



## Sharing of Memories of Jean Margaret Black, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Aug. 4, 2022

### Jane Black, Sister-in-law, wife of Jerry Black

As alluded to, Sister had many interesting sayings that came out every once in a while. I'm sure many of you heard some of these. This was written August 30, 2003, in celebration of her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. [Sister Jean Margaret's sayings are italicized. Comments Jane interjected are in brackets].

Hear ye! Hear ye! *My lord mayor of London* has ordered that on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of August 2003, that all the *starving Armenians* will gather to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of *Mrs. Astor's plush cat*, "*Twinkle Toes.*"

The *Poor Clares* will provide *love and prayers* while *Mamie Darling* will supply *the stars and garters*. The *Pinkies* will be sent *skipping from mountain top to mountain top* proclaiming *heavenly days* for all. Meanwhile, the BVMs will pray that *the Saints preserve us* and that *the Saints will preserve Ireland* as well. *Jesus, Mary and Joseph (JMJ)* [often written on her cards and notes on the envelope flap] are, of course, invited as is *my Lord and my all*.

The entertainment will be provided by *Esmerelda*, wearing Black and Gold, who will gather together the *little cherubs* [We finally figured out that when she was speaking of her students, perhaps there was a hidden meaning in "little cherubs.] and one by one will *break their legs!!!* [This was quite a shock to me the first time we watched an Iowa football game with Sister in our living room. She converted from being a Husker fan Big Red. It took some doing to turn her into a Black and Gold Hawkeye, but we were successful. The term "break their legs" she often shouted to the Iowa players as they attacked an opponent.] As a finale, Saint Anthony will guide (SAG) us *little darlings* on our *way to Mandalay* to go *down the chute!!!!* ["Down the chute" was a phrase Sister would use in many conversations discussing sisters who had departed the earth. They went "down the chute."]

A repast of *sardines and sad cats* will be served to the *barely living*.

We pray that you will be *perking right along* for many more birthday celebrations to come!

My contributions to her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. I hope you enjoyed the witticisms. Thank you for being such good friends, comrades in arms, fellow sisters. Thank you to all who took such fantastic care of Jean Margaret. Thank you to the staff for arranging a wonderful send off as she goes "down the chute."

### Jerry Black, Brother

I am Sister Jean Margaret's brother. I don't think she ever claimed me, but I am. If I don't do a good job on this, please don't be upset because I'm an old dog. I'll do the best I can.

Sister Jean Margaret was a great person. We had a great time together and I loved her. In 1943, still feeling the effects of the depression, a great aunt gave my dad \$25 to buy me something. He bought me a pony. It was quite

a bit of money in 1943. I named the pony Satchamo. Dorothy rode it to school when she was teaching. One day, she had a little problem going across a little bridge over Old Man's Creek. It seemed like the horse got scared. He flipped around and Dorothy fell off. She walked on to school about a mile. The horse came home.

Dorothy had masses said for Jane and me and sent us a card each time. One time we took her to the casino south of Iowa City. It was our sister Florence's birthday. They rode around in a golf cart, the first time they had been on one. They had supper there and stayed overnight. Florence and Sister traveled to Ireland, England and Branson, Mo. They had great times and loved talking about it.

Dorothy taught at several places, as was mentioned. She loved her "little cherubs," I think. She had to rehabilitate from being a Nebraska Cornhusker fan. We had to train her to be a Hawkeye fan, but she finally came around. She went to some Hawkeye football games and had her picture taken in front the Nile Kinnick statue when it was being installed.

Her sister Joanita became a nun in 1939 and Dot in 1945. I was only fifteen at the time. Yet, I knew her pretty well and thought a great deal of her.

### **Jane Black, Sister-in-law**

With two sisters who became nuns in the family, this man was programmed by his mother to become a priest. When he was seven or eight, the bishop came to Holbrook, Iowa, to St. Michael's Church. This young man carried the train of the bishop. His mother was busting her buttons being so proud. However, here's the other half of the story.

### **Jerry Black, Brother**

I was serving as an altar boy when I was thirteen. Pat Driscoll was also serving. If you served on the right-hand side, you rang the big metal bell with a hammer. It could wake up the people in the first fifteen rows! Two weeks in a row Pat Driscoll served on the right side. I announced to him, "Next Sunday, I will serve on the right side." He was not quite in agreement. We settled that discussion behind the altar in the sacristy. I came out with a black eye and he with a bloody nose. We ran right into this big Irish priest behind the altar. He kicked both of us off the altar. He kicked me up to the choir. At thirteen, that didn't make a lot of sense. That was the end of the priest plan. I don't think my mother spoke to me for more than a month.

### **Sister Joanne Lucid, BVM**

My story is my first meeting with Sister Jean Margaret. It was a few years ago. I was invited to be a companion. Sister had an appointment with her doctor. She looked just beautiful with her hair done. She sat in her wheelchair but had wonderful eye contact and a smile on her face. She wore a very attractive dress with buttons down the front. It reminded me of what my grandmother used to wear, like a house dress, but this dress had flowers and colors, just very pretty. Off we went to the doctors. I was sitting there when this very nice doctor came in. He said, "And who are you, Sister?" She thought for a moment and then looked over at me. "That's her job," she said as she pointed in my direction. I said, "This is Sister Jean Margaret." She smiled and accepted that. Then he said to her, "What community do you belong to?" With that, she raised herself fully in her wheelchair, looked straight at him and said, "I am a Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Strong, almost belt you over. He said, "OK, Sister, they are a nice group, lovely ladies. My wife and I go up to the cemetery most Sundays for a walk." She replied, "Know that you are always welcome there." This little first meeting just tickled me. She was very much in charge, as you brought out so very well in your stories. She could delegate what my role was. She knew who she was, and she let it be known. "A Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary." I do not think that doctor will ever forget that. Lastly, genuine hospitality was always part of her.

### **Julie Black, Niece, Daughter of Joseph Black**

I want to share a few things. The first is from her cousin Geralyn. Dick, Sandy and Geralyn and their families couldn't be here today, but Geralyn shared a story that she wanted me to pass along.

### **Geralyn, Cousin**

When my son, Brendan, was about six years old, I gave him a beautiful little gingerbread house along with a note from Mrs. Claus praising Brendan for being such a good boy and taking care of his baby sister Courtney. I hoped that he would like the gingerbread house. Brendan was so impressed with the house and that Mrs. Claus took time to make it for him. Just a couple of hours later, we received a phone call identifying herself as Mrs. Claus. Could it truly be Mrs. Claus? In truth, it was Sister Jean Margaret who had no knowledge of the gingerbread house or the note from Mrs. Claus. I filled her in the best I could without spilling the beans and handed the phone to Brendan. His eyes were as wide as saucers when he realized he was talking to the real Mrs. Santa Claus. Sister was wonderful and shared with Brendan what life was like at the North Pole. Brendan never forgot that day and neither will I. We love you, Sister, and we know you are at peace in the loving arms of Jesus.

### **Julie Black, Niece, Daughter of Joseph Black**

That was a sweet story Geraldine wanted to share and I am glad to be able to share it for her. They are the only cousins that I know of that she still has so that was beautiful.

Personally, I am thinking of Sister as being supportive, standing behind us quietly. When my dad was in the hospital at different times, she would come down. He would say, "I don't feel good." She would say, "I'm just going to sit." She would sit on the side. She was present. That was so nice. She was always there for us. She never missed our birthdays. She loved us all. I'll miss those happy eyes. When she smiled, she had that sparkle in her eyes. I will certainly miss that.

Another person who couldn't be here today was my mother, Madonna Black. She couldn't make the trip but wanted to pass along her disappointment. She thought how much my dad would want to be here and how much he loved and respected her for what she did with her life. We found some letters that she had written. My father and she were exchanging letters when he was in the war. He was making the decisions about what he should do when he came back from the war. She was making decisions about she was going to do with her life. They shared their thought processes with each other and supported each other and said that whatever they would choose, they would be very proud of each other. I know that they are together today. All our friends and family and loved ones are with Sister and enjoying her presence.

### **Sister Eileen Healy, BVM**

I drove Jean Margaret many times to Cedar Rapids to be picked up by a niece. The last woman who spoke said that Jean Margaret was proud of the family. She was *extremely* proud of all of you. She talked about how good someone had been to her father in his last days. She talked about the pride she had in both brothers. She extremely proud of you. Let's just say we could get to Cedar Rapids where someone would pick her up and take her to Iowa City without a lull in the conversation. There was never a lull in the conversation.

During relocation when we were getting air conditioning in the Motherhouse, Jean Margaret was staying with the Presentation Sisters. It was my job to bring her over to Mount Carmel many days during the week. She didn't like bumpy roads. If you know Dubuque, you know that if it isn't snowing and freezing, there will be road construction. We would drive along in and out of construction on Asbury Road and onto Grandview Ave. She was so happy when the section near the Grandview exit on Highway 151 was finally paved nicely. I always think of the section now as Jean Margaret's road. She commented every day, "They finally got this done." It was important to her that the road to Mount Carmel was smooth.

### **Sister Mary Waddell, BVM**

I lived with Jean Margaret in Petaluma, Calif., in a convent that had both grade school and high school sisters. Jean Margaret was a grade school teacher and I was high school. Our paths didn't cross too much, but I do remember her many, many quirky sayings. She was the life of the table. We used to go on vacation trips into the mountains. Jean Margaret loved that and always had something great to say along the way.

### **Barb Standish, Niece, Daughter of Jerry Black**

I had the twins and Katie. She loved my children and loved Joe's children, John and Linda's children, and Paul and Julie. I always felt that she was like a second mom. She couldn't say enough about them and always called them "little cherubs" and "twinkle toes" and "Millie Tillie" and all those crazy, silly things that she said. She was just a delight for us. I adore her and respect her. It is so fun to hear the stories you are telling. It speaks from your heart that you really do know her and that she really made a positive impact.

### **Jenny Borchers, Grandniece, Daughter of Joanne Torey, Granddaughter of Jerry Black**

Thank you for sharing all your memories and taking care of her. We all really admired her. She was so special to all of us. She was very strict when we were younger. I remember her visiting us once in Omaha. She wouldn't let me leave the light on at night. I would turn it on, and she would turn it off. We would play around a little bit until I fell asleep. She was always the light and the love of our family. This generation of our family has kept us all together. I will always remember her little quips as well. My sister Sarah wanted me to share that the "Twinkle Toes" saying was always really funny. Even now to this day when her husband does a little jig, she calls him "Twinkle Toes." I remember specifically "Three cheers . . ." whenever anyone had a good moment in their life. We will always remember her.

### **Joanne Torey, Niece (Read by husband Jeff Torey)**

As a child growing up, I was always intrigued and in awe by her habit. She was an inspiration and had a genuine gift of faith. She was a very loving person as an aunt. She always referred to everyone as "Twinkle Toes," which was cute. She always made everyone feel very welcome. We remember her genuine smile, her spiritual help, and her prayers. Dorothy would offer special Mass intentions for all of us, providing us with the spiritual strength and guidance we all needed. On behalf of her brothers, their wives, and children, we are all very happy that she finally made it home. She always said, "Three cheers." So, three cheers for Dorothy on her journey home. God bless all of you who took such good care of her. Thank you for this very beautiful celebration. Three cheers for Dorothy!

### **Sister Joellen McCarthy, BVM**

Jean Margaret was my fourth-grade teacher at the Immaculate Conception elementary school in Butte, Mont. I was a student in the years when we numbered close to 60 persons in a class. I realize now what a challenge that had to have been for teachers trying to keep us all engaged in some capacity. I recall that Jean Margaret strongly conveyed to us the importance of being very serious about learning.

One clear memory from that year is how Jean Margaret drilled us to learn our multiplication tables. We would advance to the black board in groups of four or five students. First, we drew on the board a large "T" with a long stem. Down the left-hand column we would make a vertical list with numbers that Jean Margaret dictated. Then with chalk poised at the top of the right-hand column we waited to fill in the multiplier digit. The race began striving to be the first to reach the bottom digit having filled in all the correct multiplied numbers down the right-hand column. I believe some days we even had tournaments with winners advancing to the next round. Today with calculators so available, I imagine this is a game of the past. However, 70 years ago it was a great learning device and, it certainly kept us engaged.

### **Sister Margaret Mary Cosgrove, BVM**

I remember Jean Margaret as very proper. There was a protocol to doing different tasks and she liked to follow the protocol. When she and Jean Evelyn [Menster] moved into their apartment in 910 A they invited Regina M. Qualls and me to their home for dinner. They wanted to be the perfect hostesses. They fixed a delicious dinner and gave us a very thorough tour of their apartment. They were thoughtful of our time and after dinner was over, they graciously sent us on our way. I don't think Jean Margaret had lived outside a convent before moving to this apartment and she always wanted to make sure that she followed all the "rules." I also remember that Jean Margaret carried her pocketbook everywhere she went.

### **Sister Nancy McCarthy, BVM**

I first met Jean Margaret in 1980 when I was studying in Omaha. I was living with a group of Mercy sisters since BVMs lived too far from the university, but saw them at meetings. Jean Margaret was *very* hospitable, always inviting me to things at St. Bridget's and keeping me informed of news. She was especially helpful to us a few years later when I was living in Council Bluffs where Erminita Weimar died. None of us could figure out how to dress her properly in the veil, so Jean Margaret came to the rescue. Most of all, I remember when I would volunteer at Mount Carmel in summers after she retired here. She *always* remembered me and asked how I was doing. That really meant a lot and showed me what a real community person she was.

### **Sister Regina Wagner, BVM**

Jean Margaret was in Omaha when I was in Lincoln. Whenever I visited Omaha, I usually stopped to say hello. I know that she spent happy years there and was very well liked. She was an excellent teacher and was always most congenial to me.

### **Sister Elizabeth Avalos, BVM**

For the last few years, Jean Margaret was one of our pray-ers. When I would be in Dubuque for a meeting, I would bring her some See's chocolates, which she was reluctant to share with others. That was always a treat for her. I remember her smile. Jean Margaret was a welcoming person.

### **Sister Marilyn Wilson, BVM**

Elizabeth [Avalos] and I didn't know her at all when she became our pray-er in 2018 so we ask Julie O'Neill to gather some information. When we visited her on trips to Dubuque, she really didn't recognize us, but the See's chocolates were welcome with open arms. The last time we saw her before COVID, she was not aware of our presence. Last November because of COVID we were not able to see her. We are grateful for her prayers, and we did remember her also. Prayer does transcend all human limitations.

### **Sister Ann Therese Chaput, BVM**

When I was a novice, after Mass and breakfast, I was to go to the 4th floor, Marian Hall. Jean Margaret was given the same responsibility on the 3rd floor. She took me "under her wing" to show me where ice and water were kept so to change the water pitchers in each sister's room and assist with anything needed while visiting with them.

I admired Jean Margaret's direct but caring way. She would check up on me periodically when we met at the ice machine in the morning. May she Rest In Peace with the many BVMs she served as well as others.

### **Sister Diane Forster, BVM**

Before Jean Margaret moved from the Circle Apartments to the Motherhouse, it seemed she often made a chapel visit before the end of the day, then returned to the apartment. One evening she appeared late in the evening, and a sister asked her, "It's late! What are you doing here?" Jean Margaret replied immediately, in her mock serious tone and with a grin, "I'm checking your dresser drawers. I want to be sure everything is folded correctly!"

### **Bob Peralta**

Sister Jean taught my kids in Omaha in the late 1980s. My kids feel that she was the best teacher they ever had. My wife and I agree, and she was a great friend. We just loved her! Sister Jean is one person I know will be with God in paradise.

### **John Peralta, La Vista NE**

I had Sister Jean as a third and fourth grade teacher at St Bridget's in Omaha in the early 1980s. She was a great teacher. She, more than any other teacher, helped me to learn to read effectively. After those two years with her, I was no longer behind my peers but rather usually ahead. Later that translated into college scholarships and

degree. Although I had many great teachers along the way, Sister Jean's dedication to me, provided me the fundamental skills I absolutely needed to grow.

### **John Vesely**

I am helping my son move from Wisconsin to New Hampshire this morning and am not able to be there for Sister Jean Margaret's services. I grew up in the same Holbrook, Iowa, area as Sister Jean. She was in the same class as my father, Edward "Bud" Vesely, at a one-room schoolhouse in Iowa County. Her brother Joe was a good friend of his and they rode together when they worked at Amana Refrigeration. Sister Jean later was a teacher; I believe at the same one-room school. One of her students in 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades was my dad's brother, my uncle, Ray. Ray was a friend of Sister's brother Jerry. I brought Ray here to Mount Carmel a couple of times to visit Sister Jean over the past years. On the last visit, I took a picture of them, and they were holding hands. Six weeks ago, when I was visiting him at a nursing home in Bellingham, Wash., I noticed a picture on his nightstand. It was the picture I took of them holding hands. Thank you for allowing me to share my memories of Sister Jean.

### **Sister Patricia Kerz, BVM**

I lived with Jean Margaret at St. Bridget's in Omaha, Nebr. She was an excellent third-grade teacher and had a wonderful sense of humor, along with a beautiful smile. One day she was telling us that, after her hair was cut at the beauty shop shorter than usual, she entered the classroom and heard two boys discussing her hair. "Look at Sister's hair!" She was amused at their reaction. She was a pleasant person to live with.

### **Sister Elizabeth Olsen, BVM**

Sister Mary Jean Margaret Black was my fourth-grade teacher in Butte. She was tough, committed, never threatened, yet she always carried out a promised discipline. I loved her. Most kids, especially junior high, referred to her as "General Jean" behind her back. Fourth grade was the detention room after school each day for all ages.

In third grade, I had the bedside teacher because I was confined to bed with rheumatic fever. In fourth grade, Sister tutored me after school each day. She was smart. She seemed to know everything. Sister did not seem to care what others thought of her. She was not into other people's glory! I was lucky to have her. Her sister, S.M. Joanita taught my brother and sister in fourth grade, four years before me.