



## **Sharing of Memories of Ramona Barwick, BVM (Simone)**

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Nov. 8, 2022

### **Chris Albrant, Cousin**

My favorite memories of my dear cousin Sister Ramona are the wonderful care packages from Clarke College she would send or bring with her on visits to our family. I remember the wonderful candies and clothing. She was my mother's flower girl way back when and they were always very close. We all looked forward to her visits. She would often bring a friend along and we got to know some other wonderful women. She and I became closer in later years, and I enjoyed our telephone visits. I miss her very much and she will always be part of my fondest memories.

### **Karen Ryker, Former Clarke Faculty Member**

I taught at Clarke for ten years in the 1970s and 1980s. Ramona has been a dear friend ever since. She told us not to come. That they would put her in the ground very quickly and we shouldn't bother. But she cannot stop us from celebrating her life.

These are my impressions. Her freckled skin, her redheaded self. Packing boxes of clothing and goodies to send to her Polish relatives. Leaving chocolate Dove bars, nuts, and cookies on the kitchen table for all her friends and guests. Rolling out dough for bread – rye and wheat goodness. Her thoughtful, artful selection of cards, art, and clothing for the bookstore. Her faithful attention to the post office. I met a woman here today who delivered parcels to Ramona at the post office for many years. She has come to celebrate her.

The Clarke College sweatshirts, coffee mugs, soup mugs and thermoses that she sent to us. The wooden planks that we supplied to support her sagging pullout couch for yet one more visit. When she visited us in Boston, she sent her clothing ahead so that she could fill her suitcase with fresh, sweet corn from Fincel's market. She loved the farmers' market. I know that there are people here who loved her every week at the farmers' market. She loved to go on art trip and little excursions to Mineral Point, Wisc., Belmont, Wisc., and all the little towns around here just to celebrate what they had to offer.

Her indomitable determination as she pushed her swollen legs around that gymnasium track, around and around and around because she doesn't quit. Her love of books. There was always a stack by her chair. Her intense attention to the evening news. Don't dare disturb her during *Sixty Minutes*. Her spirited life force as she faced the removal of her leg, her determination to master that prosthetic and the wheelchair . . . and she did it with joy. Her fierce acceptance of differences in all people. Her deep, quiet love of those she treasured and her loyalty to all of them. One instance, taking the paper each day to her neighbors at Clarke and leaving cookies and breads at their door. Making that painful trip up the stairs to her little bedroom each night and down each morning. Her world was so much bigger than the confines of the close walls and low ceilings. I say, well lived, Ramona!

### **Sarah Jo Burke, Friend**

She was my dear friend. The first time I was in this place was in 1963 when my family sang for the nuns after a concert at Clarke College. I decided twenty years later when I was twenty-eight to go to college. Ten years after high school, I am living in a dorm with eighteen-, nineteen-year-olds. It was a very lonesome time. But she took me under her wing. Somehow, she just did. She would take me out for picnics. It was the first time I had summer

sausage; we had that with cheese. We would talk. She loved to talk about the afterlife, and so did I, about what is coming next and the excitement about it. I think her spirituality was much larger than any one religion. That's what we shared – spiritual books and just talking and laughing. I would not have graduated from Clarke College if she hadn't been there for me because after three years, I was just so homesick. She was right there. In that last semester, I met my love for the next forty years. I thank Ramona for that. I'm wearing her colors today. She always had orangey, brown, and tan colors to go with her hair. I painted rooms for her and other things. We just liked to hang out. I was one of the few people who she would allow to wash the dishes. She was a gift to me, a wonderful gift. I know that she is home now. And she "knows" now, and I don't, and that bugs me, but I'm going there soon enough.

### **Erin Lange**

I met Ramona in 1986 when I went to Clarke as a student. I was traveling back and forth from Maquoketa, Iowa, working parttime as a surgery technician at Finley Hospital and a fulltime student. She found out about that schedule, and then there were frequent dinner invitations and a spare bedroom. It started out as a convenience and ended up being a routine out of friendship. Ramona was more than a great friend. She became part of my family, and I loved her dearly.

She was a pistol sometimes, too. For example, she was rehabbing at Mount Carmel from one her recent falls at her apartment that she loved dearly. She was so independent. She called me up one day and said, "Hey, I'm getting out today." I said, "Well, that's great!" She said, "But I can't get out until later in the day though. I really wanted to go home this morning." I said, "That's not a problem. If you need a ride, I'll come and get you." "Oh gosh, could you do that?" "I'll be up in an hour." I got up there, loaded her up with her little suitcase, and took her back to her apartment. I got a phone call that night. "Hey, Erin, did you know that Ramona was *not* supposed to leave Mount Carmel today?" I had no idea! She picked her most gullible friend for that. She called me "Charlie" and I called her "Mona Hopper." I called her "Mona Hopper" because she was always hopping around the kitchen making all those treats for her friends and family. She called me "Charlie" because she compared me to Charlie Brown. I asked her why and she said, "Because you say a lot with few words." I have other friends who would beg to differ.

I would like to quote from *Tuesdays with Morrie*. "Death ends a life; it does not end a friendship." I am going to keep our friendship alive and well until I see her again. Finally, I would like to borrow a small prayer from Sister Thea Bowman that I think sums up how Sister Ramona felt about her life, how I felt about our friendship, and how I know many of you felt about your friendship with her.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord.  
Thank you, Lord. Oh, I just want to thank you.  
Been so good. Been so good. Been so good.  
Been so good, oh that I just want to thank you, Lord.

Love you, Ramona

### **Shari, UPS**

I have known Ramona for almost fifty years. I'm the UPS lady who delivered packages to her. She always signed for them. I followed her from the West Locust entrance to the Atrium to where the bookstore and mailroom are now. She retired in 2003, but then she continued volunteering afterwards. I retired in 2004 and said good-bye to my career. She was a very special friend. We shared many laughs throughout the years. She came to my retirement party from UPS, and I went to her jubilee. I remember all the cookies that she made me over the years – tons of cookies and they were *the* best. I introduced her to my mom. The three of us used to go for lunch. Her birthday was in January and mine is a couple weeks before hers. So, we always celebrated our birthdays together. I have so many fond memories talking about our faith, sharing our faith, sharing what we thought was the purpose of life. Just so many spiritual and faith related things over the years.

One funny memory, amongst many, Kathy from the Clarke bookstore met me at the door one day. "Shari, I have a big favor to ask you." "Yeah, what's that?" "Halloween's coming. We all want to dress up as UPS people. Can you bring us some of your uniforms?" "Yeah, I could do that, but I could really get into a lot of trouble if anybody found out. We will have to keep this on the low and make sure no pictures circulate." I brought over some of my UPS stuff. It was so fun to come on Halloween and see them all dressed up.

I just loved spending time with Ramona. We shared many meals together. I used to pick her up every September. My church over in Hazel Green, Wisc., would have a fall festival. We would share a chicken dinner together and then walk around and play some Bingo and just enjoy each other's company. I'm so happy that I got to meet her and know her for as many years as I did. I am going to miss her.

### **Carrie Breitbach, Former Coworker**

I worked with Ramona for fourteen years in the Clarke mail center. She taught me a lot over the years. She was a great mentor. I was in a group called the Teresian Tapestry for 33 years. Ramona was very interested. When I came back from my monthly meetings, she would want me to share what we did and what we talked about. Over the years, our relationship was mostly about sharing our faith and stories. We would always find readings or poems that we would share with each other. I pulled them out the other day – a thick stack. How could I ever pick one to say how much she meant to me. I came up with this one – a song by Celine Dion called "These Are the Special Times."

These are the special times  
Times we'll remember  
These are the precious times  
The tender times we'll hold in our hearts forever  
These are the sweetest times  
These times together  
And through it all, one thing will always be true  
The special times are the times I share with you.

### **Diana Russo, Clarke Professor Emerita**

One of the many things I owe to Sister Ramona is my continued inability to open a combination lock (a problem since junior high locker days). On my first day of teaching at Clarke, Ramona, who was in charge of the mailroom, saw me struggling with my mailbox lock. She opened it for me and for the next nineteen years, let me go in the back and pick up my mail. It was always a plus because we got to chat. She was always a midday pick-me-up. She was warm and kind and determined not to complain even in her final difficult years. She did, however, have a wry, wise side and could be very funny. I am thankful to have known her.

### **Lori Ritz, BVM Associate**

I attended Clarke College from 1969 to 1973. At that time, Ramona was "Sister Mary Bookstore" to many of us who visited the bookstore for books, Clarke wear and Monastery caramels. But for me, my "student relationship" with Ramona changed to "mom" at the end of my senior year. I was fortunate to continue my spring semester of student teaching as a substitute teacher to the end of the school year. I needed a place to stay once the dorm closed. So, I stayed with Ramona, Sister Frances (Nan) Aid and Sister Kathleen McGrath who lived in a house up on the bluffs. I felt very much at home with Ramona's home cooked meals (my favorite was her hamburgers served on English muffins) and her cookies were the best. One day I walked in the house when Ramona was in the kitchen and announced, "Hi Mom, I'm home!" And it stuck! From that day, forward 45+ years, Ramona has always been "mom" to me. When Ramona came to Mount Carmel, I would go visit and we would have "mom/daughter" talks about all sorts of things. If I saw her in the hallway I would say "Hi, Mom" and her response was "Yes, Daughter." It was just a fun and special relationship. I was so fortunate to be able to spend time with her on my last day in Dubuque in August. Thanks, Ramona, for being that special person to me.

### **Sister Catherine Dunn, BVM**

We in the Clarke community will be grateful forever for Ramona. As you heard today, she touched many lives. We at Clarke have never forgotten her. She remains near and dear to us. Whatever she did, she did well. Someone said she could be a pistol. I only saw that once and it was justified. She was furious at herself, not at somebody else. If you ever needed a smile or a picker-upper, you went to Ramona. That smile could lift your heart to the point of singing. Today we bless her and thank her for the many things that she did that weren't known. She was a wonderful, wonderful BVM, a wonderful friend, and I loved her too.

### **Bobbie Potter**

I saw a different side of Ramona. She would bake the brownies and then cut the outside crust so that nobody got the part. She saved that crust for me. Sometimes she would bake and, dang that oven. I got those cookies that were just a little bit too done. She couldn't throw them away. She was a joy, definitely a joy. I'm sorry for your loss.

### **Shari, UPS**

When I got in the car today to come here, there was a song on the radio. It made me think of her. It's called "Friends" by Michael W. Smith.

Packing up the dreams God planted  
In the fertile soil of you  
Can't believe the hopes He's granted  
Means a chapter in your life is through  
But we'll keep you close as always  
It won't even seem you've gone  
'Cause our hearts in big and small ways  
Will keep the love that keeps us strong

And friends are friends forever  
If the Lord's the Lord of them  
And a friend will not say never  
'Cause the welcome will not end  
Though it's hard to let you go  
In the Father's hands we know  
That a lifetime's not too long  
To live as friends

And friends are friends forever  
If the Lord's the Lord of them  
And a friend will not say never  
'Cause the welcome will not end  
Though it's hard to let you go  
In the Father's hands we know  
That a lifetime's not too long  
To live as friends  
No, a lifetime's not too long  
To live as friends.

### **Samira Towfic, BVM Associate, Former Clarke Faculty Member**

I just read that Ramona is with the Lord and I am sure of that. I know how patient she is, and accepts all difficulties in her life! I am sure she is with the lord in Heaven. I am praying for her always and remembering what a wonderful woman, friend, sister she was. I will remember her all my life! I pray that the lord will offer her better life in heaven.

### **Sister Mary A. Healey, BVM**

On Sept. 8, 1949, Ramona Barwick came to Mount Carmel carrying a suitcase holding the bare necessities and crammed with candy bars. Her father was a wholesale candy salesman who gave her as many as she could carry to share with her new friends. She didn't get very far with them and was indignant by the time I met her. Being about the same height, we were close in line, and I heard her fulminations.

### **Sister Mary McCauley, BVM**

If I had the gift of music – which you all know I do not - but if I did, I would begin my sharing with the song “We Are Companions on the Journey” for those words most aptly describe my relationship with Ramona. Yes, on many occasions I had the privilege, and I mean *privilege*, of serving as Ramona's companion to various medical appointments. This is how we got to know one another. All the time we spent together often talking about serious medical decisions that had to be made is what led to my admiration and love for Ramona. Our time together led to our friendship. I should also add that our time together led to many café lattes.

Finally, I would like to comment on a verse in Paul's letter to the Romans for I believe it very aptly describes Ramona and her journey, especially the journey of the last ten or more years of her life. It is found in Paul's letter to the Romans 12:12. Paul addresses the assembled people and states, “Do not give up if trials come and keep on praying!”

We are all aware of the physical challenges that Ramona faced, yet she never lost her spirit. She was grateful for the medical care she was receiving, was grateful for the support of our BVM community and her many friends. She was also very conscious of God's presence with her. Yes, indeed, trials came but she did not let the trials take away her spirit. She kept on praying and did her best to live life to the full. The streak of independence that was integral to Ramona served her well. She was an example to all. May we learn from her and know beyond a doubt that we truly are “companions on the journey.” Thank you, Ramona, for the special journey that you and I shared.

### **Mary Coan**

A spark of loving kindness and generosity,  
A model of quiet strength hewed through challenging early years,  
An example of bearing invisible, daily pain quietly, selflessly,  
A deep and fostered spirituality, faithfully spilling over into warm welcomes,  
A nurturing spirit baked into every treat for those she loved,  
A gentle spirit personifying determination, persistence, commitment,  
A ray of sunshine greeting us each day, surrounding us with loving warmth.  
How did she love us?  
Too numerous to count the ways!

### **Susan Dolter**

I first came across Sister Ramona during my undergraduate years at Clarke in the early 1970s. My initial response to seeing her at work in the bookstore housed in the lower level of Mary Josita was, "Wow! What a wardrobe! She even wears jewelry!" In those days, such accoutrements were still viewed as somewhat radical in a professed religious. But I secretly admired Ramona's audacity. I guess I saw a kindred spirit in her.

Many years passed. In 2002, I came on board at Clarke in a hybrid role, part-time faculty member, part-time staff member. On occasion, maybe once or twice a week, I would leave my office around lunch time and mosey across

the street to the SAC (Student Activity Center) to check my mailbox. Ramona was *always* there in the bookstore, usually in the mailroom, doing her thing. Red hair and ready smile, and often earrings. Still the classy lady.

Before she retired, her outfits changed to more casual wear--stuff she could get into and out of more easily, I would imagine. When she took a tumble at work one day, a fall that she herself brushed off as insignificant, the bookstore staff were beside themselves with worry. You get that way when a person who has been a fixture in your day-to-day life for so many years no longer seems so strong, so permanent.

We have learned from you, Ramona. About the importance of the little things that underlie the big things. About how even the person in the background has an important role to play. And about how earrings complete the outfit!

### **Sister Mary A. Healey, BVM**

Today is Ramona Barwick's funeral. When young, we were about the same height, so from Sept. 8, 1949, we always were partners or near neighbors in those everlasting lines. Sometime after we were professed, SM Leo eliminated some of that lining up in pairs, so only BVMs over 90 will remember how much there was then. Ramona and I became and remained friends. She was from Milwaukee and loved that city like I love Chicago. When we both worked at Clarke, I had to go to Milwaukee for a meeting, so I told her the previous day. After the meeting that ended at noon on Friday, I went to the nearby Greyhound station and visited my father in Chicago. Sunday night I was back in Dubuque, and Monday I stopped in the bookstore. Ramona asked, "How was Milwaukee?" I said, "it was much colder than Chicago." Ramona responded, "Well, in *Milwaukee* we have the lake!