



Sharing of Memories of Anita Montavon, BVM (Felicity)

Caritas Studio, Dec. 10, 2020

Kate Keating, BVM

Anita is in my set, so we go back a bit—60 years plus. Recently we talked about our first mission. After leaving the Scholasticate, we were assigned to the same school—Immaculate Conception in Butte. Here is what we remembered. It took us three days and two nights to get there on the train. We remember having good seats on the train; we each had window. The sleeping was in the bunk beds, as I called them, an upper and a lower level. We remember eating in the dining room but don't remember having any money. We wondered how that worked. Maybe it was included in the ticket. We remember being in the full habit and having a very hard time taking the habit off in the bed. Putting it on in the morning was worse because it was dark. I came down from the upper bunk and she out of the lower bunk. We looked at each other and laughed. She had a great laugh. We remember the train backing into the station on the third day. I asked a man why we were backing in. He said, "That's how we do it here."

We remembered the many BVMs meeting us at the depot; they always welcomed any new ones that came in. We remember seeing all the sisters, not knowing anyone except one—Jane Rogers from the novitiate. We remember our first classes. She had over 35 little ones and I had 50 fifth graders. We started our teacher careers together with all its ups and downs in Butte, Mont., a town of about 20,000 people and 500 dogs. Parents did not pick up the kids at the end of the day. The dogs did. We had a real up and down time, but we made it through those days. Rest in peace, dear Anita. You deserve something very, very special and now you have it!

Mary McCauley, BVM

Anita was a member of the Set of 1956. I trust that I speak for all the remaining members of our set when I say that it was an honor to know her and call her friend. We loved her and admired her.

Anita was a gifted woman. She was an inveterate reader, very intelligent, possessed a quick dry wit, and thoroughly appreciated visiting with friends and family. We also know that she won the Mount Carmel prize for having made the most trips to the infamous Mall in the Hall! And of course following those trips, she was always grateful when Mimi would come and do her best to sort through and rearrange the contents of the limited space within the one-and-only Marian Hall closets.

Throughout Anita's 82 years of life and 64 years as a member of the BVM community, she shared many gifts. It is my conviction that the greatest gift she shared came during her last 22 years of her life when she dealt with, coped with, lived with, and accepted her debilitating disease. Anita had to have experienced many trying, hard, painful, and challenging times. She had to be weary and worn. Yet, the challenges she faced did not dampen her spirit. She welcomed visitors, expressed concern for others, and, I believe, was as up to date on the news as Rachel Maddow.

As members of the Set of 1956, we say, thank you, Anita. We love you, we cherish your friendship, and ask that you share just a little bit of your spirit with us. We also thank you for believing in and emulating the words of Jesus to Paul as found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. "My grace is enough for you. My power is made best in weakness." Thank you, Anita. Bless you.

Miriam (Mimi) Montavon, twin sister

Anita and I met before we were born. That was the beginning of a lifelong bond of love and friendship. We were inseparable from then on. Major highlights were shared birthdays for two, dressing alike until high school, playing piano duets, singing in the choir, and engaging in sewing and baking 4-H projects. In adult times I was excited to keep track of Anita's travels to various missions, especially in Colorado, Washington, and Wyoming. She inspired me to see the world and its beauty. Later on Anita returned to Chicago and this gave us many more happy times as well as chances to be present to our parents in their aging and dying years. Our loving connection and times together extended through her last years at Mount Carmel. Recently her smiles and patient acceptance of serious health issues have warmed my heart and continue to do so today.

Jane Bleivik, sister

"Sweet Neets" is one of my nicknames for my older sister Anita. Some sweet memories of our shared times come to mind:

- reminiscing about our childhoods and family life on the farm in DeKalb;
- attending Anita's high school graduation and being given her OLA class ring;
- going for cinnamon rolls at Ann Sathers in Chicago;
- hunting for classy clothing bargains in resale shops;
- exchanging newsy and fun letters with creative decorations and insertions;
- singing together at the piano (her one request when we celebrated her Golden Jubilee);
- wandering the hall at Mount Carmel, with automatic stops in the chapel, library, and "Mall in the Hall;"
- wheeling down to the sacred BVM burial grounds looking for names of our relatives and her special friends;
- having heartfelt phone calls, especially our last when we both said our trinity of "I love, love, love you" and "Adios."

We are more than grateful for this chance you have given us to consider some of the blessings of our sisterhood with Anita. It's a real help in this time of bereavement.

Anita and Paul Bookey, niece

A few years ago we took a trip to the Midwest from NYC. A very important stop was Mount Carmel. This visit was the highlight of our trip. It started with a lunch with Aunt Anita and her friends. The conversation was stimulating, but more important was how we were accepted with warmth and love. We didn't want lunch to end. Then Aunt Anita gave us a tour and introduced us to her other friends, who also were full of warmth and care. They were just wonderful. Next came Aunt Anita's room. It was filled with family pictures and other subjects that interested her. We ended our time with a meditative visit to the Mississippi River. We love Aunt Anita. Her warmth, her acceptance, her non-judgment, her love, her delight in life. What a beautiful woman! Thank you, Aunt Anita.

Carolyn Montavon, sister-in-Law

Jerry and I inherited the Montavon family piano many years ago, and we often gathered at our farm home in the country for family get-togethers. It was always special when Jane played and we all sang old favorite hymns. There was laughter and tears depending on the song being played. Anita always enjoyed our family time together.

Sara McAlpin, BVM

Anita was an excellent and voracious reader. She read articles in magazines, like *America*, with eagerness and intelligence. And she loved discovering a new novel or a recently published historical account. Reading, perhaps, helped her to live the grace of acceptance that so many found characteristic of her. She was, and will continue to be, a gift to our set of 1956.

Georgeann Quinlan, BVM

Anita and I were in the same Set of 1956. I always loved Anita. When I moved here 2 ½ years ago, I realized how much she is a "saint." One time I was visiting her and told her that. She gently told me that she would prefer I not call her that. I was surprised but obeyed her wish. Now I can say that and get by with it! Mimi agreed that Anita is a saint. We celebrated a set reunion in St. Joseph Hall on Dec. 13, 2019, thanks to Floria Shannon's gift to us of

Olive Garden gift cards. As Floria was wheeled in she reached out to Anita and they held hands. Floria said, "Now we complete the circle." They are together now again with the angels on "The Other Side."

Pat Rogers, BVM, Set of 1956

Several years ago I wrote to Anita just to say hello and share idle chitchat about life in San Francisco. She was gracious enough to reply and in her words, "while I am still able." How difficult for her to know that she would soon be robbed of the simple pleasure of letter writing. A valiant woman. We are blessed to have had Anita in our set.

Patricia Kerz, BVM

Anita and I became acquainted through her Aunt Alice Montavon with whom I lived at Holy Name. We traveled to Alaska and on the community trip with Virginia Hughes to Mexico. We both enjoyed the trips very much. Anita was a comfortable person to be with and a kind, friendly person!

Janet Desmond, BVM

Anita, a dear and joyful woman. I did not live or teach with Anita but I did join Anita, Sheila Doherty, and Maureen Doherty on a memorable summer trip to England and Ireland in 1982. We rented a camper in England. Sleeping areas were tight so we moved to a different spot each night. When I got to the inner space over the cab of the camper, I got claustrophobia. Anita offered to trade with me and I accepted her kind and generous offer. In Ireland we rented a car and stayed in B&Bs. Each of us picked one sight that we wanted to see and we arranged our travels to include each one. Anita chose the ancient Bee Hive Huts where hermit monks likely lived. We were grateful for her choice. When Anita came to Marian Hall, I would visit her when I was at Mount Carmel for a meeting. We reminisced about our trip, enjoying many laughs. Anita, you were a kind and loving BVM and I have been enriched by your joyful spirit.

Sandra Rodemyer, BVM

One summer during a BVM gathering at Mundelein, Anita, Mary Kelliher, and I had lunch in a nearby restaurant. We were seated by a window . . . in fact, Anita was right NEXT to the window. Before too long, a man, who had been walking by, suddenly stopped and began gesturing at Anita. Well, we all ignored him since none of us knew him. He continued to gesture at Anita and she continued to ignore him. The next thing we knew, he entered the restaurant and made a beeline for our table. He was *most* unhappy that Anita had been ignoring him. And we were increasingly concerned that he could be dangerous. Finally we figured out what was happening. The man saw Anita and thought that she was her twin, Mimi. It turns out that he was a client of Mimi's and was unhappy that she was ignoring him. Anita tried to explain that she was Mimi's identical twin sister. But he was having none of that. Obviously he didn't know that Mimi HAD a twin. (Nor should he have known that.) Finally Anita promised that she would get in touch with Mimi and tell her that we had met the gentleman. This could all be explained at their next session. With that, he did begrudgingly leave the restaurant. I can only imagine the conversation that Anita and Mimi had at the end of the day, not to mention the conversation that Mimi and her client had when next they met.

Carol Spiegel, BVM

Anita's spirit of acceptance was amazing. In her creative way of managing to stay intellectually alert, she showed a certain resiliency. Anita was always ready to hear about a new book and to read it if that was at all possible. And through it all, she maintained a sense of humor.

Mary Ann Fremgen, former BVM

Anita was one of the most courageous women I have known. She lived with her horrible debilitating disease with honesty and an upbeat attitude. I first met Anita at the summer graduate program at Mundelein College. We picked up our relationship at Mount Carmel when I moved to Dubuque. I first saw her in the dining room on Sundays and offered to help her eat. Her response was, "I need to have some independence." When I began bringing my dog, some days she loved to have him visit at other times not. After her leg was broken, I held him

near her and help her put her hand on him. While she'd pet him she'd talk about some of the struggles with her disease. Never did she complain or ever talk about her pain, instead she'd say, "He helps me feel relaxed." When her twin Mimi visited, Anita wanted her to meet Bronx. I'd bring him on Saturday and Anita was always grateful. Her comment, with a big smile, was, "See how he helps you feel better?" Anita, Bronx and I hope you are resting in peace.

Maureen Doherty, sister of Sheila Doherty, BVM

Sheila's dear friend Anita was a treasure. Anita was a creative teacher, keeping her students on their toes. She was able to introduce challenging activities with a kind and gentle spirit. Sheila and Anita had many happy days at St. John's in Seattle.

In 1982, Anita, Sheila, Sister Janet Desmond and I enjoyed weeks of touring England, Scotland and Ireland. Anita was a great traveling companion and eager to tackle the adventures of each day. She continued to teach us many lessons over her years of suffering. Now our dear friend is at peace.