



**Wake Stories of
Theresa (Amelia) Kramps, BVM**
Caritas Studio, July 14, 2020

Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM

Theresa and I entered the community on Aug. 2, 1959, in a set that numbered 118. Because educational preparation for teaching was a priority in our formative years, others' perception of our intellectual ability was critical to how our future unfolded. Although unintended, it was easy to absorb a subtle hierarchy of personal value based on where we went after the novitiate. While most of us went to the Scholasticate, were sent for post-BA degrees, or immediately to teach, Theresa stayed at Mount Carmel to assist in the bake house and sewing room. In my mind, I relegated her to the margins of what really mattered in BVM life.

During the decades that followed, I was vaguely aware of Theresa, not surprisingly, on the periphery of my consciousness. Then 10 years ago, the 13 of us remaining vowed members celebrated our Golden Jubilee. As Theresa spoke about her commitment to the poor, especially the children at Operation Breakthrough, I heard Mary Frances Clarke's words, "When you see a poor little one, look upon him or her with love." Something started to shift in me; I was looking upon Theresa with new eyes.

In September 2018, Theresa was on the planning committee for our reunion with vowed and former members. When Lynn Lester, Rose Mary Meyer, and I arrived at the hotel, Theresa's clear eyes sparkled her welcome. The four of us spent precious time together. Theresa gave examples of the mutual care among the members of her family. She told stories of the children she had come to love in her ministry. And she described with unmistakable self-esteem what it meant to get her degree in library science. She was sincerely interested in our lives and in all that was happening at Mount Carmel. Her affection for former members and theirs for her was evident. We brought Theresa into the center of our hearts and she did the same, one common BVM life and mission lived in distinctive ways; no margins, only wide and generous hospitality.

Due to declining health, Theresa arrived at Mount Carmel in mid-March, coincidental with the arrival of COVID-19. In a fortuitous convergence of circumstances, I as a BVM volunteer got to serve her meals in Marian Hall. On her first morning she greeted me from her place at the table, smiled broadly, and said, "I am so glad to be here." The warmth that fell between us was palpable. After more than 60 years, we were what we always truly were: two sisters together.

I want to remember Theresa out loud today so that I never forget what she taught me about diversity and not hierarchy of gifts, about innate personal value, about reaching out from the margins to draw all at the margins in to the center, about the need to honor the bake house and the sewing room. I think of Mary Frances Clarke loading potatoes into the wagon, refusing to create a class system of lay sisters. I imagine her looking upon Theresa with love, wrapping her in a calico apron, and saying, "Welcome home."

Amelia Lee, sister

Sister Theresa spent many holidays at our house with my three children and myself. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, July 4th, and we celebrated birthdays together going out to dinner. We became very close. We traveled to California together. Camped out at times which was an experience with three preteens. Disney World was our

final destination. Also saw the Grand Canyon. I was so grateful to have her with us. We flew to Disneyland in Florida with a nephew and my three teens. It was great. This was something Theresa and I never experienced as children being in a family of nine; needless to say we enjoyed it as much as they did. My family and I have many great memories with Theresa. We miss her immensely.

Barbara M. Stock, sister

I would like to share with you the kindness, consideration, love, giving, and respect that were part of Theresa's life. Many times Theresa was called to be the "great family helper." My son (Dennis) called Theresa saying, "Theresa, I need your help, Mom just broke her hip." She arrived before the day was over and spent six weeks helping us.

One of her skills was sewing clothing. She made wedding dresses, nurses' uniforms, kids' clothing, and costumes, and did many repairs. Then her crafts! She loved to share her hobby. We spent many years at craft shows. I spent time helping her at her craft booth, organizing her gifts and products for her many customers.

She was a member of St. Matthew Church in Grandview, Mo., and the sewing group that made carrying bags for patients with defibrillators or insulin pumps.

When I went to visit Theresa in Grandview, we always went to church by 9 a.m. to attend Mass at 10. I asked Theresa, "Why are we here so early?" and she told me she needed to visit with the people who attended the 8 a.m. Mass. She needed to know if she could do anything to help them. She also was a member of the Funeral Meal Group. Her favorite dishes: macaroni and cheese and goulash. We will always miss my sister.

Lynn Lester, BVM, set member

One of my favorite memories of Theresa was my experience at the weekend gathering in Kansas City, Mo., of twenty-one "59ers" celebrating our 59 years of friendship. Theresa was the perfect hostess: caring, gracious, and welcoming of everyone in her "home" city. Throughout the weekend Theresa made sure everyone enjoyed making new and remembering old memories. Theresa was a kind and gentle woman. She had a special warmth toward the young children with whom she worked at Operation Breakthrough in Kansas City. She was also extremely creative and brought joy and warmth into the hearts of many. The bond of kinship and love that Theresa shared with her family was unique. She was grateful for the opportunity to minister in Kansas City, always remaining very close to and supportive of every member of the Kramps family.

Rose Mary Meyer, BVM, set member

Theresa was a very strong woman. Theresa's heart was directed especially to others who were most in need of support. She was a loving, caring woman who labored tirelessly among those with whom she ministered. Even though she was at Mount Carmel a very short time before she died, she praised her caregivers and shared her delight with the meals. She especially enjoyed the gatherings of our set, the set of '59. Many times she brought a homemade gift for each person present. Even though her stay at Mount Carmel just before she died was very brief, she was at peace and loved being there. I am grateful for the telephone conversations we had during those few days. Thank you, Theresa, for sharing your life with us. Some of the set of '59 former members planned a gathering a few years ago in the Kansas City area. Theresa treasured these gatherings and often gave each woman present a gift she had made herself. Generosity and caring are hallmarks that describe Theresa's life. I am blessed for having known her, a dedicated Sister of Charity, BVM.

Katherine Tillman, former BVM and set member

Theresa was a very special person, loved by all of us who entered the BVMs with her in 1959. I have a pair of the lovely hot pads she created and always think of her when I use them. May she rest in God's peace!

Jennifer Heinemann, former coworker

Sister T, as she was affectionately called by all the children at Operation Breakthrough, will always be remembered here in the urban core of Kansas City where she worked for many years. Her lap was always available for a child who needed extra TLC. She had an innocence about her that drew children to her. Unlike some of the other grownups they knew, Sister T was never too busy to admire their school papers or go to their birthday parties. Sister Theresa did not look for recognition or thanks. She seemed truly happy just to serve.

Sue Koehler, former member

As a novice, I worked in the sewing room. Sister Theresa assisted Sister Mary Eudora and she instructed all of us as to what we were to do. She always had a ready smile and a great sense of humor. Sister Theresa always told us that we couldn't mess up anything, and that it could always be "fixed." I think that I did a lot of "ripping out."

Tina Williams, former coworker

Miss Teresa was a good person; she made everybody happy. I enjoyed working with her. I worked with her back in 2000. We are going to miss her.

Chris Waxter, former student, Operation Breakthrough

You just blessed so many of us while here on this earth. You made going to Operation Breakthrough fun, that's for sure. From yelling at me to stop running or reminding me, "Sister Berta is looking for you, Chris." The daycare wouldn't be as successful without people like you, Sister Theresa. You did a lot for the center and never wanted recognition or a pat on the back. You did everything that was asked of you out of love! You had the sweetest heart and smile! I could count on you to always fix the holes in my pants from playing on the playground or if one of my buttons popped off before Sister Corita yelled at me. This hurts so bad. This one is going to hurt for a while. I'm sorry I didn't get to tell you goodbye and thank you for everything you've done! I love you so much and I'm going to miss you! Thank you for everything you did to help Sister Berta Sailer and Corita Bussanmas! We need you down here but God needs you more. We love you!

Keyonna Robinson-Clark, former coworker, Operation Breakthrough

Sister T was the first person I shared an office with at Operation Breakthrough for a couple of years. She was my trainer. We shared great conversations, both work and personal. I must say she was a very sweet lady. I used to love going to breakfast with her and a few more of the ladies once a month at IHOP. We called ourselves the breakfast crew. If we didn't go to IHOP, we would go to Sister Liz's and do a potluck breakfast and just have a good ole time. She loved sewing and I loved getting my pot holders she would make for me. She will be truly missed.

Tammy McMurray, former coworker, Operation Breakthrough

Sister Theresa was an amazing woman. My family and I met her at Operation Breakthrough. We love her and her memories are forever cherished and stamped upon our hearts. She's finally home and always with us in Spirit. My last daughter has her middle name. We love you Sister Theresa.

Sharon Turner, former coworker, Operation Breakthrough

While working with Sister Theresa at Operation Breakthrough, there was something about her smile, her soft voice, her kindness, and her respect for others. She always took time out for others.

Mary Jo Weaver Larson, former BVM, Set of 1963

I am saddened to hear of Theresa's passing. Last July, a friend, Theresa and I shared breakfast with her at Mount Carmel. One of my duties as a novice in the 1960s was in the bake house, so seeing her was a special part of the gathering. The bake house was a duty that has enriched my life all these years later. Anytime I am moved to bake, bake bread in particular, I think of that experience and the love that baking brings in so many areas of life. Thank you, Theresa, for not only passing on your art, but the love that was created in that room. I can still remember the aroma as it wafted through the halls.

Anita Tebbe, former BVM and set member

Theresa was a “salt of the earth” person who never ran from work, had a neat sense of humor, and was always gracious.

Unknown

She had a deep love for the community and her license plate was TLK BVM—Theresa Louise Kramps, BVM.

Diane Forster, BVM

I chose the picture of Theresa with children on the front of the program, and later realized I could name all but one of the children, since I taught them also. As a teacher, Theresa was thorough and creative. In particular a unit, she taught on the books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, the *Little House on the Prairie* series. Theresa had been to DeSmet, S.D., and some other places where Laura’s family had lived, and could describe the places in great detail, and share the pictures she herself had taken on her visits to the various locations. It was a fine unit in reading, American history, and American heritage. I was so interested (and she was so enthusiastic) that I eventually read all of the books myself!

Living in the convent in Kansas City, I remember Theresa always had handiwork of some kind in her hands. She never paused in creating! For her silver jubilee, as we worked on the intercessions, Theresa wanted to be sure she thanked God for all the good things in her life, for all the difficulties, and even for the persons who taught her lessons she didn’t particularly want to learn!

Donna Bebensee, BVM

When we were senior novices, Marcia Keyes and I were in the bake house with Theresa Kramps. We made approximately 50 pies every Friday morning. I learned how to make excellent and tasteful pie crust from scratch. My favorite memory was learning from Theresa how to make apple dumplings. The syrup was made of red hot candies—delicious! She was always busy making something for supper while we were making the 50 pies. Though it was a very busy job, it was pleasant, even fun. This was a happy memory I have of the novitiate. I became a very good cook and I think Theresa had an influence in that. I remember Theresa as being very calming and laughing easily. “Welcome the little children to come to me.” Whenever I hear this scripture passage, I think of Theresa. Blessings on you, Theresa.

Suzanne Effinger, BVM

Theresa was a hard worker; she saw things around the house that needed to be done and went ahead. She comes from a big family so she learned that there. Theresa was good with the little children and successfully worked in a Montessori program.

Elizabeth Seaman, BVM

Family was everything to Theresa; she had five brothers and three sisters. She was a seamstress. She made table runners, place mats, pot holders, scarves and pillows, and sold them at several craft shows every year. She and her sisters did this for years. She also was a blood donor. By the time Theresa had to quit giving blood because of her medications, she had donated over 100 pints. She was so generous and kind, and did not know the meaning of “no.”