

*Sister Mary Vivina Bly, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Sept. 24, 2015*

Mary Ann Krems, Associate (Read by Deb Doyle, Pastoral Services)

I first met Sr. Vivina when I became an associate and was invited to join the Milwaukee cluster. Her twinkling eyes and ready smile made me feel so welcome. After that she always wanted to know about my family and she and Sr. Joanne Schneider and I have shared Christmas cards ever since. Even after she left Milwaukee she was always so glad to see me and made me feel a true part of the BVM community. I know she is at peace and will keep us all in prayers.

Sister Janet Desmond, BVM

One line in the Psalm fits Vivina so well: "That every soul I come in contact with may feel Your [God's] presence in my soul." This spring I met a former Catholic East elementary school music teacher, Carol. Our BVM Holy Rosary ES in Milwaukee joined with other grade schools to form Catholic East. When Carol found out that I was a BVM, she asked if I knew Vivina. "Yes, of course," I said. Carol just praised how wonderful Vivina was—a giving, fun-loving, dedicated person, supportive of the students. Carol told me this one remembrance of Vivina. Each week Vivina accompanied her fifth grade students to the music room. Instead of leaving and getting something done for herself, she stayed, sat among the students, sang along joyfully. Carol was very pleased and impressed.

Judy Moberly Mayotte, Former BVM (Read by Sister Janet Desmond, BVM)

Vivina, what a magnificent person! My gratitude to her is very deep for she helped my mother cope with my becoming a nun. This was such a gift! I give great thanks for her life and for being a part of my life. Shout for joy at her fullness of life!

Tim Bly, Nephew

My dad was her younger brother Donald. I once said to Dad, "How was Vivian as a teacher?" He said, "She was a wonderful teacher." He was a teacher as well and I thought he was pretty special as a teacher; I had him in seventh and eighth grade. He said, "She was a wonderful teacher. She had a great sense of humor, but she also was a pretty strict disciplinarian." He said that she could mix the two of them perfectly, that she would start off the year with a little discipline and, when the kids settled down, from there forward she could have a good time and get a lot of teaching done.

My oldest son Joe once found out about the discipline part of her. Sisters Joanne and Vivian had come for a visit. My wife Kim had to run into town to do some errands. Vivian and Joanne were going to watch Joe. She said, "Joe, whatever you do, don't go out on that paddle boat." We have a 5-acre lake behind our house that's six to eight feet deep. It wasn't a good place to fall into the water. He was five years old and my youngest son McKenzie was three.

About five minutes after Kim went off to town, the boys go out in the paddle boat. They are out in the middle of the lake and McKenzie is standing up on the seat and rocking. Sisters Joanne and Vivina about had a heart attack. The wind started to take the boys across the lake. Vivina and Joanne hop in the car and go around the side with the pasture and promptly get stuck. They have

to run the rest of the way to get the kids. About the time they are coming up from the lake, Kim gets home. Vivian has Joe by the shoulder and brings him up and spansks him good. He starts crying and he looks at Kim and says, "Mom, she just spanked." She said, "It's a good thing because otherwise I was going to."

Vivian was wonderful. I want to thank all of you for making her life so full. We were on our way down here and Kim looked up the name Vivian and the first thing it said was "Vivina, a full life." Thank you so much for making her life so full. What a wonderful passing she had. She was with good friends the night before and went to sleep and went to visit God. She had a wonderful life.

Margie Strom, Niece

Well, Tim, you forgot to mention what Joe is going to name his daughter who is due next month. Her name is Vivian. She will live a full life too. I loved Vivian. When I was a little girl in second or third grade, I didn't have any jewelry. I went to my grandma's house and I believe Vivian was already in the convent. I found a little silver bracelet that had Vivian's three initials on it. I said, "Grandma, do you think Vivian would mind if I took this?" She said, "I don't know. I'm going to have to ask her." I waited and waited and waited what seemed like forever. Finally, Grandma said that Vivian said I could have it if I take care of it. I was really excited, brought it home . . . and broke it very quickly. Then she gave me one that is never going to break.

I talked to my mom about Vivian when I was a little girl. I said, "Mom, why did Vivian join the convent? Was it because she wasn't very pretty?" My mom said, "Oh, no, she was beautiful! She had beautiful, glossy black hair. She had elegant hands with long fingernails. She wore high heels." Well, I still can't wear them today! By the time Vivian was 20, she had figured out what she wanted to do. She was going to teach in Catholic schools and she felt that the best way to do that was to join the convent.

She was wonderful person; she exuded peace and love. We are reminded of that every time we get a birthday card from her. We'll miss her. I'll miss calling her and having her say, "And how is Margie?" And I'll miss hearing her say, "You get an A+ for that." That's one of my favorite phrases to say to people now. I loved her and I know you all did too. We'll miss her.

Sister Kathleen Conway, BVM

I've had the opportunity to have a lot of mentoring in my life. I've had people who have mentored me professionally, in community living, in justice work—but there are two people who have mentored me in how to age gracefully. One of them who taught me to be a graceful elder was Sister Mauricine Aspinwall. Of course the second one was Vivina.

One thing that struck me about Vivina was that she was always able to be concerned about everybody. She was very aware of the needs of other people, but at the same time it sprang from this deep, inner silence. There was an extraversion about her, but yet I always had a sense of peace when I was talking with her amidst her great concern for other people. She was never afraid to challenge you if she felt things were not going quite right. I experienced that personally several times.

Sister Nancy McCarthy, BVM (Read by Sister Kathleen Conway, BVM)

The Bly and McCarthy families lived on the same block in St. Mary Parish in Clinton, Iowa, for many years before Vivina entered the BVMs, so I have a couple of memories that are different from the rest of yours. First of all, we hardly ever needed a babysitter since our grandmother lived with us, but when we did, it was Vivina who took care of us. Secondly, she was the leader of my Brownie troop all the way until we became Girl Scouts and really made a lasting impression on me.

I doubt that she realized it since there is an age difference of 15 years between us, but Vivian was always a role model for me long before I began to admire her as a BVM. She was always the kind of woman I hoped to be—so aware of people and so caring. Later she became an example of the way I would like to age—with the same awareness and caring plus a constant positive attitude toward all that life brought. Our paths did not cross often during the active life, but I am grateful for the times we've had good visits after she moved to Mount Carmel. Thank you, Vivina, for all the lessons you've taught me, one of the other BVMs on the block.

Sister Margaret Mear, BVM

One of the things I really admired about Vivina was her wonderful transparency; there was no deceit in that woman at all. I came from Pontiac, Ill., and I had family there for a while—my mom and dad were there and my aunt and uncle lived next door to us. Well, Frank Mear, my dad's brother, died so I went back for the funeral. I was in the funeral home standing next to my dad when Vivina and Joanne walked in and I was so happy to see them. Vivina saw me standing there next to my dad and those beautiful eyes got even wider and she looked at my dad and said, "Oh, I thought you were dead." My dad looked at the coffin and said, "No, that's not me." But I am always so happy the two of them came to my dad's funeral even if it was a bit early.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM

Vivina was always a grateful woman in my experience. She would thank you for whatever you did for her, however small or large. As many of you know, Vivina was one of 26 BVMs who celebrated their diamond jubilee on Sept. 6. The morning after the celebration, she left a phone message for Jean Beste and myself saying, "You deserve three gold stars and four purple hearts for carrying off that event yesterday." I think the last conversation that Vivina and I had was about her concern that a general thank you from all the jubilarians be sent to the entire congregation. She talked to me two or three times about that, wanting to make sure that that task had been accomplished. When it had, I said to her, "Vivina, an email has been sent to the entire congregation and posted on the bulletin boards so you can be at rest now about that." Thank you, Vivina, for being so grateful and so gracious.

Sister Joanne Sullivan, VHM

As a student at Clarke, I did student teaching at St. Anthony in Vivina's first grade classroom. That led to a friendship that lasted all through these years. Last year, as in previous years, we went to the Dubuque symphony. I was surprised to find that next year she will be enjoying the eternal symphony in heaven.

Sister Mary Angela Buser, BVM

We celebrated Vivina's 70th diamond jubilee a few weeks ago and that was a time of great joy for her and all of her set. Many of her set are probably not here today, but I remember five years before she initiated the gathering to celebrate 65 years. The entire set was somewhere here at

Mount Carmel so we had a beautiful liturgy. I was in the set behind them that arrived in February. I will never forget the welcome that she offered to all of us and that welcome endured through all the years.

Although I never lived with Vivina until I came to Mount Carmel, anytime we met it felt like we just continued where we had left off and it was always a wonderful welcome. I had the privilege of being one of those with her that last evening which was a thank you for something that didn't require any thank you, but Vivina had to give an elegant thank you. So I thank her for her life, her example and her love.

Marilyn Wasmundt, Associate & Former BVM

Vivina taught most of my brothers and sisters at St. Anthony. When she started teaching at St. Anthony, there wasn't a convent and the sisters would walk from Clarke. On Sunday afternoons, they would inevitably be coming up our hill and everyone would say, "The sisters are coming." Immediately all the newspapers were shoved under the sofa pillows. When the Sisters sat down, it crinkled and we would all be giggling. They came just about every Sunday so we should have planned ahead.

When I was entering the BVMs, Vivina was the one who helped me get ready. She taught first grade, but she was my favorite BVM. I would get gifts from her periodically—a statue of Mary or Joseph—throughout all of my life. When I left and got married, she came to Colorado to visit. We had the sisters come up the canyon and we made breakfast for them. She has just been with our family all the way and we are very blessed to have known her.

Sister Eileen Healy, BVM

The first time I met Vivina and Joanne, that I remember, was when they used to come to do June jaunts whenever they could. They drove the sisters from the Motherhouse on day trips. They must have gone out about 20 times during the month. It meant so much to the sisters to get out, have a day, and have lunch someplace and dinner someplace else. They came back more full of life. All the things that have been said or prayed about today were certainly evident in those years when they organized the June jaunts for the Motherhouse sisters.

Pat Van Kampen, Bly Family In-Law

One thing that really amazed me about Vivian was how sharp she was to the end. I remember at the jubilee, we were having a conversation and I said, "I just can't believe how many changes you've seen in 92 years and specifically as an educator." She went on to relate that there had been a lot of changes. We had a little discussion about how these days it's sometimes a little difficult to get respect from children. I told her that I went to eight years of Catholic grade school and four years of Catholic high school. I said, "Back when I went to school, if the sisters called my house at night, there was never a question of what the sisters did wrong. There were no questions asked." I related that to Sister Vivian and she commented, "But whatever it was, you did it too, didn't you, Pat?" I said, "Yes, I did."

Sister Catherine Jean Hayen, BVM

I have three short stories. First, I remember so wonderfully how hospitable both Vivina and Joanne were when any BVM visited the Milwaukee area. Second, Vivina came to my BVM readings and

when she couldn't come, I would give Joanne the copies to read to her. The envelope in which she returned the copies had multiple thank you notes on it. Third, she was one of the BVMs who began the use of digital books from the Blind Society. I checked recently how many she had ordered. There were 260 ordered for her to come one by one. She loved to keep current. She will be greatly missed.

Sister Joan Stritesky, BVM

Vivina and I go way back to the novitiate; she was a senior novice and I a junior novice. We both had Mother's table so there were many times to our consternation that we talked about what did happen or what didn't happen or what Sister Majella Kent would say. We had many encounters of moving dishes at the table instead of them reaching and passing them. That was the beginning.

I was sent to St. Joseph in Rock Island, Ill., where Vivina had gone the year before, and we were both primary teachers. She was my mentor and gave me so many insights into teaching. Others did too, but Vivina's was outstanding because she gave it gently and with encouragement. She was just the top person to be a mentor.

I think we loved each other, but I'm not sure when I tell you this story. We used to take walks on Sunday; it was the only way we got outside. I think we walked everywhere in Rock Island and we talked and chatted for at least a couple of hours. By the time we got home, I still had one story to tell her. We were talking about dogs and how we both loved dogs. I said, "My dog, Pal, I can't tell you how long we had him. He had six litters of puppies." She said, "Oh?" "Vivina," I said, "I really don't believe it, but he had six litters." And she gently said, "*He* must have been a *she*." That's just one story.

Also around St. Joe's, there were these big pictures but there were none of little children with curly hair or Jesus figures as a baby. We asked the principal, Sister Mary Lucilla McGrath, if we could modernize some of the pictures. She said, "What does that mean?" We said we would put in new pictures and get different backings and maybe eliminate the big ones. Many sisters came to Lucilla and said, "Where did our classics go?" She said, "I think there was a renovation made." She never told the rest of the sisters.

Vivina and I wrote back and forth through the years, but then lost contact. When she came to Mount Carmel, we had many times to chat when she would stop in the kitchenette while I was eating lunch or breakfast. She was a gracious lady, a very humble person, a gigantic teacher. I was given, not too many years ago, a little tiny framed saying with a picture of a beautiful rose. The writing on it is what I have to say about Vivina ; "You have touched me; I have grown." I know that she, a gracious lady, is up there much at home and Christ is near her.

Sister Jane Haslwanter, BVM

The first time I met Vivina was when I was a senior novice. We came to St. Anthony to observe the sisters teaching. I went to Vivina's room. Vivina was teaching second grade and she just had a wonderful class and I admired her. I spoke to her for a few minutes before I had to leave. I told her how much I loved her and her teaching. Little did I know that about 15 years later I would be teaching second grade in that very same classroom at St. Anthony. What a thrill it has been for me to know Vivina and Joanne here at Mount Carmel.

Dermot Bly, Nephew

There was a place for you that was prepared 2,000 years
and even long before that time,
a place prepared for you.

And now you've gone back home;
you've gone back home to stay
at the place that was prepared for you.

A place prepared for you who was kind;
A place prepared for you who at all times
would forestall judgement on us all.

Now today as we sit here by your side,
we will try not to weep
because we know you are at peace.

You did not fall;
you simply answered the call to return back home
to a place prepared for you.

So today, please enjoy that place and still remain with us within our hearts
and remind us all of the joy you know in the place
that he has gone before 2,000 years ago to prepare for you.

Gary Schneider, Nephew of Joanne Schneider, BVM

Through Sister Joanne Schneider, we have known Vivina really most of our lives. She came when we were graduating from schools and special events. She was family; she still is family. It was even more rewarding when she would attend the baptisms of our children and see them as they graduated. She was family. You can imagine how my wife and I felt when two weeks ago we filled out the wedding invitations for our daughter and one in particular.

Erin Norin, Great Niece

I am one of the oldest of the great nieces and I feel like I should take a moment to express gratitude, and I think I speak for everyone here, to acknowledge the tremendous generosity of time and dedication she made to filling out birthday cards and anniversary cards. I don't know exactly when that tradition started for her, but I know we were all inspired by it. What a simple thing to acknowledge that special day in people's lives and what a special thing to aspire to.

I was just sitting here thinking, with the growth of Don Bly's family, we have multiplied exponentially over the years. She must have been filling out multiple cards per day. She has touched each and every one of us in the family. I know she has also touched all of you. I for one am treasuring the last card that I received from her which was my anniversary card. It's on my bulletin board with a little note that said, "Go visit Joanne and Aunt Vivina." We never got here. Time is precious and I am so glad to be here today.

Debra Bly, Niece-in-law.

You look at a woman like Vivian and you think, "What a success!" But what is the definition of success? She was it. To have so many people, as evident here in this room today, from 92 down to an infant, she touched so many lives. Vivian grew up on 10th Avenue South in Clinton, Iowa. When Pat and I got married 36 years ago next week, we moved into the house that she and her brother and sister grew up in. I always felt like I had a little part of Vivian in my heart because we raised our children in the house that she grew up in.

When Vivian lived in Washington, Iowa, when she lived in Milwaukee, or here in Dubuque, when she came to the Fulton-Clinton area, it was always a celebration. "Vivian and Joanne are in town!" They came together and we were always so glad to see them. We always had some kind of party or celebration when they were there. They were always game for anything, be it going to the park for a picnic or taking them out on the river in our boat. They were just game for anything.

When Kim said she looked up the name Vivian and it said "full of life and joy," that couldn't be more fitting. She was such a joy; she was so interested in everybody. Maybe we can all take a little piece of her and try to be like her a little more. That would be a wonderful world! She is loved and we will miss her very much.

Colleen Van Kampen, Niece

Pat and I are parents to seven daughters so we made the Bly clan grow exponentially as was mentioned. I wasn't going to speak; I'm a little timid about standing in front of people. But I thought it was so incredibly significant that Vivian and Joanne stand for unification like our pope who is now visiting. For her to be ending this life and beginning her new life with him visiting our country is so symbolic. I pray that in our lifetime we will know unification. I believe all of you will have a huge part in it.

Tim Bly, Nephew

It was always a trick when you got one of Vivian's birthday cards because it was like a puzzle. It would start on the bottom and you had to go to the top and then maybe you had to go to the front page and then the back page. Sometimes you had to read it three or four times. We cherished these cards because it was like reading a book. It would take you half a day to read it. We will miss that from her for sure. It got really challenging towards the end because she was half blind.

Sister Therese Jacobs, BVM

I just want to add one word. I grew up on the same street as Vivian. In fact, every now and then she would say to me, "Do you know there were four of us from that little area who came to the BVMs?" Now she was the first of us, Peggy (Margaret) Keefe and I were the next two, and then Nancy McCarthy. She was always proud of 10th Avenue, Clinton, Iowa.

Monica Bly, Niece

I'm one of Sister Vivina's nieces; not her favorite niece because that belongs to Margie, but a cherished one nonetheless. Almost two years ago, I had asked Sister Vivina to put the potential adoption of my son on her prayer list. Not only did she put it on her prayer list, but she put it on

the prayer list of the 200 nuns here. Little Michael is testament and answer to your prayers. Thank you so much for helping to bring that beautiful child into our lives.

Greg Dolan, Nephew

My mother and Sister Vivina were sisters. There are numerous, numerous memories. Erin, you stole my thunder with the cards. Pat and Tim, it was hieroglyphics especially towards the end. My boys would always bring the cards and say, "Dad, can you read this to us because we have no clue even where to even start." As I listened to the stories from all the other BVMs, I sat and reflected. I am 24 years into teaching and didn't realize who probably had a very significant influence in my life—Sister Vivina, the Bly family, Uncle Don. You don't think about those things until moments like this. I appreciate everything Vivian did for our family, keeping people in touch who didn't necessarily want to keep in touch, keeping people in touch who didn't do a great job. All of you, I appreciate it. Thank you.