



Sharing of Memories of Mary L. (Charlotte) Stokes, BVM Caritas Studio, July 21, 2020

Judy Barrett Semsch, OLP Class of 1967

There are only two teachers that stand out in my memory and who left a deep impression on me while growing up. One teacher was from grade school days and the other was Sister Mary Charlotte at Our Lady of Peace High School, in St. Paul, Minn.

I was in Sister Charlotte's *Latin as a Modern Language* class and later in her French classes. Did I learn to speak Latin? No, but I vividly remember reading the story, *The Three Little Pigs*, in Latin, and the giggles and warmth Sister Charlotte shared with us as we struggled with the newfangled method to learn Latin.

But it was her French class that revealed Charlotte's true passion for the French language and the French culture. She meticulously hand wrote a transcription of each page of our text book into phonetic language so we would be able to practice perfect pronunciation for all our lessons . . . and learn the correct Parisian accent. It was important that we didn't sound like we were from the South of France! And then she would smile. She was fun and funny and treated us as capable young women.

Many years ago I did get to Paris, France. It was a dream instilled by Sister Charlotte. I went to the Moulin Rouge to see the Can-Can performed, not quite like we had performed it in French Club. I thought a lot about my high school French class while in France and wanted Sister to know that her hard work on pronunciation was rewarded when I was told I sounded like a Parisian!

She continued to stay in touch over the years, and we did see each other a few times. The last time was late September 2019. It was a short visit, but I was happy to see the same warm smile. I recently read a quote that made me think of Sister Mary Charlotte, a.k.a. Sister Mary Stokes.

"Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique. Good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" – Parker J. Palmer. Sister Mary Stokes was a very warm and caring woman. She loved teaching and she loved her students. And I loved her.

Carol Spiegel, BVM

It is a privilege to share some memories of Mary. As many of you know, Mary was quiet and unassuming. She would be the last to boast about her gifts—which were many. Mary was loved and long remembered by her students. Her fluency in French, even translating works in her later years, has been noted. It was her way with English that I have always admired. She could turn a phrase and describe a situation with insight and wit. I'll give you an example: One time after she fell and I asked her how she was, she said, "I bruised my ego." She had a way of tilting her head and smiling to tell you she understood. Her caring for others went *beyond* words. Mary often expressed her concern for her brother Dan and for her sister Catherine during their last days. When her sister Gerry was still in her own apartment at Smith Village, Mary left Wright Hall for weeks at a time to stay with Gerry and care for her. Mary found ways to visit her even after moving to Mount Carmel.

On a more personal note, Mary was a dear friend. When I lived in St. Paul with Mary Maas, we celebrated holidays and many other times together. Mary was often available to discuss what she was reading; she was an

avid reader. After moving to Chicago, I often got together with Mary and Christine Athans, BVM. You have the evidence of that in your worship aid, where we are shown after a movie in Evanston, Ill. I thank Mary for her love and friendship.

Nancy Dierberger Gauthier

Sister Charlotte and I came to know each other in 1965 when I was in her Spanish class at Our Lady of Peace in St. Paul. Sister was also my homeroom teacher my senior year in 1967. We continued our friendship to this day. Sister taught me so much more than Spanish! She taught me that being grateful for family and friendships was something to treasure and not to ever give up my beliefs. I've treasured that she appreciated my beliefs. I had lost my father freshman year so she knew how I treasured people.

I invited Sister to come to our home in St. Louis sometime in the 1990s. I was a little hesitant because my husband and I have three children. She took our crazy busy household in stride. I took her to see *Riverdance* at the Fox Theatre. We had a wonderful weekend of fun together touring around the city and enjoying each other's company.

Every year we exchanged Christmas cards. Sister would send my family *The Guidepost* magazine as a gift. I would enjoy it every month knowing it was from my friend, Sister Mary Stokes. Her sense of humor was amazingly clever. She had some great sayings and we would laugh ourselves silly together.

I came to visit Sister two years ago. She was so happy to have a visit from another classmate and me. We reminisced through yearbooks we brought. When we left I gave her a huge hug goodbye. I will always treasure my teacher and friend as a blessing in my life. I love you Sister and thank you for all the "lessons" we taught each other about life as a Sister and life as a wife and mother and grandmother. Lives so different yet both of us respecting our life choices and enjoying sharing them.

Margaret McCann Pike, Class of 1967, Our Lady of Peace High School, St. Paul, MN

Sister Mary Stokes was my French teacher at Our Lady of Peace High School in St. Paul, Minn., in 1965-67. She taught our class at the end of the day when we were *sooo* tired, but she perked us up right away with her great sense of humor and sense of fun. She had funny sayings and comical facial expressions, even while demanding excellence in French pronunciation and grammar. We absolutely loved her.

For me, the friendship continued for 55 years! And I was far from the only one. She stayed in touch with many former students, from all parts of the country, religiously sending cards for the big occasions—Christmas and Easter, but also Halloween and St. Patrick's Day. Even during the years when I was raising five children and could barely find the time to write, she never gave up on me. The letters continued to arrive. She called me in Colorado when my father was dying and attended every event of his funeral, telling me that losing that first parent was the hardest. I was touched by such loyalty.

The last time I saw Mary was two years ago at Mount Carmel. When I was leaving, I thought I probably wouldn't see her again. I tried to share a few words of appreciation for what she meant to me, and to that, she cringed as if I were applying a hot iron! "Oh, don't say that! It'll go to my head!" she cried out. No big ego there, despite her quiet greatness.

Margaret McCann Pike (Email sent after viewing the Funeral Rite of Committal on May 6, 2020)

I just watched the funeral rite for Sister Mary Stokes, my dear friend and former French teacher in St. Paul. I can't begin to tell you how beautiful, dignified, and meaningful it was. The eulogy was perfect. It captured her spirit so well, and I learned so much more about Mary than I had known. It was heartwarming to see the sisters in attendance, showing love and respect to my friend, and the music completed the service just beautifully. Three of us, all former students from the OLP class of 1967, watched it together: Nancy Dierberger Gauthier, Judy Barrett

Semsch, and myself, and we communicated with each other before and after from three locations: St. Louis, St. Paul, and Denver. So thank you for making this technology available.

Lynn Klopstock Middleton

No one had a greater impact on my life than Sister Mary Charlotte. I was a very confused 16-year-old who lost her mother at 10, then months later, my alcoholic father married, of course, an alcoholic! My freshman year of public high school was a disaster academically, so when my parents decided I was a burden to their lifestyle and I was unable to make the grade to be accepted at any local California boarding schools, through the grace of God, I found myself at Mount St. Gertrude Academy in Boulder, Colo. I was not Catholic, nor did I have any religious background. I remember being totally confused when the sophomore prefect asked the class who had brought their missal from home. I thought, "ICBM (*Intercontinental Ballistic Missile*)."

No, I didn't have one of those. But despite all my ignorance, and fear of the unknown, I flourished in an environment of love and compassion.

Sister Mary Charlotte was my prefect my junior year. That was a year filled with laughter, learning, and love! She believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. I tried very hard never to disappoint her, which, of course, was inevitable. Her standards were high. But even greater was her sense of humor. I remember her teasing me one night that she knew what a classmate was giving me for Christmas. She was holding it hidden under her habit. My curiosity and her teasing caused such a ruckus, another sister angrily sent us all to bed immediately. The Christmas gift from my classmate was three of the characters from my favorite cartoon, "Peanuts" by Charles Schulz. What Sister Mary Charlotte had hidden, and was exposed by our relentless exuberance, was an institutional-size bottle of Phillips Milk of Magnesia! Sister was equally skilled at hiding butter, lifted from the kitchen, for the rare nights that we had popcorn. (*Diane commented, "I think most of us don't know this side of Mary!"*) The next day I told her what a severe lecture I had received about my behavior. Sister Mary Charlotte confessed she had been admonished for "contributing to the delinquency of minors." How far from the truth!

Until Mount St. Gertrude and the Sisters of Charity, my life was in a downward spiral. Sister Mary Charlotte made such a profound influence on me. I treasure the memories of those high school years, especially her words of wisdom, encouragement, laughter, love, and those beautiful blue eyes! I loved her so, and never a day went by that she wasn't in my thoughts and prayers. I often thought that my own mother, in heaven, sent Sister Mary Charlotte to me. Now my mother can thank her in person.

Barbara Brooks, BVM

I lived with Mary Stokes at Our Lady of Peace, St. Paul, from 1969 until the school closed in 1973. It was my first mission. Mary and I did not work in the same department or even teach on the same floor, but she was always kind and friendly to me. I enjoyed her delightfully quirky humor and learned from her how to bear sorrow with grace. Over the years we've stayed lightly in touch. Every time I met her she left me with some nugget of insight into how live with courage and faith.