



Sharing of Memories of Katherine E. Heffernan, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Feb. 11, 2025

Kevin Murphy, Nephew-in-law

I had the privilege of meeting Katherine in 1975 when I started dating her niece, Molly. While I don't have a hundred years of history with Katherine, at least I have a half century.

On behalf of Katie's family, I want to say a few words of remembrance. We knew her as Katherine, the world traveler, who became in essence the quasi-matriarch of the family when her sister Julie passed away in 1999. Whether she visited us in St. Louis, or we visited her in Chicago, and occasionally on trips together, the stories and pictures from her trips abroad were always a highlight. I don't know if you had the pleasure of sitting through one of Katherine's slideshows. Katherine lived a full life from her time growing up in that small farming community of Hubbard, Nebr., to eventually settling in Chicago. You may have noticed that Katherine enjoyed social events, especially if music and dancing were offered.

Katherine loved people and left a lasting impression on all she met. Katherine loved to be current from politics to local events and was never bashful about sharing her opinion. A few examples. We just heard in the eulogy that she was cast as an extra in the movie *Batman*. You should have seen our kids when they heard that from their grandaunt. Believe it or not, she attended a Madonna concert in Chicago in 1988, a year of controversy. Of course, she loved the theater. One of her favorite shows was attending *Hamilton* in Chicago.

Katherine was truly one of a kind and her life's journey would make for a fascinating book. But now, as we are here today to bid farewell, her only nieces, my wife Molly and my sister-in-law Ellen, and my brother-in-law Matthew are here today as an extended family and our extended family is watching whether in Georgia, Connecticut, Illinois, Missouri, or all points around.

The care and love that Katherine received here at Mount Carmel Bluffs from all her sisters, was a testament to Katherine's other family. Thank you for all that you did, especially the aides and staff who cared for her in the end. May Katherine's arrival into heaven begin with her being surrounded by her loved ones with her favorite music playing and everyone dancing. Until we meet again, sláinte. [*Irish for "health."*]

Molly Murphy, Niece

I had many adventures with her. We had a great, loving relationship. She did become the matriarch of our family once my mother died. We were a little closer than normal. I want to read a tribute from Mary Jo Hippe, Katherine's goddaughter, sent in honor of my aunt and Mary Jo's mother.

Mary Jo Hippe, Goddaughter (Read by Molly Murphy, Niece)

Sister Katherine E. Heffernan was my beloved godmother. She was my mentor, my role model and my confidante throughout my life. Katie is one of the strongest women I have ever known. Her faith, courage, intelligence and creativity were a gift to all. Katie was a great teacher. Her vision, initiative and perspective prepared her for all the challenges in her many jobs building up the Kingdom of God, right here, right now.

Katie and my mother, Margie Dyer Williams, met as students at St. Louis University during World War II. May we all have a friendship like Katie and Margie's friendship. After graduating from St. Louis University, Katie worked at the Vatican finding war orphans and placing them in homes in the United States. Her intrepid spirit and faith in God helped her succeed in this challenging and dangerous job. Katie was recognized and honored by Pope Pius XII for her extraordinary work.

Katie's life was well lived. She had a profound impact on our world. She lifted us up and helped us believe ourselves as lovable and capable. God blessed us when He gave us Sister Katherine E. Heffernan.

Ellen Freeman-Polk, Niece

I wore my shoes today [*metallic, pointed-toe flats*] in honor of my aunt. I thought she would like that. I will read a tribute from Katherine's oldest grandnephew. His name is Terrance. We call him TJ.

Terrence Freeman, Grandnephew (Read by Ellen Freeman-Polk, Niece)

Katherine was an incredible aunt. After my grandmother, her sister Julie, died in 1999, Katherine stepped in as the matriarch of our family, always there to celebrate my siblings and cousins at our big moments: graduations, weddings and holidays.

Katherine taught us about the world, provided a bridge to our grandparents and connected us to our roots. She was funny, fearless and fierce. With Katherine by your side, you believed you could accomplish more than you otherwise could. We love Katherine and are so grateful for our many years with her by our side. With gratitude.

Clare Williams DuMontier, Sister of Mary Jo Hippe

My first memory of Sister Katie was when I was very young, about seven years old. My family stopped at her convent in Chicago on a family vacation. She was wearing a long black habit, like the ones worn by my teachers at Catholic school. I remember following her down a long dark wooden hallway to lead us to the lunch the sisters had lovingly prepared for the seven of us that day. Sister Katie was overjoyed to see us. Her love and warmth for each one of us was palpable, but her special friendship with my mother, Margie Dyer Williams, was so strong. It was pure love and joy that day. My father, Jim Williams, was also so happy to see Sister Katie. My sister Mary Jo Williams Hippe, shared a special relationship in that she was Sister Katie's goddaughter, so that was a happy reunion.

My memories of Sister Katie are always intertwined with memories of Mother and Sister Katie's strong friendship. They met as college students at St. Louis University. They simply loved and admired each other. The years fell away when they were together, and they always looked like young girls to me, sharing and updating each other on what was going on in their lives. Mother didn't share her inmost thoughts and experiences with many people, but Sister Katie was her confidante all through her life. Once Sister Katie said to me, "Your mother and I have tilled this field together." Sister Katie came to my son Clark's graduation from the University of Notre Dame. Mom and Sister Katie slept in a dorm room together! They simply had fun.

Sister Katie was always interested in hearing about my life. As I observed her with others throughout my life, I saw that she truly and deeply cared about everyone. Even so, when she talked to me, it was as if I was the most important person in the world. She had the gift of listening from the heart, truly listening with love.

Sister Katie has always been an inspiration to me. When I moved to Wisconsin, she shared with me that she had completed the American Birkebeiner more than once. This involved cross-country skiing for 50 kilometers across Wisconsin! She also participated in an international women's forum where she met with women from around the world to increase understanding and unity. She had to wear a burka, and a long robe in a Middle Eastern country. Sister Katie said this was a familiar experience, reminding her of her days wearing the long black habits, veils and wimples!

Thank you, Sister Katie, for the love and friendship which you always showed to me and everyone in my family, including your goddaughter Mary Jo, but especially for the enduring friendship and support which you showed to my mother, Margie Dyer Williams. May you have a very special place in heaven, continuing that friendship!

Janie Freeman, Grandniece (Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)

Some of my fondest memories with Aunt Katherine were the times we spent together in Chicago. She made me feel so at home in a new city. Whether we were going out to dinner, seeing a show, exploring a museum or simply spending time together, she had a way of making every moment special. I will always cherish these wonderful years spent together!"

Sister Judith Callahan, BVM

I'm from the Set of 1958 that Katie joined. We didn't get to know her when she (and we) were young as we did with the others because she had spent her novitiate with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

Katie was so secretive; she wouldn't tell us how old she was. We had a meeting called "The Polishing of the Jewel" in St. Louis when we were quite young. On the tables the first night were lists of all the BVMs with their birth dates on it. I think panic set in with Katie. The next morning, they were all gone from all the tables. I don't think the mystery was ever solved.

A few years later when we were doing Third World Experiences, Katie, Peggy Geraghty, and I went to Quito, Ecuador. In six weeks in Ecuador, Katie saw more of Ecuador than I did in six years living there. You can fill in the blanks. She was not always prudent in her camera shots of people.

In more recent years, when she first came here, she told me, "I'm going to go get my driver's license." I said, "Katie, you are not going to be driving." She said, "I'm not going to say "No." to myself. They may say "No." to me, but I am not going to say "No." to myself.

Katie was colorful. She was interesting. She was challenging. She drove us crazy sometimes, but she was loving and fun and a wonderful person.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

These reflections are from Sister Patricia Kerz who knew Katie for 25 years, both in Chicago and here at Mount Carmel Bluffs. She asked me to share them.

Sister Patricia Kerz, BVM (Read by Sister Karen Conover, BVM)

Katie was always happy, always looking for fun, and never seemed to worry. She always wanted to party and socialize. When you tried calling her at home, you rarely ever reached her because she was out partying with her friends or shopping or doing something else.

Katie loved trips to the Spiders and to Salem. But she didn't want to just sit around there. She'd check out other opportunities in the surrounding area, and then off she'd go to various places. One time, she heard some Associates say that they had never been to the Spiders, so Katie arranged to have several people go with her, including me, Mary Breslin, and associates Kathleen Weishaar and Therese Hawks. We had a great time and went out to dinner every night because no one wanted to cook.

Katie had lived with the BVM Sisters at Wright Hall, but then she looked around and decided she wanted to have a condo in one of the big high rises, the ones called Malibu East. Usually condos were for purchase, but somehow, Katie finagled and secured an arrangement to rent the condo. She decorated it all very beautifully. She was very talented in that area. Our cluster would meet there, and we all enjoyed quite a view from Katie's unit on the 44th floor overlooking Lake Michigan.

Katie did a great deal of international travel. One of her last trips with the American Women for International Understanding (AWIU), when she was in her 90s, was to Morocco. Although our cluster tried to talk her out of it, thinking she was too old, Katie was determined to go. When she returned, she showed us pictures, including one of herself riding a camel. She had purchased a beautiful rug there and had it in her apartment and even brought it with her to Mount Carmel Bluffs.

Whenever a shopping trip was planned by Life Enrichment here at Mount Carmel Bluffs, Katie would be on the bus, ready to go. She always came home with lots of packages.

There was a poker group here at Mount Carmel. When Katie told me that she would love to join, I said, "Katie, you can't be part of a poker group, because you can't sit still that long. And besides, poker is a very quiet game." Both of those things were definitely *not* Katie's style. She was up and gone in short order, and, of course, she wanted to talk all the time.

If there is one word to describe this whirlwind woman, Katie Heffernan, it would be UNIQUE!

Sister Emelyn Malecki, BVM

Katie and I were in a cluster together for at least four or five years. Katie came to Dubuque before I did. The first time I saw Katie, I said, "Katie, how are you?" She said, "I'm fine. How are you?" I knew she recognized my face, but I could tell she didn't know my name. I said, "Katie, what is my name?" She said, "I'm not going to tell you." I said, to her, "You are not going to tell me because you don't know. I'm Emelyn." Good luck, Katie. God bless!

Sister Roberta White, BVM, Set of 1958.

There is one word that sticks with me when I think of Katie. It's generosity. Most of my teaching time was in Southern California. Twice Katie with her AWIU group from Chicago came out to Los Angeles and had a celebration of different women from around the world. She invited Sister Vickie Smurlo and me to go with her.

Every time I went to Chicago for a meeting or to go to Dubuque, I would stop to see her. Katie would take me to the Museum of Art. I loved it! She had a card to get in. She would invite me to stay with her at her apartment. She would give me her bed and she would sleep on the couch. Katie really was a person of generosity. Besides being the flamboyant person that she was, she really gave to many, many people.

Jim Edgran, Son of Margie Dyer Williams

Katie was mother's best friend from St. Louis University. She was always part of our family, so we called her Aunt Katie. We could call her Sister Katie if we wanted to, but she didn't like it. She helped my mother go through a lot of the changes and troubles in her life. I thought that was important. She was always at some family function. If she didn't visit her family, she would come by our place on Christmas, or Thanksgiving, or Easter for dinner.

She helped me a lot. She helped me understand my father. My parents divorced when I was seven years old. She helped me understand the dynamics among me, my mother and my father. They weren't as good as they could have been. My father and I got along as adults.

I remember one time she missed a holiday because she was traveling in China and fell and broke her leg and, therefore, couldn't come back. One of my favorite memories, talking about parties because she really did like parties, was when she was at my older brother's wedding. She drove me down there and she drove me back. We talked a lot on that trip. However, she had the raciest outfit on. She wore a dress with spaghetti straps. No one else had anything close to her outfit, including the bride. She was outshining the bride at that moment. She danced and she talked, and I remember thinking, "Is she still in the order or not?" Yes, she was.

I really loved her because she really did point me in the direction of how to understand a true, Christian, Catholic person who was of service to others and to God as she was.

Sister Monica Seelman, BVM

Katie was my good friend for over forty years. She was someone who was always game for any adventure or outing. She loved living in Chicago, was a member of the Art Institute and considered the 147 express bus her own private taxi. She enjoyed just going down to the Loop and shopping or just looking around.

For several years Katie and I would usher at various theaters in the city. We saw lots of good plays and musicals and always had fun eating out afterwards. More recently we had tickets to the Lyric Opera, catbird seats but oh, what fun watching and listening to the performers and people watching the other folks in the audience.

Katie really enjoyed traveling, whether to Salem, the Spiders and Michigan Shores or to China, Russia and Australia. Her apartment was filled with souvenirs from all over the world.

Katie also liked participating in politics. She volunteered to phone and ring doorbells before an election. Then on Election Day she worked in her polling place all day. If some important figure came to town and had a rally, she'd be there.

Her Irish heritage meant a lot to her. She attended Mass at Old St. Pat's on March 17th and marched in the parade afterwards. She recognized all the big Chicago politicians that took part in the festivities.

The BVM Community was her first love. She was a force in the Crosstown Cluster, made sure we organized our yearly calendar, and made reservations when we celebrated at Misericordia. She was there when there was an emergency. I remember a time when my housemate, Doris Walsh, BVM, had a TIA and was in the emergency room at Michael Reese. I called Katie and told her about Doris, and she was right there, by my side, in less than an hour. I'll miss my dear friend who added color and fun and generosity to my life. Thank you, Katie.

Sandy Moses, Roberta Kuhn Center, Line Dancing Instructor

I will always remember Katie in the back corner of the line dancing class, dancing to her own private music and steps. She was delightful.

Msgr. Tom Toale, Former BVM Chaplain

What a delightful person! I will always remember her 100th birthday. Such a great celebration. She's probably dancing up a storm in Heaven.

Ellen Freeman-Polk, Niece

I want to say thank you to the BVM Sisters. You and the Good Shepherd nuns filled something for her. As kids, we stayed at many convents. When I walked up the wooden stairs, I thought, "I've been up many of these wooden stairs at the Good Shepherd's convent in St. Louis." We've all stayed at Wright Hall in Chicago. We liked the ice cream machine. And now, this Motherhouse. This is the best. Thank you for your love and support and filling her desires.