



Wake Stories of Ernestina Molinari, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, Jan. 13, 2020

Deanna Pini, cousin (*Read by Diane Forster, BVM*)

I have unsuccessfully searched for a letter Sister Ernestina sent me when I was 3 years old before she entered the BVM community, so I will have to share it from memory. "Dear Deanna, We are at the picnic grounds and I just wanted to let you know Roy is at the creek looking for the frog you asked us to bring you. Love your cousin, Elvira." Just a simple letter meant so much to a small child, letting her know she was important enough to be remembered.

Tina Celi, cousin (*Read by Diane Forster, BVM*)

My first memory of my cousin Sister Ernestina was going to the airport to meet her. She was home for vacation from teaching in Hawaii. I was 8, I had never seen a sister in habit. I saw a lady walking toward me. She had a long black dress but I couldn't figure out what she was wearing on her head. I think I was scared. She came towards me with outstretched arms to hug me. She had a huge smile and the kindest face I'd ever seen. She was so beautiful I thought she was an angel. We spent many summers together at the Russian River, the pool at the "pink house" in Los Gatos. As principal at Saint Bridget, she invited my 2-year-old daughter to come watch the school children parade in costume for Halloween. She came to the Christmas play at Saint Philip when my kindergarten-age daughter played Blessed Mother. Sister laughed when my daughter took baby Jesus out from under her veil and whispered "Mama would've loved this." Her mother (my aunt) had recently passed. I will never forget her kindness to me and my family. I will never forget her laugh; it was genuine, like her. My faith tells me I will see you again. You have earned your place in heaven. Until then rest in the peace of our Lord. I miss you. I love you.

Eileen Fuchs, BVM (*Read by Diane Forster, BVM*)

I am on retreat and unfortunately will miss Ernestina's funeral. She was my prayer for my entire religious life so she is in my heart. Every time I saw her, she broke into a beautiful smile. I knew I was in good hands. I don't know what else to say. This one really hits even though it was expected. She was very good to me.

Jaymi Philips, San Francisco, former student (*Read by Diane Forster, BVM*)

As a teacher, Sister Ernestina was wonderful. She always had a smile and a good morning for you. She was truly happy you came to school and were a part of her classroom. She made us all feel warm and welcome with that twinkle in her eye. As a grown-up, I loved listening to the story about the day she skipped school to go see Frank Sinatra. Every time she told that story, she added a few more details making the story even juicier. The last time I sat and talked to her, she gave me solid advice about bad principals with that same twinkle in her eye and smile on her face. She will be missed dearly.

James Flood, Glenview, Ill., former student (*Read by Diane Forster, BVM*)

Ernestina was my 8th grade teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes in Chicago in 1965. She was a rock star! A number of the boys performed a comedic play under her "direction" called "Little Red Riding Hood as Shakespeare Would Do It." That meant it was an all-male cast. We were all "hams" and couldn't keep a straight face for any of the lines, sort of like Harvey Korman and Tim Conway on *The Carol Burnett Show*! Sister Ernie, as we called her, needed a good stiff drink at the convent after putting up with us at rehearsal! I found her again after nearly 40 years when she first retired. We talked on the phone frequently and corresponded all of the years since. We became great

friends until she passed. I am a lawyer by profession. Whenever I called and left a message I would say I was her "mafia lawyer" from Chicago. I miss her already, but, I know, for sure, she is enjoying her mother's Italian cooking in heaven! Great run, Sister Ernie! Your life and teaching have been the backbone of so many you taught in your career. Your laugh was real and unforgettable! At least, I'll never forget it!

Kathy Luka, Chicago, Ill., former student *(Read by Diane Forster, BVM)*

Sister Ernestina was a wonderful teacher. One of my favorites. She was my 8th grade teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes [in Chicago]. Fond memories. May she rest in peace.

Kenneth Simoncini, friend *(Read by Diane Forster, BVM)*

I have known Sister Ernestina for more than twenty years. I met Sister through her brother Roy and would see her when she visited Roy and Carol in California, especially around Christmas. Sister was a very special person who always had a genuine interest in what I was doing. When I would visit with Sister, she always gave her undivided attention and would always follow up depending on the discussion. My mom and Sister Ernestina went to St. Paul's High School in San Francisco and although they were not in the same class year, three years apart, I remember my mom and her reminiscing about the BVM nuns who taught them in school. Sister would always remember to send a card with a personal note, and not only for the holidays but sometimes just to send her love, encouragement, a kind word, and always a blessing. I was fortunate to speak with Sister this last December when Roy and Leedy were visiting her at Mount Carmel. As always, Sister was bright, alert, cheerful, and giving as she told me that she would be seeing my mother and father soon and would say hello for me. I am grateful for having known Sister Ernestina.

Katie Scharle, former BVM Mary Monica, Portland, Ore. *(Read by Diane Forster, BVM)*

I wrote this up because Sister Ernestina was one of the most loved members of our set of 1948! Sister Mary Ernestina was an unusually wonderful and loving person! I was a BVM for 21 years, and I knew Ernestina well. When she was a postulant with me, she sang a song for a musical show we put on. I remember the verses (sung to the tune of MacNamara's Band).

O my name is Elvira Molinari and I clean the second floor dorm.
I never open the windows so my Sisters will keep warm.
I clean up all the bobby pins I find upon the floor.
My sisters they are careless. They don't need them anymore.

Ernestina had a huge, loving heart and a gigantic dose of common sense. She had a humility about her that touched the heart of all who dealt with her. She was always fun to be with, and must have helped hundreds of people over her lifetime. When Sister Ernestina comes trudging up the hill to the Pearly Gates, Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and Sister Mary Leo will be smiling and clapping for her for being one spectacular American Sister!

Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

I entered the convent with Sister Mary Ernestina on Sept. 8, 1948, as did other members of our set. When she arrived from San Francisco, it was late in the evening and it was dark. The next morning, she was so excited about seeing the Mississippi River. She ran out to the front lawn and stood there and said, "That dirty little stream? I can see the other side." During our novitiate, we learned a lot about Roy. Ernestina was very fond of her little brother. Roy, we kept up with all your activities during those 2½ years. When we left the novitiate, we knew almost as much about Roy as we did about God. We loved Ernestina.

Martha Ryder, BVM

I was in Sister Ernestina's set. I always felt that if I kept an eye on her, I would know what to do, because I really didn't know what to do. When we entered, she seemed to know everything. I was very grateful to keep an eye on her.

Theresa McNerney, BVM

I have known Ernestina for a long, long time. The other day I was talking with her. Towards the end, I said, "You know, Ernestina, I have the same thing you have." She said, "Well, I'm not taking you with me."

Mary McCauley, BVM

It was my privilege to know Ernestina for a couple of years in California. The greater privilege came when I served as pastoral administrator for three small parishes in northeast Iowa for six years. Ernestina was my prayer. Some of you recall that I faced a couple of challenges during those six years, and Ernestina got me through all of them. When I returned to Mount Carmel and thanked her for those six years of being my prayer partner, she would say, "Mary, I continue to pray every day for you." I am confident that that will continue now and I will forever be grateful. Thank you, Ernestina.

Karen Conover, BVM, support services

My life has intersected with Ernestina's in a couple of ways. I came to St. Paul HS in San Francisco in 1980. Even at that time, the alumni association was quite energetic. By the time that her class was ready for their 50th reunion, which they held in December 1997, ahead of the actual graduation date, it was very clear that the Class of 1948 was quite a bunch. Huge turnout compared to other years. They have been known for many decades as real supporters of the efforts of the alumnae. Ernestina came to live with us at the convent in the late 1980s. More recently, I came here to work in support services. I always knew that Ernestina was a classy dresser; we all knew that. I can't remember the company from which she had ordered about six pairs of identical slacks, I think in that lovely herringbone weave, in six different colors, all of which needed to be shortened. That was my joy to periodically measure them and bring back an altered slack one at a time. She was always so gracious. She was a classy lady.

Margaret Sannasardo, BVM

Ernestina was my principal at St. Brigid's in San Francisco for a couple of years. It was during those turbulent years when we were going here and going there and mostly doing everything we wanted to do. She didn't live with us at the house at St. Brigid's, but I remember her to be a very strong, forceful, efficient, but kind principal. We both called ourselves "paisans" meaning "friends" as Italians.

Carolyn Farrell, BVM

I only knew Ernestina second-hand from meeting her at meetings later in life. I lived with Sheila Mulvihill (SM James Kathryn) and she was part of that set. She was from a farm outside of Des Moines, Iowa. Sheila and Ernestina had a relationship from San Francisco. All I can remember are Sheila's wonderful stories about Ernestina's life-giving way. For whatever reason, I'm speaking on behalf of Sheila because she's haunting me right now.

Mary O'Connor, BVM

I taught with Ernestina at St. Catherine's in Kauai, Hawaii. She was wonderful. At that time, every week we Catholics were not to have meat on Friday. I had just arrived at the mission. On Friday, when I sent the children to get their lunch, the ladies who were serving them were giving them food with meat in it. I kept saying, "There's meat in their food." They'd say, "Yes, Sister." I'd say, "There's meat in their soup." "Yes, Sister." I couldn't get my point across. Ernestina was there so I said, "Ernestina, it's Friday and they're eating meat." She said, "Yes, yes, they are." "They're not supposed to be eating meat today." She said, "They get so little meat that the Church has given them absolute permission to eat meat whenever they can get meat." Then I knew that I could relax. I wasn't worried about the ladies or the children. I knew Ernestina was correct.

Irene Lukefahr, BVM

In 2018, we were working with the set of 1948 in preparation for their diamond jubilee. We were sitting in a circle. Norma Evans was absolutely amazing us because she could tell the community number for every single sister in her set. The Set of 1948 was known for being the "carefree little birds." They started to sing. There was a

video made of this. I think they were missing some of the better Schola members in their set. At the end of the video, Ernestina says something like, “We were never really known for being good singers.”

Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM

I have two little snippets from my memories of Ernestina. They both have the same message. It was the main message in the reflection this morning: her ability to create a joyous and loving environment just by being who she was. First, when I was teaching at St. Paul’s in San Francisco, I was living someplace else. Ernestina was the principal at St. Thomas More. In that convent, there was a young sister who had just recently entered the community and a lot of older sisters. Concerned about the dynamic in that local community, Ernestina invited a couple of us to move into St. Thomas More to create a more dynamic, lively, community for that young sister. It’s an expression of her desire to make things joyful for people. Second, when I say “pink house,” some here will probably remember that the pink house was on the grounds of Guadalupe in Los Gatos, Calif. For many of us who were in the San Francisco area, that pink house became comparable to our West Coast “Spiders,” but a very different place—no lake, not a lot of trees, but a beautiful getaway. We would go there frequently during the year and for a long time during the summer. Ernestina created a wonderful relaxation space and the opportunity to interact with the retired sisters who were living there at the time and enjoying the pool. I’m grateful to her for her sensitivity to creating a good space for people to live.

Roy Molinari, brother

One day Ernestina gave me a call. At the time, my wife was still alive. She answered the phone and then got a hold of me. My sister said, “You need to come down [to Guadalupe] and cook breakfast for all the nuns here.” I said, “Absolutely not.” I did go down there by myself. My wife said, “I’m not going to give you a hand,” so I did it all by myself. The second time she called, she told me she had a uniform that one of the nuns had made—all in white and with a chef’s hat that must have been two or three feet tall. I said, “I’m not wearing that. Absolutely not.” But I did. I said, “This is it. No more. Don’t call anymore.” But she had a way about herself. She really was a wonderful, wonderful person. I want to thank the BVMs for how well they took care of her for all these years and especially these last few months. I graduated from St. Philip while she graduated from St. Paul. I knew the BVMs pretty well. When my sister left to enter in 1948, she went with two or three other young girls from St. Paul’s. My mother escorted all of them. She definitely would not let my sister do that trip by herself. I know about one story from the train ride. After a couple of days, the other passengers realized that these girls were going to become nuns. But there were comments like “What’s that old lady doing?” referring to my mother. My parents traveled every year no matter where she was to see her. We are going to miss her very, very much, but I know she was ready for this. She certainly was prepared.

Erlinda (Leedy) Ellacer, Roy’s significant other

I found that picture of Roy being a chef wearing that hat the sisters [at Guadalupe] in Los Gatos made for him.

Diane Forster, BVM

In my own gratitude to Ernestina, when I began to work on a Senate committee, the committees were appointed and I didn’t know Ernestina at all. She made everyone feel at ease so readily. It was a great ride with Ernestina on that committee.

Stephen Wallace (Via email after the funeral.)

Sister Ernestina was our 5th grade teacher at St. Bernard’s School in Los Angeles in 1951, possibly her first full year as a teacher. She wasn’t much older than her students were. Of all the nuns that taught religion courses there, hers was the only one of which I remembered the yearlong content: the Mass. It was very fitting that we could watch her funeral Mass today. I am most grateful for that. My wife Ellen and I were privileged to visit her at Mount Carmel last year. We spent several hours with her. She remembered that we had sets of twins in our year. Sister Ernestina was the last surviving nun of the ones that we had at the school. A scholarship fund has been set up through the St. Bernard’s School Foundation in her name.