



Wake Stories of Ethel Dignan, BVM (Howard)
Marian Hall Chapel, June 20, 2018

Michelle McMinn, Niece (*Via e-mail.*)

Ethel was a source of inspiration at many times in my life when big decisions needed to be made. She was selfless and yet took good care of herself most especially in the past 20 years when she struggled and depended on God as her source of strength. Years ago, I was let go from a position in a company where the employees were like family. At that time, I was unknowingly depressed. Ethel flew down for the day and we spent time together. Her support was unmeasurable as she gave me permission to grieve and that day she breathed hope back into my life. Thank you, Ethel, for all of your selfless contributions to my life. I love you. Michelle

Kathleen Ellertson, Niece

I am Dee Dee's oldest daughter and Ethel's fan. She was such a part of my life. We were part of each other's lives for years and years. As a lifelong learner, she really instilled curiosity in me. She encouraged me, that no matter what, to keep learning, keep opening new doors. She was very supportive in the work I was doing with art and with Thomas Merton. I taught a class at Holy Trinity in Sacramento. Ethel was thrilled! We talked every week about the next week's lesson. That's just one example of the kind of energy she had. She was my spiritual mentor. She absolutely led the way for women in the church. For the future yet to come, she will be rooting for us all up there. I could be up here all day, so I will leave it at that. I love you, Ethel.

Sister Ann Cronin, BVM

I lived with Ethel in 1971. My living situation was a rather unique one. I moved in with Ethel who lives in a duplex next door to her parents Frank and Mary and her sister Pat. Shortly after I moved in, Pat decided she wanted to live with Ethel, so I moved in with her parents. I had a bedroom there, my clothes and things were there, and I would sleep there at night, but most of the time I spent next door. I would come home from school, change clothes in the other place, and then go next door to study and do what I had to do. Sometimes I would bake cookies because they loved my cookies. I would fix dinner for Pat and when Ethel got home, she and I would have dinner. The other piece I remember most about living there was Frank. Frank was a kind, gentle, man. He was probably in his early 80s, but at that point, I was only twenty-something and I thought he was ancient. Frank had a shopping cart that he used to roll back and forth to Kmart and Kmart knew he had the cart. He would walk a couple of blocks to Kmart, pick up what he was getting, bring it back and park it at the house. The other piece I remember about him was Folgers coffee, mountain grown. In the morning, he would get up around four o'clock. Ethel and Pat got up at ungodly hours. He would go over and make them a pot of coffee and then he would come back and go back to bed. When I got up hours later, there would be a pot of coffee waiting for me. One more thing about Frank. LaDonna mentioned him being an avid reader. I remember him sitting down and reading *National Geographic* magazines cover to cover. He could discuss anything in the world. He was hugely intelligent. My happy days of living there are unique and I will never forget them.

Sister Bernadette McManigal

I am grateful to Ethel for two different experiences in my life. When she was studying at Fordham, she frequently came to Bellerose, N.Y., to spend weekends or a little spare time. We thoroughly enjoyed her for both the intellectual curiosity that she brought and her joy of life, as well as the times she tried to learn to cook. My second

experience with Ethel was in 1967. She was appointed the tertian directress for those of us in the Set of 1952. She planned a varied and intellectually stimulating summer. We had a wonderful time. Ethel, thank you.

Sister Lavern Dolphin, BVM

After the community assembly gathering we had in June of 2017, I went to Ethel's room to tell her all about it. I told her how we were in the Motherhouse Chapel at round tables. I share with her some of the meetings. She was very alert, listened attentively and tried so hard to speak, but the words didn't come out so that I could understand her. I ended with how we sang a mantra that said, "I am with you on the journey and I will never leave you. I am with you on the journey, always with you." Then I said, "Ethel, that is what God is saying to you right now. 'I am with you on the journey.'" Ethel looked at me and said very clearly, "I know."

Sister Roberta White, BVM

I lived with Ethel after she retired in 1991. For five years, we were on a ministry grant near the Los Angeles airport working with new Hispanic immigrants who were mostly working at the airport. She was teaching parenting skills to new parents. I was amazed with her fluency in Spanish. She had just retired from a very prestigious job. For her to come and work with the new arrivals and very, very poor immigrants was just a great inspiration for me. I will never forget Ethel for that. She was just marvelously wonderful with those parents.

Sister Theresa McNerney

Ethel and I entered together and spent a long time together. Ethel lived in Northern California while I lived in Southern California. We probably got together every one or two months. That was a very wonderful time for me. I knew her sister Pat. I did not know her parents. Ethel and I were totally different. Ethel was very intelligent. I hadn't finished high school when I entered. Ethel, I, and Rose Ann Weber entered late, which is partly why we became good friends. Since I hadn't finished high school, I had to take a class in civics from SM Michael Flynn. All of the senior novices who were going to teach needed to take it for their credentials. I was taking it for a high school credit. The senior novices, when the class was over, all went up to say, "We didn't have time to do this. We didn't have time to outline this book." I went up and said, "I didn't have time." She said, "You will outline that book during your two-week vacation." Ethel was trying to help me learn all this stuff. I said, "I don't know this." She said, "Now Theresa, just think back to 1932 and what Roosevelt did." I said, "Ethel, I wasn't born." I loved Ethel very much. Ethel was a psychologist, but she did not want to be a psychologist. However, she was very obedient and went to study psychology. She wanted to be a Spanish teacher. As Roberta just told you, Ethel got to work with the Hispanics. After that ministry grant was finished, she came to St. Louis with Barbara Gaul and myself. We expected her to stay for some time, but another sister called and invited her to come to their house. Ethel jumped at it because she wanted to go up and be with her niece and her brother; she wanted to be part of their lives.

Sister Jeroma Day, BVM

I will never think of Ethel without thinking of an experience I had when Ethel taught us psychology when we were novices. Our class was in a St. Mary's classroom on the second floor overlooking the river. I recall one day that the sky was a blue as you could want, the clouds were fluffy white and the trees were rich green. Ethel looked out the window and said to us, "Sometimes it's so beautiful, it hurts." I hope that the beauty that God has for Ethel is so beautiful, but that it does not hurt in the way it can hurt us here on earth. May she enjoy to the fullest the beauty that God has had in store for her.

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM

This is a story about Ethel and a suggestion for all of us. Ethel courageously went down to Southern California to be at one of our ministry sites to work with our Hispanic people. We know of her commitment to our Hispanic people, to immigrants and refugees. It's no coincidence that we are celebrating her funeral liturgy today, a day that is an extremely powerful moment for all of us. Let us pray to and with Ethel for some solution to our current border crisis. Ethel's prayer is powerful. We need Ethel's commitment.

Sister Bertha Fox, BVM

I was privileged to travel with Ethel out to California, probably the last time she was able to travel. She visited friends, relatives, and colleagues. It was impressive to see the esteem held for her by all of the different people, a varied cross-section of society. I lived with her at Clarke for a few years. There are many stories about her when she used to help at the community mental health center. It was during the full habit days and she had to dress as a woman psychologist rather than a religious psychologist. She had to have a secular wardrobe. When she returned to Clarke at the end of the day, she had to go up the back stairs. The problems she had sometimes. She would go to Stampfer's department store to buy a few things that you would not wear with a habit. She had to use a check with Sisters of Charity on it. You can draw your own conclusions. It was sometimes difficult because she was a striking person when she dressed up.

Sister Dolores (Dee) Myers, BVM

I lived in the experimental convent in San Matteo, Calif., the one where she left her friends in Southern California to go north. We had a great time. Last night, I wrote down my remembrances. I won't tell them all, because there are so many. This one, however, is so funny and I just enjoyed it so much. Every morning, Ethel would get up to go for a walk across the street in Central Park. She would walk over there with her cane. She would speed along El Camino and just enjoy the park walking. I walked in the other direction and when we came together, we would go have breakfast. This is what Ethel would always say at breakfast. "Dee, have you heard the weather report?" This is rather mundane, very unlike Ethel. Then she would say, "The skies are sunny today with a high of 74 degrees midday. Strong winds coming from the west on the bridges. Small craft advisory warning." I would say, "Well, Ethel, are you going to take the yacht out today or are you going to drive across the Golden State Bridge?" That was Ethel; it was always lofty. I loved living with her. She would always come down to St. Matthias Church in Redwood City where I worked because she loved the priest, Monsignor Flynn who is a very intelligent man. Ethel said, "I want to come and hear an intelligent homily." She would drive down and after Mass, she would always say to Monsignor, "Thank you, very much."

Sister Peggy Devereux, BVM

I'm going to follow up because I lived there too. I was a new teacher in San Francisco. I kept watching her because she was newly retired and thought, "I don't think she knows how to retire." When I thought I knew her enough, I said to her, "You don't know how to retire." She would go to Sacred Heart every day bright and early to help the sisters. I said, "There's no difference with your life now then there was before." During the Easter holiday, I had a car and I said, "I'm going to teach you how to relax." She said, "OK." We got in the car and went to a place everybody visits on vacations. We were caught in the rain and couldn't go any farther. We stopped at this motel and this young man in charge of it said, "I'm sorry. We're closed." "What do you mean you're closed." "Well, we are not getting beds ready." "Well, may we come in and sit in a chair all night?" He said, "You can come in." He didn't know what to do next. We ended up in his bedroom, without him, in bunk beds. After we were settled, he called his mom and said, "Mom, guess what. I have two nuns living with me."

Kathleen Ellertson, Niece

I just want to add one thing. About the relaxation, when I was raising the kids just before and then after the divorce, we didn't have any money. Ethel made sure that every summer we went up to the house in Phillippsville for a week or two. I never knew that she every paid anything for us to stay there. I thought it was a complimentary thing from the convent. I didn't find out until years later that Britt and her brother both got to experience going up to the cabin, as we called it, and having a wonderful vacation every year with her. She did relax when we were there and I cooked.

Sister Mary Janine Wolfe, BVM

I'm a member of Ethel's set. I don't remember when she became interested in Spanish, but she taught us a song in the novitiate. I only remember the first two lines of it. "Adios, o Madre mia. Adios, Reina del Mar. Adios, o Madre mia. Adios, adios, adios."

Sister Barbara Gaul, BVM

Ethel really did like to look nice. She always did look nice and she dressed beautifully. One time, she told me that I needed to be very careful. I should only wear a high-necked blouse because wearing a low-necked blouse showed the wrinkles.

Sister Pat Donahoe, BVM

I was in her set also. No one has mentioned that our Valentine arrived on Valentine's Day, click-clacking down the hallways of Mount Carmel in her high heels and her pillbox hat.

Sister Mary A Healey, BVM *(Via e-mail.)*

Ethel was in the small set behind me and we were friends though seldom saw each other after she moved to California. When I taught on Long Island, Ethel was studying at Fordham. When the university wasn't in session, she came to one of the three BVM convents. She was at ours in June when Fordham was closed, but we still were in school. Michaelita Kelly and I taught eighth grade and planned a class picnic to which I invited Ethel. I was aware that Ethel had no brothers (*Ethel had two brothers who died in childhood.*) or nephews and had attended a girls' high school and Mundelein College, but it didn't occur to me that Ethel never had seen adolescent boys eat. It blew her mind! At lunchtime, the kids sat on the ground, but the three sisters had a card table and a nice lunch provided by mothers. Michaelita and I sat across from each other with Ethel between us with an unobstructed view of Louie. He was a nice boy, bigger than I and still growing. Louie brought his lunch in a shopping bag. When he finished all that his mother had prepared, he went to the grocery store at the corner and returned with a pint of ice cream and a tall can of Hawaiian punch, pulled out a can opener and a spoon, and proceeded to dessert. Ethel's jaw dropped nearly to the table. She still was exclaiming when we reached home.

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

Among Ethel's materials, there were several quotes from Teilhard de Chardin. I thought I would read one of them to conclude our sharing. "The most satisfying thing in life is to have been able to give a large part of oneself to others."