

Sister Mary Verelyn Kelly, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Oct. 23, 2013

Rev. Deacon Rick Rasmussen, Diocese of Davenport

I want to say a few words about a good friend, Sister Mary Verelyn Kelly. I never found out why she didn't care for the name Mary. It was always Verelyn. We go back 42 years. I was figuring it out this morning on the drive up here with my wife. I spent 22 years in the air force, I retired, and I started helping at St. John Vianney's. To make a long story short, I am ordained 26 years now. I say from the bottom of my heart that Sister Verelyn was my eminence. She made sure I knew what I was doing. I used to go by her office, and she would say, "Rick, sit down." She always told me, "Give them what they want. Give them what they want even though you don't agree with it. But after you are ordained, then I expect you to do right." She said that to me a number of times. When I was boy, I came out of the orphanage with my sister and went to Catholic school taught by nuns, went to high school taught by Christian Brothers. I left in the third year of high school and went into the navy. World War II ended right after that. I bummed around, but then I found out I had to do something with my life. I want to thank you ladies for one hell of a good education. If it hadn't been for you and the church . . . I don't think enough people say, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." I know when you get up to heaven and stand before Almighty God, you are not going to have your lawyer with you. You are going to be able to say, "My Good Shepherd, I did my best."

We just ordained a young man from Viet Nam about a year ago. I spent two combat tours there. Every day when I would see Father Hy, he would say, "Thank you, Rick, for you are my friend. We were enemies, but you are my friend." I won't take a lot of time; I won't give a homily. But once again, I want to say I have never had so much gratitude in my heart as I do this day of thanking you because a number of people don't remember to thank you. I remember we had a Father Hart who is now deceased; he got killed in Viet Nam. I said to him one time when I was getting ready to fly a mission, "You know, Father, I appreciate you being here." That's a lousy place over there. He said to me, "I appreciate you appreciating me." He used to come out and set up his altar on the jeep hood. I had two Jewish boys on my 10-person crew. He would say Mass and always made them feel welcome before we flew a mission. Whether it was two in the morning or five in the evening, he was always around somewhere to help. To you clerics, I say, "Thank you. Thank you very much."

If you would indulge me for just a moment—I am a great one for poems; I love poems. I was going through my book the other night and thinking, "What can I say to Sister Verelyn?" I know she is with the Holy Father, my Lord and God in heaven. I knew I wanted to say something to her because she's going to say, "Rick, I heard that before," because she has heard me at funerals, baptisms, homilies. The first one goes like this:

Remember me in quiet days
when raindrops whisper on your pane,
but in your memories have not grief
just let the joy we knew remain.

Remember me when evening stars
look down on you with steadfast eyes,
Remember me if once you wake
to catch a glimpse of a red sunrise

And when your thoughts do turn to me
know that I would not have you cry.
But live for me and laugh for me.
For when you are happy so am I.

Remember an old joke we shared.
Remember me when spring walks by.
Think of me when you are glad,
and while you live, I shall not die.

The second poem:

Miss me, but let me go
When I come to the end of the road
And the sun has set for me
I want to wait in a glory filled room
Where cry for a soul set free
Miss me a little, but not too long
And not with your head bowed low
Remember the love that once we shared
Miss me but let me go.
For this is a journey that we all must take
And each must go alone
It's all part of the Master's plan
A step on the road to home
When you are lonely and sick of heart
Go to the friends we knew
and bury your soul in good deeds
Miss me but let me go

Sister Virginia Hughes, BVM

Sister Verelyn coordinated a very fine parish religious education class. The neighborhood was quite questionable. This was illustrated when a young seminarian, who I had taught in school in Washington, would accompany me to the classes. They were held in the homes. No church basements. Therefore, it was expected, because of that condition that they would have religious education in the home which was really a good place for it. The toughness of the neighborhood showed itself when as we got of the El, Michael was knocked to the ground by the local gang. So

we were glad to be able to get to the home. She later got a job in the Vatican. She was really a noble lady.

Sister Dolores McHugh, BVM

I had the privilege of having dinner with Helen Garvey and Verelyn in Rome twice when Helen and I went to the International Union of Superior Generals (UISG) meeting and picked her up for dinner. We had a wonderful time with her. When we were over in Rome for the approval of our Constitutions, Verelyn was there again. We were together for dinner celebrating the confirmation for Feb. 2, but we didn't like the way the restaurant was treating us. She was ashamed when we got up. She said, "Where are you going?" "We're not staying here to eat." She said, "No, no, you have to stay here to eat." "No, no, we don't have to stay here." It was fun though; she laughed later, but she was very serious about us not leaving the restaurant. She was a wonderful woman who lived up to the very last day and was always doing something for others.

Sister Carol Marie Baum, BVM

I came to know Verelyn Kelly as my principal/superior in Chicago while I was under temporary vows. I can note that she definitely was a true disciplinarian, not only in the school but also in the convent. As you know, during those times we had Recollection Sunday each month. That was a time when Verelyn would have a conference with me and also an opportunity to go over some of the teaching skills that I had, what was needed for improvement as well as what was OK. That was my story of Verelyn during my time of temporary vows. She would have been one of ones who would have written for me for final vows. Verelyn, thank you for the gifts you have shared with me on my journey as a BVM.

Sister Mary Ellen McDonagh, BVM

When I was thinking about entering the community, maybe a junior or possibly a senior at St. Louis University, I would frequently visit the BVMs down the street at the high school I had attended. I think they invited me for a Halloween party. I still remember the costumes some people wore because it was really funny. As I recall, Verelyn went as a bumble bee. She was in the habit and she took yellow crepe paper and pinned it all the way around her arm and her head and the veil. All the way down. So she had these yellow stripes on the black habit and she went as a bumble bee.

Sister Vivian Wilson, BVM

My family moved to Casper, Wyo., in 1938. Two blocks east of us was the Kelly family. Verelyn's sister Patricia and I became very close friends. Verelyn entered the convent and I followed a few years later. I happened to be missioned in Lead, S. D., when Verelyn lived there. When she went on a home visit, I went with her. Her nieces and nephews called her Uldean, which was her baptismal name. By this time it was after World War II and the Kelly family is large and the Wilson family is large and there are a lot of little ones under six years old. They were calling me the "other Uldean." Verelyn didn't like that too well. She said, "You should tell them it's Vivian or Lauren (which was my religious name)." I said, "Who cares. We are not here long enough. The 'other Uldean' is fine with me." One day we were at Patricia's house and many of the Wilsons and Kellys were there. A lot of these little kids were roaming around. My mother and I were sitting on the couch. Verelyn's oldest niece Vicky, who was about five, was standing and listening to people. All of a sudden, she rounded up all of the little tykes out in the

front yard and she had them in a football huddle. We were all wondering what was going on. All of a sudden, they turned around and they yelled, "Vivian!" I went to the front door and out onto the porch and these little tykes yelled all over the front yard, "Her name is Vivian! Her name is Vivian! Her name is Vivian!" It was really funny.

I had a Lead story. We would put on these operettas for our summer school money. I had been asked to paint some corn stalks to put on the stage. I spent quite a few days in the laundry room at the convent working on the corn stalks. Verelyn had seventh and eighth grade and I had first and second on the first floor of the school. When Verelyn left the school she said, "I'll send one of the boys up to help bring all those corn stalks down." This young man came up and was very, very attentive, trying to do everything right. He said, "May I carry your palm trees for you?" Well, I was just disheartened. I thought they looked like corn stalks. Verelyn and a couple of other boys were going to help get it all up on stage. He said to Verelyn, "These are beautiful palm trees." Verelyn broke into laughter; she could not stop laughing because all they heard about in the convent was the corn stalks. I really enjoyed the fact that she enjoyed laughing; I didn't think it was too funny until later.

Sister Jean Marie Brady, BVM

When Verelyn returned from the Vatican, she came to Iowa City, which was not a little Vatican. She came to the hospital because she was having surgery. I can't remember how long she stayed with us, but we enjoyed her there. For as long as we have had pray-ers at Mount Carmel for those who are not here, Verelyn has been my pray-er. I hope she is still doing it.

Sister Mary Angela Buser, BVM

I had the joy of living with Verelyn from 1950 to 1956 in Lead. She was a good person to live with and an excellent teacher. Our paths didn't cross again until we came here to Mount Carmel. We've both traveled a long ways since then.

Sister Anita Therese Hayes, BVM

I lived with Verelyn in Lead, so we've been friends for many years. Verelyn was in Lead before I arrived so she was very familiar with the Black Hills and the people there. That was a really big help to me. She taught seventh and eighth grade. As it was said before, Verelyn always had everything in order, everything just right. Well, this one day, she had to go to the hospital for a day or so. We were not able to get a substitute for seventh and eighth grade. We could get one for third grade. So I went over to the seventh and eighth grade classroom. All seemed to be just fine. I walked in and everything was in order. So I picked up her lesson book, opened it, and, glory be to God, everything was written in shorthand! We got along just fine because all the numbers were OK. At least I had the pages right. We had a good day and Verelyn had a good laugh over it.

Joyce Klauer

Sister Mary Verelyn's name became very well known in our home about 13 years ago when my daughter, Mary Joyce, was a third grader at St. Anthony School here in Dubuque. St. Anthony had a program at Christmas time where the students could put together little care packages for the retired sisters and delivered them here. Mary Joyce got a gift and brought it over and Sister Mary Verelyn was the recipient. She sent back to my daughter the nicest, kindest thank you note.

My daughter decided to write Sister back and that was the start of the 13-year relationship—every Christmas, every Easter, every birthday and many times in between. Sister would bring back little gifts blessed by the pope. She would give her little angels, medals and rosaries. It meant the absolute world to my daughter. She's now a junior at Marquette University. She was home on fall break last week and we went to Breitbach's for lunch. On the way home, a thought about Sister randomly came to mind. Mom, I have a note written on my desk. I meant to bring it home for Sister Mary Verelyn, but I forgot it. I need to get in touch with her because she has been on my mind so much. Little did we know that Sister had passed away that morning. Mary didn't get the news until we opened the paper on Saturday morning and she was in the obituaries. She was absolutely crushed. She never met Sister Mary Verelyn face-to-face; she didn't want to. She just preferred to keep the relationship written. The friendship and the mark that Sister left on my daughter's heart, I can't put words to it. Mary is not able to be here today; she's got a full class load and works two jobs in Milwaukee. She asked that I come and extend her sincere sympathy to all you sisters with whom Sister Mary Verelyn shared this community and to let you know that it was a friendship that she will treasure forever. Thank you for all of your kindness and all of your work and all of the impact that I'm sure you've made on many, many children through the years.