



## Wake Stories of Dorothy (Dot) Feehan, BVM (Agnes Cecile)

Caritas Studio, June 19, 2020

### **Joellen McCarthy, BVM**

I first connected with Dot early in my BVM years. I was living in San Francisco. I received a call from Roberta Kuhn, BVM asking that I set up a way for the three nominees for regional representative to connect with the BVMs in the area. Roberta went on to say that this role was a critical new piece in our new government and that it's important that the BVMs get to know who they wanted to fill that position. Roberta asked that I set up the meeting, arrange the flights, and to not worry about the costs. I remember calling Dot at Clarke College (now University) in Dubuque. Her response was, "OK, tell me where I'm supposed to be and I'll be there." As we know, Dot was elected and that was the beginning of our friendship. This regional search was a kind of microcosm, a feeling of being invited into God's wide, wonderful world of freeing spaciousness which I experienced Dot living in all of her years. I see this spaciousness throughout all her life, but I would like to share one particular experience. When I entered the BVM community, I experienced a subtle, unspoken culture that I perceived as saying, "If you are a graduate of a BVM school, you have the credentials for membership." Here I was from rural Central High School in Butte, Mont. But through God and through her deep relishing of life in Montana—its beauty, its people and its land—I realized that I carried a very precious gift with roots in Montana. My friendship with Dot filled an important piece that had been missing. With this wholeness that I experienced, I could be open to Dot's gentle encouragement to invest into this community that I know Dot dearly loved. That encouraged me to continue to insert my life into this community in ways that I never would have imagined. I will miss Dot deeply. Knowing how she lived her life, I know we'll continue to feel invited into this wide, wonderful world and her spacious life can never be far from us.

### **Father Jim Hogan**

At the core Dot was so fully human. I was thinking of a backpacking trip I took, she, Joellen and a bunch of kids. I was going to refer to that, but instead I think I want to tell you a story about a backpacking trip to Glacier National Park in Montana. Mostly high school kids, a number of adults and Dot were sharing a tent with a young lady whose name was Cheryl Ruby. It was a great hike and Dot was game to try almost everything. We climbed Gunsight Pass and camped out in this meadow; it was a beautiful place. The next night we were underneath a huge, mountainous precipice. Cheryl liked to tell the story that when she was crawling into the tent one night, she looked at Dot and said, "What are you doing?" In all her simplicity and goodness Dot said, "I'm putting my hair up in curlers." I've never encountered anybody else who would carry a bunch of curlers in a backpack into the back country of Montana. Dot had that sense of being human and she was proud of it. Most of all, Dot was our friend. She was a friend to each and all of us—and we knew it. She accepted each of us for who we are and all those who came into her life. She loved us and spoke to us of God. She shared her Christ spirit with us. She remains my dearest friend and soulmate. I will miss her greatly.

### **Barbara Wiemhoff, niece**

There are so many memories that I decided to pick out a few of her characteristics and give a few examples. Our Aunt Dot is always filled with joy. She sees people and things from her heart. Aunt Dot was fun. As young kids, we remember that whenever Aunt Dot returned to Chicago, we had big parties. There were always lots of people and lots of laughter. In the old days, our neighbors enjoyed watching her play baseball. They were shocked that she was actually a good player even while wearing the habit with a long skirt. Dot was a pioneer. Shortly after Vatican

II, she told us that the BVMs were experimenting with wearing regular clothes instead of the habit. Of course she wanted to experiment. We will always remember the first time we saw Aunt Dot out of the habit. For the Allens, it was December 1966, my senior prom. There's a picture of my little brothers Danny, Pat and Terry standing next to me in a prom dress. But the center and focus of the picture was our Aunt Dot with red curls framing her beautiful smile and wearing one of my mom's two-piece suits. I knew then the Dot would no longer be wearing a long, black robe and veil.

Aunt Dot loved family. When she came to Chicago, we made plans for everyone to see her. The Allens, the Davys and the Grauers are a big crowd. Each time she came, there were large gatherings to celebrate her being with us. The family gatherings continued after she moved to Mount Carmel in Dubuque, Iowa. We reserved a large room, usually at the Hotel Julien, and have dinner. The highlight of our dinners was always Dot's toast. Although there were usually 20 of us, the toast made each one of us feel special as individuals and deeply loved as the large family group that we are. The last time we were all together as a group was October.

There was one facet of life that Aunt Dot did not excel in. Only one. Our Aunt Dot was not a good driver. During one of our visits to Longmont, Colo., Aunt Dot was driving my sister Nancy and me somewhere. The police pulled us over and gave her a ticket for speeding. She was going 40 mph over the speed limit in a construction zone. Nancy and I went to the courthouse to appeal. It's the first and only time we have ever been in court. We argued, "You cannot give Aunt Dot a ticket. She's too kind. She helps too many parishioners and all the residents in the surrounding community. She's a wonderful nun." Well, we were successful. The judge removed the fine. However, he gave her community service. It's through these memories, and hundreds more, that our Aunt Dot will always be a light in our lives. She will continue to teach us to be filled with joy and see things from our heart as she did.

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

I have an indelible memory of the younger Dot. In February 1968, right after professing first vows at Guadalupe, three of us came to Dubuque and joined the other "half" of our set from Mount Carmel to continue our studies at Clarke College (now University). Unlike the set before us, we moved *directly* on campus that spring semester. I was assigned to live with five others in the "group room" on the second floor of Mary Josita Hall, adjacent to the Chapel. Dot was teaching or working at Clarke and she went out of her way to make us young sisters feel welcome, included, loved, and valued.

Here's the scene: Along the exterior wall of the group room, with the door in the middle, were the six closets with sliding doors, about four feet high, with other upper cabinets for storage. On May 8, Susan Stevenson, one of our set members, was celebrating her 21st birthday, and Dot was game to surprise her with us when Sue came into the room from afternoon class. I can still see Dot deciding to hunch down and tuck herself into the closet and shut the sliding door. When the birthday girl arrived, out jumped Dot, yelling "Surprise!" As a 20-year old, I remember thinking, "WOW! This is really something. An "older" sister (she was only 41, but twice our age) in a position of some "authority" was acting like a real, fun-loving person with us newly professed. I have always treasured that image. Every time I saw her, I thought of her jumping out of the closet. And everyone who knew Dot can easily imagine her wonderful laugh and twinkly eyes as she joined in the fun that day. Thank you, Dot.

#### **Bette Voss, BVM**

Dot was a convener. One group that she convened that wasn't mentioned in the eulogy was a group from Loveland, Colo., and a group from Denver who met at a park in Longmont, Colo., halfway in between. We got to know the group from Longmont and they got to know us. She created a community that didn't exist before she brought us together. Relative to the same concept of convening, she invited me to ask Father Jim, at some point when I was considering a change in ministry, to get together to talk about possibly going to his ministry. We had a wonderful lunch, but it didn't work out. I often think to myself that she knew how to set things up so that people would come together and get to know each other. That certainly was true among her friends. Tess Malumphy and Nancy Van Anne became very close friends.

That photo of us in the raft going over the rapids was so indicative. I haven't seen that picture in ages. A couple of people fell out of the raft; they were bounced by the rapids. We finally dragged them back in over the edge of the raft. Mo (Maureen) McGrain was with us at the time. Mo was either considering entering or possibly was an affiliate at that time. We laughed afterwards that we would *really* be in trouble if our one and only novice was thrown into the water on a rafting trip. We laughed and laughed. She had such a wonderful laugh.

I'm so grateful for all the memories I have. The one thing that came to mind today was that she never had an angry look on her face. I cannot envision any memory of Dot with anything but the most loving, kind, accepting, inviting expression. No frustration, no anger. She had them, I'm sure, but her face was always one of loving welcoming.

### **Diane Forster, BVM**

Among the emails we have received, I summarized in a few words the words many sisters have sent and a few of Dot's friends have sent. They are words that have been used over and over and many of you have used. Here's my list of words for Dot: kind and loving, gracious and encouraging, spiritual and humble, patient and strong, inclusive, accepting, non-judgmental, understanding and wise, persistent and supportive and respectful, faithful and joyful, wise and merciful, vibrant, a deep and full woman and woman religious, and, above all, a friend and sister to many.

### **Mary Gene Kinney, BVM**

Wise, courageous, faithful, joyful are some of the words that come to mind when I think of Dot. I first met Dot when she was principal in Missoula, Mont., and I was teaching music in Butte, Mont. Some years later she was regional representative and I was in her Region. This was when my most significant connection with Dot began. I was living through a dark time in my life due to my use of alcohol. Dot had the courage to name my problem and point out how it was destroying my life. She came to visit one day with the intention of getting me into treatment. Naturally, I did not like the idea. We disagreed about the seriousness of "my problem." I thought it was a small problem which I could handle. She thought it was a big problem which I could not handle. After a while I began to get the idea that she was **not** going to leave until I said "yes." I still remember her kindness and strength and her belief in me when I could not believe in myself. She provided support and honesty as I went to treatment and then struggled to return home to the community as a sober person. I know deep down in my soul that Dot saved my life. I am eternally grateful every day. Thank you Dot!

### **Margaret Sannasardo, BVM**

Dot was my Regional when I was teaching junior high at St Brigid's in San Francisco. I was happy and content in doing so. On her visit to us in 1969, she kept persisting and encouraging me to apply to be principal (it was the days of Totally Open Personal Application). The last thing in the world I wanted was to be a principal. Being the obedient sister that I tried to be, I did what she asked and was accepted to be principal at St. Joseph School in Round Lake, Ill. If it hadn't been for Dot's persistence and encouragement, I would have missed one of the happiest times of my life. Thank you, Dot. I know your Irish eyes are smiling more than ever now.

*Additional Sharing of Memories not read due to time constrictions:*

### **Tess Malumphy, Associate**

Dot was my spiritual director while she was in Colorado and continued to be by phone after she moved to Montana. She was a great help to me in dealing with issues from the past with my brother. She helped me realize how much God loves us. She was a very loving person.

### **Brother David Galinski, FSC**

I met Dot over 40 years ago through the Allen family and I am thankful for it. Dot was a woman of great faith, great love and her presence brought joy to all she met. I am grateful for all she did and was for us. She will be

missed by her BVM family and all the Allens and other family members. Dot is now enjoying the fruits of a life well lived. Remember us as we remember you. Thanks for everything! Love and prayers!

### **Ellen Morseth, BVM**

Dot was one of the dearest friends a person could have in this world. In her 93 years, she treated everyone with respect, paid little attention to our shortcomings, and always managed to inject some fun and laughter into many stressful times. There are so many memories: in the 1960s there were weekly long walks on the beach in San Francisco as I prepared for final vows; such care and graciousness on her part as she accompanied me to my father's funeral after his tragic death in Seattle; as a member of the first group of BVM Regionals the patience she exhibited in seemingly endless meetings resulting in TOPA before she had to inform pastors that BVMs could no longer heed their requests for teachers to staff parish schools; and on and on. Dot was a very special and spiritual woman who will be sorely missed, always loved by her friends, and never forgotten.

### **Denise McCarthy Giuliana**

As a student when she was principal, I saw Sister Mary Agnes Cecile as a vibrant, kind, and merciful keeper of order in a large school. She smiled! Five decades later as a member of her women's prayer group, I cherished her insight, wisdom and spiritual guidance. She modeled discernment and aging with strength and grace. When Dot retired to Mount Carmel, my childhood desire to go to see the Mecca of the BVM order was renewed. Last October, my husband Dick, also a former St. Anthony student, and I combined a road trip to the East Coast with our pilgrimage to Dubuque. What a gift to be able to see the beautiful Motherhouse and to spend time visiting with our Missoula friends. Our last memories of dear Dot were to tell her how she had impacted our lives and give her a final kiss goodbye. We are so thankful for our timely trip—a true blessing!

### **Marie Corr, BVM**

It was a great experience joining Dot and Father Jim Hogan on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. They did these for several seasons. The focus was Scripture based as we journeyed the path Jesus walked. Meeting the Israelite culture was more in depth than merely being tourists. Dot was always a joyful, enthusiastic presence that reached out to all of us. When I was hesitant to try something, she instilled trust in me that ended up being very enriching. Dot's friendship was life-giving.

### **Tom Ferguson, Class of '61, Corpus Christi, Fort Dodge, Iowa**

Sister Mary Agnes Cecile and Mrs. Helen O'Leary split the teaching duties of our eighth grade class at Corpus Christi in 1961. It was my first year at Corpus Christi, having moved to Fort Dodge from Wisconsin. Both were terrific people. Sister and Mrs. O'Leary juggled our large class with equanimity and dispatch. Some of us, especially the lads, were a handful. Sister's Irish temperament and ever-ready smile served her well, I believe, in her chosen walk of life. Gosh. That was such a long time ago, was it not?

After high school, Sister's path and mine crossed again in Dubuque, Iowa. I was attending Loras College, visiting my future wife, Rita, at Clarke College (now University), when I accidentally ran into Sister in the lobby of Rita's dorm. Sister was teaching at Clarke. Thanks to our '65 classmate, Jim Savage, I tracked Sister down in 2017. Rita and I visited her at the BVM retirement home in Dubuque. We brunched at a quaint French bistro in the re-emerging downtown-river area, traveled up to Eagle Point Park for auld lang syne and drove past the Clarke campus. Sister, now in her 90s, was sharp as a tack. She and Rita got along famously; I didn't even need to be there.

As Rita's illness in its later stages overtook our lives, I neglected my contact with Sister. Now, with this notice of Sister's death, I am painfully reminded of the need to stay connected in life. As one who reads this can probably easily discern, I liked the Irish Nun very much. Thank you, Sister Dot, for all that you did for me. God bless you and have mercy on your immortal soul.

**Kathleen Conway, BVM**

In the mid-70s, Dot and I were both going to Northwestern University in Chicago for advanced degrees. I lived in the Arthur apartment during those summers and I think Dot lived at Wright Hall. I brought my lunch every day and Dot only had a lunch occasionally so I often shared my sandwich with her as we chatted and got to know one another. A life-long bond was formed over those peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

**Father Hugh O'Donnell, CM**

Dot is truly one of the best persons I've ever known. I learned so much from her and have an unending affection and admiration for how loving, wise, and inclusive she always was and has been to the end. She was the heart of the pastoral team at Spirit of Peace/Christ, in Longmont, Colo., and the people really loved her. Their team and parish were a model in the archdiocese.

**Rose Mary Meyer, BVM**

Dot modeled a joyful way of living. Her quest for new, inclusive ideas was consistent in our conversations about ritual and theology. Thank you, Dot.

**Denise Giuliani, Missoula, Mont.**

Sister Mary Agnes Cecile was my principal at St. Anthony School in Missoula, Mont., for five years. Great memories of her. What a job to run a flourishing, bursting-at-the-seams school during such a turbulent time of change in society and the church! She handled it with wisdom, strength, and humor. Later as an adult, I came to know Dot in a women's prayer group. She was a sanctuary of spiritual wisdom for many. I treasure the time in her presence. Thank you, Lord, for the gift she was and continues to be.

**Sister Rosa Rauth, OP**

Sister Dorothy and I have been good friends since grade school days. Dot and I grew up together in Ascension Parish, Oak Park, Ill., and graduated in 1940. We had a good visit when our Sinsinawa Senior Singers entertained the BVMs last year. May she rest in peace.

**Mary Ann Fremgen, former BVM**

Dot was a blessing to Colorado. She was part of a team who helped to bring team ministry to St. Anne Parish in Arvada and it became a model for other team ministry. Dot was there for me when I was transitioning from the BVMs and I am thankful to have been able to see her again during the last two years.

**Patricia Nooney, BVM**

When visiting family in Missoula, I vividly remember Dot's welcoming smiles and warm hugs as she greeted my mother and me at Christ the King parish. Definitely a treasure to hold in these days of social distancing and face masks.

**Mary A. Healey, BVM**

I lived with Dot for a year with a few notable incidents which wouldn't make sense to anyone who didn't know the people involved. However, Georgia Ann Lange, BVM told me this story. When she was in high school at St. Joseph, Rock Island, Ill, Dot's BVM aunt, also named SM Agnes Cecile, died. Dot, a postulant, came to the funeral, tall, slim and beautiful in her postulant garb with her long red hair hanging down her back. The next week many prospective vocations blossomed. Principal SM Lucilla McGrath told the girls, "Being a postulant won't make you look like that." Most of the vocations withered over time.

**Michael Prendergast**

May her memory be eternal! Her gift and that of other BVMs to the people in Montana will be cherished forever.

### **John, Barbara, Jon, Brian and Lisa Wiemhoff**

Who Aunt Dot is to the Wiemhoff Family? On June 14, 2020, we lost one of the most beautiful persons who ever walked this Earth, our Aunt Dot. Aunt Dot was the most kind, gracious, humble, spiritual, patient, non-judgmental, understanding person we ever knew. And yet, the most adventuresome and sport-loving one as well. When in Denver or Missoula, Mont., she would take John skiing at Loveland, Colo., or hike with us in the Bitterroot Mountains in western Montana, or go sailing or swimming in Flathead Lake. Aunt Dot showed us the beauty of the Colorado and Montana landscape through her sense of adventure. Eternal life and peace be with you. You are in our spirit always. We love you, Aunt Dot.

### **Father Jim Hogan, Missoula, Mont.**

Dot (Dorothy) Feehan was a unique woman and her amazing life was filled with people who loved her. She was the youngest of four siblings in a Chicago Irish Catholic family. Among Irish families the name "Dorothy" means "God's gift." Seventy-five years ago this past February, she traveled from Chicago to Dubuque, Iowa, and entered the community of religious women known as the BVMs (the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary). She was given the name Sister Mary Agnes Cecile.

After teaching in Chicago, Sioux City, and Fort Dodge, Iowa, her community sent her to Missoula, Mont., where she served as the principal of Saint Anthony's school. During that period she was still known as Sister Mary Agnes Cecile. While serving as principal she also taught 65 students in the eighth grade. From there she joined the faculty in the graduate school at Clarke University. A few years later she was elected by her BVM peers to serve (as regional) in the government of their community. She served in that position for seven years representing the sisters of Northern California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, and Montana. During that period, she reclaimed the name given to her in her baptism and thereafter was commonly known as "Sister Dot." She then moved to Colorado where she served on the faculty of Loretta Heights College in Denver and ministered in parishes in Arvada and Longmont, Colo.

Upon her retirement she returned to Missoula where she continued her personal ministry in many small faith communities. Several years ago, one of her Missoula friends wrote an essay about Dot trying to describe the unique woman she was. She described Dot as "a tall, gracefully slim woman with deliciously blue aquamarine eyes and hands that appear wide and deep enough to hold all the world's troubles." Her hands were an extension of her heart. Everyone thought of Dot as their "Sister," because her love was always non-judgmental and unconditional for everyone!

In 2012, because of health challenges, she decided to return to the BVM Motherhouse in Dubuque, Iowa. She lived there among the women she had served in a time of significant change and transformation. Those blue aquamarine eyes closed for the last time on June 14. This unique and beautiful woman of faith lived with confidence that the Gracious Mystery we name God draws us to become more fully human and alive. She lived with the conviction Christ is risen! Now our Sister Dot Feehan also is risen!