



Wake Stories of Sister Mary Johnellen Garrity, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, Jan. 12, 2018

Kathy Miello, Niece (*Read by Sister Cathy Wottreng, SSND*)

I had the privilege of being Sister Johnellen's niece. Aunt Mary Jane, or Sissy, as she was known by my children, played such an important role in our lives. Many years ago when she lived and taught in Chicago, my husband bought her a car so that she could get back and forth easily. Then, she was also known as the flying nun. She would come and stay at our house for days at a time. My children remember and love those days fondly. The little children in the neighborhood would gather around her. She would play with them for hours. They also called her Sissy. There are too many memories to mention. They are in my heart forever. I miss her dearly. I am so sorry that we could not be there for her today.

Joey Miello, Grandnephew (*Read by Sister Cathy Wottreng, SSND*)

My great aunt Sissy was to me the one person who represented all that was best in humanity. I could recount a hundred conversations that we have had that have helped to shape me, but those will remain ours. Instead, I would like to say one last thing to her. Sissy, if you are listening, even though I have told you this before, I want you to know how much you mean to me. You were my best friend growing up and have always be a beacon in the darkness. Thank you for everything. I will never forget you. I will end this the way you ended every letter to me. Love and prayers, Joey.

Joan Oberish Anzoloni, Immaculata High School Alumnae, Class of 1974

I bring the sisters greetings and much love from the alumnae of Immaculata, where Sister Johnellen taught from 1969 to 1981. I was not a student of Sister Johnellen's, but I knew her very well. I never saw her walk; she ran, she skipped, she jumped. What she was was a BVM.

Since I heard about her death, I have been praying very hard that I can get through this without crying. Like all the BVMs, she was a haven for me, she was a safe spot, and she was home. She was a place that I could be. She was a mother to me. I came from a place that was never safe. When I entered those doors, I was loved, I was educated and I was taught day in and day out that I was a child of God—valuable and loved. I learned that I could not only overcome anything, but everything, and that I could grow up to be anything I wanted. I was important and I was wonderful just for being me.

All kinds of young women felt this way and grew up to do very important things. We became doctors, we became politicians, and we became lawyers. I ran my own businesses, some of them very successfully. However, the most important thing I became was a good mother. I loved my children and still do in a way that my parents weren't able to do, because I had the most remarkable women teach me about loving children. I am so grateful for that.

I've had all kinds of women reach out to me recently and tell me about Sister Johnellen and what she taught them in history. She taught them a love of learning that I learned from all of my teachers. A love that they took with them to become teachers themselves. They learned how to study, how to take notes, and how to become that kind of teacher themselves.

People have reached out from different states, all the way from Miami. Carla Scott, who graduated in 1978, said she was the best teacher she ever had. Going on through college and graduate school, she never had a teacher like Sister Johnellen. She fortified her lifelong passion of learning and teaching. She kept her notes from high school all the way through graduate school, even when she went on to teaching herself. She is so grateful for the role Johnellen played in her life. Janet Marie Walsh said that she was such a sweet, kind person. Bob Hack, who graduated with me, said she was so special. Bob DiGirolamo, who now lives in Ireland, but was a psychology teacher at the time, said that she was a valued colleague and that his heart sank when he heard she had passed.

Sister Johnellen taught with intellect and passion for history. The only teachers at Immaculata who didn't teach that way, I found out later on, actually were not BVMs. Many BVMs told me later on, "We kept that from you, Joan. We didn't want you to know they weren't BVMs. You gave them a difficult time enough. If you found out they weren't BVMs, it would have be awful."

Sister Johnellen was an amazing woman. I got to know Johnellen better many years after I graduated because of a good friend of mine. She had, and still does have, some serious learning issues. She used to put herself down all the time. I would say, "Rose, cut that out." She went into a career taking care of younger children. She was taught by Johnellen. Rosie doesn't live too far from me so we get together. She would say, "I want to see Sister Johnellen. Come with me." On Saturdays twice a month, I would drive Rosie to Wright Hall where Johnellen lived to take her out for lunch. Afterward, we would walk the lakefront.

I had a very serious, personal tragedy of losing a child. I would walk, and Johnellen would skip, and she would say, "Look at the water, Joanie. Look at how vast that is. You can't be angry with God. Just look at the water and think about how beautiful it is. God made that. As big as that water is, that's how many tears you have, but think of how wonderful it is where Ryan is. As many tears as you cry, it will just keep filling up that ocean, but some day you will laugh just as hard."

Every time I was with her, I felt good. As I told Sister Alice Caulfield, when I walked in last night, I felt home. Every time I am in the presence of the BVMs, it feels the same as when I was 13 years old and the same way that every child that has been blessed to be in the presence of, to be taught by, the BVMs feels—that they are home. Now Sister Johnellen is home. I hope that my little five-year-old saw her and said, "Thank you for taking good care of my Mama." All of the alumnae send their hearts and their love. We know that you pray for us; we feel it every day. We want you to know that you are all in our hearts all of the time. You are in my prayers every morning, every night, all of the time. Thank you for all you have ever done for us. God bless you!

Sister Eileen Powell, BVM (Robertrese) *(Read by Sister Marjorie Heidkamp, BVM [Herberdette])*

Johnellen and I met in 1950 when she was teaching first grade at Our Lady of Loretto School in Hempstead, N.Y. I was her eighth grade lunch girl. I remember Johnellen as twice as energetic as the six-year-olds she taught, friendly and fun loving. In the annual Christmas pageant, she taught her children to sing and act "Up on the Housetop." She danced around the stage as if she was one of the students.

In 1967 when I was fresh out of the novitiate and living at Annunciation convent in Chicago prior to going to the Scholasticate, Johnellen called to invite me to her family home for dinner. We sang all the way to her home and back, around the piano after dinner, and every minute in between. Hers was a singing family and I was delighted to share in their joy for the day. Thank you, Johnellen, for lifting the spirits of a lonesome, young sister living in a big city for the first time.

Sister Catherine (Kate) Hendel, BVM

About a year ago, I received an email from a young woman who had been taught by Johnellen. She shared her deep affection for her and how much she meant to her. I put the email in her file. The other day it was brought out again so I contacted this woman. She wanted to be here today with her mother and father, who were also

very dear to Johnellen. Weather prohibited that. She called me yesterday and said that she had put a note out on Facebook to the Immaculata folks. Just as Joan said, there were hundreds of responses on her post. She also sent me a message and this is what I am sharing with you now.

Rommy Cisneros, Former Student *(Read by Sister Catherine (Kate) Hendel, BVM)*

Words cannot describe how blessed I am to be among those that were taught by you. Thank you for the knowledge that you've imparted to me and for sharing your love and life with me. The first person I saw when I came to the United States was you. You comforted me and you made me feel safe. Thank you for the many lessons you taught me and the memories I hold of the beautiful sunrises by the lake. Your knowledge, vision and wisdom in turning this world into a place of peace will live on in me, my children, and my grandchildren. Please know that you were an angel to my mom and dad, Maria and Willie. The girls will be forever grateful to you. We love you, Sister Johnellen. Until we meet again, Rommy (Palacios) Cisneros

Sister Mary Martens, BVM (Loras)

In the opening prayer, we prayed in gratitude for her loyalty to community, to family, and to ministry, and how Johnellen lived those three aspects. I had the privilege of seeing something of all three loyalties.

Loyalty to community: My first mission was here in Dubuque at Wahlert HS in 1959, the year that it opened. Johnellen was part of the first faculty and a collection of a couple thousand students at that point and time. We lived in a convent with some 50 sisters. There were 20 BVMs, 20 Franciscans and eight Presentations, plus two Dominicans. Our community life at Regina convent was just wonderful. Everything that has been said about Johnellen's love, personality and exuberance in life was certainly part of our community living there. The students at Wahlert and at her ministries throughout her life were especially blessed and rose to all the heights that Johnellen demanded of them. At Wahlert, the boys and girls both loved being in class with her and hung around after class. She was a guiding light to them.

Family: We were both at St. Mary Center for Learning in Chicago in the 1960s. One day, a woman, I believe Johnellen's sister-in-law, had her children on one of the beaches in Chicago when there was some kind of a scare and the lifeguard whistled everyone off the beach. The mother of these children died suddenly. Johnellen, for the better part of a year, if not more, took care of those kids in their home, day after day, after school. I think she came back to the convent periodically, but she mothered those kids. It was a marvel to behold.

Jolene Clauer, Mount Carmel Activities Department

Johnellen and I became best friends as soon as she came to live at Mount Carmel. Most of you may remember us dancing and singing up and down every hallway here. She would go over with me to the night program in the Caritas Center because she just loved everything I did and I loved having her with me all the time. The last time I saw Johnellen, she and I led the singing up on fourth floor. She still knew me by name. That's how close we were. I truly miss her.

Sister Joan Newhart, BVM (Joan Michael)

You could say that Johnellen and I went to different schools together. A lot of the people I knew in college had been in class with Johnellen and were very close friends of hers. When I heard of her death, I called one of these friends who was very appreciative. She had asked me so many times how Johnellen was doing. She always repeated to me that when she got into this new school with sisters that she was unfamiliar with and students she didn't know, Johnellen befriended her and made her feel welcome. I thought I should add something from Johnellen's contemporaries to the many memories of her students.