



Sharing of Memories of Joanne (Lisbeth) Simonini, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 3, 2021

Maria van Werkhoven, BVM

One of my favorite memories of coming to Dubuque for BVM Community Board meetings was the opportunity to stay with Joanne Simonini when she lived in the Circle Apartments. When I learned she loved dogs, I called her to request hospitality for myself and both Little Boy and CiCi. While we didn't know each other at the time, she was delighted to host us and couldn't have been more gracious. I soon learned via the grapevine that she shared her excitement with her neighbors in the Circle as she invited them to "visiting hours" with the dogs while I was at meetings!! Each time, when meetings were finished and I prepared to return to Memphis, she wept as she hugged the dogs goodbye. She kept a framed picture on her wall of CiCi, the ShihTzu, who was her favorite. I always secretly wondered if she looked forward to seeing the dogs more than me!!

Susan Sarcone, niece

No question I was a bit of a celebrity as a Catholic grade school student in the 1960s having a visiting aunt (always accompanied by a friend back then) who was a sister. And, unlike some of the Adrian Dominicans at school, there was never anything scary about Aunt Joanne!

As the Catholic world changed post-Vatican II, there was another source of pride that Aunt Joanne was part of the new church and the "new" sisters I suddenly encountered at St. Joseph's Academy in Des Moines in the fall of 1967. That bond continued.

As an only child, I didn't have a large immediate family. My mom died in 1989 and my dad in 2002, so in these last almost 20 years, I really was able to get to know Aunt Joanne. We enjoyed our yearly visits back to Iowa from the Washington, D.C., area where we've lived since the 1970s.

The phone calls. Everyone who knew Joanne was aware of her love of the telephone. It was so perfect when she described her "telephone ministry" as a way to reach out to people, especially back in Des Moines, during the pandemic.

Our calls were catching up on news and books we'd read, but always veered toward the political and the Catholic Church. And this is where we always shared a common bond. In the years since Joanne was living at Mount Carmel, it became more and more clear how the community that surrounded her really was a huge influence in her own views, steeped in the best of social justice.

I'm so glad that my husband, Mitchell, and our adult children and their spouses got to know Joanne well too. She was not an adventurous traveler to visit us, but so enjoyed all of our visits to Des Moines and then Dubuque. In one of our last conversations, while she was sick these past weeks, she remembered that it was Sydney's (my son Michael's little girl) first birthday on March 24. She said, "Tell her mother I will send a card, or maybe you can get her something." That is the essence of Joanne, who never missed an occasion to reach out with a card and a phone call. We will all miss her, but are so grateful for the community that supported her through her life and continues to be the presence they are.

Mary Ann McCoy, cousin

Joanne was a dear friend, a mentor, and a cousin, as was her sister, Betty! Our mothers were close friends. Through the years our friendship grew as our work in religious education brought us together. Our monthly meetings with our fellow directors of religious education, who also were new to this field, oftentimes wondered what to do, but not Joanne. She was our go-to person who had so many years of experience and wisdom! She was a real treasure! She went on retreats and trips to the various parishes for our monthly meetings. Sometimes she drove, but she loved being picked up!!

When she decided that it was time to move to Mount Carmel, she made the transition quite an event. She was generous in sharing her "extras" with so many others who needed a davenport or a bed or whatever! Staying in her townhouse overnight was fun—chatting well into the night with my sister and Joanne, catching up on all the news of family and the world at Mount Carmel! She made two trips to Des Moines and stayed with me. She delighted in being with her dear St. Joe's friends for lunch and long visits seeing cousins and friends and lunch at Noah's. It was wonderful to be able to give her such happy memories! She was so excited about the new Mount Carmel Bluffs building and her new apartment overlooking the million-dollar view from her windows! I'm so glad she was able to be there, if only for a short while!

I could always count on not only her prayers but the BVM sisters' prayers as our family went through difficult times. Her faithfulness to her community, her family, and her friends through her telephone ministry was an example that will always live in my memories. May she rest in eternal peace.

Judy Ohnemus, friend

Just a note from a friend in Des Moines who was blessed to meet and become dear friends with Sister Joanne when she was religious education program director at St. Joseph's Parish here in Des Moines. Then later she formed a small study group and invited six of us into her cottage where she had semi-retired. So many interesting and fun times and conversations we had. We also often went out for dinner after Mass. I took her to appointments for shoe fittings, and other little trips and then helped her pack and move to Mount Carmel. But despite the distance, we kept in touch by phone—many, many, many times. Joanne was always an upbeat, pleasant, and positive person. She took the time to listen and always offered prayers. I will certainly miss our phone calls, the sound of her voice, and her "tee-hee" giggle.

Carol Spiegel, BVM

The first time I saw Joanne was in the early 1970s when she and Therese Fox demonstrated the Fair Fight Technique at a Regional Meeting in Kansas City. This was an early introduction to conflict resolution. Starting about 10 years ago, when attending meetings, I stayed with Joanne in her apartment several times. She was a generous and enjoyable host and enjoyed sharing the children's books written by her niece Julia. And now, Joanne is enjoying endless hospitality and love.

Patricia Kerz, BVM

Joanne and I are in the same set. She was always friendly and comfortable to be with. I had visits with her at Mount Carmel before COVID, the last one being at Mary Ann Zollmann's retreat. I am sorry she will miss our 70th celebration in September but glad she's home celebrating with God.

Nancy McCarthy, BVM

I first met Joanne when I went to Des Moines in 1968 and have experienced her friendship off and on ever since. I was teaching at St. Joseph Academy and Joanne was at St. John's, a house always noted for hospitality. Later, when I was teaching in Council Bluffs at the Iowa School for the Deaf, I learned how much that hospitality meant. Joanne was principal at the time and one of my former teachers, Sister Mary C. Allen, also lived at St. John's. I'd been home in Clinton visiting my family for Thanksgiving and was returning to Council Bluffs by bus. A *huge* blizzard kept all buses in Des Moines, since the roads were blocked ahead and there was no way possible to get to

Omaha. All of us passengers spent the night in the bus station. I'm sure I was the only one lucky enough to have a phone number to call the next day when we were still unable to leave. I called St. John's and ended up staying there four nights until buses could get through. Mary Allen worked in the diocesan office, which actually was near the bus station. She drove me there every morning and picked me up at night until I left. Joanne made me feel so welcome at St. John's.

I also remember her hosting a wonderful party in her Des Moines apartment after Sandy Craig's associate commitment ceremony many years later. Again it was her hospitality I experienced many times when she had her apartment in the Carmel Circle. I stayed with her often when no beds were available at the BVM Center during events. When I moved to Mount Carmel, Joanne was very welcoming. We ate breakfast together very consistently until COVID happened. Then I experienced her telephone ministry. She loved to talk, and it did brighten those days we ate in our rooms. I will always remember Joanne's vibrant spirit.

Sisters Jeanie and Elaine Hagedorn, CHM

In the years Sister Dolores McHugh lived with Humility Sisters Elaine and Jeanie Hagedorn in Des Moines, they often hosted parties for both BVMs and CHMs. At one birthday party Elaine began to unwrap her gift, which was a luggage set in which several smaller suitcases were inside the big one. Sister Joanne Simonini became so excited she could not contain herself. After Elaine unwrapped the first large suitcase, Joanne could not wait to see what was in the next one and the next and the next. So Joanne grabbed the luggage and she started to unwrap all the smaller bags, squealing with delight and eager anticipation at each one. The birthday girl, Elaine, and the rest of the guests just watched wide-eyed and laughed at Joanne's glee. There was no hiding how Joanne felt. She was so fun and a joy to be around.

A friend of Joanne's, Sandy Rouse, recalls having Joanne as her principal at Holy Family School in Des Moines. Around 1985, Sandy was recognized by the National Catholic Education Association with an award from her region. Accompanied by the Diocesan School Superintendent Sister Jude Fitzpatrick, Joanne and Sandy drove to St. Louis to receive the award. While in St. Louis they decided to take a riverboat ride to celebrate. Joanne was "over the moon" that one of her teachers was recognized, so, typical of Joanne, she began dancing and dancing on the boat. There was never a doubt when Joanne was having fun! Following her retirement, Joanne volunteered her time in the Holy Family Development Office, and really enjoyed staying connected with the students and staff.

Vern and Nancy Faber, friends

We knew Sister Joanne through her sister Betty and Leo Sarcone. She always had a smile on her face and I remember her laugh was so contagious. She was very devoted to her family and to her BVM community. Our prayers and condolences to her family.

Agnes Marie (Dee Dee) Keena, BVM

I lived with Joanne one year at St. Catherine's in Kansas City, Mo. She was an avid reader. When she would come home from school, you could always find her reading. She said it helped her relax.

I was teaching first grade. Joanne was teaching the junior high students. In the evening I would listen to her stories and hope that I would never be assigned to teach junior high students. It seemed to me Joanne always knew how to inspire and encourage her students to enjoy learning and to make optimum use of their gifts. She brought out the best in each of her students. Each one was precious in her eyes. It reminds me of a line from the introduction of *Your Affectionate*. Kitty wrote, "Even in her directions on teaching, [Mary Frances Clarke] encouraged the sisters to listen to the voices of the children." Joanne truly listened to the voices of the children and in doing so, was respected by them.

In the convent in those days we took turns cooking. Well, when it was my turn I always went to Joanne and asked for her help. She always had time to work with me and together we put together some good meals. However, I realized that she inherited her cooking skills from her mother. Her mother would come and live with us for a few

weeks. During those few weeks we were treated with the most delicious Italian meals. We always regretted seeing Mrs. Simonini go home. We loved it that Joanne shared her mom with all of us.

Georgeann Quinlan, BVM

I didn't know Joanne before I moved to Dubuque three years ago. Fifty years in Colorado lessened my chances for trips to Dubuque. Anyway, Joanne and I owned the same sweatshirt, kind of. It was pretty and we'd often remark when we saw each other "wearing my shirt." She wore hers so often I was glad when she said she was throwing it away! Joanne, guess what I'm wearing today for Eucharistic Minister at your funeral! OUR SWEATSHIRT! Maybe you are showing off a new one in heaven.

Diane Forster, BVM

Joanne kept a file of some prayers that she enjoyed and appreciated. I thought I would read this one perhaps as Joanne's blessing for us.

A Gaelic Prayer

May the power of the merciful word be on your heart.
May the power of the singing word be on your house.
May the power of the good word be with your loved ones.
May the blessings of the Lord be with always. Amen.

Joanne has blessed not only with her life and her deeds, but with the borrowed words of this Gaelic prayer.