

Sister Genevieve (Basilian) Kordick, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Sept. 15, 2014

Sister Stella Marie Swakoski, BVM

Gen, loving and prayerful thoughts have followed you every day since you have had your wonderful reunion with our dear Lord in heaven. We were the best of buddies; no one could deny that. Our demand of each other's presence was great. I will always remember you being with my brother and his family. We had a great reunion at my brother's house in Colorado. I think you would enjoy this. After a splendid meal, we were all inside enjoying music and thoughts of each other, but we couldn't find Gen. We all began to look for her and where do you think we found her? Out in the flower garden picking out all the weeds, taking care of the flowers. She was a great and wonderful BVM. As a member of our set, she was always there, faithful. We always remember her faithfulness to each other. So in the very short time I have, I want to say we remember her thoughtfulness, her generosity, her loving care for each of us. I know you are happy with our dear Lord in heaven, Gen. God bless you, Gen. God bless you forever. Amen. We will always keep you in our hearts.

Sister Carol Marie Baum, BVM

I came to know Gen when I went to Des Moines to work at Mercy Park Apartments and my sister Joann, a BVM, was the director of Willis Adult Care, which was a senior program. Gen was one of the staff members for that program. She was also a very close member of the family. There was a time when we were living at Mercy Park that my mother, my sister and I were in Apartment 24 and Gen was right next door in Apartment 25.

Some of what has been said I will not repeat except for the fact that she had a tremendous love for all of creation. It was very true, even here in Dubuque, that you could often find Gen out in the soil, digging around and making sure everything was getting its proper watering and care. It brought her to a place where she really came to know her God in a very special way.

During her time working for Willis Adult Care, Janel, her niece, also worked there with her. They would have monthly bake sales for which she would ask my mom to go to Mercy Hospital and help her. So come 5:30 a.m., they would be off to get the bake sale going for the employees at Mercy Hospital. They would close up at about 5 or 6 p.m. and come home with the wonderful donations to help the Willis Adult Care program continue to thrive in Des Moines.

For me, I'll remember Gen's real zest for living and not knowing a stranger. She loved life to the hilt and she loved her family dearly. They were scattered all over, but she made it a point to stay connected with all the members of her family. So she will be remembered for her zest for life, her love of family and the relationships that she built along the way, always putting herself last and everyone else first.

Sister Monica Peichmuth, RSM, Omaha, Neb., Friend

I lived close to Gen when I lived in Des Moines. Just three weeks ago, Genevieve and Janel came to Omaha to visit us. She was so alive and so energetic. She stayed with me overnight and Janel did too. We had the best time. I remember saying, "Genevieve, don't go so fast." She took her walker and was running with it, holding it out in front of her. I will always be grateful that Janel and Gen

took the time to come to Omaha to visit us. I'm so indebted to her because, for many years, she took care of my little dog Cami when I would be gone. She also took care of another dog, Benji.

That poem "For Others" just fits her perfectly because she was always thinking about others. I don't know how many times we went over there for a meal or to pull something together. We enjoyed it. I remember her having the garden too. I learned a lot about gardening from her. I am really happy that I can be here. You know, I think she wanted to be a Sister of Mercy. That's what she told me, but I think she was glad that she did become a BVM. We're so much alike any way, aren't we?

Sister Sue Rink, BVM

Much has been said about Gen's love of creation. And it has been said about how much she loved flowers and working in the soil and getting her hands into the earth, into the clay. But nobody has mentioned that she loved getting her hands into worms and other kinds of bait so she could go fishing. I had some good experiences with Gen and Janel at The Spiders. She particularly loved The Spiders for two reasons. The first reason was so that she could go fishing and enjoy nature. The second reason was that The Spiders was not too far from a nearby casino. I had the opportunity to be with Janel and Gen at both places. I was also very inspired by the loving devotion that Gen and Janel had for one another.

Sister Mary Angela Buser, BVM

In February 2013, my sister, Sister Danetta, received a beautiful basket full of all kinds of greens from the family of one of my nieces for her 90th birthday. Danetta tried to take good care of it, but despite all her effort it seemed to get to look more like her, sicker and sicker and sicker. When she went to Marian Hall, I asked Gen if she could try her magic green thumb on the plant to save it. After Danetta's death, she said, "Well, it was too far gone. Danetta overwatered it so it was soaked. Would you like some other plant in there so you can remember her?" So she put other green things including one that was green but turned red. I said, "What is that, Gen?" She said, "Oh, it's just a weed. It grows like a weed." I think she knew my ability to take care of plants. I thank Gen for the basket of greens and reds that still sits on my window sill to remind me of Danetta and Gen. Thank you, Gen.

Sister Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

I lived and taught together with Gen at St. Patrick in Cedar Rapids. I know you have all admired her ability to work the soil, but when I lived with her, she was into coin collecting. Every night at recreation, she would bring in all the milk money that students had given her and she would look carefully at the date on every coin. There was no need for us to chat with Gen at recreation because she paid no attention to us. We teased her a lot about just looking at coins and she said, "Someday you're going to be really thrilled when I find a really valuable coin." I don't know if she ever found that in the milk money or not, but actually she did bring in money bit by bit from the coins she collected that were indeed quite valuable.

Sister Judith Sheahan, BVM

I've known Gen for long time because we lived in Des Moines at the same time. One day Gen said to me, "You know, Clemenza is really worried about the Pine Walk." Sister Clemenza Finney was a good friend to both of us. I said, "Oh really?" She said, "Yes, so many of those big pines have gone down since we were at Mount Carmel as postulants and novices. Clemenza is just regretting that so much." A few weeks after Clemenza died, Gen said to me, "I've had the best idea. I found a little pine tree way back in the forest. I'm having the men dig it up and I'm going to plant it again along

the Pine Walk.” She did that and she had the men put a fence around it so it wouldn’t be eaten by the deer. She was very proud of that little pine tree. She often said to me, “Have you been down to see it?” I was always embarrassed if I hadn’t been. To me that was just so typical of what Genevieve would do. It pleased me very much that she did it for Clemenza. I hope they are having a great reunion in heaven.

Sister Catherine Jean Hayen, BVM

I have fond memories of Gen at St. Patrick in Cedar Rapids with connection to both my mother and father. Dad and she were best of friends as he helped her with her kiln maintenance needs, as they talked about what they saw in the skies at night and different science theories. My mother and she shared the common interest of gardening and often shared the fruits of their gardens. I would also like to share something from Mary Ann Carney Thompson, former BVM Felicity Mary, with whom Gen and I lived at St. Patrick in Cedar Falls. She wrote recently to Gen.

Mary Ann Carney Thompson (Read by Sister Catherine Jean Hayen, BVM)

I have thought a lot of you this summer and you are always in my prayers. You have been a blessing in my life and in the lives of many others. You were always good to me when I was in Cedar Falls and that meant a lot to me at the time. I remember taking you to UNI for pottery classes and you showing me what you made. I am so happy that you, Gen, sought me out at our BVM entrance reunion in 2012. That was the best surprise of the whole event! Thank you for caring about me.

Peter Teahen, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

I am a former first grade student of Sister’s. “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. How many pecks of peppers did Peter pick?” It was a ditty that has always been a good reminder of Sister Gen and her impact on my life. As a child, I had a severe speech impediment; I didn’t pronounce words. I didn’t do a lot of speaking, only some stuttering, but mostly failing to pronounce the letters and words properly.

As a first grade student, Sister took me under her wing because, as I later found out, Sister had taken a summer school course. That was a time when there wasn’t a lot of speech therapy. I was fortunate enough to have Sister at St. Pat in Cedar Rapids. I became one of her guinea pigs. I remember having private sessions with Sister as she took me through a whole series of ditties and tongue twisters to teach me how to speak appropriately, effectively and with confidence.

I’ve always held Sister Gen in high regard as a major influence in my life. Over the years I have grown to do a lot of significant speaking both in Iowa as well as around the world. One of the primary roles that I have served for the last 15 years is a national spokesperson for the American Red Cross on major disasters. I’ve had the opportunity to be on shows like *Good Morning, America*, *FOX News*, the *BBC Al Jazeera*, and media all around the world, talking about disasters and their impact. I am a teacher.

My professional background, as many of you know, is that of a funeral director; I do own a funeral home in Cedar Rapids. But I am also a mental health professional who specializes in trauma and crisis. Through my teaching, I have been able to touch the lives of people from the tsunami-hit country of Sri Lanka, the front lines of the genocide in Darfur, and working with humanitarian aid workers helping them deal with the psychological impact of what they do.

Just the other day with the anniversary of 9/11, I was giving a major speech in Nashville when I received word of Gen's death. I thought how appropriate to be giving a speech to a community on one of the most powerful moments in the history of our country to receive word that the woman who taught me "How many pecks did Peter Piper pick?" had died two days before.

We never know the impact we have on other people's lives, the rippling effect of taking the time, of her taking that summer school course and using her students as guinea pigs. I still have the mold of clay with a marble stuck in it that she fired up in her kiln. I still have the gift of speech that some people probably wish she had never given me. It is a powerful tool as educators and as caring, compassionate people that when we take time to help someone else, we really will never understand the impact we have had. She truly had an impact in my life and in the lives of people with whom I have worked in disaster-torn countries and on the faculty of the University of Iowa teaching master's and doctoral students. None of that would have happened if she had not taken the time to help me learn how to speak appropriately and effectively. I will always thank her for that.

You talk about the past. I, of course, as a child lost touch with Sister for a long time. Through Sister John Thomas who taught me in high school, I found out that Sister Gen had come here, so I made a point to come to see Sister. I came with a friend on a Sunday afternoon and asked if Sister was here. They said, "No, she's out and about today." I said, "When do you expect her back?" They said, "At 4 o'clock." "Well, tell Sister that we'll be here at four." So I told my friend who is not Catholic, "You don't understand that a lot of times Sisters go out and they help at Mass and they help clean up the altar and distribute Communion to the shut-ins, all this humanitarian work." Next time I will keep my mouth shut because when we got back at 4 o'clock, Sister with a gleam in her eye said, "I was down at the casino gambling." That's how she loved to pass her time.

It was a proud moment for me to be able to come and present the first book that I wrote and dedicated to Sister Gen saying that the gift that she gave me is the gift that I hopefully can give others in education. I will always hold a special place in my heart for her and think about the ditties that she taught me that allowed me to come and pay honor to her today.

Sister Patricia Donahoe, BVM

That's a tough act to follow, but I want to express my gratitude to Gen for her impact on my brother. The first thing I thought of was Genevieve, but we called her Gen. G-E-N really stood for generosity personified. In the early 1990s, my brother had a stroke which left him a hemiplegic. As part of his therapy, he was assigned to Mercy Hospital's Adult Daycare Center, where he would spend the day while his wife was at work. That's where he first met Gen who was in charge of activities there. Fast forward to 2004 when he developed cancer of the throat and larynx and he could no longer be left alone at home and needed home health care. Whenever Gen came to Des Moines on her own business, she always dropped in to say hello to him. He was just overwhelmed to think that she would do that. That's who Gen was for so many of us.

Sister Therese Mackin, BVM

Rosemary and Jerry Mackin, my sister-in-law and brother, lived in Cedar Rapids. Rosemary was a coin collector too. She used to meet with Gen and they would compare their JFK, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, silver dollar coins. They had fun comparing them.

Jack Shultz, friend of Gen's sister, Kathleen

I met Gennie through her sister Kay. I took care of her sister for about 12 years after her husband passed away. I know Gennie and Kay were very close. Gennie used to visit them in Arizona over the winter. When Gennie was in Des Moines, Kay would go down and stay with her a week at a time. You would never guess where I would meet Gen when she was in Des Moines. She always thought the halfway point was Meskwaki in Tama. So that's where we met when I took Kay down and when we met to bring her home. Kay always called her "my bossy sister." When Kay was in the nursing home at Sumner and Gen would come and visit, I would say, "Kay, why do you call her 'my bossy sister?'" "Because she always thinks she knows what's right." But Gen was really good to Kay and made special efforts to come and visit her. I really enjoyed my relationship with Gennie. I can see how well thought of she is in this community.