



Wake Stories of Sister Patricia Marie Potok, BVM (Liberata)

Marian Hall Chapel, March 23, 2018

Sister Mary Jean Ferry, BVM

I came to Mount Carmel three years ago right before Thanksgiving. Of course, I was very lonely that first Thanksgiving. Pat must have sensed this because she called me and invited me to her apartment for Thanksgiving along with four others. She gave us a delicious dinner with turkey, dressing, pies, cranberry sauce, the whole works. I am grateful to you, Pat, for your great hospitable heart.

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM

I never knew Pat as Liberata. I did not meet Pat until 1980 when I came to serve at Marian Hall as the administrator and Pat was one of our special nurses. In the beginning days when we worked together, Pat was the nurse supervisor for the fourth floor and then she became the nurse supervisor for the first floor. I have to say Pat was extremely committed and concerned about all of the women on the floors on which she served. She was always trying to help them.

Pat, as we know, had a rather special gift for problem solving and sometimes a unique approach to medical solutions. Her goal was to help the sister and make the sister more peaceful. I am grateful for the years that Pat and I spent together here at Marian Hall. We were neighbors during the last 10 years that I have been back in Dubuque. Probably my greatest privilege was being able to journey with Pat, in particular during the last month of her life when she was experiencing such intense pain and there was nothing we could do. She did not have a creative solution to her own illness as she had for many of our other women. The only thing I was able to do was to stand with her, be present, to accept the reality, and let her know that she was not alone, that we were with her. I think that she appreciated that quiet presence. I will remember not so much Pat the nurse, but Pat the person who experienced a very mysterious illness and together we stood in silence and accepted it. Thank you, Pat.

Sister Margaret Sannasardo, BVM

Pat and I went to Immaculata together and entered together with five others. We never had the same pathway as we went through the missions, but anytime I came to Mount Carmel, Pat had that gentle, loving smile. She was quiet. She liked sports as I remember from Immaculata. She didn't play, but she was always so supportive of us. I just remember Pat being so gentle, loving and quiet. Whenever I came here to Mount Carmel, she always had an embrace for me. Love to you, Pat. I know you are resting in God's loving arms.

Sister Maureen Patrice Fury, BVM

I, too, have experienced Pat's hospitality. When Sister Jean Beste and I moved into the circle apartments in November, Pat invited us to her home with her sister for the Thanksgiving meal. I am very grateful to Pat for that. I would like to say I witnessed Pat's determination. On mornings when I was walking very early, Pat would be coming over to the Motherhouse. She was so determined to get to her office and up to Mass. I thank Pat for her giftedness to us.

Sister Donna Schauf, BVM

I lived with Pat for two years in the circle. There are two stories that I remember. She would talk about Clarksdale, Miss. She really loved that place. Because they were very poor, she and her students would make donuts on Saturday to sell on Sunday at the Mass to raise a little money. She was very proud of being about to do that. The other story is about the two beautiful trees in front of the Motherhouse. She planted those trees. She read somewhere that if you put a little beer in the water when you water it helps them grow. That beer really worked!

Sister Lou Anglin, BVM

I will always associate Pat with the Spiders and the great care that she took in taking care of that very holy place. What probably impressed me most, other than the care and the love she had for it, was the relationships that she built. I don't think there was anyone who ever lived on that lake that she didn't know and know where they were from and who they were related to. Still, when I go up there now and talk with folks that we deal with up there, the first question is always, "Well, how is Sister Pat?" The holy place has just become holier as far as I am concerned. I thank Pat for the great care that she gave to so many of us, and the Spiders.

Sister Mary Janine Wolff, BVM

I remember Pat as the beautiful companion of one in my set, Sister Therese Miller. I also remember her up at the Spiders the once or twice I was there. The best time for me was when I was first missioned to Cedar Rapids to teach first grade. She had just left there. The first day of school, this one came in with the goldfish, this one came in with the gerbil, this one came in with the flowers . . . They were not first grade. These were second graders that she had had in first grade and they kept those things over the summer. The classroom was so organized that I had a very easy time. By the way, it was the one and only time I had 18 children.

Sister Donard Collins, BVM

I lived with Pat when she was still Liberata at Holy Cross in Chicago. We both taught first grade. Frequently, people would get us mixed up because we were just about the same height. I also worked with Pat when she came to Mount Carmel to minister as a nurse. I happened to be the 3–11 p.m. supervisor in the late 1970s and Pat was up on fourth floor. The aides very lovingly called her "the little general" because she did run a tight ship. Her care was for the sisters, her deep concern for each one of the sisters, because at that point they were the ones with memory loss. Pat cared for them very lovingly.

It has been hard these past months to see Pat become the person that she did at the end. I find that very difficult. I had the privilege of spending some time with her last Saturday. I said to her as I left, "Pat, now today is the Feast of St. Patrick and you are named Patricia. It would be so wonderful if you could just go to God today." She did not go to God that day. On Sunday morning when I was told that Pat died, I again sat by her bedside and said, "Pat, you were just being stubborn yesterday and would not go on an Irish day." Pat, you have been a good friend over these many years. It was wonderful just to be able to knock at your door and walk in.

Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM

I knew Pat in the Liberata days. When we entered, at least at our time, Pat was the shortest person and we lined up according to our heights. Whether we cheated or not by ducking down or stretching is another story. Pat was then the mother of our set (*first in line*). It was a title and position that she cherished to her dying day. We all knew that. Later on, I was at the Roberta Kuhn Center at Mount Carmel.

As Marge said, my path didn't cross very often with Pat's during our ministry years. Once I worked here, she was across the hall in her foot care office and I was in the Roberta Kuhn Center office. We really became close during that time. She talked a great deal about her grandnephew. I heard a lot about that little fellow. I could tell that she loved him and that family meant a great deal to her. Sister Margaret McGinn and I in our later years and when Pat was still in charge of The Spiders, went up to help open up. Maggie and I both agreed that Pat was in charge. Whatever she said, we would do. Thanks, Pat, for all you've done for so many people.

Sister Carol Cook, BVM

I knew Pat in her early teaching days. She was the first grade teacher at Holy Cross in Chicago. I had kindergarten. In those days, we had crowded classrooms. I still don't know how both of us managed to leave our classrooms at the same time. Maybe it was lunch hour, I'm not sure. I had one child who spoke Spanish. I knew nothing about Spanish. He was a very intelligent young man so he caught on to what was happening. He also was mischievous. He came in one day with a box that had a baby bird in it. I thought, *I can't keep this bird in the classroom. What are we going to do?* I had no way to communicate with him. Somehow, I knew that Pat had Spanish at some time and knew enough to help me. The two of us took the Spanish-speaking student and went out to the convent courtyard to put the bird under the bush. Pat told him that the mommy bird would come and get him and everything would be fine. He said, "That's OK. We've got more at home."

I lived with Pat again in Clarksdale, Miss., and yes, it was a special place. I didn't see her in the classroom because the high school, where I was, was very separate from the elementary school. I know that her classroom was conducted just as we know Pat. Everything was in order. The children were quiet, but satisfied and happy. Pat had a special attachment to the dog. We didn't have much in Clarksdale, but she had this dog. Thanks, Pat, for the memories.

Sister Floria Shannon, BVM

I had a few interesting events with Pat. One was a trip to Boston. We drove Sister Honora Wilson to a sabbatical event out there. It was very eventful. You must know that neither one of us are very talkative. I must admit there wasn't a lot of conversation, but we certainly enjoyed the trip. We went to Boston and saw many things there. We went up into Canada so we could see the Niagara Falls at night, which was absolutely gorgeous. It was a fun, interesting trip.

Another big event was our ride in a hot air balloon. Pat came to me one day and said, "Would you like to go for a ride in a hot air balloon?" I think I must have gone white as I said, "I'm deathly afraid of heights." She said, "If you go with me, I will pay your way." "Really?" Sure enough, we went. It was on Father's Day, the third Sunday of June. I don't remember the year. There are pictures around of the balloon being blown up. The man said to us, "Once that basket sits up straight, you have so many seconds to get in that basket." There were eight of us – four on one side and four on the other. There was a smaller balloon that was going to go up with us also. The basket hit me about at chest level so I felt safe as I hung on for dear life. You really don't know you are moving. It was an absolutely, fun, gorgeous day. The pilot of the balloon had to get permission to land in a farmer's field, but he couldn't reach anyone because it was Father's Day. Our half-hour trip ended up being well over an hour.

An important part of being on a hot air balloon ride are the bottles of champagne. When we landed, a van was there with a card table set up with white table clothes, bottles of champagne and boxes of little green Andes' mints. Champagne is an important part of the balloon ride because originally, the balloons were made of paper and if a spark started the balloon on fire, they would grab the bottles of champagne, shake them and put the fire out. We had great fun. For the many years we have been together, thank you, Pat.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

I have been here only two-and-a-half years. My contact with Pat had been through the fall drive to get sisters and staff inoculated for the flu. Last week, I had an appointment at Grand River Medical. The first nurse comes in and does all the preliminary things before the doctor sees the patient. We struck up a little conversation and I mentioned that I work at Mount Carmel. She said, "Oh, did you get your flu shot?" I said, "Yes." She described having worked here at some time in the past and commented on how Pat regimented everybody to be sure they were inoculated each year. I thought it was interesting how the influence of what we do goes far and wide.

Sister Catherine Dominick, BVM

I also lived with Pat at Holy Cross. She went out to every butcher to get white feathers to make wreaths for Christmas decorations. We collected these feathers, put them in a pillowcase and put them through the washer.

Afterwards, we would put them on a bed in one of the big rooms. Well, someone mistakenly opened a window and the feathers ended up all over the floor. We all had to pick them up.

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

There was a sister I had lived with who came here to Mount Carmel and was happy here for many years. There came the time when she needed to move to Marian Hall. This was going to be a great difficulty for her. Pat sat down to talk with her one day. At the end of the conversation, she had agreed to come to Marian Hall. I think that that kindness and confidence that Pat could convey to a sister in distress was invaluable for them and us. At the end of the conversation, I remember Pat saying, "Yes, she will go to Marian Hall. After a number of tears, she agreed to go." It was safe with Pat for that sister to say, "Yes, I will go."