



Sharing of Memories of Mary (Thomas Daniel) Donahey, BVM

Caritas Studio, Dec. 21, 2020

Betty Voss, BVM

Mary and I lived and taught together at Mundelein College in the 1970s and 1980s. During that time, her physical challenges were many but her wonderful personality shone through it all. She was a delightful friend and, as so many of you know, an excellent teacher. During my tenure at Mundelein, I often took a class, when my teaching schedule would allow, and that included more than one class with Mary. She was always well-prepared, gave depth of background to her subject matter, insightful commentary relevant to current events, and was a gifted facilitator of classroom discussion.

Her popularity as a teacher was attested to in a recent conversation with Sue Rink, who was academic dean at the time. She described Mary as a gifted and popular teacher and that her classes would fill up promptly at registration time. Then students who didn't get in would come to her to see if she could get them in. I asked Sue if she did that and she said, "I think I did a few times." Sue then asked me to include her praise of Mary in my words today.

After I came to Mount Carmel to live in March of 2019, I was able to see more of Mary. And at each chat session we had over lunch or in her room, she would bring up a particular memory. Some of Mary's classes met in the evening—6 to 9 for instance—and afterward she, I, and a group of students would head over Hamilton's, a favorite watering hole on Broadway. There, over a glass of brew, we'd chat, laugh, continue to probe issues and to solve the world's problems—political, spiritual, and everything in between. It was a great experience for all of us.

Mary, as you know, that project of solving the world's problems is not complete. I hope you are enjoying great peace knowing that your many students and friends, inspired by the learning, wisdom, and genuine care for all humanity that you instilled in us, continue the work of building a better world in your name. God bless and thank you, Mary

Tom and Linda Donahey, brother and sister-in-law

Six-year-old Mary was not too pleased when her parents brought home her new baby brother, Tom. As the story goes, she tried to sell him to the mailman for a nickel. Her version of the story was she wanted at least a dime for him.

Mary was very athletic and very competitive with her two older brothers. Mary loved her farm cats. When she saw her older brothers teasing one of her cats, she defended her cat by chasing her brothers across the yard with a gas pipe.

At the age of 11, she came down with polio and spent seven months in the hospital. Her mother would make the 100-mile round trip to see her every other day. After polio, her athletic days were limited, and she devoted her time to her studies.

Mary graduated salutatorian in her high school class. Her only B was in home economics, which was probably a higher grade than she deserved. Mary graduated from Creighton University with a degree in math. She turned

down job offers from several major companies; she had already decided to devote her life to the BVMs. Mary was always very supportive of her family and the BVM Sisters.

Bette Donahey, sister-in-law

I met Mary in 1965 during my first trip to Panora, Iowa, after I married her brother, Dan. She was Sister Mary Thomas Daniel—in a full habit with a [BVM] companion in tow. She was a little intimidating. I later knew her as just Mary. She was an amazing person who overlooked her many challenges while serving others. She had polio at age 10 and spent many months in the hospital. Later in life, polio returned as Post-Polio Syndrome.

Mary's intellect was only eclipsed by her giving nature. She took early retirement so that she could care for her aging and infirm parents, Dan and Lottie. Because of Mary, they could remain in their own home. Mary's sacrifice was a true gift to them. Mary was the epitome of love, humility, faith, friendship, and caring. She was a good example for all of us. We will miss her dearly. Rest in peace, dear Mary.

Mike Donahey, nephew

When I think of Aunt Mary, I think of four primary things: her intelligence, her courage dealing with polio, her interest in public and church affairs, and her commitment to family.

Intelligence. Everyone who knew Mary knew she was extremely bright and a great college professor. I had the sense, but never knew for sure, that she could be a very demanding professor as well. Her contributions will live on in the hundreds of former students who were lucky enough to have her as a teacher and professor at Clarke, Mundelein, or Loyola.

Courage dealing with polio. My father Dan, who was 13 months older than Mary, admired her courage very much. She was a vigorous and athletic young girl before polio and one can only imagine how frightening not only her initial polio treatments, but also later back surgeries were for her. She dealt with polio and its aftereffects and severe pain with courage and remarkably good cheer. It is my hope that her reward in heaven is even greater because of the suffering she endured over her lifetime. As the Bible says, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."

Interest in public and church affairs. Aunt Mary had strong and well thought out political views and views about the direction of the church. Her strongly held political views led to many loud but good-natured debates during family visits. I also recall being with Aunt Mary and witnessing her immediate reaction when it was announced in 1978 that the College of Cardinals had selected Karol Wojtyła as the new pope. I won't write more about her political views other than to say her feelings about passing from this Earth during the current presidential administration are likely very similar to those of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

Commitment to family. By family, I mean not only her birth family, but also her BVM family. Others can speak to her 60 years as a BVM much better than I can, but it was evident to all her strong feelings for her BVM sisters. When Sister Lynn Winsor called to tell us that Aunt Mary had passed, the first thought I had was of the wonderful reunion with her mother, father, and brothers, Mike and Dan, that was occurring at that time in heaven, particularly with her mother Lottie, with whom she shared an uncommonly close bond. In the late 1990s, Aunt Mary took a leave of absence from her teaching to live with and care for her mother in her final years. That meant so much to Grandma Lottie and enabled her to remain at home until her passing in 1999.

We all admired Aunt Mary and will miss her very much and hope to be reunited with her in Heaven someday.

Virginia (Ginny) Donahey Proconiar, first cousin

Some of the best times of my childhood were the days we spent out at Dan and Lottie Donahey's farm playing with our cousins, and Mary was a part of that. Then I remember what I felt when I heard about her decision to

join the convent. It was surprising but also special, and I knew then that she would have an interesting life and be taken to places she could not even imagine.

We all knew Mary was brilliant, but she was also very kind, empathetic, and a good listener. When my father John, her uncle, was dying in 1986, she reached out to him with a beautiful letter that I know brought him comfort.

I was lucky enough to get to visit the new home in Dubuque and experienced the hospitality of Mary and the other sisters as we shared a variety of wines and cheeses. And one thing I discovered before that—to be able to sit and have a long conversation with her was almost like being in a masterclass.

Charlotte Donahey Coppess, first cousin

Mary was a unique person. She had that warmth and charisma that drew you to her. She was always interested in others. I enjoyed conversing with her and, of course, her intellect was intriguing. I am so happy that in summer 2019 Jay and I got to spend a day with her. We arrived for lunch and then visited for hours with Sister Mary about family memories and looked at photos. Sister Vivian joined in too and they recounted some humorous moments preparing for a trip out west with Sister Mary's parents!

My dad, her Uncle John, had a great relationship with Sister Mary. They loved visiting with one another. There was a special bond there since they both had struggled with polio as children. I will miss seeing her at family events and I'll especially miss her sense of humor!

Lisa Stacy, niece

My memories of Aunt Mary are from cross stitching George Washington with her trying to teach me, but I, being very stubborn, wanting to do it myself, to having her show me how to be a cat whisperer. She was always patient with me. My best memory was having a discussion with Aunt Mary, Grandma, and Grandpa about the picture on the fridge. I always thought it was me but did not remember ever wearing the outfit. But it was really Aunt Mary at the age I was then, probably about 10. We looked like twins. I guess that is part of the Donahey way.

When I got ready for college you, Mary, were there to help me again to get to go to Chicago and do so many things. I never really said thank you for that opportunity. But am truly blessed that I got to go to Mundelein and Loyola. I have so many great memories of that time. After college it was still fun to visit you. You always had a new story about your brothers to tell; it was fun to listen too. I wish now I had recorded them.

You are my only true aunt. I am blessed and will try to be more like you in the future, hoping to make you proud. You were an amazing person, loving spirit, and funny storyteller. Miss you and love always.

Mark Donahey, nephew

I will always remember my Aunt Mary's kind smile, good cheer, intense curiosity, and genuine interest in others. She always made me and others feel welcome to visit, share, and learn. I hope I can do better to follow her example.

Wendy Cotter, CSJ

I was brand new assistant professor of New Testament in the Loyola Theology Department in 1991 when I first met Sister Mary. She had a glow of kindness and light around her, her wonderful smile and her spirit of gracious collegiality in all our endeavors and to everyone. She was such a gifted person, knowledgeable and wise. I know she is praying for us all, this, her first Christmas, there in the heart of its meaning.

Mary Anne Hoopes, BVM

I first met Mary when I was a novice. She came to teach Vatican II documents. She made the Council come alive. Mary and I were then members of the religious studies faculty at Mundelein. I was the chairperson of the department until I went to Africa and Mary was always a supportive faculty member.

I so admired Mary, especially when she began teaching at Loyola. Never did she complain about navigating Sheridan Road or the Loyola campus. In fact, Mary never complained. She was always cheerful. I always visited Mary when I came to Mount Carmel and will miss her greatly. I am so happy her suffering has ended.

Nancy McCarville, associate, former BVM, Set of 1960

My vignette of Mary Donahey spotlights her dry sense of humor! Entering in 1960, the year JFK was running for president, Mary had been an active Young Democrat at Creighton University. I imagine she missed the fervor of the campaign as postulants soon found themselves cut off from the news. Maybe that's why Sister Mary Benedicta introduced Saturday morning current events sessions led by Mary! Earlier this year, I asked her if she remembered relating news to us from the podium. She said that actually it was she and another postulant working together. Neither of us could remember the other person's name but with a little chuckle, Mary added, "I believe she was a Republican!" More than her quiet playful words, I appreciated her authentic self.

Nancy McCarthy, BVM

When the set of 1960 entered, the six of us who had already graduated from college took some classes together, so got to know each other in ways different from what the rest of our huge set experienced. Mary was one of us and always the one I went to when I needed to make sense out of life, especially life in the postulate and novitiate. She always had something so sensible to offer. Even though I spent many years in Chicago during the time that Mary lived there, we really didn't see each other much, unfortunately. I've always regretted this. When I moved back to Mount Carmel two years ago, I again often asked Mary about things that didn't quite make sense. My most recent memories of her include the last Sunday of the month socials, when we used to gather and our set would reserve a table. Mary and her friend Marie Fitzpatrick always seemed to enjoy the sharing. We were all especially happy that Mary was able to join us for our 60th jubilee celebration in July, both for the liturgy and dinner. Mary is truly one of the treasures of our set. I'm sure we've all learned many lessons from her. Thank you, Mary.

Dorothy (Dodie) Dwight, BVM

Mary was a brilliant and unassuming woman; an excellent teacher who readily could make Lonergan simple and understandable at the dinner table; and a keen conversationalist who, during her decades in Chicago, kept abreast of not only national and Illinois politics but also the political scene in Iowa.

That being said, what stands out most about Mary in my mind's eye are: first, her resilience and determination in meeting life's challenges; and second, her quick wit and the mischievous, impish smile or ready laugh that invariably would follow one of her not-infrequent, under-her-breath quips.

First, resilience and determination. Mary's great determination, i.e. the 'fighter' in Mary, was born of physical suffering and mobility issues from having contracted polio as a young person. Mary did not let her physical challenges stop her from living life as fully as possible. I clearly can see her in postulant garb, 'running' toward me on the basketball court in the barn at Mount Carmel during recreation, entering fully into the challenge of the game; and I recall hearing the story of her having been state ping pong champion while in college at Creighton. Not one to be tied down by extensive, serious spinal surgery in her middle years and a subsequent, lengthy recovery period, Mary returned to full-time teaching in graduate and undergraduate religious studies at Mundelein. In her last years of teaching at Mundelein and then Loyola, she would drive her electric scooter at such a fast clip on the sidewalks between classes that you had better watch out!

Second, quick wit/sense of humor. To visualize Mary's beautiful, wide, always welcoming smile when our eyes would meet, and to hear her hearty laugh after one of her comebacks or that of another person at table, still gives me great joy.

Nick Patricca, a former colleague of Mary for decades in the Department of Religious Studies, emailed this line about Mary following news of her death: "I hope the saints and angels enjoy Mary's wit as much as we did." I think they are doing so right now!

Becky (Margaret) Nelle, former BVM, Set of 1960

I am flooded with good memories of our Mary Donahey. She makes my spirit soar. On our first evening in the postulate, Mary approached me with a question: "Are you related to a John Molloy who attended Creighton University?" My answer was a quick, "Yes, he is my first cousin!" She went on to tell me they worked together on the John F. Kennedy presidential campaign. A card game of bridge one evening at Wright Hall was a blast. And most recent, a phone chat in September which I cut short when I realized her difficulty in managing that. I followed that up with a lengthy letter.

Agnes Marie (Dee Dee) Keena, BVM

Mary and I entered with 116 other young women in July of 1960. Mary, by her example, taught me the value of listening with an open heart and mind. I realize that those who are viewing this livestream cannot see the picture I sent. It was one of my last visits with Mary. She was wearing a patch-quilt-like skirt. I told her that skirt could probably tell her life's story. For once she *asked* me a question, "What do you mean?" I told her that Carl Arico wrote a chapter on "Making a Spiritual Quilt." He related that the master quilter selects her pieces of many shapes and sizes. The challenge is arranging the pieces of different sizes and patterns together to create a 'one-of-a-kind' quilt. I told Mary that, like her skirt, her life's journey was "one of a kind," filled many different experiences with hundreds of different people. In the end, you the 'quilter' and the beholders (the thousands of people you have touched) will look upon your work, your quilt, and be amazed and transformed. Oh yes, Mary responded to my explanation with one word and a smile, "Interesting." I am so grateful I followed that response with, "Mary, you have always listened to me. I know you could lecture or write a book about what I tell you, but you are interested in what I have to say." She smiled and said, "Well, if you truly listen to each person who comes your way, you can always learn something new. Dee Dee, I have learned something new from you today." I would like to believe that when the Lord came to invite Mary home, the words she spoke were, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

Kathryn (Kitty) Lawlor, BVM

When I heard an elderly gentleman who had been a polio victim say on a TV news program that, "No one ever recovered from polio," I asked Mary if that were true. She nodded her head, "Yes." Mary told me that when she was isolated as a young child in a sanitarium in Des Moines with polio, her mother, when she visited her, would stand on the grounds beneath a window outside Mary's room and shout to her. At one time her mother climbed a ladder to the window calling Mary's name. Mary opened the window and as she was talking to her mother a sanitarium nurse spied what was happening and closed the window.

Dolores Dooley, friend

Mary Donahey was a very dear friend. Living with Mary while at Mundelein College years ago left memories that have nurtured my heart and soul. She will be sorely missed.