



Sharing of Memories of Ellen (Rose Evelyn) Morseth, BVM Caritas Studio, Sept. 29, 2020

Mary McCauley, BVM

Ellen and I had mutual friends, namely BVMs Deanna Carr, Michaleen Gibbons, and Michaelita Kelly, and it was through them that I came to know, love, and admire Ellen. Believe me she was one special woman. She was quiet, gracious, warm, intelligent, dignified, kind, and perceptive. She also possessed a special sense of humor. Although I say Ellen was quiet, if you got her into a storytelling mood, you could be assured that your evening would be filled with feelings of amazement, humor, admiration, and gratitude. The tales she shared about her pastoral ministry days in rather isolated Montana parishes were memorable and, I must admit, a bit unbelievable. Yet Ellen insisted that the experiences were true!

I think it would be correct to say that Ellen was a very principled woman. She was firm in her convictions and held not only herself but everyone else to high standards. Without a doubt she was faithful to our BVM mission and did whatever she could to free herself and others in God's steadfast love. Personally I looked forward to the day when Ellen would return to Dubuque and be a part of our Mount Carmel Bluffs community. I spoke with her a few days after her fall and, I believe, before she had any hint of the aggressiveness of the cancer within her. Her spirit was typical of Ellen—warm, positive, caring, and kind. And this, I believe, is the spirit that she is now sharing with all who welcomed her to heaven—her family, her BVM Sisters, her many ministerial friends, and all those whose lives Ellen Influenced simply because she was Ellen!

Anne Kendall, BVM

Ellen felt a calling to be a BVM having known the BVM sisters in her hometown of Seattle. She entered with the set of 1960, but was deterred from completing her novitiate because of the objections of her family about her entrance into religious life. When she was old enough to implement her desire, she re-entered the BVMs. Her spirit of determination manifested itself, as it would throughout her life.

Ellen ministered in Montana with BVMs Deanna Carr and Mary Frances Shafer, her lifelong friends. She wrote books with her friend Biago Mazza and she made good friends with those in her apartment building. My close relationship with Ellen was born 10 years ago when she had a rare type of cancer in the back of her mouth. Surgery left her with a large hole in that place, with speech that was difficult to understand. The cancer was a rare form that doctors said was only something one would see in a textbook. When I stayed with Ellen in Kansas City for several weeks while she was recovering, we put together puzzles, read books, watched TV and, of course, exchanged ideas about church, society, and the BVM community. She had firm ideas about all entities.

In her time in Kansas City, she typed up Joan Doyle's papers. It was a great service because she knew the background of what was happening at that time in church, society and Leadership Conference of Women Religious . . . even though now it was many years later. She was Joan's secretary and could read Joan's distinctive handwriting and Joan's editing of her talks and correspondence.

The knowledge of this bout with cancer came upon her unexpectedly. I had received a birthday card from her just a couple of weeks ago, in which she mentioned having survived the first cancer surgery for 10 years. Little did we

know what was to come so soon. In interest of time, I want to thank Ellen for her work for the BVM community and the church. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Renee Dunlap

When I left hairdressing over 30 years ago, I came home with two things. One was my skills, the other was Ellen. I'm not sure whose idea it was, but we both decided that I was going to continue doing her hair. Having Ellen in my house for the first time, I was a little concerned because it's an animal house, literally. Rescued animals. But to my happy surprise, Ellen was an animal lover and rescued one herself 12 years ago: a kitten named Snuggles, also known as Luna. Snuggles was a little homeless kitten at Ellen's apartment complex; she was hanging from a tree for two days. Once down, Ellen took her in and fed her. She said, "She just lays in my lap and purrs and her paw is the color of my favorite skirt." Ellen named her Snuggles and she was in love and was set to keep her. But to her sadness she discovered how high the yearly pet deposit was in her apartment complex. So she asked me if I would please take Snuggles in and give her a good home. I said, "Absolutely." Upon Snuggles arrival I took her out of the box and held her nicely and she growled. I never had a cat growl at me, so I quickly gave her back to Ellen where she curled up in her lap and started purring. Ellen just said, "She's sweet." Ellen even cried when she left her, even though she would see her at least once a month and anytime she wanted to. When we changed her name to Luna after a movie character, Ellen made sure and asked me several times if that was a good name and not a bad name. I said "Yes, the character is very sweet and just a little bit crazy." Then Ellen was OK with that. Ellen saw Snuggles for many years after that and we still have Luna today. At Christmastime Ellen even bought and wrapped up toys with name tags for all the pets. Not only was Ellen a blessing to my husband, my son and me, but to all our pets also. She is family.

Biagio and Dorothy Mazza

We have known Ellen for the past 32 years since she started working for the Center for Pastoral Life and Ministry in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph in July 1988. We invited Ellen to our home for Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and periodically got together during the summer. She would always graciously accept and come, except for the few rare snow events at Easter and Christmas. We enjoyed spending time with her, sharing food, wine, and conversations about life, church, politics, and everyday events. When the grandkids were there, we had a great time playing games together and chatting along. Ellen enjoyed a good wine, along with some good Italian liquors and homemade Italian desserts. We always made sure that Ellen took home numerous doggie bags of food and desserts so that she could continue the celebration at home.

I, Biagio, worked with Ellen at the Center on Parish Pastoral Council leadership development and discernment along with parish staff development. Together we worked on two books—*The Leadership Book* and *Prayer Plus*—offering both lesson plans for Parish Council formation and discernment, along with a spirituality focused on prayer and attunement to the role of the Spirit in parish life. Ellen was adept at responding to parish leadership and staff needs with creativity and enthusiasm, always empowering others for ministry. She taught me a whole lot about leadership formation and development in parish life.

We will miss Ellen very much, and our holidays and life will not be as enjoyable or engaging without her presence and smile. But we will always remember her in our eating and drinking. We will always keep an empty chair and plate in her honor and memory. She always sat in the same place. May she continue to enjoy eternal life at the heavenly banquet with our Loving God as she enjoyed life among all of us.

Elizabeth Seaman, BVM and Barb Roy, BVM Associate

Ellen, we will miss our monthly adventures as we celebrated community feast days, all filled with prayers, good discussions, great food, and lots of just good sharing. We will miss you and Theresa Kramps, BVM. Be at peace.

Judith Farrell Boston, former member of the Set of 1962

Ellen Morseth wanted more than anything to be a BVM. She proved this by entering the Community in 1960 and then, after family pressure forced her to return home, re-entering with our set in 1962. From that time on, Ellen

lived and loved her life as a Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Members of Ellen's 1962 set are saddened by her passing. For many years she has been the sole remaining vowed member of our set. We looked to her with gratitude and pride in the service she was joyfully giving. In 2012, Ellen wrote of her many roles and achievements in our 50th reunion booklet. One of her first assignments sent her to my home parish of St. Paul in San Francisco, where she taught and served in administration for 10 years. But her path took many turns: secretary to the BVM president, student of pastoral studies at Emmanuel College in Boston, pastoral minister in Montana and Missouri, and the co-founder and leadership consultant of an ecumenical ministry. Now Ellen joins our set's first saint, Sister Geralyn Marie Lussion, who entered eternity in our early novitiate days. Rest in peace, dear Sister Ellen. You served many, you loved much, and you made your 1962 set very proud.

Sue Thaelke Koehler, former member of the Set of 1962

I was one of the set of 1962. Ellen was such a wonderfully kind, loving, caring, and sensitive person. She would always have a sweet smile and a ready sense of humor. Ellen was humble, and always looked out for others instead of herself. She also had a deep understanding and love of Christ, which she shared and radiated to others. Ellen is home now, and we rejoice in her happiness. We also ask her to look out for us until we can join her.

Catherine Jean Hayen, BVM

I remember sharing a second floor Motherhouse dorm with Ellen shortly before she left Mount Carmel. I came to my alcove, which was near the hall and I heard Ellen crying in her alcove near the window. I walked back to her to see what was making her cry. Sobbing, she said that her mother thought that Ellen should come home as she wanted her there. Ellen felt that she needed to honor her mother's wishes and said she was leaving. She did so soon after that. Then, two years later, Ellen re-entered. She was the only remaining member of that set but always celebrated with our Set of 1960. God bless her.

Nancy McCarthy, BVM

I'm a member of Ellen's first set—Set of 1960. When I first learned of her death, I was on my way to mail her a card. The message on the card was, "You are one of God's special gifts," and I think that's how I'll always remember Ellen. During the time we spent together at Mount Carmel, that was how I saw her. There was definitely always something 'special' about Ellen and I was very sorry when she went home. Also sorry I never got to see much of her after she re-entered two years later. Our paths just never crossed very often over the years. But we always considered her part of our set, especially when she ended up being the only one left in Set of 1962. It was wonderful having her present at our golden jubilee. I really shared some good time with her when she visited Mount Carmel a couple of times since I've lived here. I also had the opportunity to experience her facilitation expertise at a region meeting in Chicago. I'm sorry I only heard from others about the many good works she engaged in during her BVM life. Our set will really miss this "beautiful person."

Mary Jo Weaver Larson, former BVM

So sorry to read of Ellen's passing. She was the principal at St Paul Non-Graded Primary in San Francisco, my first and only mission 1968-69. I spoke with her briefly at the Gathering in 2019. Godspeed, Ellen.

Sharon Lesikar, former BVM

Ellen was the big sister I always wanted. We entered together on July 31, 1962, along with so many wonderful young women who were part of our set. I had a chance to know Ellen better when we were assigned to clean the Marian Hall Chapel together as junior novices. Ellen saw the amusing side of so much we encountered on our walk over from the Motherhouse and back, as well as while we worked. She always knew exactly who she was and was comfortable being that. I have admired Ellen's poise and tact, and also her gentle humor. She was the one I wanted to be when I grew up.

Irene Lukefahr, BVM

In the fall of 2001, the then West Region of our BVM Congregation began the process of electing new regional representatives to follow Mary Kay Dum and Gwen Farry, whose terms were to end in the summer of 2002. The

election committee met and decided to experiment with a discernment process where the entire membership of the West Region would gather together and discern our next regional team. Ellen Morseth was asked and agreed to be our facilitator during the entire process. In the many months that Ellen met with those discerning, she was always gracious, a loving support, well-prepared, and always open to the movement of the Spirit, and encouraged the discerners to do the same. When the entire region gathered in the spring of 2002, Ellen guided us all through a prayerful, open, and honest process. When Mary Frances Clarke wrote her sisters about the election of who might follow her, she encouraged them to pray to God for a “holy and happy” ending. That was what Ellen did. At the end of our West Region’s discernment weekend, a spirit of joy and peace permeated the entire assembly. Thank you, Ellen, for your leadership. May you now rest in peace knowing your labors have borne much fruit.

Norma Evans, BVM

I fondly remember spending Sundays with Ellen, celebrating Mass, and traveling across the grand Golden Gate Bridge to Sausalito, Calif., for breakfast and shopping.

Peggy Mueller, former BVM

I was in Ellen’s set and entered in 1962. When we had our 50th reunion, which she attended, we sang this hymn together. I include it here in tribute to her, her grace, and her loving commitment to others for so many years as well as in honor of the BVM community which has been our community as well.

Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel

Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel whom in ancient prophecy
God revealed to Saint Elijah by an Oriental sea.
Rise again on God’s creation bring to bloom this arid place
With the white cloud of your beauty and the rainfall of your grace.

Lady of the mystic mountain, where the Lord has set His throne,
Up its steep ways of the Spirit, none can walk save love alone.
Grant us grace to climb Mount Carmel and to learn that love is loss
Guide us till our ways outdistance all earth’s treasures save the cross.