



Wake Stories of Eliza Kenney, BVM Marian Hall Chapel, Dec. 13, 2018

Maureen Flood (*Letter to Sister Judith Dewell, BVM read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

Dear Judith, Susan Coler let me know that Eliza passed last night – and my heart breaks along with yours! I am so glad we got to see her last summer. She was truly one of my favorite people on the planet. It is a huge loss for you, especially, and the BVM community. Her life was a blessing to so many. You are in my prayers at this difficult grieving time.

Sister Lynn Winsor, BVM (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

Eliza loved Arizona. She loved the desert and she loved Xavier in Phoenix where she attended high school. Eliza and Judith Dewell would come out to Phoenix in the early spring, when it was cold in Dubuque, and would visit family, high school friends and enjoy Arizona. They stayed at Xavier Convent and loved sitting in the warm sun and travelling the Grand Canyon State enjoying Arizona's beauty. She loved going to the Butterfly Wonderland Experience and truly enjoyed returning to Xavier for alumnae reunions. I worked with Eliza and Judith on the 175th Jubilee CD. Selecting BVM composed songs, choosing a variety of music styles and listening to the final product all were wonderful experiences I shared with them. For the 175th Jubilee, Eliza and Mary Alma Sullivan collaborated on the beautiful songs "The Journey" and "Let Us Sing, Alleluia." It was so wonderful being a part of that CD project. When Joanie Nuckols, Linda Roby and I were planning our 50th Jubilee in 2017, we asked Eliza and Mary Alma if they would be open to composing a song for the Jubilee. "Let Us Be Grateful" was the composition that delighted us, and the entire community, and is used at so many BVM liturgies and prayer services. Eliza was a good friend and a BVM in every way. I will miss her, as will we all.

Sister Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM

I want to comment on Lynn's observation. Actually, Lynn didn't contact the two of us, Eliza and myself. Rather, she contacted Eliza. She said, "You know that the three of us are going to be celebrating our jubilee. Would it be possible for you to write something original? She didn't say what. A singable song? Background music? Eliza came to me and said, "Would you be willing to do the lyrics?" Eliza preferred, as I think most composers do, to have the words in advance before she started to compose, not only for what the words themselves said, but also for the tone that the words suggested. Her music would try to bring to life that tone.

Sister Regina M. Qualls, BVM

When Sister Jean Monica Lanahan retired as the curator, Eliza graciously accepted the position. She took to it with such energy. One of the things I was most grateful for was her commitment to rotate continually the art. Eliza and her cart were a very familiar site all across the campus. It was always piled with things. I said to her one time, "You know you don't have to be changing these *constantly*. You could do it less often." She was very conscious of those with mobility issues who couldn't get to all areas of the campus. She said, "No, I want to keep changing things so that they have different things to look at so they are not always seeing the same thing. When a sister had a photo or some piece that she had created, Eliza tried to hang it near that person's room so that she could see it and other people would know. She was a delight to work with and very committed to not only adding beauty, but also making sure everybody could appreciate it.

Mary C Howk Hanley, Former Student, Mundelein College, Class of 1977.

Freshmen year, we loved to go to the greenhouse on the seventh floor of Mundelein. One day we were there and saw this little plant growing out of a pot. Because I was also an art student at that time, I happened to know what marijuana looked like. Eliza and Judith were sitting in Eliza's office. I had to tell them this. I said, "I hate to tell you this, but Sister Cecilia Bodman is growing marijuana in the greenhouse." The look on their faces! They said, "Miss Mary, how do you know that?" Anyway, the next day that little plant was gone. I had to take a science class and I did take it with Sister Cecilia Bodman. Aside from making us great musicians and students, they took care of every part of us. We used to wonder the street on a Friday or Saturday night having fun going to different little places. Eliza and Judith would say, "That's fine. We're glad you girls are experiencing life, but we worry about you. So please let us know when you get back. So our routine was that when we were coming home, we would go to the Spanish Arms; they lived on the third story. We would sing from the street up to them. Sister Dorothy Dwight was our vocal teacher. I think she is here. We sang lots of things that you taught us, Sister Dorothy. That was their way of taking care of us beyond teaching us music. They took care of our souls. We'll miss Eliza very much.

Christine Olsem, BVM Associate & Employee

I met Eliza in July of 2011 shortly after coming to work in the Office of the Secretary. I manage the databases that keep track of the art, furniture and various collectable at Mount Carmel. Eliza didn't always like dealing with the new identification card that had to be printed and attached a piece of art every time it was moved, but I always enjoyed every opportunity to spend time with her. Even though there is a partition in my office that blocks my view of the door, I always knew when Eliza was coming. She would rap her knuckles along the entire width of the door as she walked by and still be surprise when, before I could see her, I called out, "Hi, Eliza." "How did you know it was me?" In the last couple of years, as Eliza came less and less often to the BVM Center, I embraced opportunities to take items to her office. Usually, she would be playing her piano, completely absorbed in the music. I felt so blessed for the opportunity to not only hear her play, but to watch her play.

Over the years, I would share my concerns and struggles with Eliza. She always listened patiently, then taking a step toward me and looking me right in the eye, she would say, "You need to do what's right for you." In Eliza, I heard an echo of my deceased mother, who would also listen patiently, and then say, "You do what you need to do." Eliza's artistry inspired me to add more material and ribbons to my seasonal decorations at home, but I could never get them to look like hers. Last January, when Judith was in the hospital, I took down and packed away the Christmas decorations in the Heritage Rooms and corridor. By the time I was done, I had a huge ball of masking tape and knew at least one of Eliza's secrets! While decorating the curio cabinet in the second floor Caritas turret two days ago, I discovered that I had missed the masking tape that Eliza placed under the statue of Mary last year. I just had to smile.

On the first Sunday of Advent, I played and sang for Lessons & Carols in the Motherhouse Chapel. I saw Judith and Eliza during the program, but missed them afterwards. The next morning, Judith brought Eliza over to my office to share how much they enjoyed the program. I will be forever grateful to Judith for that. It was the last time I saw and spoke with Eliza. We chatted while Judith took care of a few items. As I was looking at her, a thought ran through my mind that, regrettably, I never vocalized. I thought, "Eliza looks so beautiful today." She died two day later. Looking back, I believe she already had a heavenly glow. I miss her so very much.

Sister Margaret Mary Cosgrove, BVM

One of the reasons I joined the BVM congregation was because, as a student at St. Francis Xavier Grade School and Xavier High School, I saw that the sisters could be friends with each other and that they truly loved each other. I want to thank Judith and Eliza for modeling that friendship, for being good for each other and for teaching us all how to have good friendships. I know they had challenging times when Eliza became sick, but they still stayed together. When it was time, Judith helped Eliza move over here to the Motherhouse and came with her because it would be a safer environment. I want to thank Judith and Eliza for emulating such a wonderful friendship as a model for all of us.

Sister Dorothy Dwight, BVM

Different former colleagues of Eliza and some of her students sent e-mails with memories that they would like to have read today.

Sarah Gabel, Chairperson, Fine and Performing Arts, Loyola University. (Read by Sister Dorothy Dwight, BVM)

Thank you for letting me know [about Eliza's death]. I loved her so. She taught me much about leadership in the short time I knew her. I first met Eliza when the dean of College of Arts & Sciences asked me to serve as interim chair of the Department of Fine Arts at Loyola University. She immediately understood the challenges I faced coming from theatre with little knowledge of the fine arts or music disciplines I was to lead and took pity on me. She oriented me to her music program with grace and told me that I should trust my skills and take things one day at a time and, sooner rather than later, my "new" faculty would come around. She was right. What impressed me most about Eliza was how much she cared for students and the program that she helped to build. She cared so much about the students that she and her fellow BVM music faculty decided that for the program to move forward in the large institution of Loyola, they should retire and make room for a new generation. That was Sister Eliza, willing to sacrifice for the greater good and always thinking of others.

Mary Chris Lakome Misik, Former Student, Mundelein College. (Read by Sister Dorothy Dwight, BVM)

My memory, actually one of so many, was being on the seventh floor at Mundelein and sitting quietly as I listened to Sr. Eliza practice intricate pieces as she "skated" over the keys! Such a treasured memory. Blessings, Dorothy. Please give my love to Judith. In love & song, Mary Chris (Lakome) Misik.

Carol Loverde, Former Student, Mundelein College, Class of 1973. (Read by Sister Dorothy Dwight, BVM)

I just had to finish my undergraduate degree in music! The seventh floor at Mundelein College was my "home" for two years after transferring from Loyola University right next door. It was there that I met Sister Eliza, Chair of the Department of Music, who along with Sisters Judith Dewell, Dorothy Dwight, Louise Szkodzinski, and Kathleen Dawson, gave young women in the early 1970s the best student-centered, Catholic education possible.

Sister Eliza loved teaching, and in our music history courses, she demanded excellence. She embodied what it means to be an articulate, informed musician, encouraging all her students to develop the skills of in-depth listening and critical analysis. She could discuss every music composition in Rosen's *The Classical Style*. And, oh my, those "drop the needle" exams in Contemporary Trends were challenging! To this day, I still recount the three periods of madrigal style to my own students. Thank-you, Sister Eliza. *In Paradisum, deducant te Angeli*.

Rebecca Kornick, Former Colleague (Read by Sister Dorothy Dwight, BVM)

I consider myself fortunate to have known Sister Eliza Kenney since 1991. I had been teaching Class Voice for the theater department at Loyola as the lone musician for 11 years. Dorothy Dwight and I had enjoyed singing in the Chicago Symphony Chorus together during those years. Dorothy invited me, when Mundelein affiliated with Loyola, to put in an application to Eliza, for a teaching position with the newly formed Loyola music program. I was so pleased to get the job, and to be a part of the actual music faculty at Loyola. Little did I know, in no time, I'd be looking forward to lunches with Eliza, Judith and Dorothy. We became like family, as they kept up with news of my young children at home, and my daughter, Anna, who was born in 1994. They also shared helpful piano playing tips for the voice teacher who "accompanied" her students.

As head of the new music department, Eliza shepherded a growing music program. I remember the signup sheet in the office when she first put out the feelers to see how many Loyola students would be interested in playing in an orchestra. That instrumental program grew to serve both music and non-music majors through several ensembles, which involved students from all over the university in music. Woodwind, string and brass teachers were hired as the program expanded, serving more and more music major and minors, as well as band members. That was just one aspect of the program that grew under Eliza's leadership.

I'm so glad Judith, Eliza and Dorothy migrated east to Chicago! It has been an honor to witness the devotion and support Judith and Eliza offered one another: Judith's humor and feisty spirit, complimented by Eliza's gracious, yet firm leadership. I am a better person for having known them. Thank you again, Eliza. I am so glad I had the opportunity to know you. My prayers are with you Judith, Dorothy and the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the Motherhouse.

Ken Portnoy, Former Colleague. *(Read by Sister Dorothy Dwight, BVM)*

Dear, Dorothy, thank you so much for sending me the sad news about Eliza. In a direct, but a seeming roundabout way, she, and you, and Judith and your other colleagues in that wonderful Department of Music had a major influence on me, not so much on music, perhaps, but on how to treat young musicians of promise and even those who were merely talented and enthusiastic. For five years, I had my office on the seventh floor right around the corner from Eliza's room, and I would often stop by to bother her, and your colleagues, with one thing and another. I must tell you right now that she, and you, and Judith and others were nothing but kind to me, and patient with me, but that's the way you were with everyone, especially your students, and that's what I picked up. You know that after I left Mundelein I became program director and an on-air host for WEFM radio, where I indulged in my love of music, and where I also got to interview on-air many musicians who came through Chicago (three I will mention: Michael Tippett, Peter Pears, and, of-course, my lifelong friend John Rutter).

When I returned to Boston in 1979, I was hired by the Opera Company of Boston as assistant manager of the main house, but, more importantly manager of their touring company, Opera New England, which gave performances from Connecticut to Maine, of "standard" operas, but also performances for children. It was here that the lessons I learned from Eliza, and you, and Judith and your colleagues came into play, and into important play at that. Opera New England hired two kinds of artists, some clearly professional and experienced and some who were just beginning to learn the craft of opera. Because of my Mundelein experience, I learned to be kind, and patient, and encouraging and supportive of our young singers, some of whom were hardly past their Conservatory graduations. I spent a lot of time with them, both in Boston and elsewhere, listening to their stories, giving them professional advice, and helping with the daily challenges of living and working on the road.

I was very successful in my capacity as a fundraiser and as a practitioner of public relations, especially in what you would consider "smaller markets." I will swear to you that without my Mundelein "training," I would have been a failure as a manager of people. The personal and interpersonal skills I learned from my BVM colleagues and teachers were more valuable to me than I can tell you, which is why I always look back on my days at Mundelein with great fondness, rather than just an anonymous nostalgia. Eliza and her entire department were, and still are, so important to me. Without your friendship, collegiality, understanding, and skills I would have never become the person I became.

Gene Geinzer, S.J., Former Chair, Fine Arts Department, Loyola University. *(Read by Sister Dorothy Dwight, BVM)*

Dear, dear Eliza. Whenever I would "pop" one of my crazier ideas you would just smile and ask me, "Gene, do you really think so?" Your voice of wisdom kept me grounded, most of the time. You passed just in time to play the piano for the Blessed Virgin Mary "live" on December 8! What a great sense of timing you have! Congratulations on a terrific performance. Enjoy heaven!

Gerry Honigsblum, Former Mundelein Colleague, Modern Languages Department. *(Read by Sister Dorothy Dwight, BVM)*

Fifty years ago or so, I entered the bustling halls of Mundelein College as a young, innocent, and naive assistant professor of French. My chair parachuted me into a senior class on contemporary theater that reoriented my doctoral thesis. The country was agitated by the war in Viet Nam and a host of super animated faculty were remaking the world. On the seventh floor (you could serve as elevator operator), Eliza Kenney headed the Department of Music, where wayward musicians like me – we call them *mélomanes* in French – found outlets for our creative energies. Yes, we were maniacal about all the mellow things in life. Eliza, and her colleagues Judy, Louise, and Dorothy gave us shelter, fostered our interests, tolerated our impulsivities. And manage we did, to

produce evenings of performances that included opera scenes, Renaissance madrigals, and art songs from England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and France. Enough to keep us going for three generations. Eliza Kenney embraced all of our daunting efforts. She'd be pleased to know that my youngest son, Daniel, carries the torch forward, singing in the Paris Opera Children's Chorus, and at Moscow's Alexandrova Choral Ensemble . . . no coincidence. May she be escorted heavenward by a chorus of angelic voices for her steadfast support of a more lyrical world.

Sister Kate Hendel, BVM

We've heard a lot of stories about how wonderfully supportive Eliza was of her students at Mundelein and at Loyola. That support didn't stop when you left. Both Sister Diane Forster and I were with Judith the other night when Eliza died, both former students. Both of us spent time talking about how she supported us over the years. Every time we would meet, whether we lived far away or close by, she would stop and ask, "How are things going?" Sometimes we would have a diner with Eliza and Judith. She was always supportive, always encouraging us. That never stopped. It was a great honor to be with her because, even in her death, she supported us in that peaceful graciousness that we knew of her.

Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM

Eliza left several things that she would like read. One is the complete text of the prayer on the back of the program. As an Arizonian, Native American culture was part of Eliza's life. She gave this prayer.

O Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me! I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom. Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset. Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice. Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught my people. Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock. I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother and sister, but to fight my greatest enemy – myself. Make me always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes. So when life fades, as the fading sunset, my spirit may come to you without shame.

From Red Cloud Indian School, Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

Finally, some words from Karl Rahner that Eliza left for us.

Though invisible to us, our dead are not absent . . . but living near to us, transfigured: having lost, in their glorious change, no delicacy of their souls, no tenderness of their hearts, no especial preference in their affection. On the contrary, they have, in depth and in fervor of devotion, grown large, a hundredfold. Death is, for the good, a translation into light, into power, into love. Those who on earth were only ordinary Christians become perfect; those who are good become sublime.

"On the Theology of Death," by Karl Rahner, translated by C.H. Henkey.