

*Sister Veronica J. (Jackie) Burke, BVM (Timothena)*  
*Wake Stories/Reflections*  
*Marian Hall Chapel, May 20, 2016*

**Kathy Greaney Bebe, Friend and Former BVM** (Read by Janet Mahmundy, Pastoral Services)  
*(From an e-mail prior to Jackie's death.)* I have put a few words together in remembrance of Jackie Burke. I could write a book about Jackie and what she means to me and my family for these past 55 years. My boys and their wives are joining in with me in our deep love for Jackie whose influence, love and support for each of us cannot be verbalized. We each want to be there with Jackie now and after she passes yet she clearly told us that we were not to come. Dang it anyway, she always knew what was best.

*(From a shared story: "What Jackie Means to Me.")* Our lives intersected in Des Moines, Iowa. I had just been missioned to Visitation as a young nun and Jackie was a superior at St. Ambrose. It was in Des Moines where my real chosen family emerged with Jackie Burke, Eleanor Burke, Betty Carey and Joan Stritesky entering my life as truly my family. We are still family after 55 years. Jackie, Eleanor and Betty played a prominent role as godmothers in our family community. Each of them was my oldest son's godmother and did they take their responsibilities seriously! Yes, AND with fun lovingness, showering the best of worlds for him and for his younger brother.

We always spoke of Jackie as "The Godmother." She was the one who called the shots, who the others relied upon for strong decision-making, who clearly looked at situations and determined what actions or non-actions were in the best interest for all and each person. Jackie is my surrogate mother. I lost my mother one year after meeting Jackie and she stepped into the role of mother, friend, provincial, godmother, counselor and spiritual guide. I know that Jackie loved me "with her whole heart" and that nothing could separate us. She was so accepting, nonjudgmental, encouraging, and always loved me and my family with an unconditional love. More in my heart . . . I will miss her dearly.

**Sister Judy Callahan, BVM**

I have messages from Kathy's two sons. We can never delve the depths of a mystery of a person. One way to get to know a person and their greater dimensions is through what other people say about them. As Jackie's letter writer, I got many insights that I probably would not have discovered relying only on my own observations.

**David Bebe, Kathy Bebe's Son** (Read by Sister Judy Callahan, BVM)

*(Written before Jackie's death.)* We are keeping Jackie in our thoughts and prayers. It means so much to me that you were playing my CD *(cello recital for master's degree)* for her these last days. That is the closest to being there that I could possibly hope for. Of course, you could share with her my memories at her home in San Francisco as a young boy: the dogs, the snails in the backyard among the rocks, the view of the city, that one could see Toys R Us from their backyard, the playgrounds, the food, and, most of all, the laughter. These memories were so magical that I will carry these special times with me forever.

Strangely, my father had mailed me an old doll that was mine when I was three years old. Tonight, my three-year-old son Gus was playing with it and I thought it would be fun to go through some old photos that my mom gave me to see if perhaps the doll was in any of the childhood photos. We didn't find the doll, but I did find the attached photo. *(The photo was David at about age 9 trying to teach Jackie how to play the cello. She was seated in a chair with the cello way out in front of her, not having a clue what to*

*do with it.*) I loved the look of joy on Jackie's face. I imagined that I brought my cello to play for the Godmothers. (*How many of us have three godmothers?*) During a practice, she must have said, "That is amazing! How do you do that? I could never do that." I'm sure I proceeded to give her a lesson and tried to convince her how easy it is to play the cello. All this as she remained in her chair. A beautiful moment of music-making and how uncanny that I found that photo today of all days!

**Jonathan Bebe, Kathy Bebe's Son** (Read by Sister Judy Callahan, BVM)

*(Written before Jackie's death.)* If she happens to have a good moment, tell her that her godson and goddaughter love her very much and their little guy knows about his great-godmother and every story makes him smile. (*Their little guy is about six months old. His name is Declan.*) She has brought such wisdom, joy and love to all of us and we will love her fiercely for generations to come.

*(After Jackie died, Jonathan wrote the following message.)* Jackie Burke is my godmother and has far exceeded that role in my life. One of the last times we visited Mount Carmel, I was so bold as to say to the other sisters that Jackie is my grandmother. I was awaiting the correction and clarification that Jackie would have said before, but to my surprise and joy, she embraced the idea and even shared that I had called her my grandmother to some other sisters. This is the epitome of the joyous and loving spirit that Jackie has shared with so many of us.

Jackie has always been a steadfast support, a voice of reason, a cheerleader and educator for my entire life. Her guidance has led me to make some of the most important decisions in my life and, knowing that she was there to support me, I always made them with confidence. All three of the BVMs, whom I was lucky enough to call my godmothers, formed and shaped my love for my fellow humans and my respect of the earth and everything beyond. I know that she is now looking down on all of us with a loving, guiding spirit. There isn't a day in my life that goes by without me thinking of her. I am so humbled and honored to have been part of her journey. I am excited to pass on all that she taught me to our son Declan. With love, Jonathan.

**Sister Judy Callahan, BVM**

On a personal note, as a letter writer, Jackie's friends became my friends as they shared the impact that Jackie had on their lives. To be Jackie's friend was a joy, a privilege, and a tremendous blessing. Her spirit continues to inspire us who knew and loved her.

**Sister Therese Frelo, BVM**

There was something special about Jackie Burke. The twinkle in her eyes told it all. She was an unusual woman; she was so well-balanced, so understanding and so giving. She had a tremendous sense of humor and she loved a good time and yet she was a serious woman, independent, strong and faithful. She always seemed to know the right thing to say and would give it to you straight and yet she listened. She was a wise, gentle and loving woman.

I really got to know Jackie during the last 15 years that I lived here in Dubuque, because she and Joan Stritesky were such very good friends. Joan would find it difficult to express her feelings today, but I know she would agree with what I am saying. It was that twinkle in Jackie's eyes that was always there, even to the end. When she looked at you, you always knew and understood each other. She was a friend to many and to me. She will be missed. I know that Jackie and her sister Eleanor, her brother Tim, her parents, and her friend Betty Carey and Sister Maureen O'Brien who always used to go to see her, and Mary Frances Clarke, and all the BVMs and friends must be having a grand Irish celebration in heaven.

**Sister Miguel Conway, BVM** (Read by Sister Jean Beste, BVM, Community Representative)

When Jackie Burke is being remembered, please let people know that she is the one who first established our connection with the Centro del Muchacho Trabajador—Una Familia de Familias in Quito, Ecuador, in South America. I lived with Jackie and she was my provincial when Father Halligan, S.J. wrote the letter to the community requesting a sister. Jackie went to bat for me when she went to Dubuque for the “annual shuffle,” as we called it. That is how I came to Quito. I owe her more that I could ever express. Father Halligan offered Mass especially for Jackie the day we heard of her death. What a dear and special person!

**Sister Kathleen Antol, BVM** (Read by Sister Irene Lukefahr, Community Representative)

I have two brief memories to share. One comes from Sister Kathleen Antol, BVM with whom I talked on the phone yesterday. She told me that when she was in eighth grade at St. Ambrose in Des Moines, Jackie was still in the big border habit. Kathleen said what first stood out were her big eyebrows. What impressed Kathleen so much was how Jackie treated and how she interacted with the other sisters. Kathleen said, “I looked at Jackie and said, ‘I want to be one of those.’”

For the other memory, I think I am speaking on behalf of many of the members of the Set of 1961. Shortly after profession in February 1964, many of us moved over to Clarke for the summer. Jackie was sent from Des Moines to be our summer superior. Many of us when we gather still think about Jackie and that summer. The best description we have of it is “the summer of love.” About 50 years later when we were celebrating our golden jubilees, we asked Jackie to be part of the jubilee celebration. She could hardly believe that any of us would have remembered her. Well, how could we ever forget you, Jackie! Thank you for loving us!

**Sister Joanne Lucid, BVM**

I have had three wonderful experiences with Jackie. The first one that I recall was in the pool at Guadalupe College in Los Gatos, Calif. The other sisters were doing what they were supposed to do. We had a Senate and they were in the chapel, but Jackie and I were in the pool. We could hear everything so we were thinking that we attended the meeting. Jackie kept saying, “Be quiet! Be quiet so they don’t hear us.” And with that, a big splash and then another “Be quiet!” and a big splash. We couldn’t help ourselves because it was so wonderful to be in that big pool. After the meeting that day, there were several sisters who told us that we were making a lot of noise, but that we had chosen the better part. Jackie remembered that incident when I had the privilege of interviewing her for the Archives several years ago.

With Sister Jean Byrne’s help, I had the questions to ask Jackie. At first Jackie said, “What’s this about? Why would you want to interview me?” So I gave her my explanation about why she was so important and about how much history she remembers. I did see and listen to a side of Jackie that was very serious, very much in love with the sisters, very filled with love, caring and compassion. It was a time of changes. She had a very, very difficult position because of the things that were happening in the community, especially among the young and the older sisters. She very gently talked about that. Jackie was a very, very special lady. I, too, would like to mention the love Sister Maureen O’Brien brought to Jackie when she would go to see Jackie at about four o’clock every single day that she could. That brightened Jackie’s day. I remember the day of Maureen’s death and all of our concern was with Jackie.

**Sister Mary M. O’Connor, BVM**

Sister Lydia Buntmeyer, BVM and I had the joy and privilege of being with Jackie during the renovation at Mount Carmel when we were asked to move to a different area. We were sent to the Hotel Julien. We were to be gracious and welcoming. Well, they picked the right one with Jackie. People came in and felt welcomed and at home. The only ones who didn't were the cleaners, because they hadn't been there since Al Capone had been there! They would come in and say, "Do you feel evil in here?" We said, "No." Jackie made all of us feel welcome. She was a strong-minded person and was easy to be with. God bless Jackie Burke.

### **Sister Eileen Healy, BVM**

I just want to add to what Mary said. The washer and dryer were in their suite. So the welcoming they did, which was phenomenal as far as I was concerned, made life at the hotel better for everyone. The hotel allowed the BVMs to use the washer and dryer so they didn't have to use the quarters we had given them. Of the 15 or 16 sisters who lived there, we never did get a quarter back.

### **Sister Karen Conover, BVM**

Jackie is a friend because of my friendship with Sister Maureen O'Brien who was first embraced by Sister Eleanor Burke when she and Maureen arrived on the same day in Cascade, Iowa, sometime in the early 1960s. I'm amazed how community enfolds us; one friend and then another friend and then it grows and grows.

I have a story that Maureen would tell about both Jackie and Eleanor who grew up on 29th Street about 2 ½ blocks from St. Paul. Their father ran a tavern across the street. I don't remember exactly if it was during Prohibition, but it was looked down upon. At any rate, the sisters would record the names of the students, their addresses and their father's occupation. Well, Jackie said one thing which was not what her father did and Eleanor said a totally different thing which again was not what he did.

Then there is the story of Jackie as a young sister going home with a provincial. They went to the house to visit Mrs. Burke. Mrs. Burke in her brogue was fussing at the provincial because Jackie was assigned to teach second grade. Her mother didn't think that was a very elevated task. The provincial said to Mrs. Burke, "Oh, Mrs. Burke, we put our most capable teachers into second grade. I've taught all the grades from the little ones all the way up to high school." Mrs. Burke looked at her and said, "See, you got out of it!"

What I recall from the 1980s and 1990s, when Jackie and her sister Eleanor and Betty lived together in a couple of different houses, was their welcome of so many people. San Francisco is known for a great variety of people and lifestyles and perspectives. The home of those three was so open. I believe that they had many parties. There was a constant gathering of a number of gay men and others, just a great variety of folks, which happened every holiday season. It was Jackie who was that welcoming presence. Maureen always called her "Jack." It was "El" and "Jack." I was gifted with their friendship. While we prayed with Jackie as she was waiting to go home, we kept saying that Tim, Eleanor, her parents, Maureen and all those people were waiting for her. I am really trusting that there is a great, great gathering that we can only imagine. We love you, Jackie!

### **Sister Mary Ann Zollmann, BV**

My story is a simple story that follows up on the words welcoming and hospitality. When I think of Jackie, I think of an open heart and an open house. I'm sure I ran into her many times before, but I first really met her on Aug. 22, 1972. I had been teaching at Xavier HS in St. Louis, which as you know is my hometown. I was moving out to San Francisco where I felt like I really knew no one. I was going to live

with Sisters Maureen O'Brien and Joellen McCarthy in a little house in San Francisco. On the day I arrived, Maureen met me at the airport and then said, "I need to go to St. Paul today." Eleanor Burke and Betty Carey were at work and Joellen was away up in Montana. So she took me to the home of Jackie, Eleanor and Betty. The only one home was Jackie because she had broken her leg. She was lying in bed in her bedroom. I will never forget the scene, and I was ushered in with a chair to the end of bed with this woman that I barely knew.

To this day, I cannot tell you why except that as I have gotten to know Jackie perhaps it's clear, I poured out my whole life's story. Jackie and I smiled about that for many years afterwards. Looking back on it, because of what others have already shared, I know that I did that because I sensed immediately in Jackie her welcoming and hospitable heart. In the eight years that I spent in San Francisco, I spent many, many, many hours in the welcoming, spacious, open home and open heart of Jackie, Eleanor and Betty. It is one of my fondest memories.