

Sister Mary Francile Luking BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, May 9, 2014

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM

I had the unique pleasure of being Francile's assistant when she was the principal of the consolidated junior high in Rock Island. She was also asked to be the principal for the middle school building. She said she would if she had an assistant in each building. I was fortunate to work with her for a year and to experience what a fine administrator she was. She was always concerned about the students, faculty and parents.

About eight years later, I got a Christmas card from her. If you have seen the beautiful needlepoint in the Resurrection Chapel there is one that is a picture of a cat who is absolutely strung out on a tree limb and doesn't even have the energy to move its tail. Francile wrote me and said that she was absolutely exhausted after being a principal at St. Pat's for six or seven years. All she wanted was a place to go and just be. I called her and invited her to come live with me in Georgia. Her response was, "Well, that sounds like a fine idea." But she had to talk with Carolyn Farrell who was her Regional at that time. She must have talked to Carolyn because she came at the end of the school year.

However, she did come for an in-between visit in February. Her plane was delayed because of ice in Cedar Rapids. When she landed in Chattanooga, the daffodils were in bloom. She was in her element. We had a wonderful weekend together. When she was leaving, she picked daffodils and wrapped them up carefully so she could take them back to school and put them on the faculty table so that they would have hope that spring would eventually come.

In the year that Francile and I lived together, I was reminded again that she was such a lover of beauty. She had grown to love flowers by being surrounded by them ever since she was six months old. She loved walking in nature. She could make a picnic lunch in a hurry. Another needlepoint with animals says, "This is our earth and we need to care for it." Whenever we would go walking, if Francile saw paper on the ground, she would always pick it up and say that when she was a girl scout she learned to leave the earth and the world better than how she found it. For me, that sums up her life.

Sister Kathryn Lawler, BVM

I am looking at the picture of a woman reading to these little children on the wake service program and it reminded me of a time when a group of us visited Jonestown.

Deanna Randall and Francile were operating a Montessori school in Jonestown. The Montessori school was the best building in the town. When we visited, Francile welcomed us, but then she had other more important things to do and she went off to a corner. Francile sat on little stool and the little children who were about the same size as Francile were sitting around her. She was reading to them. Her teaching years were spent with teenagers and as an administrator, but she would spend her retirement time with those little cute kids.

Irene mentioned how Francile enjoyed nature. When we were doing breakfast up on the fourth floor and Francile would come to her place at the table, the first thing she would do was to look

out the windows. The dining room looks over the whole back acreage. She would say, "Isn't this beautiful!" It inspired me to appreciate that whole back acreage by the way she expressed the beauty she saw out that window.

Sister Dolores McHugh, BVM

Anytime that I went up to fourth floor Caritas Center, Francile was always making sure that Gertruda Struble was awake and was at the right place at the right time. I've been thinking here as we celebrate her life, how is Gertruda doing now? If you get a chance, visit with her.

Sister Mary Angele Lutgen, BVM

I had the privilege of living as a neighbor of Francile's and Deanna's in Jackson, Miss. I lived two years with Therese Jacobs when I was a Regional and they were one apartment over from us. They were great walkers. They have covered more miles than I can imagine when they lived in Jackson and also in Clarksdale when Deanna was a Montessori teacher in Jonestown. So I know they were great walkers.

I also visited Francile at the school where she was an administrator in Jackson. She was so proud of the little children and their achievements. She stood in awe as she observed them in the process of learning. She taught me a lot of lessons in the time that I have known her. She was a quiet woman, but she had pretty strong convictions yet she was very gentle. Thank you, Francile.

Sister Genevieve Kordick, BVM

Francile was a year behind me in the novitiate. She was always very, very pleasant. I was always very jealous of her because she got a letter from her parents every day. Her mother and dad each sat down every night and wrote to her. She often said, "Oh, I wish I could answer them, but I only can answer them once a month." I didn't see her for ages and ages until I came here. It was always very pleasant just to talk with her. God bless her.

Sister Susan Rink, BVM

I did not know Francile until about four years ago when I started going regularly to the fourth floor. During those many trips, I was always impressed with her beautiful smile and her friendliness. Even though there was no such thing as a superior or leader up there, she, especially, was one of the persons looking out for the other people. When I was there yesterday, I did ask about Gertruda. The nurses said that they were not sure if Gertruda quite understood what happened.

Sister Anita Therese Hayes, BVM

As I read through some of these prayers, I thought that they so speak of who Francile was. For her "selfless giving and her quiet love for all people." I looked back over the time I knew Francile. She was principal at Iowa City Regina and Alleman HS. She would come to the Motherhouse when we needed a driver or someone to help with different tasks. Francile was always the same, especially her lovely smile.

When she went to Jackson with Deanna, I asked, "Do you like this?" She said, "Yes, this is wonderful." Whatever the task, she said, "God's calling me here." Regarding her wonderful needlework, she told me once that her mother taught her that when she was about seven years old and she continued. She had that beautiful smile and that little chuckle. She just went on with life.

She was a wonderful person to know. I'm sure she's up there having a little chuckle at all of us now.

Sister Deanna Randall, BVM

I can't add on too much to that because that's who she was. She was wonderful to live with. She taught me so much about nature, people and children. She never got mad; I never saw her angry. She would simply go on. She was simply wonderful to live with. She would come out to Denver near the end of my home visit and we would go to the cabin my sister owned at that time and go hiking. Every day we hiked up the mountain and back down. My sister was just as interested in her and enjoyed having her as if she was her lifelong friend. So I have fond memories of her in the mountains walking the trails and telling me the names of the birds. Back home in Jackson or Clarksdale, we would walk the trails every Saturday morning and look for the birds. She knew the names of all of them. We had a little bird book in case we forgot it. We also kept a journal with a list of the birds and where we found them. I'll miss her a lot.

Sister Julie O'Neill, BVM

In the *Living with Christ* booklet this morning, the first line of the reflection reads, "A person who cares deeply for another will often give a tangible sign to express her love. Without signs, a person can't tell if she is loved." If you've ever been up on fourth Caritas in the last four years and close enough to Francile, she would have touched you on the cheek, sometimes with both hands. If you've never experienced it, you missed something wonderful.

Sister Mary Kelliher, BVM

I came from the same region of origin as Francile, Casper, Wyo. When I first came here a couple of years ago, my sister Rita reminded me that there was a Francile Luking here. Francile, she told me, was in her first grade class at St. Anthony and there was another distinguished BVM in that class. She isn't with us anymore—Sister Mary Antonia Bowman. They started first grade about the time I was born. Rita had very fine memories of Francile. I always reminded Francile that we originated from the same place. She had a lot of happy memories from her St. Anthony school experience. Rita said she left for Kentucky in the seventh grade.

Sister Jean Beste, BVM

I, too, would go to the fourth floor. I thought I was giving Francile something, but she gave me much more. They usually were sitting in a circle and all I did was call them by name. "Hi, Margaret. Hi, Gloria. Hi, Grace Andréa, Gertruda ..." When I finished the circle, Francile pointed her finger at me and gestured me to come over. She took both of my hands and said, "I want to tell you something. You come here all the time and you know all of us, and we like that." When it was time for lunch, they went over to the table. She called me back, took my hands again, and said, "I want you to remember that you call us by name." It was as simple as that. Thanks, Francile.

Sister Anne Buckley, BVM

There was something so special about Francile. It was almost like her soul was out in front of her. She had such a . . . well, joyful isn't quite the word because she was so peaceful and so warm and so loving. It was almost like she was surrounded by it. I couldn't see her without being aware of it. She was a wonderful person and real gift. Thanks, Francile.

Sister Janita Curoe, BVM

I was principal of a school in Jackson. Francile had called and wanted to know if I could use a secretary and I said, "Yes." She came down and was my secretary. After six years, I was accused of mismanaging money. This hurt me terribly and I could not go back to the Board. We were trying to get another BVM, but it was the time when there weren't a lot available. Francile came in and said, "Would it make it easier for you if I said I would be the administrator?" I said, "Oh, yes it would." She became the administrator of that school, pre-school through third grade. That's where she connected with Deanna and the Montessori school, and the rest is history.

Sister Deanna Randall, BVM

One thing that she is famous for is riding on the back of a motorcycle from her home visit back down to Jackson. We always think about that when we think about Francile.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM

I want to follow up on Deanna's story. Francile's sister Ann lived in Oregon and drove a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. When Francile would go out to visit in the summer, she hopped on the back of Ann's motorcycle and they would go on trips. I remember her coming home and telling us, "You know, those folks who drive those Harley-Davidson motorcycles are the nicest people in the world."