**

**Sharing of Memories of Martha Ryder, BVM (Briant)**

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Nov. 28, 2021

**Sister Mary McCauley, BVM**

I offer this brief memory of Martha not because I knew her that well or ever had the privilege of living with her or taking a class from her in physics or astronomy (wish I had). Instead my knowledge, love and admiration of Martha simply comes from observing her during her days at Marian Hall. During this time, I often had the privilege of serving as her companion to various medical appointments. It was in these sacred moments that I would hear about her family and her great love for her hometown of St. Louis.

However, my greatest privilege or blessing about knowing and loving Martha came on the day that Sister Cathy Wottreng asked if I would meet with Martha and assist her to select some of her favorite scripture and music appropriate for her funeral. When the day came for me to do this, I did my best to offer various suggestions that I thought might appeal and epitomize her life. When I did so, I got little reaction. Finally, in a very firm, clear voice, she stated, “Oh, I don’t know. Just love God, love your neighbor and be kind to all. With these few, definitive and concise words, our conversation ended. I knew Martha’s heart; she just had shared it with me. I knew her advice for living a holy and wholesome life. Hence, I knew what scripture to suggest for her funeral liturgy. So this morning we gather to celebrate Martha’s life, to thank her for her presence with us, thank her for the gifts she shared with so many students and colleagues. We also gather to offer Martha our sincere love and admiration. As we do so, we acknowledge and affirm her words of wisdom and promise to do our best to carry out her special council, “Oh, just love God, love your neighbor and be kind to all.”

**Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM**

A number of years ago, when I was ministering to our retired sisters at Mount Carmel, I received a phone call from the mother of two of Martha's former students. The mother told me that her family moved to Clinton, Iowa, where the two youngest of six children attended Mater Dei High School where Martha was on the faculty. The mother went on to say how much her daughters, and many other students, loved Martha, adding that she was their favorite teacher. The students loved to tease Martha and Martha enjoyed teasing the students. Martha often signed her name on the chalkboard or on students’ papers as "S. Martha." Soon the students began to call her “Sister Smartha,” since she was so brilliant! This woman was so grateful that two of her children had Martha as a science teacher. She credits Martha for inspiring these two daughters to become doctors who chose to work among the poor. Thank you, Martha, for touching the lives of so many young people. May you rest in peace.

**Sister Nancy McCarthy, BVM**

I first met Martha when we served together on the Ministry Grant Committee many years ago. She offered such valuable insights and was such a wonderful person to work with that she made the work enjoyable. Later she taught my niece and nephew at Mater Dei High School in Clinton, Iowa, so I saw her when I visited there. Martha was so committed to helping her students succeed and continue on to college. She offered tutoring after school and after supper every night of the school week. I was so impressed with how much she cared about each student. I wished I'd been able to do something similar for mine. Thanks to Martha, Kevin & Laura (twins) both passed math and science during senior year and went on to college. Martha was the last BVM to teach in Clinton and stayed on in the house by herself for a few years. Later, I got reacquainted with Martha, who had retired to Mount Carmel, while volunteering at Mount Carmel in the summer. She remained a pleasant, caring person until the very end. I'm very lucky to have known her.

**Carolyn Ziegker**

I remember Sister very well from our days at Prince of Peace. I taught religious education on Sunday and met her through that. She was what I called a true Christian person. I enjoyed visiting with her. RIP in God’s glory, Sister.

**MaryLane Blomquist**

Sister Briant Ryder was my astronomy teacher at Clarke College - one of my favorites!! She will be in my prayers!

**Brenna Decker, Former Student**

Sister Martha was one of the most brilliant and inspirational women I’ve ever been lucky enough to know, a leader and mentor in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) long before the catchy acronym existed.

Whether patiently talking students through a two-column proof on the overhead projector or posting a handwritten sign asking that the “pretty red stapler” be returned when it had gone missing, Sister’s quiet humility and firm guidance were a hallmark of every math and physics class at Prince of Peace High School in Clinton, Iowa.

During my senior year, I took an independent study statistics class with Sister, although our long afternoon chats were rarely about statistics! She shared stories of growing up in the Italian neighborhood of St. Louis, playing the harmonica and field hockey, and of converting to Catholicism after encountering Sisters who inspired her to follow in their well-educated and service-driven footsteps. Always a lifelong student, Sister kept up on the latest mathematical and scientific discoveries. Listening to recorded lectures by Fermi and others inspired her to go back and get a second master’s degree in physics many years after her first “because it had all changed.”

I was honored in 2005 to nominate Sister Martha for the Presidential Scholars Teacher Recognition Award and we traveled together to Washington, DC, for the award weekend. I was so pleased to see her honored on the national stage for all her contributions - a truly well-deserved recognition! In the printed program, teachers were asked to share a reflection on teaching, and Sister’s simple words perfectly encapsulate the impact she has had on so many of us. She wrote, “A student I taught 30 years ago wrote that her interest in astronomy, picked up in my class, has lasted. She downloads the Astronomy Picture of the Day and often uses the picture as her computer screen background. I should have written to my teachers.”

Reading that now after many years, I’m glad that I remained in correspondence with Sister! She was always quick to share articles of interest to my architecture profession or any other tidbits she thought interesting. Thank you for everything, Sister, my teacher, mentor and friend. Rest in peace.

**Sister Kathleen Holland, Clinton Franciscan**

I just wanted to express my sympathy to you and your congregation on the death of your Sister Martha. I had the privilege of working with her for four years at Mater Dei High School in Clinton, Iowa. Her classroom was right across the hallway from the Guidance Office and she would often stop in to greet me and see how I was doing or perhaps to check up on me. She had a gentle smile and keen sense of humor! Sister Martha was well respected by faculty and students. She ran a "tight ship" in the classroom, but had a heart of gold and would "bend over backwards" to give students extra help if they wanted, or at times when she thought they needed it! I especially remember how extremely kind she was to one of our faculty members who was wheelchair bound.

**Sister Bertha Fox, BVM**

Martha (Briant) taught Physics for the non-science majors at Clarke College when I was a senior music major there in the 1950s. I took the class and thoroughly enjoyed it, for she was a fine teacher and exuded enthusiasm, especially for astronomy. After graduation I joined the BVMs. That physics course was listed on my transcript; perhaps that’s why I was asked to teach General Science for high school freshmen, as well as music in grades 1-12, when I began my teaching career. A few years later, I joined Martha at Clarke, but in the music department. She helped design the planetarium on the roof of the new 1960s science building and introduced many students and adults to the glories and mysteries of the visible universe.

One summer Martha was my home visit companion. Always generous and kind and adaptable, she brought a baseball autographed by Stan Musial of the St. Louis Cardinals that she gave to my father, who gave it to my brother who gave it to his son. Martha also brought a powerful telescope that she had built, which featured a special lens that she had ground. My entire family fondly remember this. They could watch our neighbors who lived on a hill more than a mile away!

Martha was my cousin’s freshman adviser at Clarke and, even in recent years, she always asked about Rosie whenever we visited or met in a corridor. Rosie holds Martha in highest regard.

Martha was not a limelight person; she worked behind the scenes. She loved science and math, especially astronomy, and was an enthusiastic teacher. She kept up with developments in physics until a few years ago. She was a faithful friend and BVM.

**Sister Diane Forster, BVM**

I was in a summer general science class at Clarke College that Martha was teaching. For the final exam, each student was to explain a small project to Martha. I recall explaining my project and then Martha asking me a question, sounding as if she did not understand. I felt impatient explaining again—surely *SHE,* of all people, understood my perfectly clear explanation! It was only later I realized that Martha was teaching teachers how to teach. She was testing not only my knowledge of the science project, but also wanted to know whether I could explain the project in more than one way for students who would not understand the first explanation.

Included in Martha’s file of preparations for her funeral services was a long, handwritten list in very small lettering naming many persons for whom she prayed. There are many names, but two entries tell us Martha had a big heart. She listed a “crippled lady on Grand,” and a “lady at the rodeo.” She may have only observed, or may have met, these two ladies, but her concern for them, even unnamed, lasted.

Also in her file is a small page of carefully written Greek. With no reference in English to its content, and no one who reads Greek close at hand. I am guessing that it is a passage from the New Testament. Irene mentioned that Martha liked to tease the students. Considering the teacher and scholar that she was, perhaps Martha is challenging us to pursue learning, even outside of our comfort zones, “teasing” us into continuing to learn. I wonder if anyone watching or listening reads Greek. Maybe it’s a challenge from Martha.