



## **Sharing of Memories of Mary Jeanne (John Edward) Stopper, BVM**

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Jan. 22, 2025

### **Mary (Stopper) Alexoff, Niece**

My last memory of Aunt Mary was eight months ago when my husband Mike and I came to Mount Carmel to attend the funeral of her sister and my aunt, Sister Suzanne Stopper, BVM.

Knowing that Mary Jeanne's disease had progressed significantly, we did not expect any reaction when she first saw us. We were both delighted when she lit up like a Christmas tree and graced us with that joyful smile.

Following the funeral and the Congregation's silent procession out to the Vista entrance, I was standing beside her when all those around me began singing the traditional song "Mother Mary of Mount Carmel." I will never forget hearing those beautiful angel voices lifted in song as I bid a silent farewell to my Aunt Sue being slowly driven away toward the cemetery. Then I realized I could hear our very special angel singing along with the rest of them and I was blessed to be standing right next to her, my dear sweet Aunt Mary!

### **Gina Siembieda, Niece**

As I am sure all will say about Sister Mary Jeanne, she was one of the most happy, cheerful people you would ever want to meet. She never ceased to be amazed and impressed at anything you would say. For so many years we enjoyed her company at our family gatherings. She will be missed!

### **Sister Mary Jean Ferry, BVM**

I knew Mary Jeanne Stopper almost her whole life. Our families lived on the same street, Sierra Vista, looking at the beautiful mountain. The Stopper family and my family had many similarities. Even the name of the girls in our family. Mary Jean and Mary Jeanne. We had a Sue, and they had a Sue. We had an Elizabeth, and they had an Elizabeth. So, it was amazing that we grew up so close and were so much alike.

I was a freshman when Mary Jeanne was a senior. She had gorgeous, long, beautiful red hair. She was also a leader in the Sodality of Our Lady in our school. I want to mention how many times I lived with Mary Jeanne – Holy Family in Glendale, Holy Redeemer in Montrose, and in Phoenix and North Hollywood. As you can see, our lives often crossed.

The Stoppers had some difficulties in their family. I remember when in Glendale, a large corporation wanted to build The Glendale Galleria, a huge mall. The Stoppers had a house right on that spot. So, they knew the pain of having to leave their home for a multi-national company. As I thought of that, I thought of people today leaving their homes because of fires and floods. The Stoppers had that pain too.

There was another social issue that affected Mary Jeanne. She often talked about her dear little friend who lived right next door. They would play together and were so close. One day she woke up and her friend was gone. In fact, the whole family next door was gone. The reason? They were Japanese. During World War II, the government moved the Japanese out to Manzanar in the hot California desert. I know this was painful for Mary Jeanne because she talked about that little girl so much.

Mary Jeanne liked to travel. Roberta [White], Mary Kay Dum, and I went to Ireland together. I would like to tell two stories that happened on that trip. When we got there, we met Peggy, a very wealthy lady. She showed us all around. She insisted that we go by rowboat with Michael on a rainy day out to the lakes of Killarney. Of course, by the end of the trip when we got off the boat, we were a mess covered with water and mud. Naturally, all we wanted was an Irish coffee. We all gathered in our room. I looked out and tears came into my eyes. There was Mary Jeanne, sitting regally without her shoes, without her stockings, and Peggy was washing her feet. It was so much like Jesus. Sometimes, it is harder to receive than to give. I saw Mary Jeanne receiving the gift of Peggy washing her feet.

Something else happened on that trip. Mary Jeanne got a brand-new camera. She wanted to take pictures of every meal and every picnic, and she did it. We would put down our utensils and smile. There's a sad part to that story. When we got home, she went to have the film processed, but she had forgotten to put the film in the camera!

Mary Jeanne was a very, very special person in my life. I am so glad she is part of us. She lives on with her smile, her support. Thank you, Mary Jeanne, for your presence with us and not just today. You live on with us so closely.

### **Sister Vickie Smurlo, BVM**

I lived with Mary Jeanne twice, once at Holy Family, Glendale, and once at Holy Redeemer, Montrose, California. Today I am wearing a Holy Family HS purple sweatshirt. I think it is only fitting that I wear this sweatshirt in her honor because she loved teaching at Holy Family.

When we moved to Holy Redeemer, we took turns doing the dishes. There was one song. I'm almost afraid to name it because it might get stuck in my head the rest of the day. She would sing "Moon River" over and over again. If she wasn't singing it, she was humming it. We got to *not* like the song!

We had good times. When she had to have physical therapy, I would be in the dining room with her as her incentive to get it done, because she did not eagerly want to do it. I knew she loved to sing, so as many times as possible, we would sing to do the exercises.

I have fond memories of her. I know that the girls at Holy Family HS loved her. It's nice to know how much she touched their hearts.

### **Sister Marilyn Wilson, BVM**

I didn't live much in Southern California with her. I lived in Northern California. When we came down for any kind of meeting, I usually would stay partially with Holy Redeemer. Of course, people have mentioned so well her smile and her great hospitality. The minute you came, she would be at the door. She would help you with your luggage and get you upstairs. Then she would be around all the time asking you, "What do you need?" She is precious in my heart for her kindness, her generosity, and, of course, her hospitality. May she be resting now with her sister.

### **Sister Roberta Ann White, BVM**

I lived with Mary Jeanne at Holy Family and Holy Redeemer. I can't say enough about her hospitality. Many of my relatives came to visit at both Holy Family and Holy Redeemer. She was the first one at the door to invite them in. They all mentioned how they felt so welcome when she greeted them.

We were fortunate to have a pilgrimage tour group offering a week in Rome for \$300. How could you resist? So, Mary Jeanne and I went. It was for nuns and priests to encourage them to make pilgrimages. One of the sisters dropped out, so I got to take my mother with me. It was very, very, beautiful. We had such a wonderful time. There was an archbishop with us who knew the Pope, so we got to have Mass with the Pope in his private chapel. That was a special experience.

In Ireland, I volunteered to drive not realizing that they drive on the left side of the street. Every time we stopped, I said, "Please say left, left, left." We had a wonderful time visiting the location of Mary Frances Clarke's school. The original isn't there, but they have a beautiful low-income project there. So, we took a picture in front of North Anne Street.

Part of my family, my mother's Sullivan side, were having a reunion of my cousins in southern Ireland at the same time. We were all at a pub one night. They were passing the Guinness around and saluting. One of my cousins said, "I'm going to tell your superior." And Mary Kay Dum, replied, "I *am* the superior!" It was a delight!

My cousins over there always called Mary Jeanne "the red-headed sister." They thought she was more Irish than the rest of us. They finally found out that she was German. We had a delightful time. Mary Jeanne's smile, her presence, was joy and hospitality. That was her signature. Thank you, Mary Jeanne!

### **Kathleen Hebron, BVM Associate**

Sister Mary Jeanne was a ray of sunshine in my life. A mentor and friend who was a beacon of love and hope that guided my way at Holy Family Girls' High School in Glendale, Calif., for many decades.

When I was principal at Holy Family High School, Sister Mary Jeanne would stop by my office at the end of her day. This was usually every day of the week. I so looked forward to her late afternoon visits. After dealing with all the busyness of my day, it was so refreshing to have Sister stop by with her infectious smile and kind words. It was so uplifting that I found myself smiling long after she left for home!

God bless her. May she meet in love our Heavenly Father and rest in His peaceful embrace for eternity.

### **Grace Mendez, BVM Associate**

I was co-moderator of the freshman class at Holy Family Girls High School in Glendale, Calif., with Mary Jeanne for two years. When I was hired there, Mary Jeanne and her sister Suzanne were my first contacts with the faculty (other than the principal). Mary Jeanne was always cheerful, optimistic, and kind with everyone.

In later years, she was my partner playing Gaigel with her sister. We even played after Mary Jeanne moved to Mount Carmel! She never forgot how to play that card game! Every time I spoke with her, she would ask me about my grandchildren, because the nine of them had names from the Bible, and she loved to hear me repeat the whole crowd.

### **Sister Mary Martens, BVM**

My memory of Mary Jeanne is more recent. I learned to play Kings Corner thanks to Mary Jeanne and her good friend Jan Link, who were regular card players, as I came to realize. This was in the Caritas Center before its deconstruction. I would periodically visit around Mount Carmel in the areas of memory and extended care. I learned Kings Corner, and could see what others have said about her teaching ability. I was a "freshman student" in Kings Corner. Her smile of welcome was so present. "Come on, Mary, sit down and play with us." I said, "Well, I'm not much at playing cards, but teach me and I'll learn." Which they did. They not only taught me Kings Corner, but they told me what to play and when to play it. I think in the hope that I might win one day. I don't ever remember winning Kings Corner, but I am reminded of what I learned early on at Mount Carmel. People who have memory loss do not lose their characteristics. Mary Jeanne certainly exhibited hospitality. She exhibited that smile. She still had the ability to teach someone something new. I am grateful for the late-in-life relationship that I had with Mary Jeanne.

### **Sister Mary Jean Ferry, BVM**

I want to mention one thing. When you go downstairs to dinner, you will see purple and gold flowers, the colors of Holy Family. It happened that the florists just sent them. Nobody told them that purple and gold were the

colors. I thought how beautiful it is that even the flowers for the celebration in the dining room will be Holy Family purple and gold.

**Clara Schwartz, BVM Associate**

I am from Glendale, Calif., and belong to the cluster in Glendale. When we had meetings each month the first person who opened the door was Mary Jeanne. We were greeted with a hug and a smile. She always made sure we were comfortable. I cannot remember a time when a smile was not on her face. When I visited her at Mount Carmel it was the same. She was one of a kind and God surely welcomed another angel.

**Sister Cindy Sullivan, BVM**

My home away from Ecuador when I was fund raising in California was the Montrose community. Mary Jeanne was always there with a big smile welcoming me home. We played cards, Mexican Train [Dominoes], ate together and laughed together. Mary Jeanne was never down – always smiling and welcoming. I know Suzanne welcomed her home. How things have changed, and Montrose does not have any BVMs there. I know they are missed, as is Mary Jeanne.

**Sister Bette Gambonini, BVM**

Mary Jeanne had a beautiful smile that made you feel welcome, and special. She was delighted to see you and made you feel at home.

**Teresa Tiffany, BVM Associate**

Sister Mary Jeanne had an infectious smile. When you called her by name that smile grew brighter.