



## Wake Stories of Marguerite Yezek, BVM (Valerian)

Marian Hall Chapel, Feb. 22, 2019

### **Sister Mary Nolan, BVM** (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

I first met SM Valerian on Sept. 8, 1955, the first day of my sophomore year at Our Lady of Peace, St. Paul, and I was late. When I got upstairs, SM Valerian was waiting for me at the door of the room. She asked me gently, "Where have you been?" I said, "I just lost my best friend," and then I started to cry. "My family and I just took my sister Pat to the train headed to Mount Carmel." SM Valerian smiled and said, "I know how you must feel, but I also know that Pat will continue to be your friend through your entire life." SM Valerian was right and I made a new friend, teacher, mentor and role model for all these years.

### **Carol Muske-Dukes, Former Student** (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

I remember Sister Mary Valerian – she was the algebra teacher at Our Lady of Peace High School (Class of 1963) and she was full of energy and insights!

### **Denece Truhler Dreger, Former Student** (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

As a member of the Class of 1964 of Our Lady of Peace High School in St. Paul (I am a proud classmate of Teri Hadro), I remember Sister Valerian well! She was a part of the education I received those four years at OLP. My education included not only 'book learning' but also *life* learning on what is important. It has served me well!

### **Karen Larson Triplett, Former Student** (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

Sister Mary Valerian was my favorite teacher at Our Lady of Peace (Class of 1964). I looked forward to her English class everyday – it was so stimulating and so much fun.

### **Sheila Fahey Boerner, Former Student** (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

Sister Valerian was my religion teacher at Our Lady of Peace High School in St. Paul, Minn. I remember her beautiful smile and her exuberance. She and all of my BVM teachers strengthened my faith. Sister Valerian, in her love of teaching, made me decide to teach also. After our six children were in school, I taught English at St. Patrick Junior and Senior High School in North Platte, Neb., for 19 years. I will always treasure the education I received from Sister Valerian.

### **Ann Malchow Schwalbach, Former Student** (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

I had Sister Valerian for English my sophomore year at OLP in St. Paul (Class of 1965) – a gifted teacher! May she rest in peace.

### **Mary Lou Reid, Former Student** (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

Marguerite was my first creative writing teacher at OLP when I was a freshman. I learned a lot from SM Valerian, as she was known to me then. Sister was also very encouraging. I visited her regularly while I was at Mount Carmel. Marguerite was always so effervescent when I was in high school; I thought she was beautiful.

### **Sister Rose Mary Meyer, BVM** (*Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM*)

I knew Marguerite when she was involved in parish social ministry at St. Peter in Skokie, Ill. She was a delight. She enjoyed her time ministering with the folks she visited. I appreciated her enthusiasm and caring.

**Bill Shermach, Friend**

Many of you have seen my wife Joan and me wandering around here. Most of you have been introduced and we have met each other. For those who don't know, my name is Bill Shermach. My wife Joan and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share in the celebration of the life of our friend and sister Marguerite Yezek. Many of you have already heard the story about how our lives intersected with hers, so in her creative writing way, I'll be concise.

On a Sunday morning about 35 years ago, we were at Mass at St. Lambert in Skokie with our five children. As we were leaving church, we were approached by two ladies. I originally said "lovely ladies," but one of the nursing aides on her floor said "classy." We were approached by two classy ladies – Sister Marguerite and her longtime best friend Paula Kelly. They explained that they had decided that since they were getting older and their friends were getting older, it was time to make some new and younger friends. After watching us at Mass for several Sundays, they picked us. That was the beginning of a friendship that grew into a love.

Marguerite and Paula's one-in-a-million friendship began right here at Mount Carmel in September of 1938 when they lined up and were given consecutive community numbers. Marguerite said, "We have stood side by side ever since." We were happy that they became family to us; we felt honored to become part of their circle. Over time, we shared many celebrations together – birthdays, anniversaries, weddings. When Wright Hall at Mundelein College closed, that meant that they could celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter with us as well. Marguerite was a great cook and a most gracious hostess. We did our best to keep up. By the age of fourteen, our son Chris had learned how to make the perfect highball. A highball for the driver and a double for the passenger; that was the rule.

I actually heard, really heard, for the first time the message from chapter 31 of Proverbs at a memorial Mass for Paula Kelly. The words kept coming back to me as I wrote these notes. "Who shall find a valiant woman, her value is more precious than gems. She opens and extends her hand to the poor. She reaches out her filled hands to the needy." Sister Marguerite lived her life following the example of Christ. It didn't matter if she worked with children who came from families with means or in a disadvantage parish among the poorest. She always worked and gave her all freely and willingly to each of her students. Entering the order, she gave up the opportunity, as most people would say, to have children of her own. The tradeoff was that she had many hundreds of children, some who are here today. Proverbs goes on to say, "The children shall rise up and bless her." Sister Alice Caulfield asked if we had an address for a woman from China who had sent a package of cookies to Marguerite this Christmas. We immediately knew whom she was talking about. A family from China came here for a few years. They had a teenage son who was a student at Notre Dame HS for Boys in Niles. The Brothers there recommended Sister Marguerite to be his tutor for math and English. Now, more than 20 years later, his mom still sends an annual token of her gratitude. Obviously, Marguerite's work with that young man was very important and still appreciated.

When she moved back to the Motherhouse, Marguerite asked us to stand close to Paula. We were happy to do so and made visits to Dubuque several times to see Marguerite. We always felt that our first connection was engineered by the Holy Spirit and that the love and the friendship we shared was nothing less than a gift from God. Marguerite's gift to us is all of you in this community. She truly was a valiant woman. She was a big part of this community of valiant women. We feel blessed to have met her and so many of her sisters and to form many new friendships here. Many of you have shared your appreciation for our attention to your Sister Marguerite, but we feel that her presence in our life has been, and will continue to be, a great blessing to us and to our family. Ever the teacher, the greatest compliment Marguerite ever gave us was that we were A+++ friends. We appreciate your warmth, your hospitality and your caring support during this last week. We were privileged to have shared in her last days on her journey home. She and all of you will be an important part of our lives forever.

### **Sister Vivian Wilson, BVM**

I had been teaching art in the Roberta Kuhn Center, but am now fully retired. When I first came to Mount Carmel, I had heard of Marguerite Yezek, but I had never met her. She sent a note saying that she wanted to see me so I went to her. She wanted to help to teach art. I said, "I would be glad to have you. Where did you get your training?" She said, "I didn't pay any attention to anything. I went to the library and I took out every book there was on art. I've read every book cover to cover. That is the basis for my art." She truly is a remarkable artist. I have dearly loved her, her friendship and her approachability.

### **Sister Kate Keating, BVM**

I knew Marguerite through Paula. Paula was my math teacher at Cathedral HS in Chicago. She also prepared me for entering the BVMs. I remember visiting often with them in their apartment in Skokie, Ill. We would either go out to lunch or have a special meal there. Marguerite was the cook; she knew what we liked and always made something very special. We had *real* napkins and always ice cream for dessert. I noticed beautiful art around the whole house. I also noticed that there wasn't a spot of dust anywhere. I remember how they in their retired years tutored high school kids in English and math and talked about the missions they had experienced together. I remember the stories of their many travels, as was mentioned, but they went into deep storytelling. It was a unique friendship, as we all heard, that began in 1938. It must have been a grand union between the two of them. Keep on enjoying, Marguerite and Paula!

### **Sister Anne Buckley, BVM**

I knew Marguerite in Skokie for a little while, but I didn't realized that she was an artist until I came here and saw one of her paintings. I tried to tell her how much I liked it, but she said she didn't like it. She said she made a mistake in it, but she wouldn't tell me what it was.

### **Sister Eileen Healy, BVM**

I drove Marguerite to see Paula many times. I just realized a reoccurring theme as we got into the car – her concern for Paula, because Paula wouldn't cook. It never clicked with me until I heard that Paul just ate crackers and cheese. Marguerite was very concerned that that wasn't right and that she should cook something. I think that she did cook while she was there so that Paula would have frozen meals that she could take out. Every time Marguerite got in the car, she was concerned that Paula wasn't eating. Enjoy the feast of heaven!

### **Sister Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM**

I taught at OLP. Marguerite was already there teaching freshmen English. With the levels we were teaching, I got her students, students who had been educated in writing by Marguerite. I suspect that if a vote had been taken that moved Marguerite out of freshman year teaching, there would have been general outcry on the part of at least the science and English teachers. Everybody wanted Marguerite's students because, more than teaching, she taught them to appreciate learning. "Wherever you are; whatever you're doing." It was her goal to make lifelong learners. I would echo everything said by the former students from OLP.

### **Sister Helen Jean Hurley, BVM**

I as one of the very few privileged people who lived with Valerian on her first mission. When I was assigned to Sacred Heart, Rock Island, as a young nun, I was scared to death as. I didn't know what they would expect from me. Every time there was a problem, who came to me aid but Valerian. She was so wonderful to me. We used to take walks in front of the convent and down the street. Valerian would prepare me for almost anything. I think that's how I managed to get through my first mission without getting into real problems.

### **Sister Karen Conover, BVM**

I work here at Mount Carmel in Support Services so I meet all kind of personal needs of the sisters. That's how I knew Marguerite in these last three years. However, on a couple of occasions we had some wonderful visits. The book that she wrote, *When Teaching Was Fun*, is on display in the back. She shared that with me. I taught for over 40 years, and still it was wonderful to read about this very experienced teacher. It was so delightful to read

and then to come back to discuss and chat with her. She was always so welcoming with a wonderful twinkle in her eye.