

Sister Mary Leana Kohnen, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, April 8, 2014

Sister Virginia Crilly, BVM

Leana was a good teacher and she worked well with students who were gifted to give them more challenges. When I used to go up and visit her, Leana would give me a smile and then her usual comment was, “Do you have any chocolate?” because she loved chocolate. And so it became a part of my life to visit her and have her ask that question. I have been told by many of the sisters on third floor Caritas that Leana will be missed.

Sister Dolores McHugh, BVM

I would like to pick up on Virginia’s comments on her memories of Leana. Every time I went up to third floor she would be in a big heavy chair. It looked like she was sound asleep, but I caught on to her. When I saw her I reached down and said, “Leana, you’re awake. Give me a smile.” And she would open her eyes and give me a smile. She was such a gentle, gentle, gentle woman.

Sister Patricia Fitzgerald, BVM

I never knew Leana until I sat with her during our Ministry of Presence a day or two before she died. That morning she touched my life so strongly that I just have to share it with you. I was sitting there; it was my first time sitting with someone who was dying. I was a little bit nervous wondering what I should do if she died. Well, people set me at ease telling me what to do. I started talking to her, whispering mostly within my own being. Then it became audible as I was saying, “Leana, you are so beautiful.” Then I waited a minute and said, “You’re just so beautiful, so peaceful, so beautiful.” After about the third time I said it, her hand began to come out from under the sheet. Without opening her eyes or saying anything, she put it up to her head and proceeded to mess up her hair. Thank you, Leana.

Sister Mary O’Connor, BVM

I lived with Leana in East Moline, Ill. She came in 1986. She was at Muscatine, Iowa, at the time, but we needed a computer teacher in the upper grades. Sister Geraldine Galloway and our principal went to see what she was doing. They invited her to come to St. Anne School; she did and I am very grateful.

The Saturday morning before her death, Alice Dunphy told me Leana was quite low. I went in immediately. As I was sitting there, I thought about what Fr. Ardel Barta used to remind us—God loves you. So I said that and thanked her for the many ways she helped us at St. Anne.

She not only taught computer; she taught the advanced group of fifth grade reading. She also taught religious education on Sundays; she had the third grade because she liked the younger grades. She helped us plan trips. When there were community events, she would get magazines to help us pick a place of interest nearby. We would go a week early and enjoy the time. I wanted to thank her for all she did, so I began to thank her.

She was not only aware of the school, she was aware of each one of us. One time we were going to teach religious education on Sunday. I had two pairs of shoes that were the same style—one of one color and one of another. She looked down at me and said, “Mary, you’ve got one color on one foot and another color on the other foot.” She saved me on that; I had eighth grade religious

education so I grateful for that. I thanked her for many things. She finally got her hand out from under the cover and she shook my hand. It made me realize how much she appreciated our time living together.

Sister Anne Beckley, BVM

I visited Leana a couple of times. One time she was lying there very quietly and I thought that maybe she was going to go to God very soon. Suddenly she opened her eyes as wide as her big eyes could go and she lifted her head up off the pillow. I know she saw somebody. As the time went on, I thought, "She's asking God to wait because she wanted to see her sister Kitty." Whenever you mentioned Kitty's name, even though I said Catherine, she had this huge smile. I'm sure she and God were negotiating her time of leaving.

Sister Margaret Zimmermann, BVM

Leana and I are in the same set. I had an experience about five or six weeks ago to accompany Leana to the dentist. While we were in the car and while we were waiting to see the dentist, she didn't say a word, but I was talking and telling about the things going on in the community. After she came out from the dentist, I heard her say, "Thank you." Again we were sitting and waiting for a ride and I spoke, but she didn't speak a word. When we got home and were getting out of the van, she said to the driver, "Thank you." We got inside and I brought her up to her room and she turned and said, "Thank you." Although she couldn't really talk, she could understand and knew what was going on. It showed again what a grateful person she was.

Sister Mary Angela Buser, BVM

On my way back to my room on the third floor Motherhouse, I often passed through the third floor Caritas. I would stop to see my friend Betty Sullivan and her good friend Leana who usually were sitting in the common area. Betty and I would chat a lot and Leana would look on. Then I would begin chatting with Leana and she would give me this wonderful smile. I realized that I had been kind of ignoring her. So after that, I would greet her especially each time I stopped and talked to her a little bit. Once in a great while I was privileged to get a sentence or two from her. I wish I could remember them, I'm sorry I can't, but her beautiful smile was always there. The day she was dying, the nurses had fixed her up in preparation for her sister's coming. Her beautiful smile was there, not quite as full as usual, but it was that peaceful, beautiful smile.

Sister Mary Kelliher, BVM

I lived with Leana a short time at Wright Hall. It was my opportunity to renew a little bit of novitiate because her favorite poem was "The Jabberwocky." She loved, as many of us do, the nonsense of it. It was also my privilege to take her to the Art Institute for the last time. She had a very childlike, whimsical nature and a love for art. I think Mary Therese von Holt also went with us that day and we had a good feast for the eyes. Leana had the heart of an artist too.

Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM

I'll take you back to the late 1950s and my first time on the missions. I was probably at St. Paul in Davenport a couple of years before Leana came. They were challenging years. Leana had that calmness about her that everyone mentions now. What I remember, too, beyond the fact that she was very kind to everyone, was that she was going to summer school at St. Xavier for theology at that time, which was pretty unusual in the late 1950s and into the 1960s. She and Therese Kane and others were going also. Leana was very smart. I often wished that her ability could shine forth even more in the area of intellectual achievement within the community. But she didn't have that kind of personality, I guess. I do know that she was a very gifted woman. I was impressed with that even though in those days you didn't talk very much about those things. For a number of years after she left, she sent me a birthday card. I thought that was very unusual

because we weren't that close, but she was very thoughtful. My birthday would come around and there was a card; there was that connection through the years. I just wanted to say something about her because I have never quite forgotten her style and her intellectual ability.

Sister Lydia Buntmeyer, BVM

I lived with Leana on two different occasions. I live with her in Clinton where she taught the lower grades and also in East Moline. She was very, very adept at planning trips. We had a practice of taking our vacations together and we would take these wonderful, wonderful trips. She would know exactly where the motels were and how long it would be before we got to each motel. She would make reservations so that we would be sure we had a place. She was a very organized woman; she knew exactly where things were and what things were going on. So we had many benefits from living with her. She was very quiet and unassuming; you never knew what would be happening next with Leana. God bless her

Sister Paul Francis Bailey, BVM

I was in the same set as Leana and I lived with her later on at Wright Hall. I think that Carolyn hit the nub of who Leana was. She was a very gifted, a very talented and an intellectual woman, but her quietness and calmness shielded all of that. Whatever she did, she did very quietly and in a very unassuming way, but always very kindly. She had a very great love and devotion to her sister Kitty as most of you have already commented. While we were at Wright Hall, Kitty would frequently come and take her to places of interest, especially places of artistic interest. She loved, absolutely loved, to go to the arboretum. I thought if you went to the arboretum once, you've been there and seen it. But she could go almost every other day and still want to go back. The Art Institute was another place she loved to go and she loved plays. Kitty was wonderful about providing all of them for her. Through all of this, most of her intellectual ability and her ability to lead were exhibited in very quiet ways as mentioned by Mary O'Connor and Lydia when they talked about her capacity for planning great trips. She was a quiet woman and certainly, I think, very close to God.

Sister Brigid Mary Hart, BVM

My recollection of Leana is also from Wright Hall. I also recognized her as a primary teacher. Recently, I usually saw her on the third floor and would visit with her along with the others. I happened to be in her room right after her sister Kitty had been there and she had been anointed. Carol Baum was there and trying to pray with her. I noticed there was a painting on the wall and I thought, "I think that's hers." So I went over to find out it was hers. Of course it had beautiful mountains and sky and some birds. It was wonderful to be able to say to her, "It's OK; you can go now." It was the appropriate time for her to go – that quiet presence like the quiet times she had painting at Wright Hall, probably with Vivian Wilson and Mary Eustella Fau, part of the gift of creativity that it takes to be a primary teacher. Peace to my friend Leana.