



Sharing of Memories of Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM (Robert Emmett)

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, July 7, 2023

Sister Kathleen Conway, BVM

Mary and I have been friends for 56 years. We have lived together, taught together, traveled together, laughed and cried together, and argued and disagreed together.

Mary's was a multi-faceted personality. She loved her family and friends, her Irish heritage, the Spiders, painting, and a good movie. She felt most at home in her garden. She *really* loved being the Sullivan matriarch. She was a writer, a poet, a teacher, a faithful companion, and a life-long and passionate Democrat. Mary shared her family with me, and I felt accepted by the rowdy, funny Sullivan clan – so like my own.

For several years Mary has said she was ready to die, or as she put it "I'm ready for the next great adventure." The last time we were together we were planning her diamond jubilee. While she wasn't looking forward to the stress of the day, she was eager to be with the family and friends she loved so much. Dear Mary, you are now with loved family and friends, just not the same ones you expected.

Thank you for an over-half century of friendship.

Sharon Sullivan, Niece

This is a hard day for us, but, like Kathy said, she wanted to go home. It is hard to lose someone who filled such a big place in our lives. I want to make this a little funny, but I don't know if that is irreverent.

There isn't anyone in the family who hasn't been cut out of the will at one point or another. Our family is big on teasing; it's a sign of affection. The more we tease, the more we love you. We are loud, vagarious, and happy to be with each other all the time whenever we can. [Sister] Mary Pat [Haley], San [Sister Ann Harrington], and [Sister] Kathy [Conway], unfortunately, also fell victim to our family's loud, rowdy teasing. I could say, on behalf of my family, that all three were as much family as Aunt Mary was. If Aunt Mary showed up without somebody it was "Oh, we aren't good enough? They couldn't come to Christmas with us? They couldn't be with us?" Then they heard at Easter. "Oh, so glad you came! So glad you are able to join us." If Aunt Mary was losing the teasing battle, the first thing that came out was "I am your matriarch. You should not be talking to me this way." If it went further, it was "And now you are cut out of the will." We would tease back, "The whole two dollars and 49 cents." She would say, "Oh, no. Terry took me to the track. He placed a bet for me. I won a whole five dollars and it's not going to you now."

My mother passed away last year. I always looked at my mother as the guardian of my happiness. I always looked at Aunt Mary as the captain of my spirit and the champion of my untapped potential. There wasn't a conversation that Aunt Mary ever had with anyone in our family that she wasn't looking

to help, or tell us what she saw in us that could further or better or enlighten or engage or make us more content and spiritually fulfilled. She always wanted to be a selfless involvement in our lives.

We lived in Philadelphia for eleven years and then came back. It was a hot day and my mom, Aunt Mary, San, and Mary Pat all decided to go to a movie, and I went with them. I can remember the movie. It was a movie called *Diner*. It was a great movie. We were leaving, and I couldn't tell you one thing about the movie now, but I remember walking through the parking lot and Aunt Mary comes up and says, "So what do you think?" I said, "It was good. I really liked it." She goes, "What was your favorite part?" She started asking questions. It was the first time, being 13 or 14, that someone asked me my opinion. I could actually go forward pass just "It was good." I had a voice, and she never stopped letting me know I had a voice. What I also love is that my nieces Nora, Hannah, and Alaina, who are here, are the next generation and Aunt Mary took so much time to get to know and cultivate the same foundation of love, respect, and worthiness that she gave to my generation.

I listened to the eulogy and all the things she did and I didn't know half of them! She definitely was not someone who spoke her accolades. I wish her in this moment so much peace. I hope and pray that she is with my father, her brothers, my mother, her parents, all that people who passed before her who she loved so much. She was really ready to go and see.

Thank you all, the BVM community who have been such a wonderful strength. I have always loved coming here. This is one of my favorite places to be. Every time I'm here, you are always so kind and so generous. Thank you for not only having us, but taking such good care of our aunt who we loved so much.

Terrence Leo "Terry" Sullivan, Nephew, Son of Daniel Francis Sullivan

As my sister Sharon said, Aunt Mary was someone very special in our family, someone we all looked up to. I went to her on quite a few occasions for advice and help. A couple of times I had a public speaking commitment and Aunt Mary just banged it out. She was just so good.

On a little funnier note, when my brother Matthew and I were younger, Aunt Mary, Mary Pat and San would come to the house. The BVMs wore the big habits. I was scared to death! I spent a lot of time with Aunt Mary and was lucky enough to go to Ireland with her on a couple of occasions. Aunt Mary would do her research for the congregation and extensive research on the Sullivans. I was able to travel the country with her. The experience, spending time with my aunt, was just wonderful. The Sullivans and the Mahoney family all loved our Aunt Mary.

Tim Sullivan, Nephew, Son of Robert Emmett Sullivan

My dad traveled a lot, so we only got to see the family every couple of years. She always wanted to know about the education I was receiving. She told me all about the stuff I needed to learn. We took a test about dollars and quarters. I didn't know what they were. I knew money from Guatemala, but didn't know about U.S. money. My brother and my sister went on to be honor roll students. I went on to be a construction worker because school for me was not as important as hands-on.

Terry says the nuns scared him. The nuns in Thailand taught me to cross my sevens, but the nuns in Pekin, Ill., didn't want that. I decided to draw the line and said I would cross my sevens. Aunt Mary told me kudos. When my mom died, Aunt Mary wanted to leave right after the funeral, but I just wanted to keep her there for a little while longer. So, I brought out the Tullamore D.E.W., two glasses and some

ice as she was telling me how she was going to leave. Pretty soon, she was staying the night. I love my Aunt Mary.

Dee Dee Dahm, Cousin

We lived next door to one another. Her dad and my mom were brother and sister. It was a great time always to be there with Mary Alma and her mom. Her mom was a piano player and would play for all of us to enjoy. We loved everyone. We enjoyed being with one another. We were such a close family.

I didn't have a sister and she didn't have a sister, so we decided to be each other's sister. Mary Alma was my "big sister." She was the one who took care of me and babysat me and my two brothers. There were times when she would put the boys to bed very early. "Dee Dee, we got them to bed and now we can have some fun and do whatever we want. This is going to be our time. We are just babysitting one another." I just loved her so much and really liked to be with her. She was so smart.

All this togetherness, living next door to my aunt and uncle and cousins. We had it made! We could do whatever we wanted. It was always a fun day, especially sitting around with her mother at the piano. Mary loved to sing and thoroughly enjoyed it. She was so close to me. She was a role model for me. I really believe my education was influenced by Mary Alma. We all went to the BVMs for education. I went to The Immaculata because of Mary. I went to Mundelein [College] because of Mary. I was a Jesuit educated person because of Mary. I enjoyed it all so much. I was so lucky to have a cousin who was outstanding. Thank you, Almighty God, for Mary Alma in my life. Mary Alma, I love you so much!

Mary Therese Dahm Pujals, Cousin, Daughter of Dee Dee Dahm

I am one of Mary Alma's cousins, but I call her my aunt out of respect and love. My mother shared with me that one of their favorite highlights was playing baseball, especially in the empty lot across the street. She always emphasized that Mary Alma was the best baseball player among herself, her two brothers, and Mary Alma. So, she was a role model in sports as well.

Speaking of education, Mary Alma guided me as well. When I was discerning about which college to attend, she said to emphasize a small, liberal arts school that really focuses on leadership, helping women to strive for leadership roles, provides a well-rounded education and is faith-based. I am so grateful for that. I did get good advice from her. She was always willing to share beautiful stories about family and our Irish heritage. The gift she gave to my mother and her brothers about a sense of family and joy and humor and faith is lifelong. That's part of Mary Alma's legacy to all of us. Mary Alma, you will always be with us in our hearts and minds. We love you always

Nora & Hannah, Grandnieces

I [Nora] was fortunate to live in the same building as Aunt Mary, San, and Mary Pat for the first year of my life. In that year, we formed a very special bond that I am very, very grateful for. We moved about 45 minutes away, but sleepovers soon became a very regular occurrence. Aunt Mary would pick us up in her car. The air conditioning did not work so we had to crank down the windows as fast as we could. We would go to the same Taco Bell for lunch and watch the airplanes fly over us. I remember every detail of her house – the cold brick floor in the hallway, the jump down into the sunroom, the walls of her bedroom covered with photos of her family. Every time we slept over, we made pancakes. She would purposely drizzle a bunch of little ones so we could eat them before the pancakes were ready. When I was older, Mary came to my volleyball games, my softball games. She stayed up to date on my business classes, my writing classes, my high school newspaper articles. She always made sure to tell

me how proud she was of me for every achievement no matter how small. With her help, I received the Mary Frances Clarke Scholarship twice. She was so adamant about getting everything I needed for that. My Aunt Mary made me feel like I could do anything. She championed my ideas. She told me both sides to every story. She was a safe, warm, funny, considerate aunt who loved me for exactly who I am. I will miss her squeal and the way she called me "Nora Dear" anytime I called her. I will miss her familiar scent when hugging her. I will miss her so much.

Michael Terrance Sullivan, Nephew, Son of Robert Emmett Sullivan

We spent a lot of time overseas, so we didn't have a much contact with Mary, although she did come and visit us every once in a while, like in Spain. It was a pleasant visit. She was always a delight to be around. On occasion, I was disinherited, but I wasn't around as much. I will echo many things people said before of Aunt Mary. She was just a wonderful person, always engaging. On the research side, I had the opportunity to work with her in the State of Illinois Archives in Springfield, Ill. I was doing a bunch of research going all over the place picking cards out. We were working on the area of Clinton, Ill. The family was there. They worked as farmers and railroad people. There is an interesting thing that I picked up. There were no names attached to it, but all the timelines fit. There was someone who was convicted of something in the same timeframe and in a family that seemed very similar to the one in Clinton. There was no name. So, since she was only there for a day, she didn't have time look into it. It was just a delight to be around her. She was engaging, friendly, very knowledgeable and always curious. I love you, Aunt Mary, and hope to see you again.

Sister Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

In February 2017, we had a very severe flu epidemic here. We were isolated. Our nurses, aides, and all our employees went way beyond the call of duty in caring for us during that flu epidemic. Mary Alma wrote a poem to thanking our employees for how they served us during that time.

Gratitude

Thank you, thank you, and our blessing too,
for your kind service during the wave of flu.

"Stay in your rooms," the nurses said;
so you carried the trays and the sisters got fed.

Thank you, again, for work done with zeal;
Your kind words and smiles accompanied each meal.

Long hours, newer duties were part of this phase;
You were surely our family in your care through these days.

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

Mary had asked that we play a particular song as a thanks to family and friends for the many years of care and love for Mary. Because of copyright restrictions we cannot do that, but the song is "You Raise Me Up" and you can find it on YouTube, probably in several versions.

Among the memories that came by email, so many came from former students who spoke of Mary as teacher and, later, friend. As we would expect from Mary's students, these were so well written. You

would enjoy reading them. Even as a retired person, one of the writers wrote, "I'm glad Mary is not using her red pen on this. I would still be correcting it."

Sister Brigid Mary Hart, BVM

Moving to Roger's Park in 1986, I first got to know Mary Alma. Her smile, bright blue eyes, openness, and intensity were trademarks. Lucky for me I got to share them in a women authors book group at Rose Mary Meyer's place, and garden weekends at Salem, Wisc. Also, I will always admire her faithfulness to and care for Ann Harrington's sister, Katie. I am most grateful. Namaste.

Connie Knapp and Judy Farmer

We have many fond memories of Mary Alma and her BVM housemates Mary Pat Haley and Ann Harrington. We recall Chicago group birthday gatherings, many breakfasts together, January 2nd [Mary Alma's birthday] celebrations, and a wonderful trip to Kentucky. We could always count on stimulating conversations and occasional challenges from Mary. A painting Mary did for us will continue to be a constant reminder of our long and enduring friendship. Mary Alma, until we meet again.

Chantal Mahler, Former Student

Sister Mary Alma was one of my communications teachers at Mundelein College (BA, '89), along with Sister Mary Pat Haley and Betty Prevender. I often think of them whether I am watching the news or a movie or listening to the radio. They were hugely influential in my life. I am sure I developed my love of documentaries from Mary Alma. She will always be in my thoughts and heart.

Linda LeClair, Former Student

Sister Mary Alma (Robert Emmett then) taught English and journalism at Our Lady of Peace High School in St. Paul, Minn., when I was a student there. She was lively and demanding, in a good way, expecting the best of us. She urged "intellectual curiosity," a phrase and motto that has remained with me ever since. Few things heard at sixteen stay with one permanently. Sister Mary Alma gave me, and many others I am sure, a guide for life.

Mary Harrington, Niece of Sister Ann Harrington, BVM

Mary Alma was my aunt's roommate and one of my mentors though I never took a class with her. She welcomed me to Mundelein College and, like all the BVMs, taught me how to be a woman in this world. My respect is endless.

Sister Mary A. Healey, BVM

Mary Alma grew up north of Chicago. In 8th grade, most of the girls planned on going to St. Scholastic HS which is just south of the city limit. When she told her father she'd like to go there, he said, "No, you'll go to Immaculata." His law office often hired girls right out of HS, and those from Immaculata were the past prepared, in his opinion. To Immaculata she went and thence to Mundelein College.

Rosemary Flood Larson, South Elgin, IL

I so regret I am unable to be at the Memorial Mass for Mary Alma, but delighted to be included in the assemblage of "Mary Moments" about to be shared.

Initially, my engagement with Mary was fraught with apprehension since I was her timid communications student who morphed under her leadership as a Mundelein College staff member,

and subsequently, for 40 more years, blessed to have her call me friend. I knew her as Sister Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM, then Mary Alma, then "Sully."

It was the first day of Mundelein College's Fall 1977 semester. A curly-haired lady with the Irish smile stood before the occupied student chairs and announced, "This is Film 101, a requirement for those majoring in communication. Anyone in the wrong class?" Two ladies gathered their things and flew out of the room. Immediately, she explained that what you see on screen is not reality. It's costumed actors working in a fake lot in Hollywood with written dialogue, faking emotions, changing scenery and someone directing according to the written scrip. I was astonished and later asked if that had to be explained and yes, there were young students who needed to be enlightened.

The work was hard, the assignments tough and they got tougher. We read a story, we saw the movie version and we did an essay on what we felt was unique or unremarkable between the genre or medium. It was "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and I was sure I did a great job, but my papers returned covered in red ink, a lot of red ink with remarks between the lines and up and down the margins. Reminded me of blood. But Sister Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM, was kind, saying maybe I had forgotten about grammar, punctuation, run-on sentences, verb agreements and more by the distractions of my childbearing years.

Her knowledge of the history and advancement cinema was amazing and earned her a committee seat at the Chicago International Film Festival selecting the films to be featured each year. She knew Siskel and Ebert, as well as other cinema notables, while continuing her teaching schedule.

She assisted me through classes pertaining to my major, Japanese film, documentaries, and the making of our own film where we rented the equipment from the college, and we best return it in better condition than we received it. She questioned students as to how they were doing and directed them to the resources available to assure their success. She did everything possible to make us aware of our potential as women. I loved her for that.

But she said I was a troublemaker; the original department award for "Most Promising Young Writer" had to be changed to accommodate my age to "Most Promising New writer." I graduated at 41, 8 years younger than Mary. My *alma mater* invited me to consider taking a job as alumni director with the responsibility of serving on the Mundelein 50th Anniversary Committee which Mary had a leadership role. We worked together and worked we did. Mary designed the committees, the job descriptions, work progress timeline, meeting dates leading to final celebration in the fall with alumni reunions, and an exciting all-day "Prime Time," a variety of workshops where alums could share their special expertise in their related fields. An idea that continued annually.

Mary had amazing organizational and leadership skills and was unflappable if there was so much as a hint that the brochure printing would be late, or the caterer couldn't find eggs. At that time, Mary Alma and her roommates, Sister Ann Harrington, and Sister Mary Pat Haley, hosted a dinner in their apartment for Oscar winning alumna, Mercedes McCambridge, inviting the committee to a wonderful evening.

After I left Mundelein College, I worked for several Catholic non-profits and asked Mary to work on our newsletters. I never knew how savvy she was with layouts, spec'ing type, aligning columns, and working with Photo Shop. She charged non-profits a low rate making little money for her supplies. I

said, "Mary you're entitled; you must have a desire to purchase something you can't afford." She said maybe a Mac or . . . she hesitated...a Mac and a hammock. She had a wry sense of humor. Nonetheless when I submitted the galleys of my newsletter stories, she had that red pen ready but admitted she didn't have to use it quite as often as the old days.

We had lunch so often and the laughs she provided were well worth the cost of the lunches I paid for. She insisted she pay but I told her you can't ask a nun to pay for lunch. She said good, because if I indulged, she was afraid I'd order the lobster.

She retired from teaching and she and the sisters in the apartment decided it was time to move to Mount Carmel. I felt sad but she loved it there, loved the sisters, those she knew and those she didn't. She adored the volunteers who were so accommodating. Anything we want, she said, they would get. I said what if you wanted a Snickers bar and there was none to be found? She said, they'd get into their cars and go to the nearest gas station and get one. Amazing.

I remember an early story about an old barn on the property that was ideal to continue her oil painting. Even in Chicago she was painting, and we shared tips on techniques. Her subjects were sceneries of Ireland's farmland. The idea of dragging her supplies back and forth was a non-starter.

I could go on, but I am still afraid Mary is lurking with that red pen. Thank goodness I did not have to show these remarks to Mary in advance or I'd still be at this computer correcting, correcting, correcting.

Please, dear Mary Alma, watch us as we go, remind us of your love and support and guide us 'til we are together again. Thank you, Mary, for your intelligence, your wit, the promise you had in us. My journey with you has been a pure delight.

Mary Lou Reid, Associate

Mary Alma has been my sparring partner in the battle of words for the past 60 years. What was the right word, the right expression and who got the last word in the battle...hmmmm...usually MA.

It started when I was a junior at OLP and Sister Mary Robert Emmett (Mary Alma) was my home room, religion, English and journalism teacher. Religion class was midday and I admit to using a bit of the time preparing my homework for the afternoon history and algebra classes to follow, *but* I was listening. Mary Alma always suspected me of not paying attention but could never catch me. One day MA announced a written pop quiz. She collected the papers, graded them, and passed them back the next day. MA handed me my quiz back first and said with obvious annoyance, "You got 100%." And thus raged our battle. All was set aside however afterschool, when a group of us sat around the press room playing ukuleles and singing. MA had a lovely voice and wasn't too bad on the soprano uke.

After high school, I entered Mount Carmel as a postulant and a few years later was promptly sent on a mission experience and who was also there? Mary Alma. It's then that our relationship changed from teacher and student to peer.

Throughout MA's years at Mundelein, I came to visit periodically and stayed with her in her walk up with Mary Pat Haley, Ann Harrington, and others in Chicago. Visits always included a trip to Gino's pizza with the candlestick center piece on the table dripping wax down the Chianti bottle – maybe we

ordered an additional bottle – but the evening was always filled with words, words and words. The hospitality was reversed when MA came to New York City one year for summer school and stayed in my Manhattan apartment.

Fast forward to 2017 when I stayed about six weeks at Mount Carmel. I spent mornings writing my book. I'd often join Mary Alma and others for lunch, but after lunch MA and I always sat together and went over whatever I had written that morning, always searching for just the right word. There were a few lunches out at the Hotel Julien during that time as well. I watched MA order some forbidden dietary items but pretended not to notice and smiled at her with a knowing twinkle. I would accompany MA to the art studio and just sit quietly while MA painted. We have three of MA's paintings hanging in our home today.

My book was published in 2018 and I returned to Mount Carmel again in 2019 for another five or six weeks. It was several spinal fusions later for MA. This time we met in MA's room where my dear mentor, colleague and friend sat in her big brown recliner. This time I mostly listened, waiting patiently for her words to haltingly tumble out. This time was our last time together. Storytelling learned in MA's English class and the quick and concise writing style learned in MA's journalism class laid the foundation for my now late in life career as an author's coach for a major corporation. My great appreciation for the power of words learned from a master is Mary Alma's lasting legacy gift to me.

Sister Marilyn Wilson, BVM

Mary Alma, Mary Pat [Haley] and Ann [Harrington] were the most gracious hostesses to me whenever I traveled to Chicago for Senates, Assemblies, and various other meetings over many years. Their Arthur Ave #2 was my home away from home. There were many airport pick-ups and drop offs. There was always a couch bed in the front room or one in the back. Many meals were shared (I even volunteered to cook and shop). We had many intense lively discussions, storytelling, and relaxing happy hours. Often, I worked with my computer at the dining room table. Mary was always there with a generous heart, kindly wisdom, and deep sharing. I will miss her and treasure our times together. May she rest in peace.

Sister Elizabeth Avalos, BVM

Mary Alma Sullivan was a presence in my life since my scholastic days when I student taught at Holy Names High School in Chicago. Mary Alma was someone who encouraged me in my early days of trying to teach.

After that I got to know her by asking for hospitality at Arthur Street when I came to Chicago for Region 10 meetings, associate gatherings, or other BVM gatherings. Mary taught me much about Chicago, Irish lore, and standing up for justice issues. She was always welcoming with a smile on her face and another story to tell.

I joined Mary and Ann Harrington in Quito to assist with setting up the library at Nuevo Mundo. I would read the Spanish title of the book and tell them what it was in English, and they would figure out where it belonged in the library. During my stay there, those of us volunteering at Nuevo Mundo traveled to Cuenca, a town in the Andes. The road to Cuenca is hazardous. Mary and I wondered if we would survive the trip.

I so appreciated Mary Alma's guidance and friendship; I will miss her.

Carolyn Campion, Boulder, Colo.

We were privileged to have Mary Alma, aka Sister Mary Robert Emmett, as our English and Journalism teacher at Regina High School in Iowa City, Iowa, from 1958-1961. At only 30 years of age, she could be very serious and a disciplinarian in class, but also full of life and fun in our extra-curricular journalism activities. But we always knew where we stood with her, and admired her tremendously. Her fierce pride of being Irish and from Chicago was never far from the surface.

I thought for some months if Mary Alma could become a nun, maybe I should consider it, too. Nevertheless, her guidance in journalism, writing & editing led me to my career in communication with companies in the food industry.

I lost track of Mary Alma for a couple decades as I was trying to locate her at Mundelein. Eventually in 2011, I 'found' her and visited her and Ann Harrington in their Chicago flat shared with another nun. We celebrated St Patrick's Day at a pub in Evanston. I invited Mary Alma and Ann to Estes Park in 2012. As the photos show, we had a wonderful time sharing events from a rodeo to a visit to the Yves Saint Laurent exhibit at the Denver Art Museum. In 2016, I invited Mary Alma and Ann to my new home in Boulder, and I visited them again in Mount Carmel in 2018. Our relationship stretched from 1960, over 60 years, but I could finally 'repay' her for her gifts to me when in late January 2022, we could meet again at Mount Carmel to establish the Sister Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM Scholarship at the Gannon Center so more generations of young women can benefit from an education at Loyola University - just across the street from where we 're-met' in 2011. Mary Alma was an amazing person, who will always stay in my thoughts and prayers.

Diana Sullivan

I was married to Daniel Sullivan III, and we have three daughters, Nora, Hannah, and Alaina. Aunt Mary was a big part of our life and I recall so many wonderful visits and phone calls. Aunt Mary was supportive of my work as a nurse and as a mom. She loved each of the girls and celebrated birthdays, holidays and other get-togethers with us. She encouraged each of us to continue our education and helped provide strength in our lives. I am very grateful beyond words for the impact she had in our lives and who we each are as women. My youngest daughter does not have many memories of Aunt Mary, but we will be sure to share her legacy with Alaina, so she knows how important she was in shaping our lives. I am grateful for the BVM community and thank you for taking great care of Aunt Mary all of these years.

Aunt Mary, we love you! Thank you for loving us unconditionally!

Rosemary Larson

Hi, Chantal. Loved reading your comments. I, too, having graduated in '79, remember things that all three taught me, especially Mary's comment on how to know a movie is a good one? Ask yourself, how you feel when leaving the theater and if you are thinking about the film the next day and the next, that was a good film. Betty Prevender had hysterical stories about PR work, especially first-hand since he worked at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston and Mary Pat Haley was equally clever in making points memorable. I then became Alum Director at Mundelein from '80 to '84.