



Wake Stories of Mary Jeroma Day, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, March 28, 2019

Sister Rebecca Stramoski, OCSO, Abbess

I am away from the abbey this week but got news of Sister Jeroma's passing yesterday. I wanted to send my/our condolences for your loss. Jeroma was such a joyful woman full of energy. We will truly miss her bright smile and positive spirit. I am glad we had the opportunity to know her and share part of our lives with her through the years. She was a real gift to us. Blessings to all and all our BVM sisters. Our prayers and love are with you.

Moria Urich, Clarke University, Dubuque, Iowa, Class of 1982 *(Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)*

Sister Jeroma wrote regularly to me as my pray-er and I always loved hearing from her. I will miss her and so many wonderful BVMs who taught me over the years.

Sharon Lesikar, Our Lady of Peace (OLP) High School, St. Paul, Minn., Class of 1962 *(Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)*

I got to know Sister Mary Jeroma late in her life. I soon grew to love her wonderful way of looking at the world. She and I graduated from OLP High School in St. Paul, Minn., so I felt an immediate connection to her. It has been a great privilege to know Jeroma. She was so kind to me in her letters and in person when I had the chance to visit Dubuque. I will remember her with love.

Mary Ann (BVM Associate) and Jim Krems, Stevens Point, Wis. *(Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)*

Sister Jeroma was a prayer partner with my husband and me. She was always sending me a note about what was happening on the different celebrations. She cared about our family concerns and prayed for them and I am sure she is doing that now as well. I will miss her ready greetings when I came to Mount Carmel and will miss her presence.

Juanita Johnson, sister of Deanna Randall, BVM *(Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)*

Another saint for the BVM Set of 1956! She was an outstanding communicator with us, which endeared her to those she so efficiently corresponded as a scribe for those who couldn't express themselves in writing. She will be remembered by so many families who received those notes and messages from her as a goodwill representative for the BVM community! That wonderful smile, even at 5 a.m. when she picked me up for an early flight back to Chicago, will linger in my mind for many years to come. Farewell, Jeroma! You will be greatly missed by us all! I am sure you are having a beautiful reunion with my sister Deanna and many others from the BVM community as I write this memory! With Love, Juanita.

Jean Donahue, excerpts from PowerPoint about Jeroma *(Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)*

Our exuberant Jeroma, whom we loved and delighted in, wrote and pondered about steadfastness of purpose in her written story. She tells us Mother Teresa's words inspired her: "God has not called me to be successful; God called me to be faithful." Jeroma wrote, "Ministry has been a kaleidoscopic experience for me [through my varied ministries]. I have loved every place and ministry that I have been involved in." We thank you, Jeroma, for enriching our lives. You will always be in our hearts and prayers.

Joann Martin, friend (*Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM*)

I remember this lovely and friendly woman when visiting my brother and sister-in-law for our annual St. Patrick's Day celebration in Arizona. She was engaging and eager to celebrate.

Margaret Schmidt, sister (*Read by Michael Day, Nephew*)

In remembering my sister, she had many gifts that stand out. Serving others was her whole life's mission. One of the greatest influences she had on me was her unfailing love for the Catholic Church and her devotion to daily Mass. The times I was able to visit her various missions showed me the depth of her ability to give to the poor, the lonely, the immigrant, the prisoner, and to reach out to anyone needing an extra prayer or the gift of Holy Communion. My heart is so heavy with sadness over Veronica's death. Not being able to give her a hug once in a while was so difficult. The November day when she went into surgery, my husband was admitted to the hospital with severe congestive heart failure in Tucson, Ariz. Because of his declining health, I couldn't make the trip to Tucson to Dubuque. She understood. We talked regularly about me coming in the spring, but God called her sooner than that. With my husband dying March 14 and Veronica on March 22, I know God has a plan to bring them together so they both stay out of mischief. Thank you to all who walked with Sister on her journey. She suffered, but I'm sure you made her journey as comfortable as possible. My thanks to all of you at Mount Carmel. Please give my sister that big hug.

Michael Day, nephew

Margaret also sent a photo. At Margaret's house, which is part of the original homestead, there is a pond. She and her brothers worked tirelessly to rename that pond Veronica Pond. It was done mostly for Grandma (Jeroma's mother), but it also fits for Sister too. The photo is of the pond and a bench there. Margaret says it was one of Veronica's favorite sitting spots when she visited.

I would like to share a few thoughts too. After listening to the eulogy, I realize that I didn't know my aunt at all. She was gone by the time I was born. She would show up at family gatherings now and then. For us kids, it was kind of a scary thing to have a sister there. With uncles and aunts, we had fun, we wrestled, we played ball, we did all the stuff at the farm, but we didn't know how to react to her. She wasn't around and we didn't know much about her. As I grew older, I came to understand what she was doing with her life. I have a better understanding of her now after the eulogy. I had no clue what she did, where she was, who she took care of, how many people she impacted in her life. All I can say is that I am very proud to be her nephew.

She always wrote and sent cards for birthdays—my wife's birthday, my daughters' birthdays. Even when my dad died, every anniversary of my dad's death, every anniversary of my mom's passing, she always would send a card telling us how important that day was to her and knowing how important it was to us. That was a really good thing because my daughters learned how to write letters because of her. My youngest daughter was in the process of writing another letter when Sister passed away. She sent me a picture of some of the stuff she had saved from Auntie Sister that she set out. She said she was thinking about her today too. Sister touched a lot of people, sometimes in mysterious ways. I will miss her greatly. I now know that I, too, didn't take enough time out of my life to spend with her. I know that she understands.

Sister Carol Marie Baum, BVM

I was fortunate to meet Jeroma at a social event in Winona when she was celebrating her jubilee and living with Margaret Mear, BVM. It was an absolutely wonderful celebration. Talk about hospitality! It was really a joyous event. In the spring, we would go up to the Spiders (BVM leisure house in northern Wisconsin) to prepare for the summer visitors. I would never recognize Jeroma without her knee-high rubber boots and her hat; they went every place Jeroma went, including to Arizona, believe it or not.

She asked me if I would be willing to drive on a road trip. I love to drive so I said, "Sure. Where?" She said, "I'd like to visit my sister Margaret and her husband in Arizona." I said, "Great! Let's plan it." We took that road trip last year. It was a marvelous event. I dropped her off in Tucson and I went on to Phoenix. Later, she met me in

Phoenix and we took another road trip. There were two places she wanted to see before we headed back home—Bryce Canyon and Zion National Park. We had a wonderful time. One thing not yet mentioned was that Jeroma was the star of catnaps. She certainly did not need eight hours of sleep. Very often, three-thirty or four o'clock in the morning, she would be up reading, praying, and ready to start the day when most of us were waiting for eight o'clock to start moving. She was an avid game player. She would get sisters on campus involved in the evening after supper. Her laughter was contagious. She certainly spread her joy far and wide. Thank you, Jeroma, for wonderful times together.

Sister Mary Jean Ferry, BVM

My story is from Jeroma's mission to St. Agnes in Phoenix. She had a First Communion class. Since they were not yet ready to receive, they had to stay up in the choir loft. When it came time for Communion, Jeroma would walk down and receive Communion, walk back up to the choir loft and smile at each child and, in that way, brought Jesus to each child. It shows how much Eucharist meant to Jeroma.

My wonderful mother knew Jeroma from Incarnation in Glendale, Calif.; they worked together. Jeroma had to leave for a while to get her degree in library science. My mother wrote a degree to give to Jeroma. It's most amazing that my mother would do this. It's from the entire Ferry family.

The College of T.F. of G. (The Ferrys of Glendale), but authority in them from Simmons College, confers upon Sister Mary Jeroma Day, BVM, the following degrees:

SVD— So Very Dear

ATL – Away Too Long

BKP – Bachelor of Kindness Personified

CBS – California's Beautiful Sister

FWH – Forever Working Hard

DLS – Doctor of Lasting Smiles

CPL – Chief People Lover

SOF – Simply Our Favorite

In testimony whereof, this diploma is given in Glendale, Calif., this 27th day of July in the year 1969.

Mother had all of us sign it. Mine is right there; I recognize my handwriting. This honors my mother and Jeroma. Jeroma, we love you so much. You are so very dear to us. We thank you for your life with us. We know you live on in our hearts.

Charlene, former Trappistine

I was in charge of the gift shop at Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey where Jeroma worked. She also worked with candy and really did everything. She was amazing and we are definitely going to miss her, not only for her work, but for her presence as well. When I was a novice, I wasn't supposed to be talking with the professed; they were a little more strict. I always thought of Jeroma as my second novice director. When everyone would be having their meridian—their rest—and were not allowed to talk, I would run over to the gift shop and talk with Jeroma. She was a beautiful soul with whom to talk. She just had this gift of presence—a relaxed, no worry, presence. She really will be missed at the Abbey.

Whenever it was black walnut season, the sisters would be in their chapel stalls facing the window ready for Mass. Outside the window they could see Jeroma with her shopping bag gathering all the black walnuts. The priest was ready to start, but the sisters didn't want to ring the bell until Jeroma was done. I can still see Jeroma hurriedly picking up the nuts and the sisters just smiling. Jeroma was always busy. On behalf of the sisters and Ron here,

who also works at the Abbey, Jeroma will be greatly missed. She was a real blessing to the community. It was almost like she was one of the sisters.

Sister Donard Collins, BVM

I've known Jeroma since the 1970s when I was at Blessed Sacrament in Chicago. With all the gifts and talents mentioned about Jeroma today, one characteristic was not listed. Jeroma was always cold; she was cold in the middle of summer. One time, Marion Murphy, Jeroma, and I went to Ludington, Mich., to visit my nephew who lived in a small cabin and was teaching school at the time. It was a cold October day—a penetrating cold. When the alarm rang at five o'clock, my nephew was there at the door ready to take us out to visit the beach along the pier. We walked all morning in a cold misty and were freezing. At noon, we went home for a bite to eat. We were going to head to Traverse City, Mich., in the afternoon to visit another nephew. We said, "Miles, perhaps we could stop at the church and you could play the organ for us." He was thrilled because he loved to play the organ. We went to the church and he played the organ while the three of us sat down below. Actually, all three of us fell asleep. I think he played about 20 minutes. We heard the opening chords and not the rest. Jeroma was always cold and enjoyed the warmth of that church. In these last months, when she was still going out to the doctor, and I had the privilege of being with her, she still was cold. First came the hooded sweatshirt, then the quilted vest, perhaps a sweater, but always a heavy winter coat. I think Jeroma is enjoying the warmth of heaven.

Sister Georgeann Quinlan, BVM

I'm from Our Lady of Peace, another redhead from the Class of 1956. Ten of us entered the BVMs that year. Those were the days and it was wonderful. We had a large class, so in the novitiate, I didn't get to know her all that well. Margaret Mear and Jeroma came out to Colorado where I lived for 50 years. Margaret had a wedding in her family so Jeroma came and stayed with me. It was delightful. I'm not a big morning person so I said to Jeroma, "I know you like to get up early to write letters and stuff, but don't wake me up." She would get up early and write all kinds of letters. (I inherited her donor list and her Eucharistic minister duties.) It was so much fun that week together in Colorado because it was her first time there. It's especially nice taking people around when they have never been there before. Jeroma, God bless you. I said to her recently, "I've never seen anyone change as much as you have." She was so much quieter when she wasn't here.

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM

We all know that Jeroma engaged in many ministries and did so with great enthusiasm, generosity, and integrity. Sometimes her own personal integrity was challenged a bit, but she remained faithful to who she was. One of her most precious ministries was when she came back to Mount Carmel. Especially in the early evening hours, she was present to our sisters in our memory care unit. She had a wonderful gift for responding to and serving as an advocate for our women in memory care. I would like to make a special public thank you for that wonderful, compassionate gift.

Sister Anita Therese Hayes, BVM

A long time ago, during the summer, Jeroma and Nancy McCarthy were both at the Motherhouse. In those days, sisters would come during the summer to work and take care of the all the things that needed to be done. That's what Jeroma and Nancy were doing. As the weeks went on, the three of us discovered something very important. The three of us all had red hair, all had blue eyes and, best of all, we all were left-handed. That was really something very, very important. To this day, we consider that. We might not have the red hair, but we still have blue eyes and we still are left-handed. Jeroma, you know that we love you.

Sister LaDonna Manternach, BVM

Jeroma liked to go for drives. She would often take people from the Motherhouse for a Sunday afternoon drive. One day, they went out to find St. Patrick's of Garryowen because it had been remodeled and the whole group wanted to see the church. They drove and drove and didn't find the church. They ended up coming back to Highway 151. Across the highway from where they had stopped was a little shed with two guys in a truck having a conversation. She just drove up there and said, "We're looking for St. Patrick's of Garryowen. Can you help us find

it?" "Surely, I could," one guy said. "I was one of the people who helped get it remodeled." He was my uncle Alan. However, she didn't realize he was my uncle. They had a wonderful conversation. He found out they were BVMs and wanted to know if they knew LaDonna. "Sure. She's a wonderful singer." "Oh, she is?" he said. He kept dragging them on until he finally revealed that he was my uncle. Then he led them down the road to St. Patrick's of Garryowen church. They had a wonderful visit and even got inside to see it all. They loved it.

Christine Olsem, BVM Associate and employee

I didn't meet Jeroma until she moved to Mount Carmel and started volunteering at the BVM Center reception desk. Every now and then, we would chat a few minutes. I always loved her bright eyes and big smile. A few months after we met, I arrived at work to find a small, decorated handmade box on my desk with an unsigned note wishing me a Happy Birthday. Inside I discovered Trappistine caramels. I had no idea who gave it to me. A few weeks later, on my last day at work before leaving vacation, another decorated box appeared, once again with an unsigned note: "A little something to enjoy on your trip. Bon Voyage!" It was a few months more, as I continued to chat with Jeroma, that I learned she volunteered with the Trappistines making candy. Ah, mystery solved. The little treats continued to appear on my birthdays and vacations. The final time was last November on the Monday after the BVM Heritage Society meeting for which I had scanned and resized photos of the BVM Hidden Figures. The caramels accompanied her thank you note. Sorry, for the pun, but Jeroma was so sweet.

I was accepted as an Associate in 2014. Immediately, I was invited to join a wonderful prayer group of both BVMs and Associates. However, I also wanted to join a cluster to discuss BVM topics or selected readings. Besides living 30 miles from Dubuque, I have numerous parish responsibilities on weekends both at liturgies and to the homebound. I was looking for a cluster that met on a weekday when I was already in Dubuque for work. Three years pass. One day I mentioned my desire to Jeroma. She had been thinking about starting a new cluster. She asked me what day and time would work for me, and based on my response, invited other residents at Mount Carmel. Just like that, the Gertrude's Group cluster came into existence. Thank you, Jeroma, for all your kindnesses to me.

Jennifer Head, BVM Archivist

Jeroma volunteered in the archives for several years and I am so very grateful for all of the help she gave. Much of the preservation work done in archives is necessary, but tedious. It usually involves putting individual items like photographs, documents, and books into special envelopes, folders and/or boxes. Jeroma enjoyed this type of "hands-on work." Thanks to Jeroma, diplomas described as "hopelessly rolled up" have been flattened and cataloged, accounting ledgers dating back to 1833 have been put into protective wrappings and labeled, and photographs have been organized and stored individually. Everyone in archives enjoyed working with Jeroma and we will miss her dearly.

Sister Margaret Mear, BVM

When Jeroma first came to Winona, she had a red pickup truck. The whole time she was there, the back was full. Those who cleaned out her rooms would appreciate that. The first night she was there, she made chicken soup with *one* chicken wing. We divided it at supper. I said, "Jeroma, I'm a full professor at a college. We can afford to make chicken soup with the whole chicken." They had a wonderful retirement party at the parish when she left parish ministry there. The priest in his tribute said, "Jesus Christ drives a red pickup truck."

Sister Eileen Powell, BVM

I always admired Jeroma's lack of need for material things. One time I was visiting her, I think in the South. She lived in an old house. We spent the day visiting at the prison. When it got to be evening, we went home to the house. When it got dark and we needed artificial light, she went into her bedroom and took the one lamp she had in the whole house and brought it into my room and gave it to me for the night. She didn't need very much in her life. She was very generous to others, but for herself, no. I am grateful my memories of Jeroma.

Jolene Clauer, BVM Associate and activities employee

I would like to speak on behalf of the Mount Carmel staff. Jeroma knew everyone by name. I was so impressed with that. I would see someone and not know who he or she was, but she knew the person; she made a point of it. I got to know Jeroma with her ministry in the memory care unit. She would always come to Friday night sing-along. She knew I knew more verses than were in the book. She'd say, "Sing them all." As I sang, sometimes she would nod of a little bit and then say, "Don't you have another one?" This song is one I like to sing during this time of the year; you will see why. When she gave me the letter that said she was very ill and she knew she wouldn't last very long, she said, "Could you sing that at my funeral, Jo?" I said, "Anything for you." "Really? You know you could come to my room every night and sing me to sleep." That's what I did except for the week that she was quarantined. I sang three songs the last time I saw her alive. I sang "The Rose" and then this song. After "The Rose," I thought she was asleep, but she opened her eyes and said, "You're gonna sing another one, right?" I said, "I am going to sing your favorite one now." After that, she was asleep. I sang one more for the sisters that were with her. I gave Jeroma this piece of wood on the ambo; it goes with the song "Heart of the Wood."

Heart of the Wood

By Daniel Demay & Tony Villanueva

I think what made granddaddy great is that he didn't work all day
I'd love the time we spent and I'd go everywhere he went
We'd end up on some old deer trail
And I'd listen hard as he would spin his tales

We were in a field of stumps he said I got a new one for you hon
These trees once stood tall and I'm the man that made them fall
I cut 'em up, sanded them down
And you wouldn't believe what I found

'Cause past the bark and all the scars
Our home was in the heart of those old trees
God bless who sowed those seeds
A hundred years and they just grew
And only heaven knew just what they'd mean, to our family
All that time to become what they should
You know our home was in the heart of the wood

He smiled, said there's my favorite one, pointed at a cherry stump
He said I couldn't afford the one at Sears so the good lord planted one right here
He carved out what he saw within and he gave it to my dad when he turned ten

Past the bark and all the scars
There was a guitar in the heart of that old tree
All from just one seed
A hundred years and it just grew
And only heaven knew just what it'd be
And how that tree could sing
All the time to become what it should
There were songs in the heart of the wood

He said we can mark a tree to keep from getting lost
And it'll always point our way home like that old rugged cross

A hundred years and it just grew
And only heaven knew just what it'd be
And who'd hang on that tree
It held the Son of God like it should
But I know it broke the heart of the wood

Sister Gail Fitzpatrick, OCSO (*Email*)

We have lost a dear friend in Sister Jeroma. You have lost a wonderful sister. God has blessed us all in the gift of Jeroma-among-us, and so we thank God for her life, her sense of humor, her creative cards and sweets, and so many other expressions of her goodness. Now, may Jeroma know God's love and our love in a new and blessed way. Peace in Christ.