



Wake Stories of Sister Joan Newhart, BVM (Joan Michael)

Marian Hall Chapel, March 20, 2018

Pat McTeague and Sonya Rendón, BVM Associates in Guayaquil, Ecuador *(Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)*

A great woman and a good friend of Nuevo Mundo was Sister Joan Newhart. We feel sorrow for her passing, but we know she is with God. We were so fortunate to have seen her on our last visit to Dubuque and had the chance to reminisce about good times in Ecuador. May she rest in peace.

Christine Olsem, BVM Associate & Employee *(Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)*

I started working in the Office of the Secretary in July 2011. I met Joan within a couple of months when she brought in transcripts of her interviews with Mount Carmel residents. These “Meet-a-Sister” interviews took on a new significance in June 2012 when I was missioned to compose the welcome that is read at a sister’s funeral liturgy. Multiple times in the last six years, Joan’s interview was the only document in a sister’s file that enabled me to put flesh and spirit on the dry bones of a list of missions. Thank you, Joan. I am deeply and forever grateful.

Sister Mary Sattgast, BVM

Joan and I were housemates for 30-some years. Part of that time, Sister Terese Shinnars was with us as well. During that time, we never had a fight. We were always able to get things done together. It has been one of the greatest privileges of my life to have known her that well. She also made arrangements with members of her family to bring me to holiday meals when my family was too far away for me to join them. I will miss Joan, but I am so happy she is with God.

Sister Susan Rink, BVM

Joan and I were both chemistry teachers. She followed me at a couple of missions. I want to talk about the time we shared an apartment. We called it an apartment, but it was really a room, at Michigan State University. We discovered that the room we had was at one end of the campus and our classes were at the other end, and there was no transportation. We each purchased a second-hand bicycle. In the evening after classes, we decided we might as well use our bicycles to see the world. We went bicycling every night and ate supper wherever we found a place that we thought was fun and cheap. Actually, it was a wonderful summer; one I will never forget.

Stephanie Knipper, Student, Clarke University, Dubuque, Iowa

I am a Clarke student who has been visiting Joan for the past two years. My sophomore year we started a project where we interviewed a BVM sister and I was paired with Joan. Ironically enough, we both almost didn’t do it because we were afraid of meeting someone new since we’re both introverts. It was nice that we were both nervous. I am really happy that we didn’t back out, because if we had, I wouldn’t have met someone so amazing. I met with her every week for a semester. I learned how similar we really were. We learned at our first meeting that our birthdays are just a day apart. She was so much like me in many ways, like how we interact with people. We are both very quiet unless we are around people with whom we are comfortable. One thing she did that was exactly like I would do was when we were walking to her room. In the hallway, there was a huge group of people. She had her walker and said, “I really don’t want to walk through all these people. I don’t want to bother them.” So we went all the way through the library, in one door and out the other end, just to avoid going through the crowd. She was just a great person. I learned so many life lessons from her. I am very happy that she is now with God.

Mary Ann McGinley

I did not live with Joan; I tried to blackmail her. I was a senior at Immaculata HS in Chicago back in the 1950s when we students didn't know anything about the nuns. I found out that she was Bob Newhart's sister. I decided that this class would be a straight A. I went in and very forcefully said, "I know Bob Newhart is your brother." She said, "Yes, I have two sisters, too." Then she asked about my family. Do I have brothers? Do I have sisters? I couldn't steer her back to my negotiations. Then she said, "You better go. You are going to be late for class." That was how I met Joan Newhart.

Sister Donard Collins, BVM

I am in the Set of 1949, the set that Joan entered. Because Joan entered after college, she was one of the older members. Three-and-a half or four years when you are seventeen seems so much older. When we reached our eighties, we realized that those few years really didn't make much difference. In 1964, we were tertians at Clarke College after our 15 years in the community. Joan wanted to play ping-pong one day, but couldn't find anyone to play with. Anyone who knows me knows that when any ball comes near me, even a ping-pong ball, I cover my face immediately. So we played ping-pong and, when we had finished, Joan said to me, "Donard, you are one step higher than a backboard." I was so naïve that I didn't even know it was an insult.

Sister Mary Healey, BVM

I also entered with Joan. I'm glad that Christine Olsem mentioned all those interviews that Joan wrote. I knew about them, but I had forgotten. They are probably some of the best samples of Joan's excellent writing. It's always been a disappointment to me that with all the ground she covered, all the things she learned and did, that she did not publish much after we left the novitiate. Now in the novitiate, we were constantly putting on entertainments. Joan wrote them and I generally starred in them because I am capable of learning yards and yards of dialogue. I would like to read some of those interviews because she was a superb writer.

Sister Margaret (Peggy) Geraghty, BVM

I lived with Joan in St. Louis and at Carmel HS in Chicago, but my roots with her go back to Immaculata. I was a student when she was a teacher there. She always gave me a bad time for not taking chemistry. I would like to share two memories. One is a memory from Sister Mary Frances Ries that she asked me to share and the second is my own.

Mary Frances remembers when the Bob Newhart Show was on in the 1970s when we were in St. Louis together. It was *required* watching in the convent. The night it premiered, we decided to give a premier party with Joan as the celebrity guest. If anybody remembers the Carol Burnett take-off of *Gone With the Wind* when Carol dresses in the drapes, well, Margaret Clark, who was our cook and is Sister Marge Clark's mother, made Joan an outfit from an old pair of drapes. Mary Frances says that she found every flower in the house and pinned them to Joan. So Joan was the celebrity that night and she did it with such good humor.

My memory of her is also one of good humor. I have many others. She was generous, smart, loving; I loved everything about her. She always said that my biggest weakness was that I laughed at her jokes all the time. I will never forget this one. A group of our faculty and students were going to the Smoky Mountains on a camping trip over spring break. They were in four cars. We had someone on our faculty and in our convent who was a darling. We loved her, but she always had a little dark side. She always feared the worst whenever something was going to happen. As they were about to leave, this sister looked into every car and waved goodbye to everybody with a heartfelt farewell, wishing them a good trip. Joan said later that everybody thought she was just saying goodbye, but she was actually studying their faces so she could tell the undertaker what they all looked like.

Sister Judith Callahan, BVM

In 1987, I was just returning from Ecuador after five years. I was going to start an MA program at Mundelein. I didn't even know how to take out a book and I had never touched a computer. I had three wonderful BVM tutors that helped me. Joan let me play in her computer lab. She showed me how to use a mouse, how to play Solitaire

and all the things that could be found on a computer. Sister Pat Donahoe tutored me next on the Apple II computer and showed me how to save files and much more. Sister Frances Loretta Berger showed me how to check out a book. Joan has helped in more recent years at the Roberta Kuhn Center. As I was teaching beginning computer, I learned all kinds of techniques and tips from Joan. Thank you, Joan, for all your good work and your help.

Virginia (Ginny) Brittain, Sister

You all know how funny Joan was. I thought I would try to give one illustration from the last six days when I was here. One of these very supportive ladies left the room, I can't remember who it was, and as she left, she said, "I have to go now." Then Joan said, "So do I, in every sense of the word." She kept me laughing for all of my 74 years. I'm sure she'll still convey a lot of that.

Sister Mary Jo Keane, BVM

Many years ago, I used to go visit an Irish uncle after school. I would leaf through the magazines he had. One was the *National Inquirer*. Lo and behold, on page 3, at the bottom, there was an article about Joan Newhart, the sister of Bob. It was a cute little article. I clipped it out and showed it to Joan one time. I gave it to her and she said, "Oh, no! I never thought a BVM would be reading the *National Inquirer*."

Sister Donna Bebensee, BVM

Since Ginny didn't tell this story, I'm going to tell. Joan was in the postulate and hadn't been in very long when she received a letter from her mother explaining that Ginny had fallen and skinned her knees. She cried so hard that all the family gathered around to try to console her. No one was successful. Finally, Ginny stopped crying and said, "If Joanie was here, I'd be laughing by now."

Sister Terese Shinnors, BVM

Several years ago, I was grieving the loss of a very dear niece. A friend said to me, "The only thing worse than losing Katie would be never having known Katie." Today, I am thinking that about Joan. The only thing worse than losing Joan would be to never to have known this woman who had such a gift for friendship.

Sister Diane O'Donnell, BVM

I was with Joanie at Immaculata when I got word that the school was to close, but nobody knew that yet. Joanie came in one day and said, "Well, how is everything going?" I said, "Joanie, sit down. I need to tell you something." I told her that the enrollment was down and things did not look good. She said, "Oh, my goodness! I'm sorry I asked you." Then she said, "Fear not. We can do it. All will be well."

Harry Gustafson

I've been so blessed to be part of this extended family. I was also Joan's date. My business had me in Dubuque every now and then. When I came here, I always made sure we would go out for dinner or lunch. I am going to miss her dearly. I think in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, mighty Theseus said about nuns, "Thrice-blessed are they that mold to that life." When I think of Joan, her three blessings were her calling, her family and all of you, and her love of entertainment, and not just being fun and funny. She started it in the family. Everybody talks about Bob. Bob's wonderful, but there are other people. Brittians have a son who was on *Saturday Night Live* for a year-and-a-half. There is Pauline's son Jim who was the president at Wheaton Drama. My own daughter works for a theatre company in Milwaukee. Joan started it all for everybody and she will be dearly missed.

Sister Loretta Hubl, BVM

Before I came here, I lived in Glendale, Calif. I lived there for many, many years. My home in Glendale was Holy Family. We seemed to be the host of many events. We hosted teaching BVMs how to use a computer. Joan was coming out to California to teach the workshop. I volunteered to pick her up at the airport, even though I didn't know who she was. I made sure I saw her picture in the *BVM Directory*. I enlarged her face and put it on a big popsicle stick. I went to the airport and stood there, being only four feet tall, with all the people coming through. I

held my sign up high to greet her. I think if she could have crawled into a hole and buried herself, she would have done it. She said, "What do you think people think when they see that sign?" I said, "They don't know you any more than I do." We had the best time having her as our houseguest. God be with you, Joan. We are going to miss you.

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

I was at a meeting where we were at different tables. I had said something actually kind of smart aleck at the table. As the meeting ended and I was walking out of the room, I heard Joan speaking to a group of people. She said, "Do you know what Diane Forster said?" It doesn't matter what I said, but she had caught it and it was fine. I said, "Do you know how seldom I'm quoted?" That was a high compliment for me from Joan. Secondly, on my mind is that Joan has been a member of our Schola for many years. We have her place of honor in the back row of the Schola. We will all miss Joan among us in our music, especially the alto row. So we have to have Joan sing along today and bless us by sending us another alto!