



Sharing of Memories of Carl Loras Pilmaier, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Jan. 3, 2025

Sister Linda Roby, BVM, Niece

Yes, it's true. My grandmother Laura entered the BVMs. That's fun to think about, but I'm very glad she left and gave birth to our entire family. When their youngest daughter expressed a desire to become a BVM, Carl and Laura were very pleased. Years later, when I announced that I was entering our community, Grandma delighted in saying, "God got two for the price of one!"

Carl Loras has always been Aunt Ada to me, my siblings and my cousins. When I was growing up, our family was the only one that didn't live in the Midwest. So, every summer Mom and Dad would pack four little kids in the car and drive Highway 80 from San Francisco to Des Moines, Iowa, to be with our relatives. Aunt Ada always arranged to take her home visit at the same time. While the grandparents, aunts and uncles were visiting in the house, Aunt Ada and her sister companion would be outside with all of us cousins organizing baseball games and teaching us West Coast kids how to catch fireflies. If we couldn't be outside, they would take us inside to play a horse race game or, you guessed it, bingo. So, BVMs were family and BVMs were fun.

Years later as a BVM, I had the joy of being at the same school as Aunt Ada for two years at St. Pius in Des Moines. I was teaching second grade, and she had transitioned from being a classroom teacher to being the school librarian. It was so evident that she was greatly loved by students, parents, and fellow faculty members. I was proud to be her niece.

A few years later, I moved back to Portland, Ore., and she moved to Mount Carmel. I would call her every few weeks. At that time, you needed to go through the front desk to connect to the person you wanted. I was quite surprised when they would say, "Carl Loras is not available right now. She's bowling with the Clarke students." I was amazed that she was going bowling! I didn't know about Wii bowling. In later years, I would often be told, "She's signed out to go to the library." That, too, puzzled me until I finally learned that "library" was the codeword that she and her friends used for the casino.

As the buildings here at Mount Carmel Bluffs were being constructed, we would talk every week. When she moved into her new home, she would always ask me, "When are you coming?" "As soon as they finish my building," I'd say. "Well, they had better hurry," she added, "because we have to play cards." It was such a delight this past year and a half to be here with her and to see her enjoying life to the full at age 97. Playing bingo, mastering Wii bowling, laughing and visiting with so many BVM friends, and, yes, beating me at Kings in the Corner at least half of the time. Note: Carl Loras had her best score ever of 223 in Wii bowling the week before she went to the hospital. She was good at that.

Thank you, Aunt Ada, for all the joy we shared. Thank you especially for introducing me to this wonderful BVM family which we both deeply love.

Marietta Bratta-Garber

Sister Carl Loras was my second-grade teacher at Blessed Sacrament School in Chicago. After a difficult first grade, Sister turned my life around. She was kind, loving and encouraging. I looked forward to seeing her each day. I became a secondary teacher, and I told my students she was my role model in teaching. I wanted them to know if I was encouraging, engaging and respectful to them, it was because of her. I connected with Sister through the years, and I always told her how much she meant to me. I am happy that I mailed a Christmas card to her early this year. I'm sure one of the sisters read it to her if she had difficulty reading. I am happy she knew how much I loved her. I know she is at peace, and I will ask her blessings and her intercessions for my prayers.

Sister Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

I lived with Carl Loras at St. Augustine in Memphis, Tenn., and at St. Patrick's in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. At the time I lived with her in Cedar Rapids, St. Jude became a new parish, and Carl Loras was to teach in the new school. She taught second grade. She tells the story that she formed all her classes into reading groups. The groups would come for their lessons and sit in a round circle on little chairs. Carl Loras would sit with them on a little chair and conduct the reading class. During one of these reading classes, there was a little guy who was acting up. Carl Loras said, "You come and stand by me." The little fellow came over and stood by her and the reading class went on for a while. Then he bent over and kissed her. She said, "Oh, go sit down." I know Carl Loras was loved by her students.

Brother David Galinski, FSC

The day after Labor Day, September 1950, a little curly haired boy, that was me, walked up the stairs to room 18 at Blessed Sacrament in Chicago. Standing at the top of the stairs was Sister Carl Loras with the best smile that I have ever, ever, seen. She greeted each one of us. As I walked through the door into the classroom, little did I know what the future held for me. I have my second-grade class picture here with Sister Carl Loras. There were 53 of us. I cannot believe how she was able to captivate all 53 of us and kept all of us in line. even though I was a little precocious. She did a great job. She was loving. She was kind. She made sure that each and every one of us felt important. She pushed us to the best of our abilities. I really, truly believe that I owe my vocation to Sister. Even as a second grader, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I credit her influence for that. I didn't know what Sister was like in community, but listening to the stories, I have a feeling that she was a spitfire in community. She always loved to play games. Little did I know that I would be driving my second-grade teacher to the casino here in Dubuque! I think of that now and I just can't believe I did that, but I did.

I lost contact with Sister for a while, but then we re-connected. I cherish every time I was able to visit with her and thank her for everything that she did for me and for the kids she taught. Our founder, St. John Baptist de la Salle wrote a book for the brothers called *The Maxim for the Founders*. Every day he wrote something to the brothers. I think Mary Frances Clarke did something the same for the sisters. One of the things he wrote struck me and reminded me of Sister. "What glory is reserved to those who have instructed children, when their zeal and devotedness for the salvation of their charges is made known to all and when the heavens will resound with the cries of gratitude of those happy children toward those who showed them the way to Heaven." I picture Sister Carl Loras. I can imagine her being welcomed by Mary Frances, and all her former students for all that she did. Dear Sister, thank you for everything you have been to me and for all those you have taught. I know she is enjoying the rewards of a life well lived.

Donna Jones, Former Coworker

I taught with Sister at St. Pius in Urbandale, Iowa. She was such a dear friend. When she came to St. Pius, she was the school librarian, and technology was not her strong point. At some point, she had to convert the whole library from the card catalogue system to a computerized system. She wasn't really excited about it, but she sure rose to the challenge and accomplished it. She was loved by all the students for her kindness, her knack for helping them find the right book. She loved to share her vocation story with such joy with them. They were always so astonished that she had this skin affliction and was cured or the thought that she couldn't go outside. They loved hearing her tell that story and she told it to them every year. She was loved by the staff. We all knew about her bingo and casino habits. We also knew about the "library" because she had shared that with us many

times. When we came to visit, we would take her to her favorite place – McDonald's. We tried to visit her here at Mount Carmel once a year. She loved this place and took us to every nook and cranny and introduced us to all her friends. Most of all she will be remembered for her kindness. She kept us in her prayers. She would reach out and talk with us and ask us about our families. She was a very dear friend.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

I moved to Dubuque to work in support services in August of 2015. In one of the many tasks that fell under that office was the candy cart. At that time there was an infamous trio: Joan Stritesky, Enid Lodding, and Carl Loras Pilmaier. The antics of those three as they pushed the cart, rang the bell, visited with the sisters and enjoyed candy themselves was just delightful. It gave me such an insight into the way in our retirement we reach out to each other, make life a little more fun and delightful, and recognize the sisterhood. I treasure that and the scene of the three of them. Priceless!

Jim & Connie "Cookie"(Smith) Pilmaier

My name is James Pilmaier and I am one of Ada's nephews. In the summer of 2017, my new girlfriend Connie Smith, also known as Cookie, and I took a trip to Iowa to introduce her to my family. We had decided to take a day trip to Dubuque to meet my Aunt Ada. She was happy for me to have met Connie, but in the future Connie would always be called "Cookie." So on our visit we received the grand tour of Mount Carmel. I am fairly sure we saw every room and hallway. Several times during our tour we met some of the sisters living there and most of them told her she could cut the nickel tour short at any time. Later that day we took Ada to lunch, and when we got in the car, she told us she knew the perfect place. It turned out we ended up at a nearby casino. Go figure. Later I heard that whenever she went to "lunch" she would sign out that she was going to the library. I thought that was funny. So, during our lunch she excused herself and told us to stay and enjoy our lunch. It didn't take too long, and she was back. I guess her research at the "library" was cut short.

Another quick memory I have is from when my brother and I were young. Our family always received a care package from Ada at Christmas. Well, as we grew the second-hand shirts we got remained the same size. I remember taking pictures holding up what we got in front of us. They were four or five sizes too small. It always made us laugh. It's the thought that counts. Up until a year ago, we always received Christmas cards from Ada addressed to Jim and Cookie. We loved reading those and will miss getting them.

Jim Janicek, Nephew

I have vivid memories of summer nights on Grandma Pilmaier's screened in porch in Des Moines playing "May I". I was about 12 years old. I'd bring my jar of money I'd found in the couch or earned doing chores back home in Colorado. Grandma, Ada, her sister companion and I would sit for hours playing for money. Ada was a fierce competitor and often would walk away with the winnings! I joke with friends that I have a dear aunt who's a Nun that loved gambling in casinos and would fleece you if you ever were in a game of cards with her. There was always a scent of cinnamon in Grandma's house from baking, and to this day, when I smell cinnamon, I think of those firefly-filled evenings on the porch, full of laughs with Ada, and less money in my pocket. We've taught many friends how to play "May I" since then so in one small way, her legacy goes on for generations. Dear Ada left much love in her wake, and I will always cherish having her in my life.

Kristin Janicek, Niece-in-law, Wife of Jim Janicek

My favorite memory is when Ada and I decided to tackle Therese's house (Ada's sister's house) and get it ready for the sale. We would sit for hours together talking about what we found, laughing at the millions of greeting cards that Therese never got rid of, and kept on sorting. We didn't know each other but we had so much fun together during that week. I hold that memory so dear to me. She also brought our kids the most precious gifts that still sit on the shelves in their now empty rooms.

Diane Roby, Niece, Sister of Sister Linda Roby, BVM

Sister Carl Loras — Aunt Ada — was a cheerful presence in the Pilmaier family, with a twinkle in her eye and an easy laugh. Since her sister Mary Anne's kids lived in California, we saw her in the summers when we visited

family in Iowa. In the early years, she wore a cumbersome boxy veil that let us see her face only from the front. With time, the habit and veil relaxed. Living in Des Moines, she loved her work at St. Pius, looked after our aging grandmother (known as "Madame X"), and regularly visited her brother John and Patricia Pilmaier. After retirement, she traveled with our parents to Paris, Rome, and Germany, and visited Medjugorje where the Virgin Mary was said to have appeared. Living at the Motherhouse in Dubuque, she liked to tell me about the view outside her window. She always took time to write notes to each of us in Christmas and Easter cards, and to offer us her prayers. Rest in peace, Aunt Ada, I love you.

Sister Jeanie Hagedorn, CHM

Sister Carl Loras served as librarian at St. Pius X School in Urbandale, Iowa, for many years and was admired by the students, staff and parents as well.

Sister's niece, Sister Linda Roby, and I were both teaching second grade at St. Pius at that time. One special memory I have of Carl Loras was when I invited her mother Laura Pilmaier to visit my second-grade classroom. Laura was an accomplished artist, and both Sisters Carl Loras and Linda were very proud of her. So, Carl Loras was delighted to bring her mother and some of her mother's beautiful paintings to show and tell about her art work.

I remember the wide eyes and the oohs and aahs of the little seven-year-olds as they listened to and admired Laura. I was grateful to Sister Carl Loras for making that encounter possible. But just as touching was the pride, I could see on Sister's face watching her dear mother being recognized for her artistic accomplishments. Now mother and daughter are reunited once again in the Presence of the Divine Artist of All Creation.

Sister Mary Marten, BVM

A group of BVMs would meet for lunch with Brother David Galinski when he came to Dubuque. It was easier to do pre-COVID because the Caritas Dining Room was a large, welcoming space for what became known as David's Harem. Carl Loras, Helen Emerson, Liz Wirtz, myself, Maggie McGinn, all had a connection either with Carl Loras or, in the case of Maggie and me, teaching at St. Patrick HS in Chicago. The luncheon began to diminish in number with time as people moved on to eternity. The last lunch we shared together was in the guest dining room here at Mount Carmel Bluffs. Carl Loras sat and glowed through most of the conversation. There is much joy in heaven as Carl Loras joins the previous members of the harem.

Sister Kathleen Mullin, BVM

This is about an event that happened when there was a funeral for a BVM at St. Joseph on the southeast side of Des Moines. After the Mass, BVMs and others filled up cars to drive to the burial site on the other side of the city. Carl Loras realized that I was alone after being on a home visit and had simply joined everyone at the Mass. I said, "I would love to have a companion Would you join me?" "Oh, sure," she said. When we were coming back across the city for the luncheon at the church, she mentioned that she lived on a particular street in Des Moines. She said, "Could we drive by it so I can show you the house I lived in?" I said, "Oh, sure," and mentioned that I didn't live too far from her when I was in Des Moines. We were driving along. At a throughfare that used to be open south and north, now had a four-way stop. We stopped at a stop-sign. On the left, there was a car who had the right-of-way, but just stayed there. I said, "I think there is something wrong with that driver." It was a young man. I feared starting out because I was not sure what was going to happen. We said a little prayer for him together. I started out, and sure enough, he tried to hit our car. He was probably quite ill mentally. Because I had moved rather quickly through the intersection, he hit the back of the car and then sped off. We were safe with our seat belts on. The sound of him hitting our car was such that people came running out of their homes and were concerned if we were alright. I was able to drive back to the Quad Cities with that car. What could have been a disaster was a miracle because we thought about him and prayed for him. Carl Loras then told me her story of her childhood disease and the miracle.

Fran Pearson, Former Coworker, St. Pius X School

Sister and I became close friends while we were at St. Pius X School. She was the librarian, and I was the school secretary. Through that friendship she became a family friend. Some of our favorite times together were playing cards; she taught us how to play May I and Kings on the Corner. After she moved to Dubuque, we would visit her and make a trip to McDonald's and then off to the casino where she would play the penny machines. Her secret to winning was she would run her finger across the screen and then spin – a winner every time! She was a very special lady and will be truly missed by our family.

Kathleen Flemming, Volunteer Pastoral Care Minister, St. Pius X

Sister Carl Loras was devoted to the care of her mother Laura Pilmaier, who lived to be 100, when she was the librarian at St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale, Iowa. I was employed as the Pastoral Care Minister and delighted in taking Communion to her mother on a regular basis. Her mother would say, "Let's take care of Jesus first and then we can play cards." I met many of the Pilmaier family, and they were filled with love, joy, and kindness. I picture a great reunion of Sister Carl Loras in heaven with her mother and siblings.

Larry Pilmaier, Nephew, Son of John Pilmaier

Not sure if this is appropriate to share, but I tell a true story. One day Ada was visiting Mom and Dad at the farm. Dad's birthday was coming up. Ada asked Dad what he wanted for his birthday. He said what he really wanted was a new shotgun. Ada left, went to Prairie Meadows for a little slot machine action. As luck would have it, she won quite a big jackpot. She went out and bought Dad a new shotgun and delivered it to him. He asked her where she got the money for a new shotgun, and she sheepishly said that she prayed for it.

Dave Pilmaier, Nephew

My name is Dave Pilmaier. I am the youngest son of Tom Pilmaier, Ada's youngest sibling. I remember Dad telling me about growing up with his siblings. Ada was the nearest sibling; I believe 3 years older than dad. Well, apparently Dad was pretty onery, and Ada, well, wasn't. Dad had to work hard to get into trouble without being caught by Ada. She apparently paid close attention to Dad's mischievous behavior. He managed to outwit her a few times. He also told a story about when Ada was a young girl, at the age of helping in the kitchen. I guess she made a layer cake one day. Dad's general rowdiness caused the cake to "fall." Ada just filled in the top cavity with frosting. Dad thought that was the best cake ever.

When Ada came back to Des Moines, Mom and Dad saw Ada quite a bit, as they usually traveled to Iowa about once a year. Ada would always send back care packages for my brother and me, and our families, as we got older. She liked to go to Goodwill, hunt out the bargains, and pass those on to others. I believe this gave her pleasure.

We were all in Iowa, one summer, not exactly sure why, no doubt a family get together. Ada mentioned to Dad that she had some stuff to send home, and Dad tells her, "I don't have any room." She inquired, "Not even a small box?" He replied, "Not even the smallest box." At the time he and mom were the only passengers in a Chrysler van. I'm not sure why he didn't like to humor her.

As a small child, I seem to remember that Aunt Ada was stationed in Lincoln, Nebr. She traveled with Sister Mary Louis Catherine. We lived in Colorado at the time. We loved it when they came for a visit. They were always up for playing games, and just generally play with us children. We always looked forward to their visits!

As a young man, probably early 20s, my wife, Deb, and I, along with my brother Jim, and his wife were all out at Mom and Dad's house for Christmas. Mom handed us each a present from Aunt Ada. We both opened these gifts, and inside were very nice sweaters! I think that these may have been some Goodwill bargains. The only thing was, they would only fit a very young teenager. I just wrote a letter to Aunt Ada, thanking her for the great sweater.

I will close by saying that Aunt Ada's death is very sad for me, as she is the last of that generation of Pilmaiers. She was a wonderful aunt, and a wonderful sister. Since her passing, I have contemplated the possible impact that she has had on countless individuals in her teaching service.