

Sister Isabelle Hennessy, BVM (Vaune)
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, May 14, 2015

Sister Katherine Heffernan, BVM

Isabelle was a very important person in my life. We had rooms beside each other on the 7th floor of Wright Hall for 13 years. She discovered the public school system at Lakeview HS in uptown Chicago. Uptown is a pretty rough part of Chicago. She was a counselor there and she really enjoyed it. She would talk about it and would tell me, “Well, you have a big title, more prestigious, but I have better benefits.”

Eventually, I decided to go to the Chicago public schools as a social worker, but that was many years of Isabelle telling me about it. We loved Wright Hall; it was perfect for us. I see Mary Healey over there; we all really liked it. But Isabelle decided we should move into an apartment and eventually, Isabelle talked me into it. Well, we didn’t go far; we just went across the street—the Spanish Arms at Mundelein—and there were a bunch of BVMs there—Anne Carr, Pat De Costa, Eliza Kenney, Judith Dewell, Mary Kardelis, a bunch of us. We were hardly moving out! We just moved across the street and we liked that a lot.

Eventually, Isabelle moved back to Wright Hall while I was down the street on Sheridan Road. I always felt a part of Wright Hall because Isabelle kept my keys. If anything happened, I could always get in because Isabelle had my keys and I knew exactly where they were in her room at Wright Hall. When she moved to Dubuque, it was very sad for me. She would always say, “When are you coming?” I’d say, “I’m coming, Isabelle. Wait for me.” The last time I talked to her was when she was making arrangements for me for Sister Ann Ida Gannon’s birthday. She said, “Are you going to come and stay?” I said, “Wait for me, Isabelle. I’m coming.” I have many years of love for her and it’s a big loss for me.

Sister Joan Stritesky, BVM

I’m a former member of the second floor of Marian Hall South. There was a gang of eight of us there. Isabelle was a great one for walking the floors. One day she met me and said, “What are we going to do about the shower?” I thought she was talking to me personally and said, “What about the shower?” She asked, “When do you shower?” I thought I was sure she was talking to me. I said, “I get up about ten minutes before six and by 6:10 or 6:15 a.m. I’m finished.” She said, “Oh, I walked in on you.” I said, “I know you did.” She said, “Well, who else showers?” I thought we all had a problem, but nobody was telling us about it until she got there.

She said, “Why don’t we have a list? At other places we had a schedule.” I said, “Well, we are kind of a maverick group here and we don’t do that.” Well, finally she asked somebody else and they made us a list. My name is stretched from about 6–7 a.m. and I thought why am I on there so long? I met Isabelle almost every day and one day I said, “Get off of it. I told you when I shower and I don’t worry about the others.” Finally she got my hint that I don’t want to talk about the showers.

Then she said, “What room are you in?” She was looking at my room and was in one diagonally to the left from me. She said, “I’m looking at another room.” She later moved to one on the same side as mine, but to the right. I don’t know if it was anything to do with the shower or anything to do

with who was in the corridor. Well, she got her special room when she went to The Mansion. I'm sure our Lord had everything set up for her and is taking good care of her.

Sister Judy Callahan, BVM

I did not know Isabelle very well, but she was my prayer partner when she was at Wright Hall in Chicago. We communicated and I always looked her up when I was there. Since she came here, I would meet her down in Wellness and she always had such a pleasant welcome and shared a few stories. Hearing that she had several rooms and no room quite satisfied, I'm glad she is in heaven where there are many mansions and she can take her pick.

Sister Jean Beste, BVM, MCCRC Community Representative

Two months ago during March and April about 40 sisters moved from their rooms into other rooms. Irene Lukefahr and I were in our office and Isabelle came in and said, "I think I should move because I'm not in skilled care." We said, "Well, where do you want to move to?" She said, "Well, I want to move next door." We said, "OK, that's possible." So she did move next door. Five days later she comes back and says, "I've been looking around. I found a room in the Motherhouse on the third floor. That's the room that I want." That one she couldn't have because of her level of care. That was number two. Five days later she comes back and she says, "I've found a room on the second floor of the Motherhouse." That floor is assisted living, so we said, "That's possible." So we signed her up for that room. Well, she came back five days later and said, "I don't want that room. I don't want to live in the Motherhouse; I want to live in Caritas." Well, we didn't have any room in Caritas, so we said, "You will just have to wait." So now, she is with her God where there are many, many rooms in the mansion.

Sister Therese Frelo, BVM

I happen to be on that second floor too. Last year we celebrated by have a delicious Italian meal. I was fixing some pasta and she was bugging me saying, "Are we having spaghetti?" I said, "No, we are having mostaccioli." She said, "Mostaccioli? What's mostaccioli?" "Well, it's a kind of pasta." She'd meet me in the hall and she'd say, "I can't wait to have that mostaccioli." So we had that delicious mostaccioli dinner about a year ago. I would meet her so many times and she would say, "When are we going to have that mostaccioli dinner again?" Well, last week we decided it was time for us from the second floor to celebrate saying good-bye because we were split up in the moves. We got together and of course we had mostaccioli. So she celebrated the mostaccioli. So Isabelle, I'm sure there are some Italians up there, there better be! And I'm sure they'll fix the mostaccioli for you.

Sister Donard Collins, BVM

I'm in Isabelle's set. Last Saturday I happened to be on call. At about 3 p.m., I was trying to prepare the list of Ministry of Presence for Sister Gertruda Struble. As many have said, Isabelle liked to walk the halls. Well, Isabelle came down the hall and I greeted her and said, "You know, Isabelle, I'm just working on Ministry of Presence for Gertruda." "Oh," she said and returned to her room. That was the last I saw of her.

Sister Brigid Mary Hart, BVM

I knew Isabelle more from Wright Hall than from here. I do remember her walking the halls, but she was very disciplined about other things too. Not only was she at Lakeview HS for many years doing her ministry and counseling, but she also walked to the Sovereign Apartments, where she swam at the pool.

Sister Marie Fitzpatrick, BVM

I enjoyed Isabelle as much as everybody else here. However, I was thinking about a time when I was in Denver and she was in Chicago. Her sister in Denver died and she wondered if any of us would be at the services. I contacted everybody and all of us went to the funeral liturgy. It happened that Isabelle got to O'Hare Airport, but she became ill and could not make the trip. So when she heard that the rest of us were there, she was very grateful.

Sister Mary Healey, BVM

Speaking of discipline, Isabelle, who loved to swim, was past forty when she learned how. I was always an enthusiastic swimmer, but I'm not a good swimmer. I never learned how properly; I just followed my mother into the water like a polar bear. Isabelle knew how much I enjoyed it and she wanted to swim. She took lessons and learned to swim when she was 42.

Sharon Rezmer, Novice

We all know how hard it was to keep Isabelle in one place. She used to walk the halls at Wright Hall and she did it here too. When I was working at Wright Hall, Isabelle fell and broke her wrist. I went up to her room to talk with her about taking her to the emergency room. She looked at the time and said, "But it's almost time for you to go home. I'll just take the bus." It took me a little while to convince her that maybe that wasn't such a great idea. I said, "Well, I'll just take you there and have you checked out." So we get to the emergency room and they put her on a gurney and, of course, immediately she wants to know how long this was going to take and what are they going to do. We tried to explain it to her. Now, I've been in emergency rooms a number of times so I know it's not a quick ordeal. Isabelle just couldn't get the idea that they wouldn't take her immediately for x-rays and send her home right away. So she told me, "You go home now. As soon as they finish, I'll take the bus back." Well, we were hours in the emergency room. Every time she saw a nurse or a doctor she would she pop up on the gurney and ask, "How much longer is it was going to be?" It was so difficult trying to keep Isabelle in one place, because she just kept popping up. When I heard that Isabelle just "popped off" the other day, I thought that's Isabelle not wanting to be any trouble. I hope she's settled now.