



Wake Stories of Maurine Therese Thiel, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, July 3, 2018

Sister Joanne Simonini, BVM

I am one of the lucky people who lived with Maurine Therese in Kansas City. Three of us in Dubuque now were together in Kansas City – Dolores Marie McHugh, Lolly (Mary Ellen) Zimmermann, and myself. The rest of that community is no longer living. Everything that was said about Maurine and her pictures on display certainly exemplify what I experienced personally of her teaching expertise and her willing to step in. We had some situations where she stepped right in and picked up the pieces in primary classes. She helped the associate teachers to do that. I always most enjoyed Maurine and continued to enjoy her here until she was unable to share with us.

Sister Therese Frello, BVM

About ten years ago, Joan Stritesky and I moved to Dubuque into the BVM Circle Apartments. We shared an apartment complex with Maurine Therese and Therese Fox. We had many evenings when we shared supper, in either their dining room or in ours. We shared many a good time and many a laugh. I remember those years with Therese and Maurine. Then we moved to the Motherhouse. Now, Maurine was on the third floor at one end and Joan and I were on the third floor at the other end. We decided we had better do this again and invited her to come down every evening to our room. A very good aide was wonderful to bring her down. We would have popcorn and different treats. Maurine just loved it. She enjoyed the program. She laughed. She was her old self. We saw that part in her maybe two weeks before she died. So it was really a shock when it did happen. Maurine loved life. That's what I loved about Maurine. She loved life and she loved people. Every time we got together, we always knew she would say to us, "Where's Therese? When is Therese coming?" We would say to her, "Therese is not coming." "Where is she?" "She's in heaven." "She's in heaven?" "Yes." Isn't it wonderful? Maurine and Therese are together again.

Sister Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

I lived with Maurine at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago. She taught first graders in a building separate from the high school. We had an agreement that when she wants to raise money for projects in her first-grade classroom, she would have all the little children draw a picture. They would come to my classroom of high schoolers, walk up and down the aisle with their pictures, and the high schoolers would buy their pictures. I would always warn them before the younger students came up that they could not pay less than a dime for a picture and that every first grader's picture had to be purchased, and they were not to throw them away where the first graders would find them. It was a great treat. Actually, it was a treat for the high schoolers too, because they so enjoyed having those little children come and explain their pictures before they were purchased. It was great to work with Maurine.

Sister Joan Stritesky, BVM

You could say so much about Maurine Therese and her relationships with others and us. One thing that was remarkable about her is that she could keep a straight face while I was telling a story and she wouldn't give it away as some people would. She really had eyes that told what she was thinking. When we would watch a program on television, usually mysteries, she would look over to the side, just slide her eyes over without moving her head, and give approval or not. She did something like that when she was lying in bed. The only way she talked was by squeezing Therese's hand and shooting her eyes off towards me. I would say something to her. If

she wanted to find out whether it was true or not, she would look toward Therese. You could tell by her eyes that she didn't know the answer before that. Her eyes told so much about who she was. They were alive. They were loving. They were very caring. They really were wonderful.

Mike Keating, Cousin

I am the youngest of a very large, long line of Keatings. My view of Sister Therese is very much from the caboose looking at the train at the end of the tunnel. As you all know, she was a very special woman. I just want to give a bit of a context to the family she came from. Uncle Max and Aunt Marge were truly a very unique family within our family. From my memory, they had always lived in the house where my grandparents had lived in Chicago on Iowa Street. It was a tiny, two-bedroom house. My grandparents had seven kids and two uncles living with them. There must have been about 14 or 15 living there and Max Thiel lived there as well. Uncle Max, who was German, scared everyone. He had a heart of gold, but a voice of steel. Aunt Marge was a constant giver. When my dad died, she was one of the first there, cleaning the kitchen and making food for the family. She was always making sure that places were set. Barbara Ann's (Maurine's) brother Jimmy had one of the biggest personalities I ever met. Everyone wanted him to give their eulogy because he gave great eulogies. Max, the youngest, was the FBI agent. For a young boy, and all of us young kids, that had an aura of mystery and elitism. It was something so out of the ordinary for this very ordinary family.

Barbara Ann was the quiet one in that group. My early memories of her were of wearing the hat that you all used to wear. I don't remember exactly how it looked, but I remember it was very frightening. It wasn't until I became older that I developed a strong relationship with Barbara Ann. My son Demetrius is here. She was especially kind and generous to my family in very unassuming ways. We started getting these Christmas cards from a secret Santa made out to my son. I couldn't figure out for the longest time who was sending them. It wasn't until this weekend that I told my son it was Barbara Ann. She was giving me all the credit. She was also very generous to my mother, who had dementia for a long time. Her constant kindness to my family and me is something I will be forever grateful. This was done when she was not a spring chicken; she had many other things going on. She will remain very close to me in my heart. The memories of the family, the Thiels, and Max's brother Jimmy will always be part of my memories as well.

Sister Kate Keating, BVM, Cousin

I would like to share about five memories of Maurine. Maurine and I grew up in Chicago on Iowa Street at the west end of Our Lady of Angels parish. Eight cousins lived on the same block. Three parents were Keatings – Maurine's mother Marge, my dad Bill and their brother Mike. Maurine was the oldest of the eight cousins so I really didn't grow up with her. I grew up with Max, and that was a problem. I did not get to know Maurine until I entered the BVMs. I got an assignment to be a principal in Chicago at a tough school in Cabrini Green. I had three new primary teachers and I didn't know anything about primary kids. I called Maurine and asked, "Would you please work with these teachers?" Of course, she said yes. For a whole week, she came over after school and worked with the teachers. She continued to do this afterward, too. As we all know, she was very creative. I remember the one story where she took kids on "vacations." They did all the planning in the classroom – what kind of clothes to bring, warm or cool, and anything else that would fit in one suitcase. The day came to "leave" and they were ready. They made something that looked like a suitcase. All of a sudden, a little kid started crying. Maurine said, "What's the matter?" He said, "I forgot to say goodbye to my mother."

Maurine's dad was my godfather. My dad died when I was in high school, so he took over. He was a special guy. When I came to Mount Carmel, Maurine and I got together. She told me that her dad had to pay extra money to get me into the community. My response to her was "Every penny was worth it." As a kid, I walked pigeon-toed. Uncle Max said to me, "I want you to walk with your feet out. Stick them out like a duck." So I did. Believe it or not, I began to walk straight. To this day, I not only can walk like a duck, I can talk like a duck. You can ask some of my cousins' kids. Iowa Street was a good place to grow up. I will always remember it and I will always remember the people. Rest in peace, Barbara Ann. Enjoy your new Iowa Street.

Max Thiel, Brother

Her first message from heaven was “Don’t talk long.” As has been mentioned, there were three children in our family. My sister was the oldest, then my brother Jim and myself. I knew early on that I was going to be closer to my sister than to my brother. In the late 1940s, there was no TV, but there was the radio. On Saturday, my brother Jim wanted to listen to the opera while Barb wanted to listen to Notre Dame football. You know which side of the fence I was on.

Her baptism name was Barbara Ann. She was affectionately called Skip, but I’m not sure of the reason for that. It came from father, but everybody called her Skip. Her religious name was Sister Maurine Therese. Maurine was a very special name because she went to St. Mary HS and idolized Sister Maurine Gearen. She absolutely idolized her. If you met Sister Maurine, you knew exactly what a wonderful, wonderful woman she was. She was the inspiration for Barb to become a BVM sister. There is an interesting story about that. She had relayed her ideas to my mother; they were very close. Then she had to go in and tell my father that she was thinking about becoming a nun. My father was in bed. There’s a cemetery called Mount Carmel in Chicago. She went into my father and said, “I decided, after much prayer and thinking, I want to go to Mount Carmel.” He, in his inevitable style, said, “Why do you want to go to the cemetery?” She had to explain to him what Mount Carmel was.

She was, obviously, very good to me. She was always the giving person some of you have spoken about. The way I will remember her will be the same as many of you. I saw a documentary one time about the Panama Canal on its 100th anniversary. They were marveling about the fact that over a hundred years, it continued to work as it worked on the first day of its existence. They were curious about how it could do that over a hundred years. The engineer said, “It was able to do that because of the simplicity of its design.” That certainly is Sister Maurine Therese – simplicity of design. From an early age, the only thing that she wanted to do was to teach the little kids to read. She went on to college while she was a nun. She went on to graduate school and got her master’s degree in child development. You would never know that. She would never talk about it. It was about teaching the little kids to read.

When our son Max was born and still young, she had not seen him. We were in Connecticut and she was in Illinois. We came to Chicago to surprise her with little Max. Unfortunately, I can’t remember the nun who picked us up at the airport, but she said, “We’re going to send little Max in and see what she’s going to do.” She was at St. Bartholomew at the time and across from her classroom was the daycare center. It was not uncommon for a child from the daycare center to wander into her room. She had her children in front of her doing the reading and we sent Max John in unannounced. She immediately said, “We have a visitor from across the hall.” The nun that brought us there at one point said, “Does that child look familiar to you?” She thought it was a teacher’s child and was trying to figure out which teacher’s child. We poked our head in and she was very surprised.

Barb was the card lady. Every birthday, every Halloween, every Thanksgiving, every Christmas, she would make sure people were remembered. I want to thank everybody in the community. God knows how good you were to her, how well you took care of her, how well you accepted her. On behalf of my family, I can’t thank you enough for this service and everything that was done for her. We are deeply appreciative of all the people who were close to her – Sister Therese Fox, who has passed, Ann Chaput, Kate Keating and all of you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you very much.