyce had those gifts. She took the cat for what and who it was. She loved its personality, recognized it, feasted in it, and enjoyed it. She was always very compassionate with her cats. If they were ever sick, she took great care of them. If they were frightened, she looked out for them. I often think that some of those gifts she shared with those cats were true of what she shared with all of us. She enjoyed the gifts of people. She enjoyed people. I don't think she ever knew a stranger. I was amazed how freely she was able to talk to people and talk about the people she was serving.

Her home in Florida became the Motherhouse for us. We were two hours south of Joyce's home. Most of the Associates and others were north of where she lived. So, we used her home as our Motherhouse. She was very hospitable, always joyful, always had refreshments, enjoyed having company. It was never a burden. She was courageous. We both shared the hurricanes.

Knowing what Joyce had to go through with her disability was far more mysterious than some of the things we went through. She managed to find relationships with sisters of other communities. They loved her and she loved them. It was all indicative of who she was as a person very accepting of others.

She loved her family. She loved her Bohemian background. I was fortunate enough to go to Manasota Key, a very special place where her sister and she would get together in the summer. Beautiful sunsets, beautiful place

on the beach. She loved the music that came from her family. Her niece and nephew, who are here today, delighted us with a cappella music. Joyce was so excited to share that. What a wonderful gift that was!

Joyce lived a very simple life. I don't mean that in a negative sense. She only had what she needed and all of it was a gift. I was always amazed and inspired by her. When she was losing her eyesight, I remember she showed us this huge machine that was given to her so that she could read. She was never angry or upset that she couldn't read. Her excitement was because she had this machine that could help her. She always saw things that would be disabilities for other people as gifts because people would help her live life as she wanted to live it. She lived it to the full.

When Patti and I were in her room, we talked about Manasota Key. I know that she was responding to us. I know that she was seeing what we saw as we talked to her. We urged her to walk the beach with Jesus and go to the sunset and be grateful for all that God had given her. I am grateful to have shared some of that with Joyce over the years. I know that if there is a cat heaven, she is there with them.

Sister Colleen McGinnity, BVM

When I think of Joyce, I think of her playful and light heart. She worked in pastoral care for many years and was compassionate and kind. She also worked in the marriage tribunal for the Tampa diocese. I am sure they found she has a listening heart, always sensitive to the pain in people's lives and non-judgmental.

Often when Ann [DeNicolò] and I tried to get together with Joyce, we would find a place in the middle. One time we decided to meet at a shopping mall in Sarasota, Fla., because they had lots of restaurants. She called me on our way up and said, "There's a group of musicians in the middle of the mall. I'm listening to them." We arrived and could hear the musicians as soon as we walked through the door. We were looking for Joyce and saw a big crowd gathered around the musicians. There was Joyce singing and dancing and just having the time of her life in the middle of this crowd. It was so totally her. She loved people. She loved life. She always was where there were people and where there was life.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM, Set of 1961

Joyce was a wonderful member of our set, and we loved her so much. Joyce had the ability to adjust to almost any situation. When she moved to Mount Carmel from Florida, it was during a time all of us were quarantined. But Joyce didn't complain about that because it had snowed. She had not seen snow for over 40 years! She said she just sat at the window and watched the snow day after day. Joyce, you are well-named because you brought joy everywhere.

Susie Tilton, Niece

I will miss my Aunt Joyce and visiting Mount Carmel when I go to Iowa. The BVMs have been so special to me and my family. Thank you, sisters, for taking such good care of Joyce. I will visit her in the Pine Walk.

Sister Sandra Rodemyer, BVM, Set of 1961

Joyce was in my set. When she moved to Dubuque, Iowa, she realized that, since I was from Des Moines, I knew Joanne Simonini. Joyce would keep me updated on Joanne's condition as she was dying. I really appreciated her thoughtfulness! Also, she was a cat lover. She had to give up her cat when she came to Dubuque. She *really* missed her cat.

Linda Tormey Lavery, Former BVM

When I remember Joyce, it is not an event, service, or single accomplishment that defines her for me but as a woman who lived in gratefulness. She lived each day gratefully in the fullness of what it brought both suffering and joy.

Joyce and I both entered the community in 1961. Entering with more wisdom and experience than most in our set, we did not get to know each other well at that time in our lives. As we connected in later years at set reunions and through a mutual friend, Sister Jackie Rice, I always experienced a sense of serenity about her and

a deep gratefulness for her life and work in the community. I sensed she experienced life as a gift, one that she accepted cherishing her work and friendships formed while also accepting the disappointments and diminishment she experienced.

I thank you, Joyce, for reminding me by the way you lived that each day is an extraordinary gift, not a given, and that we can choose how to live that day with its joys and sorrows. If we live in gratefulness we can, as what Rumi advises, "Be grateful for whatever comes." There was not a get together in person or on zoom that you did not mention how grateful you were to be back at Mount Carmel "living like a queen," you said! You are now experiencing the great fullness and mystery of the love that guided you and your life in the community. Woman of gratefulness, thank you!

Anne Marie Zingarelli Long, BVM Associate

I was in the novitiate with Joyce and saw her only a few times after profession. I remember Joyce as a quiet, genuine person with a big heart, a big smile, and saw the good in everyone. Thank you, Joyce, for touching my life. Rest in peace.

Sister Dolores "Dee" Peppard, BVM

I will always remember Joyce's beautiful smile and her gracious, joyful spirit that it expressed. Joyce's presence in Florida was certainly a gift to her family, although I'm sure Joyce would say that they were a gift to her. After Joyce's mother died, Joyce went into pastoral care ministry, where she accompanied those who were sick or dying. Joyce's complete acceptance of people, and her ability to listen deeply, must have been a gift to people at a vulnerable time in their lives. I imagine that even now, Joyce is celebrating the fullness of life with all those whom she accompanied on their journeys through death to life. Joyce lived with her sister "Squarkie" for about twenty years, and Squarkie's death was particularly difficult. Joyce knows well the experience of grief. And now she knows the experience of resurrection.

I have two fun memories that I'd like to share. The first is when we were in the novitiate. Joyce was a physical education major before she entered the Community. One day, Sister Mary Leo Hogan asked Joyce if she'd help remove the cobwebs from the rafters that were high in the Chapel ceiling. So, while we were all at lunch, Joyce enjoyed the opportunity to toss baseballs through the rafters of the Chapel ceiling!

Another memory is that Joyce used to come back to Chicago for some BVM regional meetings. A group of us would usually go out to dinner with Joyce after the meeting. On one occasion the meeting was in Chicago in the wintertime. Joyce, having come up from Florida, announced that she really hoped we'd have some snow while she was here. The idea of seeing snow again made her giggle with joy! The rest of us around the dinner table groaned, even at the thought of it!

Thank you, Joyce, for your beautiful smile and your fun and loving spirit.

Sister Sharon Rezmer, BVM

Joyce and I met each other for the first time in Florida when we both attended a mission trip to learn more about the plight of the immigrant farm workers in the United States. Afterwards, Joyce volunteered to drive me to her apartment where my sister Nancy and her husband would pick me up to drive to their condo which was on the same street about seven miles away. We became acquainted with each other on that ride; sharing stories about our work in parishes and learning about each other's history including that Joyce had been a physical education teacher for years. I also was introduced to her faithful cat. We stayed in touch and when I visited my sister in Florida, Joyce and I would get together with my sister and her two sisters for lunch or a little sightseeing. I was grateful for Joyce's down-to-earth hospitality and kindness. I had wanted my sister Nancy to know more of our BVM sisters in a relaxed environment and Joyce graciously helped ease Nancy into accepting my choice of vocation.