



Wake Stories of Mary Ann (Adoratrice) Ruhde, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, Feb. 7, 2020

Sheryl Schulte, former BVM, Lewes, Del.

My condolence on Sister Mary Ann's death. She was a very caring woman and I appreciate all she did for me. My prayers for her.

Carol Marie Baum, BVM

I came to know Mary Ann and Louise Levandowski, BVM at the time when they were making the decision to transfer to Mount Carmel. At that point in time, I was a Congregational Representative so I was the person who helped them make that transition. I want to comment on two things in regard to Mary Ann and Louise. First, their generosity. I was a recipient when Mary Ann moved to Mount Carmel with Louise. Mary Ann took on the job of working at the Caritas Center reception desk in order to give the receptionist her break and lunch time. I was also one of the subs for that. There were times when I couldn't do the job. All I had to do was go to Mary Ann and say, "Mary Ann, could you?" "Don't worry. I'll take care of it. I'll do it." She was always Johnny-on-the-spot. There she was. I would also like to talk about her smile and her rosy cheeks. You never met Mary Ann that she didn't have a smile on her face. From the reflection we just heard, we know that she dealt with some serious health issues. However, she could always find the bright side of what God was asking of her. Her last couple of days were the harder ones. I have to say, Louise, you were a marvelous friend. Every day after their breakfast, you would find Louise and Mary Ann together in Mary Ann's room saying their morning prayers—a real testament to their faithfulness to a loving God. Mary Ann, thank you for the gifts you shared with us.

Angela Skretta, eldest niece, New Paltz, N.Y.

Aunt Mary and Aunt Louise have been a fixture in my life from early childhood to the present day. It's impossible for me to think of Mary without Louise. Two sisters who go together like peanut butter and jelly, hot dogs and apple pie, and vanilla ice cream with chocolate cake. My siblings and I thank Louise for always, and we mean *always*, helping to care for our grandparents and our other late aunt, Janet Ruhde. In the summer of 1984 when Grandma had strokes, Mary was there. In 1991 when Grandma learned that I had safely given birth to her first great-grandchild, it was Mary's hands that Grandma laid her head against as she smiled in relief and drew her last breath. In the spring of 1998 when my grandfather died, it was Mary who had been taking care of him. In subsequent years as Aunt Janet had surgeries and lost limbs due to diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis, it was Mary who cared for her. It was *always* Mary who was the caregiver and always, always with Louise's loving support, calm strength, physical help, and prayer by her side. Our gratitude goes to both Mary and Louise. Thank you, Louise, for helping Mary care for our family all those years and also for caring so deeply for Mary since she started having major issues with her leg and hip last July.

One of my earliest memories of Mary's impact was when Great-Grandpa Willets (Gramps) died in 1975. I asked Mary where Gramps went; I didn't understand why he disappeared. She said that God came and scooped him up in his arms, held Gramps close and brought him to be together with our Lord in Heaven. The image of being scooped into the arms of God and held close was very comforting, but my very concrete, almost five-year-old mind was terrified of being plucked up into Heaven and then disappearing. I was safe while inside under the roof of my parents' home, but every time I went outside I hide under the picnic table. It was only when my mother

explained to me that Mary didn't really mean that God reached down and picked up Gramps. The positive image of returning to God's loving arms in Heaven remained a comforting thought.

My other childhood memories are of the lunches and dinners that Aunt Mary would make for us whenever we visited our grandparents in Davenport. On Saturdays, after we picked up Grandpa from the bank and go to the house, Mary would make Manwich sloppy joes. What a treat! When visiting on Sundays, it was usually roast beef or ham with either mashed potatoes or Becky Crocker scalloped potatoes, and always green beans. Dessert was chocolate cake, often with vanilla ice cream. The aroma of those meals returns with fondness as my mind's eye travels back to the dining room and kitchen at 811 Grand Court in Davenport, the home my mother and her sisters grew up in, the home that belonged to our grandparents.

Even as a child, I also understood that Mary's relationship with her sisters, Janet and my mother Patricia, was complex. Why, in all honesty, would we expect anything different when even the Bible shares stories of sibling rivalry through lessons learned and deep love even between Martha and her sister Mary. The Bible tells us that sibling squabbles and love are very human. We sometimes forget that the squabbles are not terminal and that love will and does overcome all. Mary showed us frequent examples of presence, compassion, and support with her own siblings. Mary was there for my parents when one of my brothers was born. Mary cared for us older kids, who were still very young. On New Year's Eve in 1971, when our mom threw a birthday party for my dad when he turned 30, she took care of me at 4, John, who was 3, and Fred, who was a newborn. I was sure that we had a lot more fun than all those 30-year-olds down in the basement.

Most recently, Mary helped me to develop a greater understanding and compassion for our parents' growing limitations as they age and to not take those limitations on their travel personally. Us kids were also sure that Aunt Mary had a red Batphone (from now on we are going to call it the BVM Batphone) waiting for Mom's call to request prayers for whichever one of us six kids worried her and Dad at a given moment.

Aunt Mary, my mother Patricia, and their sister Janet shared a love of chocolate. All three of them have gorgeous blue eyes, adorable button noses, a gift for gab (which I clearly inherited), an ability to laugh at themselves, and an infectious laugh. Most importantly, they all shared a deep and wide belief in God our Father and the power of prayer—both the prayers you storm Heaven's gates with for special intentions and the general intercessions for our Lord to watch over and care for us in general and protect those we love. They all lived it in different ways—Janet with her Bible studies at two churches and teaching nursing, my mother with our father with their six kids and their spouses and their 16 grandchildren, and Aunt Mary with everyone she came in contact with.

The last example Mary gifted to us was that of grace when she endured the pain of her leg and hip and the humility of moving from caregiver to being the one who was cared for. Dear Lord, we thank you for the blessing of Aunt Mary and all she taught us. We thank you for Louise serving in your love by her side for over 60 years, for our own parents, and for all the Sisters of Charity and the love that they live in mission and service. Amen. As a small token of our huge gratitude, we invite you to enjoy cake after lunch. We will be remembering how Mary would have enjoyed it. May we remember, as Mary said when I was not quite 5, that God scoops us up in his hands and holds us in love.

John Skretta, nephew

I'm one of Angie's little brothers, so I'm here as a fact checker to set the record straight. Growing up, the six of us kids had the privilege of spending many weekends with Mary as we traveled to Davenport for family dinners and gatherings. I would be remiss if I did not specifically note the exceptional quality of the ham and scalloped potatoes that were routinely served up as afternoon dinner fare. (Hopefully followed by a dessert of vanilla ice cream with Hershey's chocolate syrup straight from the can!)

I'm an educator and school administrator; that's my vocation. As such I know the challenges and rewards of serving as a building principal as Mary did. However, I find it even more impressive that she was a kitchen

manager in a high school. School administrators know that if there's one thing that actually impacts learning outcomes and the climate of a school, it's the quality of the food service and the kitchen staff! Kids don't always remember the classroom but they can always tell you what was for lunch that day!

Mary lived a life of service and selflessness. Mary's constant companion and fellow friend in Christ throughout was Louise and together the two of them were a great source of prayerful presence for my siblings, and our entire family, throughout our years growing up. Mary was present with us and affectionate towards us always. She always wanted to know how we were doing, how school was going, and what we were involved in. She asked about and was aware of all that we were involved in—school activities and our academic pursuits—and she took a great interest in not just our accomplishments but more importantly our spiritual development. She helped us and reminded us the importance of being good people. Mary was caring and always curious about others. She never made it about herself and never sought recognition or reward. This selflessness and service exemplified who she was. Mary cared for those around her throughout her lifetime and did so without complaint; without seeking the recognition or affirmation of others.

The simple gifts that Mary bestowed upon us kids while growing up reflected the sense of service and commitment to education. They were not always sufficiently appreciated at the time. For my birthday, I typically would receive a package of wide ruled notebook paper. You can imagine that as a kid how thrilled I was to receive that gift. In fact there were a number of times when on the way home I voiced some disgruntlement at the present. Mom and Dad always clarified "John, she took a vow of poverty!" As an adult I've grown to appreciate the intent and gesture of these presents.

Mary's work in schools inspired us to consider committing to the vocation of education. Her leadership in education was an important influence me and for many of us. We have sought to serve as educators or in the health or public sectors. I can't help but think that this is one small way in which Mary's legacy is perpetuated by her nieces and nephews. On behalf of the family we are grateful to all those who could be here to join us today for sharing the memory of Mary's life. Thank you for welcoming us and celebrating her life.

Carolyn Farrell, BVM

I knew the Ruhde family way back in 1956. Then I was Sister Mary Lester. Maybe the end of the family would remember that. Mary Ann had just entered the community that year and I came and to teach fourth grade. Mary Ann's mother, Mrs. Ruhde, was the savior to the sisters at St. Paul the Apostle, driving us about everywhere. Those of us who are a bit older know what it meant have someone to call and say "Would you please take me to grocery store . . . the doctor . . . the train depot . . ." That's how I got to know the Ruhde family. Her father was very good; he was a banker and did a lot of errands for a couple of older sisters there. I never really knew Mary Ann, but I certainly knew her parents. From their lives of generosity, I could see how their children picked up that spirit. I really didn't spend time with Mary Ann until I came to Mount Carmel and would talk with her because of the Davenport connection. She never complained and she went through blazes! I always admired that quality in her. In gratitude for Mary Ann's life.

Louise Levandowski, BVM

I'm not going to share something about Mary, but it will be about all of you—sisters, associates, family and friends. Since Mary and I moved to Mount Carmel, we have felt wrapped in the love of all of you, particularly when Mary had her last two surgeries and especially since Mary suffered a stroke a week ago. We have been recipients of so many promises of prayer, understanding, hugs, and thoughtful acts. I thank you from the bottom of my heart and ask God's blessings on each one of you.