



## Sharing of Memories of Marjorie M (Herberdette) Heidkamp, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Nov. 26, 2024

### **Jenna Pozzi, Grandniece**

I would like to thank the sisters for welcoming my family and me to celebrate Aunt Marjie. It's really nice to be back at Mount Carmel. I've always felt really welcome here. I also want to thank the aides and the medical staff for taking care of her. I know that when she had to leave independent living, it was a struggle for her. I actually worked here for a little bit which really gave me peace of mind knowing that she was going to be taken care of. Finally, I can't forget to thank Sister Liz Wirtz, her confidant, her sister, and an absolute honorary member to our Heidkamp family.

When I was ten years old, we celebrated Aunt Marjie and Liz's 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee. Ten-year-old me knew Aunt Marjie as the fun aunt nun who would sing with me about the moon, the tragedy about the McGintys and the McCarthys, have me for sleepovers, and who would pretend her hands were full of voltage every time we shook it. It was a full weekend of celebration. At one point after the Mass and the luncheon, I remember being on stage running around with my cousins. We all took turns at the microphone saying, "We love you ,Aunt Marjie!" Then we would laugh. I realized now what a gift that must have been. Each one of us kids kept a substantial, ongoing relationship with her. As we grew into adulthood, that relationship never wavered. She worked hard to maintain them. As I stand here at 33-years-old and try to convey that to you, all I need to do is go back to what ten-year-old me said, "I love you, Aunt Marjie!"

I am going to read you a poem that my cousin Calley sent me that has to do with Marjie's handshake.

Childish eyes wide, we gathered around you like a bonfire,  
Felt your warmth spread through generations into us.  
Your ringless hands stretched for our little fingers  
To entrust with our eager reach,  
a small flame we could carry into our palms,  
A kindness unbearable to withhold.  
You gripped my hand and shook it like an earthquake, unfettered,  
radiating all that powerful joy through your fingertips into mine.  
I started giggling as you cackled with laughter,  
eyes shining in the light you had gifted me,  
as if to say, "Go make the world shake with this love."

### **Emily Lancaster, Grandniece**

Going back as far as I can remember, my Aunt Marjie was always the fun one in the room. I remember being a young kid and snuggling up next to her. Laying my head on her chest, I would fall asleep there. I would say how comfy she was, and she would say, in her familiar, sarcastic laugh, "Oh boy, am I glad!" At age five I didn't know how inappropriate it was to call a grown woman "squishy" and "comfortable." She would walk my sister and me to the park across the street. She would play this game with us. She would say, "Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay" while swinging her hips into ours, knocking us off the sidewalk. We would just beg her to do that over and over again. We just thought it was the funniest thing ever. Over the years, she would continue to come to visit us in Arizona.

Some of my fondest memories are swimming with her in our pool. She could float out there for hours. The water was truly her happy place.

Over the last several years since I have lived in Chicago, I have enjoyed making the short trip over to Dubuque, Iowa, to visit her. I would pick her up and take her thrifting to find stuff to make her art. After, we would go off to Tony Roma's for a delicious dinner. We would finish the night off at the casino.

Last year, Neil and I both visited on St. Patrick's Day. We met many of you and had some shamrock shakes here. We gave her \$100 to gamble with. She went to her first machine and started hitting random buttons and was betting \$20 a spin without knowing it. She won \$500! We enjoyed a beautiful steak dinner at the casino that night. It was one of the best dinners we ever had.

Sadly, this summer, I spoke to her often since our wedding was coming up. She really was trying to make it. Two days before our wedding, she called us and said, "I'm sorry, but I can't make the trip." But knowing how much she meant to us, she wrote a beautiful blessing for us that was shared with everyone in attendance.

Just a few weeks ago, I visited here. I saw her just before she passed. I brought her a chocolate milkshake and was able to go through the wedding photos. Neil's grandmother Phyllis and Aunt Marjie were in grade school together. We didn't find this out until we had already been dating for two years. Phyllis was able to visit her just a few weeks ago. They had not seen each other in 76 years. It was a beautiful reunion. I have pictures for a lifetime.

### **Neil Lancaster, Husband of Emily Lancaster**

I am probably the newest person to get to know Marjie, only being around for the last five years or so. It became very apparent very quickly what an incredible and important woman this was. The first time I was brought out here was relatively early in our dating. Emily thought it might be serious. I got a bit of the scanning rundown from Marjie to see what I was all about. I could pick up right away and appreciate her life's work in healthcare with myself being in healthcare. We could talk about that very easily. She had a lot of insights and perspectives that she was able to offer to me. I managed to earn the title of her "Favorite Carpenter" by fixing some shelves. She was always quick to listen and quick to offer meaningful advice. It was no surprise that before I talked with Emily's father about proposing to her, I talked with Marjie. She had some good insight into that. She was an incredible woman. I enjoyed having the time to get to know her and coming out here to visit her.

### **Dr. Mary Heidkamp, Niece**

My name is Mary Heidkamp, and I am also known among family members as Scooter. I am the third oldest of Marjie's nieces and nephews.

Aunt Marjie was no ordinary woman. When I was born, she was 14 years old. My first vivid memory of her was when we crossed the Mississippi at first light to attend her profession. We didn't see her much in those years, but she was a real, yet somewhat unusual, presence in our lives. She was kind of like a mythical character, being spoken about often and appearing periodically in that scary big old-fashioned nun's habit.

We would all agree we won the lottery in having her as an aunt. I can't even venture to guess the actual number of nieces, nephews, grandnieces and -nephews and great grands, but without exaggeration more than 100. The thing is, she knew each of us by name. She would ask about our children and grandchildren and in our frequent and long phone conversations, she would ask provocative and probing questions, offering prayers and assurances.

Each of us thought we were her favorite! She listened intently, counselled wisely, worried appropriately and loved us fiercely. She wasn't just one more old woman. She was a strong woman role model, vibrant in so many ways, teaching us to speak up and make our voices heard, to treat others with kindness and compassion, and to find our own path in making the world a better place for others. Indeed, she was a force of nature.

Aunt Marjie would laugh heartily at our silliness. Back in the day when she and her seven siblings and their spouses would gather with all of us cousins, there was always laughter, pranks, music and fun. Singing was a big part of our gatherings.

The Herb Heidkamps (Herb was her oldest brother) gathered 60 strong in Galena last August, and she spent a full day with us, talking with each person, making the little bitty ones giggle and just bringing so much joy to all. As she drove off, some wondered if this would be the last time.

How can we be sad? She lives on in our hearts and now "we each have one more angel in heaven, one more star in the sky." The world just got a bit brighter. Because of her example of love without abandon, we each have what it takes to carry on.

When Aunt Marjie and I had one of our regular phone calls last week, not knowing it would be the last, she asked about my two and a half-month-old granddaughter, Louisa. She then asked if four-year-old Helena and 24-month-old Jerome had the angels that she made for each of them from old jewelry on display in their rooms. I assured her that each child looked at the angel every night before bed. She told me she wanted to find some old jewelry to make one for Louisa. I was quite excited about that. And the next thing I knew, Marjie was gone.

But that's the essence of Marjie, thinking about each of us, even the newest baby, in some way or another, right up to that last breath. So, with her as one more angel in heaven, one more star in the sky, we know she is still with us in a new way, continually illuminating the path forward. To know her was to love her and to know her was to know that we were each deeply loved! And as the old singer songwriter Art Garfunkel would remind us: "When the singer is gone, the beat goes on". And so, it does.

### **Sister Eileen Healy, BVM**

As postulants, we were seated according to the alphabet. So, Healy and Heidkamp were seated together. On the very first day, we knew we had a friend in the congregation. What I remember most – and you don't have to admit it if you don't want to – are there any nieces or nephews here who are 71 or older? I saw your pictures when you were little, little kids. It's how we became true friends. We would share pictures of nieces and nephews and all the wonderful things you were able to do and how smart you were. Thank you very much for being here. I will always love you as I love my own nieces and nephews.

### **Marjorie Mary Brinck, Niece**

I was named after Aunt Marjie. I always felt very lucky and very special. I happened to talk with Aunt Marjie the Sunday when she was in the hospital. When she answered the phone, she was gasping for air a little bit. I said, "Aunt Marjie, I'm really worried about you." She said, "I don't think I'm dying." And she laughed the way she always did. Then she said, "But I might be." We continued to have a really good conversation about that. Then she said, "There are things I want to do before I die." I said, "What are those things?" She said, "There are some craft projects I need to finish. And I would like to write a letter to my family." We talked about that for a while. I said, "Well, if you can't write it, do you have an app on your phone where you could record it? Could you dictate it to somebody? Do you want to dictate it to me?" Then she moved on from that and said, "I think I am going to be OK. But if I'm not, that's OK." It kept bothering me that this letter didn't get written. I would tell Gunnar, my husband, "I just feel so bad that she didn't write the letter." I guess it was more for me that I wanted the letter because I know how good it would have been. Then just the other night I was crying about it and talking about it again and it just popped into my head. I said, "Gunnar, I think I have the letter. Remember Storyworth?"

A year ago, for Christmas, Gunnar and I gave Aunt Marjie Storyworth. It's a company that sends one email with five or six story prompts each week. She would get to pick one and answer the story and email it back to the company. At the end of the year, they compile all the stories into a book. They gave one to Aunt Marjie and one to me. I wanted to share it with the family that Christmas, but she said, "No, I don't want to share it. But maybe

after I die." There was one story that I think is the letter Aunt Marjie would have written, or at least parts of it. The prompt was, "What makes you happy?"

What makes me happy? What a profound question! Some days just opening my eyes and being alive makes me happy. Sometimes hearing from a family member or an old friend fills my heart with joy. Some days quiet prayer with no words or thoughts or music or anything, but just being in the presence of the Sacred fills my heart with happiness and peace.

Knowing I have touched another's life in some positive way makes my heart swell with gratitude. Every once in a while, I hear from a former student. They are now in their sixties. Even the ones I taught in first grade are senior citizens. The students I hear from the most are from Antioch, Ill. Two or three will visit or call from time to time. Others write an occasional note. It is such a gift when one of them visits or calls and shares their present life and memories of the past and thanks me for some small thing that I may have done for them. Once in a while, someone contacts the BVM website and leaves a message that way. Their gratitude, respect, and happy memories are more than I ever expected. In reality, there are probably some out there with less happy recollections and I am sorry for that. If there is some way to make up for any hurt or offense I caused a child, I would do it. They were all so good, innocent, and trusting. From the six-year-olds to the fourteen-year-olds to the high schoolers who returned to visit. The Vietnam soldiers and the vets who shared combat experiences. The young married and the college students struggling with relationship issues and moral questions. So many over the years came and laid their problems out and trusted me to care and listen and sometimes – rarely – have an answer. What a gift each sharing has been and is.

My BVM sisters are a source of happiness and peace and security. I know they are here for me, and I am here for them. We share a common philosophy and faith. We care for the Earth and the Cosmos. We love our Church while at the same time critiquing that same Church. Being part of the Circle of Friends fills me with pride, gratitude, and affection. My best friends are BVMs.

And family, in every form, shape and configuration, singly or in a humungous group, on the phone or in person, family as a group and mostly as individuals who make up that crazy, mixed up, colorful, motley group give me great joy. And I haven't even mentioned books, movies, walks, moon rises, constellations, herds of deer, turkeys, a fox streaking through the setting sun. With all the sorrow and misery on this Earth, there is much joy too.

### **Jean Maggie Hanson, Former Student, Sister of Sister Diane Forster, BVM**

In addition to one's own family, there are those extraordinary people who form your life and values. When Sister Marjorie and I met, we were both children. She was a very young teacher and full of enthusiasm for her time at St. Peter's, and I was beginning my teen years. She handled our adolescent nonsense with humor and wisdom. She was contagious joy. She was challenge and growth, and, despite our obliviousness, she was love. I know some of us continued to seek her company after graduating. These last few years I was given the opportunity to reconnect with her. In these last years, she still has been pure joy and love. She was a gift from God. Thank you, Marjorie.

### **Sister Terese Shinnars, BVM**

Marjie and I both began our teaching careers at St. Jerome's School in Chicago. She arrived there in 1955. I had been there since 1953. I have been trying to capture Marjie's essence in a single word and I think that word is *delight*. She found delight in teaching her first graders who reciprocated with delight. She was a delight in our community there. In those days we were seated in the dining room and community room according to the order in which we entered the congregation, so she and I sat near each other. That was such a delight, such a delight that we were frequently called to order by our superior. Over the years, when our paths crossed, it was

always a delight. Over time Marjie had grown in wisdom and grace so a visit with her was always a lifegiving moment. Thank you, Marjie, for having graced my life.

### **Helmut Gerfer, aka Opa Muti, Cousin**

Hello, my American Cousins! I am very sad to hear that Sister Marjorie has passed away. I remember her so well. During my visit in 2011, I had a lot of interesting talks with Aunt Marjie. She was incredible. Her thoughts were, I would say, typical to her – warm-hearted and always care and concern for her loved ones. I loved her very much, so sorry not to meet her again. Martina and I will light a candle in Altenberg Cathedral. Marjorie was there with her sister Rosemary in 1986, so her soul will feel what I wanted to tell her. With love to all Heidkamps.

### **Bob Heidkamp**

When I was a youngster, there was a saying that I learned at the Heidkamp family picnic. I thought it was only for the picnic, but I learned later in life that it was out of respect. I want all of you here to do it with me. I will say, “one, two three” and we will do the Heidkamp BVM saying. One, two, three. . . Hip-hip-hurray! Hip-hip-hurray! Hip-hip-hurray! We love you, Aunt Marjorie.

### **Betty Pozzi, Niece, Daughter of Rosemary Heidkamp Cramer, Mother of Jenna Pozzi.**

I was probably here more than many of you because I always lived the closest. Whenever she moved, she called me to come to help move the furniture, set everything up, hang the pictures and make it look very nice.

When I was here less than two weeks ago, just a few days before she went into the hospital, she wanted me to help clean up her room. That’s hard because she has art projects all over the place. She had things in progress. I said, “Do you want me to put all of these pieces with this frame?” “No, I think you can just put them all back in their boxes where they belong and put all the frames back in the closet.” I thought she would just start over.

I was going through all the little boxes of jewelry because she was going to help me with an art project for Christmas. She said, “Just keep putting things aside that you want.” I said, “Oh, no, I’ll be back after Thanksgiving. We can do it all then.” Well, now I don’t know what I’m going to do.

Aunt Marjie wrote to all of us. I don’t know who of us has not received a letter or a reflection from her over the years of how she sees you in relation to her and the world. Often, she would even put them in a picture frame. We all really cherish those kinds of things. When her mother died, she wrote a reflection about the weaver, about God being the weaver. All these threads of her life, all these little things that her grandmother, being a mother and a wife and taking over an insurance business, learning how to drive a car after her dad had died. To Marjie, that is just how she saw life. Everything is just a little piece, a little part of that life and put it into perspective. What she says in the end, is “She spoke to her children very often of the tapestry weaver. All the threads of an ordinary life of a very ordinary woman who loved and was loved and who allowed God to make a beautiful thing of her life.” Marjie did that. She did just what she said about her mother. She created these things for us. She said, “We look back today and see the pattern that is lifted from the loom.” That’s the pattern of her life and the legacy she has left all of us. We love her very dearly and we will continue to love her. Thank you all, especially the women in her set. She loved you all so very much as she did us. She had a big heart and lots of love to share.

### **Thomas Cramer, Nephew**

I know all of you think you were the favorite, which is probably true. I was the least favorite. Aunt Marjie and I would get on the phone every two, three, four, five weeks. There was never any real pattern to it. The thing I remember most was that she always challenged me. I would get off the phone with her and think for hours about how should I do this, how does she want me to respond, how am I supposed to go on. There were things that made me think about what I can do. She is one of the reasons why I am where I am today. Yeah, I struggle day in and day out to make things work. Her faith, her belief, inspires me to continue even though many don’t think what I am trying to do is worthy. I believe that it is worthy. I believe that I am helping. I know that Aunt Marjorie always helped us.

Wednesday morning, my sister Mary Kay called me. She said, "I've got some news." I said, "Aunt Marjie." She said, "Yeah." I had to turn the TV off and stop listening to everything. I cried. I was a terrible mess that day. She loved us. She loved me. I am going to miss her a lot. I am going to miss the challenges. I love you all.

### **Sally Heidkamp-McCarthy**

Her love connected each of us to the Source of Love. I will always be grateful to be her cousin, friend and cohort at Lutheran General Hospital. Love continues in all she touched.

### **Joan and Bill Shermach**

When I was a little girl, I used to hear the name Marjie Heidkamp around my house quite a bit. My sister, Carol, thirteen years older, was a classmate of Marjie's at Immaculata. After graduation in 1952, Marjie went to the BVMs, and Carol went to the Sisters of Providence. I didn't hear much about Marjie after that, but through our wonderful friend, Liz Wirtz, my husband, Bill, and I got to know Marjorie Heidkamp.

For the past years, we have formed what we call our BVM posse. Marjorie became a part of our "Younger Posse" after we lost Sister Marguerite Yezek, BVM. I cannot find the words to express how much I appreciated her humor, candor and love. Her creative and artistic talents will always be a part of our memories as we look at the numerous creations she gave to us. At our last in person visit, she took delivery of a box of odds and ends that were destined to become parts of her art and the looks that came across her face as she sorted through the pile really said so much about her. As she picked and pulled you could see her discerning what would and what wouldn't fit her vision, delight at the treasures and a small frown at those too odd bits, but the wheels were constantly turning, the plans for projects already forming. She was always a woman in motion who never failed to slow to a stop to share her love.

### **Jimmy Cramer**

My birthday was closest to hers, so we had a special bond.