



Sharing of Memories of Kathleen Spurlin, BVM (Bernardone)

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Sept. 5, 2023

Sister Carol Spiegel, BVM

I had the privilege of visiting Kathleen and her friends while she was still in Leakesville, Miss., and then accompanying her when she moved to Mount Carmel. We always enjoyed the fact that my great aunt Lorraine was Kathleen's baptismal sponsor. Knowing Kathleen these past years has revealed her deep faith that must have begun early in her life and was deepened with her baptism.

Kathleen Norris (former BVM Daniel Mary) & Raymond Komar, Meridian, Miss.

"Sweater up your buttons!" were words I heard Sister Kathleen say to her 5th graders on the playground in Butte, Montana. Remembering these words still make me laugh.

Kathleen and I first met at St. Anne's School in Butte. We remained in touch through visits and letters for over 60 years. When she came to Houston, Texas, to begin her master's degree at the University of St. Thomas, she would often care for our four children so my husband and I could get away for a mini vacation. Our adult children still recall fondly how Kathleen would make tasty treats for them like pudding pops, pies, and cakes.

I applaud her many years in prison ministry here in Mississippi at Parchman, one of the more dangerous prison units in the State. But Kathleen went about her duties with serenity and trust in God's presence, catechizing the inmates, addressing their spiritual needs, and most often helping them with the basics of education.

Her love of music inspired her to start a choir among the inmates, and this choir became one of her most satisfying accomplishments. On one of our visits to Kathleen at the prison, she proudly put on a concert for us and introduced us to her student inmates. She saw herself as an advocate for these inmates, and I believe she often endured persecution from other staff members at the prison because she was a woman, a Catholic, and an advocate for the prisoners.

When she was in Butte, she reached out to the people of Guatemala by faithfully collecting medicine samples and medical supplies from various pharmacies and then sending these items to Guatemala. I am sure her students often had a hand in helping her pack these boxes.

As I reminisce about Kathleen, I remember that she had a great love for the song, "Panis Angelicus," and for Psalm 91. She will be missed and fondly remembered by all in the Komar family. Thank you, Kathleen, for our years of friendship and love. Your caring and loving spirit and sweet laughter will remain with me forever. I love you.

Ro Palmer, Mount Carmel Bluffs Employee

His Eye Is on the Sparrow
By Whitney Houston

Why should I feel discouraged
And why should the shadows come
And why should my heart, my heart feel lonely?
And long for heaven and home
When, when Jesus is my portion
A constant friend, constant friend is He
His eye is on the sparrow
And I know He watches over me

I sing because I'm happy
And I sing because I'm free
His eye is on the sparrow
And I know He watches,
And I know He watches,
And I know He watches over me

Sister Regina Wagner, BVM

When I arrived at Mount Carmel, I met Kathleen. She was down the hall from me on second floor when I started working here. We became the very best of friends. I visited her several times a week and provided whatever services I could. We shared many, many stories of her experiences when she worked at the prison. I helped her with correspondence. I read to her the letters that came from a former prisoner when she was in Mississippi. He had such a love for her and the thoughtfulness she displayed when he was in prison. He always looked forward to her visits. She had a wonderful ministry at that prison. That's what made me identify with her so much. She had many, many stories that she used to tell. I enjoyed talking with her. I used to do a little ministry in a prison in Nebraska myself so I could identify with her and the wonderful life that she had.

Sister Julie O'Neill, BVM

As we have heard, Kathleen spent many years in prison ministry. So it is no surprise that the tragedy of capital punishment would be a constant of prayer in her life. Whenever she was asked to name a specific intention before we began to pray the rosary, she would plead for the abolition of capital punishment. Therefore, it seems so ironic that she died just 30 minutes after we had celebrated a liturgy in memory of the Passion of John the Baptist. Certainly, that event was capital punishment. Hopefully, in Kathleen's memory, each of us will continue to pray for an ending of that capital crime.

Sister Jacquelyn Cramer, BVM

I lived with Kathleen in Clarkesville, Miss., in the middle to late 1970s. She taught 7th and 8th graders. I taught 9th through 12th graders in the high school. Kathleen's classroom was a no-nonsense, all-business classroom. However, I have communicated somewhat regularly with former students that we both taught through the years. The Kathleen that they remember is not the disciplinarian, the English teacher, the religion teacher who kept everything straight. They talk about the person they felt comfortable going to with their problems. That was not apparent. I am very pleased that the rest of her life demonstrated that wonderful quality.

Sister Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM

The memory I hold of Kathleen is carried in the words of Thomas Merton: *We are always and everywhere all soaked and bathed in love.*

I got to know Kathleen during the months of serving meals on the second floor of Marian Hall during COVID. In those brief relational moments, Kathleen and I shared bits and pieces of our lives and we became connected in a way that defied the confines of quarantine. We stayed connected and during our occasional visits I learned of her love for Mississippi, heard stories of her neighbors there, and was inspired by her passion for those she came to know in her prison ministry. I also became aware of her devotion to the Sacred Heart and to St. Francis, both of whom inspired her own great wide love.

As Kathleen's DPOA (Durable Power of Attorney), I witnessed firsthand her loving movement toward death: her embrace of hospice, her expressions of gratitude to the staff for their daily care, her appreciation for the sisters who stopped in for a visit. On the last day she was able to talk, she wanted only one thing: to be sure those close to her knew she loved them - her brother Jerry, her sister Lurlyn, her nephew Barry, her dear friend Kathy.

I was given the great gift of communicating her love to family and friends and then passing their love back to Kathleen; of being there as our spiritual care staff, nurses, and hospice caregivers tenderly ministered to Kathleen; of keeping vigil in silence, prayer, and song with BVMs as Kathleen lived between here and eternity; of hearing her peaceful surrender in her recognition of death, "Mary Ann, I am dying" followed immediately by her invocation to "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph;" and, after her death, of absorbing the reverence of the funeral director as he prepared her for leave-taking. As I walked beside Kathleen to the Gables exit and the waiting hearse, I felt enveloped in the love she knew surrounded her day in and day out.

I must remember this, I said to myself: *We are always and everywhere all soaked and bathed in love.* Thanks for the memory, Kathleen; and I promise you I will not forget.

Patricia Bond, Leakesville, Miss.

After being employed in the Alcohol and Drug Program of the South Mississippi Correctional Institute (a maximum all-male prison), Sister Kathleen was introduced to me as the Chaplain who would offer the prayers for the A&D program graduations. It was told that Sister Kathleen was a well-respected chaplain but warned not get on her bad side as she was a "force to be reckoned with." I called Sister Kathleen to arrange for her part in the graduation ceremony. Sister Kathleen was gracious, polite, professional, but did inform me that she did not approve of "pretty" prayers to which I agreed.

The prayers indeed were not pretty, obligatory prayers. Her prayers had substance, a worthy message, and carried the full, beautiful force of her compassionate Christian beliefs. These prayers were a small indication only of what Sister Kathleen truly was and the service which she provided in her unstinting devotion as lead chaplain for the institution. Sister Kathleen was fully committed to providing full spiritual guidance and support to the inmates, to their families, to the volunteers, and even to staff if requested. She was a driving force for spiritual programs, for promoting an inmate choir, and for the building of a beautiful chapel with the aid of a volunteer contractor, which when completed was dedicated to her and her service. She was a fierce advocate for the men and their families for right treatment, but would not tolerate any who were attempting to manipulate or were not honest and straightforward with her, yet even those men respected her and her honesty. Sister Kathleen was loved and respected by those she served and those she assisted. Those men who returned to the world and succeeded after release did not forget her and often verbalized their appreciation to her.

Sister Kathleen's service and caring did not stop with her prison duties. She was a great ambassador of Christian good will who worshiped with community churches of all denominations, who participated in their musical presentations, and made friends therein. Sister Kathleen loved music and singing and people, and was always alert for ways in which she could help. Upon retiring from the prison, Sister Kathleen did not stop her service. She immediately began working as a sitter with a home health hospice provider. In this capacity she was no less

devoted and constant in her providing service and attendance to needs of those who were dying and their families.

It was my great fortune and blessing to be called friend by Sister Kathleen, along with several others to whom she was close. Sister Kathleen was as devoted and loyal to her friends as she was loyal in every aspect of her life. To be a friend of Sister Kathleen was to enjoy adventure, enjoy her wonderful sense of humor, partake of her wonderful culinary abilities, to be challenged mightily in the game of Scrabble (she gave no quarter!), to appreciate her sharp intellect as well to benefit from the depth of her spiritual experience and knowledge which she was willing to share. How blessed we all were to know her and call her friend.

I never saw the "bad" side of Sister Kathleen, but she indeed was a force with which to be reckoned. She indeed was a force for service, for giving, helping, for good will; a force who was humble, who was devoted to her church, her missions, her purpose; a force who freely gave never expecting a like return. Sister Kathleen's beautiful spirit and force will be deeply missed by those of us who knew and loved her.

Judith Lucchesi O'Sullivan

I've known Sister since I was 8 years old (I'm 81 now). She was my teacher at St. Brigid's School [in San Francisco] for both the third and fifth grades. I believe we were her first class. She was transferred when I was in the eighth grade. We lost contact for several years until the Class of 1956 had a reunion and she came. I was unable to attend. Sister got my contact info and we have been in touch since then. Several years ago, there was a special BVM celebration at St. Paul's in San Francisco. Sister was going to attend, so we decided to meet there, at long last. Before the meeting, we exchanged photos, as I had never seen her without her habit, and, she has never seen me with grey hair. It was a very memorable meeting. She was a very special person, a wonderful teacher, and a loving friend.