



Sharing of Memories of Suzanne (Frances Carol) Effinger, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Dec. 19, 2024

Anthony Effinger, Nephew

I was never too close to my father's side of the family. I came along very late in my parents' life, and by the time I did, we had moved from the Midwest to Colorado. My father, a salesman who had traveled every week for years, had little interest in getting on a plane again.

That said, my mother and I made a trip to Milwaukee in about 1971, where we saw Aunt Sue, Aunt Mary, and Grandma Frances. Aunt Sue left an impression. Her kindness was clear to anyone who spent time with her. She had my father's wit and intelligence, enhanced by a kinder, more reflective side that was clear even to a six-year-old. She and my father had the same angular features and blue eyes, the hallmarks of the Effinger clan.

I saw Aunt Sue now and again in the years that followed. In 1996, she came to Portland, Ore., where my wife Diana and I had just moved. The BVM order was having a conference here, and Aunt Sue added a few days to her itinerary to spend with us. It was summer, which in Oregon means berry picking. We took Aunt Sue to Sauvie Island in the Columbia River to pick Marionberries, an extra-sweet blackberry species that grows only in the Northwest and doesn't travel well because it's so fragile.

Aunt Sue, Diana and I spent the day picking, coming home with pounds of blueberries, Marionberries and raspberries. Aunt Sue was tireless while picking and then spent an equal number of hours helping us wash and package our haul to freeze for winter. During that visit, Aunt Sue and I talked about everything, including politics and theology. I learned that she had incredible insight into this world and nuanced, unexpected views about the spiritual world.

I'll never forget when we dropped Aunt Sue off at the Red Lion Hotel in North Portland for the conference. In the lobby, she was clearly in her element, greeting nuns from all over the country and striking up immediate conversations about BVM policies and positions on what I could tell were sensitive, contentious topics in the church. Those conversations demonstrated steely resolve, adding something to her kindly demeanor that I hadn't seen. It was clear to me then that she had the same wit and intelligence that Tom--her brother, my father--was known for, and that she had inherited her parents' unsentimental realism about a world in desperate need of right speech and right action.

My mother, who died in 2022 at 96, adored Aunt Sue--Sister Sue, to her. Whenever her name came up, my mother would glow a little more and talk about how Sister Sue worked tirelessly to teach adults in Milwaukee how to read. She gave her life and time to those less fortunate. I can only hope that my two children, now 19 and 21, have some of that same generous spirit. So far, the signs are good. They know about Aunt Sue, and when they come home this holiday, I will read her obituary to them and share memories that Sean Bradley [Spiritual Care] - who has been a Godsend to Aunt Sue for years and to me this month - collects.

I regret that I didn't get more time with Aunt Sue and her brothers and sisters before they passed, but I cherish the memory of a glorious summer day, gathering Oregon's bounty with a thoughtful, kind aunt who strived to make a fallen world better for those most in need.

We love you, Aunt Sue.

Sister Helen Gourlay, BVM

We first met in Milwaukee. We both attended the Dreamer's Ministry Workshop in about 1992. We could choose our ministry and get together with others. It so happened that Barbara Kutchera [BVM] was also at that Dreamer's workshop. She and I had decided that we would go to Milwaukee, her home. Sue asked to join us at Christmastime, not realizing that Barbara, as Sue described, was an "off the wall" extrovert. We found work. Barbara was ministering at the jail and doing creative arts work with African Americans. Sue was ministering in literacy. We found the Shade Tree Family Resource Center run by the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the African American community. We all served there in various capacities. They thought they had found a gold mine with three people coming in who all had training and didn't need a salary because we were paid by the BVMs. They were thrilled. We had a good time and met many Afro-American people through that ministry.

Before I go too much further, I want to be sure to thank the wonderful staff here at Mount Carmel who have been with us on the journey. The Gables staff saw to it that Sue would come over to visit me. They would take her over in the wheelchair. Everyone was so friendly and helpful. Of course, all of you BVMs have been so supportive during this long journey.

Sue loved her family and kept in close touch. Her family became my family too since mine is not close geographically. Dave and Kelly, who are here, mean a lot to me. We would spend holidays with them. They take care of rescue dogs. Sue had a great love for dogs, and I liked them too.

Sue loved teaching older adults. Some people might not know that she volunteered at the humane society. She loved animals. She told me that she had to get in the kennels with cats at times. That's more than I can take!

We had a nice anointing for Sue about five days before she went into hospice. Beautiful people would go up and thank her and say something special to her. Afterwards, I stood at the foot of her bed and said, "Sue, how are you?" She said, "I want a beer." She was a true Milwaukeean to the end. We checked with the nurse and then provided her with one. That was one of her last requests.

Sue knew my family also, so we had occasional gatherings with them. It was a privilege to be with Sue during her surgeries, her illness, and her death. It took a long time. It was a long journey for her. It was hard. The morning of her death was beautiful. It was the first Sunday of Advent. Some of us watched the Mass soon after she had died. The readings and the songs were just beautiful. It was so fitting for her to have that love and support from Mass right away. Now I ask that Sue rest in peace. Her journey is just beginning.

Sister Janet Desmond, BVM

I am also from Milwaukee and was in Milwaukee at the same time. Sue and I had both returned to our hometown. Sue's sister Mary Ann lived in an apartment. Sue moved into the same building to help Mary Ann with whatever she needed. Finally, Mary Ann moved to a nursing facility and was confined to a wheelchair. Sue visited every day and brought her to the activities. She was just a wonderful help to her older sister.

I went to the Adult Learning Center as a volunteer after Sue retired. I heard so many wonderful descriptions of Sue and how they loved her there. I was tutoring in the same room in which she taught. I could see why the first-grade training she had helped because so many folks in that room did not know how to read.

What really stuck with me was when we had our BVM clusters. Sue volunteered to take her turn and made up these beautiful prayers, discussions and sharing. It was always a pleasure knowing that Sue was going to be in charge. Blessings on Sue!

Sister Carol Spiegel, BVM

I have a nice memory of Sue. It was one of the first times I went to a state fair. She and Barbara Kutchera, Deb Poturalski [former BVM], and I went to the Wisconsin State Fair. You could just tell how much she loved it. My main memory of that day was Sue tried to recapture the lyrics to the Rogers and Hammerstein's opening song in the movie "State Fair." It was a theme throughout the day. I could see how she loved to have fun.

Kambra "Kammie" French, Chief Mission Officer, Carmel High School, Mundelein, Ill.

Sister Sue was my grade school principal at Lake Shore Catholic Academy in Waukegan, Ill. In my childhood memories, I see her kind smile, I remember her leading us in prayer and always being involved with my fellow students. She had the rare gift of being both gentle and strong. As a child, I looked up to her and wanted to be both gentle and strong like her.

When I was a student at Marquette University she was living and ministering in Milwaukee and looked me up and reached out. I remember being stunned that my grade school principal would care enough to check in on me. But, of course, her kindness was unparalleled. I had the privilege of visiting her home in Milwaukee for dinner one evening. We spent time catching up and she wanted to know all about my future plans and how I would live my vocation. As I shared my thoughts and ideas, her signature gentle strength encouraged and inspired me.

A couple of years ago I had the privilege of visiting Sister Sue at Mt. Carmel Bluffs. As I entered her room it was as if the years melted away; the comfort and joy I felt from hearing her voice and seeing her smile will stay with me. As we sat down to lunch, she looked me in the eye and said, "Okay, Kammie, tell me everything!" We sat and talked for quite some time that afternoon. I was no longer a little girl looking up to her principal or a young adult dreaming about the future but Sister Sue was still the same. Her kindness and humor were there. Her smile and kind embrace were there. And, of course, her gentle strength was there once again as we shared the joys and sorrows, challenges and successes of life.

I am grateful for the beautiful witness of her life and for the ways she has inspired me as a woman, a leader, and a minister of the Church. Sister Sue Effinger, pray for us!

Sister Kathleen Mullin, BVM

Initially, I only was aware of Sue because of other people. When she taught at Presentation, she was with Margaret Mullin, my cousin, who taught fourth grade. When I was in the Scholasticate, my cousin said to me, "If you get into first grade, you should contact Sister Frances Carol. She's an excellent teacher." Actually, I did get into first grade but didn't contact her. I had excellent people around me to help. Later I lived in the same area as one of her set mates Catherina Walsh. Catherina talked about Sue and how special she was. She asked me to pray for her when she was doing her pioneer ministry in Milwaukee. When I moved her and joined a faith sharing group with Sue, I learned about some of the things that had been said today. A few times after our session, I would go to her room, and we would talk. That was a gifting time for me. I thank you, Sue, for who you have become and how you shared your wealth and invited others to share their story.

Sister Bernadette McManigal, BVM

I was privileged to be with Sue in a prayer group that lasted one year here at Mount Carmel. During that year, I was always impressed with the depth of what Sue shared. Today, I want to express my gratitude to Sue for sharing her faith life so openly and so beautifully.

Sister Monica Seelman, BVM

I lived with Sue at Holy Cross in Chicago in the late 1970s and have great memories of our time together. Her sister, Mary Ann, co-owned a little cottage in Fish Creek, one of the towns in Door County, with her good friend. Every year they would give the cottage to Sue for two weeks. We loved our vacations there, walking through town and stopping at all the little shops, checking out the pottery places and swimming in Lake Michigan.

Mary Ann had a bird feeder in the yard which attracted finches and warblers by the dozen. Luckily, she also kept a bird book in the cottage, so we all got into identifying gold finches, wrens, woodpeckers, and flickers. Jon J. Audubon would have been proud!!

One year while we were there the refrigerator went out and we spent a great deal of time checking out used appliance stores for a replacement. Meanwhile a neighbor kept our perishables for us. At last, we found one, had it installed and could go back to our sunning and bird watching.

Another memory of Sue was her generous spirit. During parent-teacher conferences one year she found out that the mother of one of her first-grade students never learned to read. Sue offered to tutor her and spent many hours teaching her the basics.

More recently, when my brother Danny was dying of cancer, both Sue and Helen came to the house to visit him. Seeing their faces brought a big smile to Danny's lips.

I cherish all my memories of dear Sue.

Sister Margaret Mary Cosgrove, BVM

I did not know Suzanne very well, but I knew her as a kind, "behind the scenes" person, she did not like being in the limelight. But she was so gracious and was so good about helping others.

Barbara Kutchera and Suzanne were living together when Barbara was losing her battle to cancer. Friends of Barbara would often drive to Milwaukee to visit. One of Barbara's good friends was Chris Athens [BVM]. Both Barbara and Chris were talkers, often non-stop talkers. Both were enthusiastic about different ideas and could wax eloquently on a number of topics. Suzanne told this story at lunch after Barbara's funeral. Chris was at their home visiting Barbara and Suzanne had fixed lunch for the three of them. They were eating together and both Barbara and Chris talking. At one point, Suzanne asked them, "When you are together, who listens?" The whole table at the funeral lunch burst out laughing. It was such a great question.

Mary Maas, BVM Associate & Former BVM

Sue was a friend of mine. I met her when she came to teach at Holy Cross in Chicago in the 1970s. She was our fourth vacation partner after my mother was no longer able to travel. Sue, two School Sisters of St. Francis and I spent several summers with a week's vacation at Salem (*BVM vacation house in Wisconsin*). And we traveled once on a train/fly trip that Sue had arranged with a travel agent. I spent overnights with her when she lived in the senior housing complex in Milwaukee. Sue was upbeat, compassionate, and fun to be with. I shall miss my phone calls to her and my visits with her.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM

Sue was a gracious woman filled with gratitude for whatever small task or act of kindness she received. For about 1½ years, I would meet once a month with some of the sisters in Gables to discuss community issues, including *Salt* magazine articles, *BVM Center News* or our *BVM Constitutions*. Sue was an active participant at those sessions whenever possible. At the end of the session, it was Sue who thanked me for providing the opportunity to come together for a meaningful community discussion.

Sister Judy Callahan, BVM

I did not know Suzie well, only that she loved music, especially opera.

Sylvia Stites

My condolences to Suzanne's family and friends. I taught with Suzanne in St. Louis, Mo., at St. Timothy's School. She was the first-grade teacher. She was a sweet woman and was always patient and kind to the kids and to me. I remember her well and know she rests in peace.

Anonymous

This poem by Sister Joyce Rupp is one of Sue's favorites. She picked up the book it is in at a memorable retreat in Marathon, Wis., in 2003. As her eyesight failed her, she often asked for it to be read to her. She appreciated its affirming words. Now it is her message to us, especially appropriate during this season of winter.

Evergreen,
silent sentinel of hope
through all seasons.

Somewhere
deep within me
an evergreen grows,
strong, tall, resilient,
always singing
of life.

Her stouthearted green
endures, thrives
amid winter wilds.

She is strong.
She is evergreen.
She lives in me.