



Sharing of Memories of Judith Dewell, BVM (John Marie)
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Sept. 22, 2023

Bob Neumann, McCullough Creative, Inc.

My heart sank when I heard that Judith had passed away over the weekend. I had just seen her a couple of weeks ago and, as always, she was full of life and spirit. She was such an important part of the refresh of the Motherhouse and the history wall, and it's sad to think that she won't get to enjoy it. I'm sure that she will be missed in many ways.

Sister Susan Coler, BVM

My memories of Judith go back to my days of being a music major at Mundelein while at the Scholasticate. The music majors were a close-knit group, and Judith and Eliza Kenney were the energy that kept us going. Judith was always so positive and encouraging of me, personally, as a BVM and as a musician.

Later I joined Judith, Eliza, and Dorothy [Dwight] as a faculty member in the music department. Those were good times – working with motivated students, making wonderful music, and interacting with BVMs, including in Region Ten.

Together Judith and Eliza were formidable advocates for music and the arts, carrying their enthusiasm through the merger with Loyola.

But even more wonderful was their ability to build relationships with students — relationships that endured and supported the students as they moved from Mundelein to the rest of their lives.

Although a team with Eliza, Judith was her own person and I will remember and cherish her enthusiasm, her smile, her encouragement, and her friendship. And it makes me smile to think of the two of them together again.

Sister Nancy McCarthy, BVM, Cousin

I decided to go first because I have a little story that I know no one else has. Yes, Judith's mother and my father were cousins. But, as you heard, she went to OLA [Our Lady of Angels Academy] and I went to St. Mary. Clinton is a very small town, but we lived on opposite ends of it. That really meant something in those days. Her two brothers were in class with my two brothers, so our families knew each other. I never got to know Cathy; she was born too late.

After we entered, we got to know each other a little bit. But due to circumstances beyond our control, we were not supposed to be talking about our families. That limited our getting to know each other. There were ten musicians in the novitiate when we were here. Not all of them in our set, but most. I started class with them, but very soon decided to drop out. I never wanted to be a music teacher. I was so far behind them in my preparation that I was grateful to get out of it. I admired Judith so much for her hard work. Music meant so much to her. She really spent a lot of time on it always.

Now my little story is about when we lived together at St. Joseph Academy [in Des Moines, Iowa,] the only year she taught high school. We were on the social committee and already not wearing habits. Part of our job was to purchase wine for our parties. We took turns. We still had ration books in those days. It must have been a Sunday when I went. The man said to me, "Sorry, lady, you've already been here this month." I was taken a back, but then I realized what he meant. I said, "No." as I was getting out my ID. He said, "Well, that other red-haired lady certainly looked like you." I knew right away he meant Judith. And it was true, in those days, we did look a little bit more alike. Also, I can't resist saying there was a third redhead in our set, and she still is – Jean Gordon. Thank you, Judith, for all you brought to us.

Sister Jacquelyn Cramer, BVM

I just want to tell you about a little kindness that is so characteristic of Judith. I arrived here two years ago. Once I got into my apartment, Judith was helping me hang the pictures. I had one square of cloth that had a painting on it that had been purchased on the street in Kumasi, Ghana. I asked her if I could just tack this up to the bulletin board. She said, "Oh, I don't know." And she just took it. Two days later she came back with this beautifully framed picture with an edging around it that perfectly matched the colors in this cheap, street painting that I had bought. Every time I look at it, I think of that instantaneous, quiet, kindness and generosity that was just who she was.

Sister Kathleen Conway, BVM

I am in Judith's set. I just remembered this. Judith, Eliza, and I lived in the apartments on Arthur Street. There were a lot of BVMs on Arthur Street in those early days. I went to visit the two of them who lived in the apartment right next to us. I walked into the kitchen. Judith was sitting at the kitchen table with all these books in front of her. I said, "What are you doing?" She said, "Well, these are cookbooks. When I want to relax, I read cookbooks." It remains a mystery to this day.

Sister Dorothy "Dodie" Dwight, BVM

As long as we are in the kitchen, another a good story about Judith. She was so good with the students. She and Eliza, as you know, were very can-do people. Nothing stopped them if they had an idea.

We needed to have all the rooms on the seventh floor of the Mundelein building painted, but there wasn't money. We had bake sales. Sue Crook is here. She can testify to all the bake sales. We raised the money to buy the paint. We went to maintenance to learn how to put up the scaffolding. During one of the breaks, the students, Judith, Eliza, and I painted the floor. Sue was part of the group of students who were not painting. They were over in Eliza and Judith's apartment making food for those who were painting. The story to this day is that they made chicken salad. There wasn't enough room in the kitchen for all the bowls and pans, so Judith said, "Let's just put it in the bathtub." The students didn't realize the pans were going with the chicken salad. They were imagining the tub filled with chicken salad. That's the kind of thing that just happened.

Judith was so faithful to Eliza. That was a beautiful relationship to see, a beautiful relationship for the students to see that kind of fidelity and working together.

Sister Margaret Mary Cosgrove, BVM

Judith was such a loving and kind person. A lot of what she did was behind the scenes. People didn't know she was the one taking care of it. I think over the next weeks and months some things are going to fall through the cracks. We are going to become even more aware of what Judith did for all of us behind the scenes.

Sister Eileen Healy, BVM

I have a Jesuit cousin who lives on the West Coast. He said that at the time of the merger between Mundelein and Loyola, the best thing that happened for Loyola was the influx of the wonderful Mundelein music teachers because Loyola had had a very weak music program. This is just a shout out for all those Mundelein people who moved to work with Loyola.

Georgina Mensen, Former Congregational Employee

Sister Judith was a gracious and loving woman. She was very neat and meticulous. I have many fond memories of her. Judith loved her family and was thrilled when her sister Cathy moved to Dubuque. Once a big sister, always a big sister. Judith was a talented musician and often reminisced about her ministry at Loyola University. She volunteered in the Treasurer's Office and assisted me for many years. We became very good friends during this time. After I retired, we continued to keep in contact and went out for lunch. My husband Bob and I enjoyed Judith and her sister Cathy coming to our home for lunch. They enjoyed the fresh garden produce and rural scenery. Judith was a dedicated walker. When she came to my office in the morning, it was nothing for her to have 5000 or more steps already. Thank you for your friendship, Judith. I am going to miss you. You are now rejoicing with your family and dear friend Eliza Kenney.

Sister Lynn Winsor, BVM

I'm from Phoenix, Ariz., and I bring the condolences from all of us out West. Judith and Eliza used to come out to Phoenix to vacation. I would take them on trips. One time we went out into the desert to Saguaro Lake. The poppies were filling the desert, the whole desert was completely golden. I remember Eliza saying, "This is nature's way of making music." They were so into this just like they were into their music.

I used to go over to their house on Pennsylvania Avenue for dinner. They were so gracious and fun. I remember asking them to write some music for our Jubilee. Eliza said, "Oh, yes, I think." She was so cute when she said yes. She got together with Mary Alma [Sullivan] and they wrote some music. I remember when I got on the 190th Jubilee committee. Judith was on it. She always had such an optimistic, fun attitude. We would have questions at our meetings. She would always have answers. "Do we have any table cloths?" She would say, "Yes, there are 15 down in this room." We would say, "Where are the juice glasses, the water glasses?" "Oh, there are 25 over here." She knew everything about this place. I think she had a key to almost every place.

She was so generous. I came one time when I had never been here before. She gave me a tour of the complete complex. I had no idea where I was going. We went to the chapel in Arbor and said a little prayer together. She was holy and fun. She made life really something else.

On Saturday, Carol Marie Baum and I were going to pick up something. We ran into Judith in the garage. We said, "Judith, how are you doing? We have our meeting on Monday." She said, "Yes, it's coming up. I'm really excited. We are going to have a great time at the meeting." Then she said, "I just came from sister Cathy's house. Her home is beautiful. She said she loves it. I'm so happy for her." Then she said, "You've got to come up and see my new place." We said, "We'll come tomorrow." We never got to see her beautiful place. We will always remember Judith for the wonderful, caring woman that she was. I don't think there's anybody who loved the BVMs more than Judith Dewell. We will miss her so very much.

Maureen P. Flood, Mundelein College, Class of 1980

I am so saddened to learn of Sister Judith's passing. She was a major influence in my decision to major in music. She was my advisor, and I remember sitting in her peaceful blue office, paying close attention to her words of wisdom. I also remember fondly her teaching the course on music's history of the Romantic era, and the enthusiasm with which she spoke of the music, the history, and the composers. It has always been my favorite style because her enthusiasm was contagious! She was also an inspiration, and I remember her working so hard to achieve her doctorate degree while being an active faculty member.

Like so many of the Mundelein BVMs, she had a positive impact on my becoming a lifelong learner. I think so often of my teachers there, as I teach piano every day, and I am so very grateful for their investment in my life. I was fortunate to visit Judith and Eliza in Dubuque a few times, and only wish I could have made it this past summer. My heart goes out to all the BVM community for your great loss. I will cherish the memories and the lessons I learned from Sister Judith forever.

Sister Angele Lutgen, BVM

In November 2018, I was invited to join a new group, the Transitions Task Force with Judith Dewell, and several others, under the leadership of Kate Hendel. Judith and I worked together to itemize all the furniture in the Marian Hall rooms and some in the BVM Center, artwork by our sisters, the items in the heritage rooms, statues inside and outside and so many other things in preparation for the major changes that were coming. We also worked with the task force members and the design person from PHS in selecting paint colors, carpeting, and furniture choices for the buildings.

Judith was so competent, knowledgeable, and efficient about so many aspects of what we did. She was a comfortable person to work with and I learned a great deal from her. As I look around the buildings, I see many signs of Judith's presence. You may see signs of her presence too in the displays and the art on the walls. Judith will always be a part of Mount Carmel Bluffs. Thank you, Judith, for all you did.

Sister Mary Jean Ferry, BVM

Judith did all those wonderful things we've been talking about. What she did supremely well was breathe. She sat right over there in this chapel, every morning during our prayer with Katie Anders [Spiritual Care Coordinator]. She was so faithful. Just breathing in and out. Now that place the past couple of mornings was empty . . . but not really. I would be there right behind her place and just kept breathing the memory, the presence that she is still with us. She had the gift of knowing the value of being still, quiet, and breathing. Thank you, Judith, for teaching us the beautiful lesson of breathing.

Sister Mary Janine Wolff, BVM

Just last month I was asked by the community to move from the Motherhouse to Arbor. During the time I was here, I was very close to Judith, either right across the hall or seeing her every day doing so many different things. I was shown three rooms in Arbor and was asked to make my choice. Someone took me into the most beautiful room in the whole place and said, "You can have this room." I said, "Oh, this is too much for me. I don't need all of this." This was on a Friday, and he said, "Give me your answer on Monday." I went to two different BVMs on the weekend, one was Judith. I said, "I really don't need all of this." She said, "God is giving you a gift and you are saying no?" I am enjoying that beautiful room.

Diehm, Vietnamese Sister

I lived in the Motherhouse with Judith for more than five years. I know her very well. I see that Sister Judith run all over the house. I saw her everywhere. She ran from one display to another. She was really busy all the time. That's what I saw. When I learned how to drive, we changed from the white car to the brown car. She told me, "You have my car now." Later, when I took piano lessons, she also shared her piano with all of us. She said, "You have my car and now you have my piano too."

During the time after Mary [Crimmin] and Marion [Murphy] died, we were living alone. (*Mary Crimmin and Marion Murphy lived with the Vietnamese Sisters in Deerfield. The Vietnamese Sisters called them "Bà" meaning "Grandmother."*) Especially, during the time when we had snow, Judith would always check on us. She lived in the Letter Wing and could look outside to see if we had come home [from Divine Word College] or not. She would say, "Oh, I feel relieved because I saw your car parked in front of the building." She was really a deep friend of ours.

Diane "Pluck" (Pluckebaum) Jankiewicz, Mundelein College, Class of 1977

I first met Sister Judith 50 years ago this month as I began my freshman year at Mundelein College in Chicago. As a music (and education) major, most of my time during those next four years was spent on the seventh floor of the Skyscraper. I remember many of the classes I took with Sister Judith as well as endless conversations outside of class and the visits to her apartment. Sister Eliza Kenney was my piano teacher. They were best friends. After graduation in 1977 we remained in touch. Sister Judith and Sister Eliza played the music for my wedding. My husband Mike and I continued visits with them yearly. The conversations with Judith were always lively and we had wonderful discussions about many aspects of life.

Upon Judith's retirement to Mount Carmel in Dubuque our visits continued. Judith enjoyed giving us a grand tour whenever we came to Mount Carmel and always shared the latest projects as a curator. We shared wonderful meals at Caroline's at Hotel Julien. Judith looked forward to moving into her new apartment. Unfortunately, our visit this fall will not happen. Her last email to me announced she had started to practice piano again. Sister Judith was my teacher, my friend and a person that inspired me to teach music. She was a consummate professional. She sought to always improve herself. She was dedicated to the mission of the BVMs and possessed great faith in Jesus. I will miss her.

Suzie Wright, BVM Associate & Congregational Employee

I met Judith first on a day when I needed to borrow a piece of BVM art for a commitment ceremony that happened soon after I started working for the BVMs. It was obvious that she loved her role in working with the BVM art collection. Through the last six years, I discovered that she was gentle, unfailingly kind, and had a delightful sense of humor that easily bubbled up.

One day, she came looking for me with a determination that had me wondering what was up. She was eager to share that her sister Cathy was soon to be moving to Iowa and she was so proud of the work Cathy was doing concerning human trafficking. She was looking forward to spending more time together in a way they had never really had the chance to do before. Recently Judith had commented to me that having Cathy live nearby was something that she treasured and how proud she was of Cathy and the rest of the Coalition Against Human Trafficking for the work they do.

Last week, I nodded and gave her a brief "Hi" on my way to a meeting. She had a smile on her face and obviously had a mission to carry out too. And yes, of course she was dressed in a lovely blue shirt, as she so often was. That simple exchange is a good memory to carry forward. She will be missed.

Christine Olsem, BVM Associate & Congregational Employee

I was introduced to Judith and Eliza shortly after I started working in the Office of the Secretary in July 2011. I manage databases that track artifacts, art, furniture, and other miscellaneous valuables that Judith and Eliza placed on display. There were always new pieces to tag and the constant updating of item locations as Judith and Eliza frequently rearranged displays. I am very involved in liturgical music as a cantor and a guitarist. A mutual love of music only deepened my relationship with Judith and Eliza.

Judith and Eliza taught me little tricks of how to build beautiful flower arrangements and make decorations stay in place. They also taught me more about furniture and art than I ever desired to know. I loved helping them, especially at Christmas time. My primary responsibility was to set up the Fontanini set in the Gertrude Regan room. I loved that set with all the characters and places like the manger, the tent for the wise men, the marketplace with a donkey working an olive press, and more. A child's imagination could run wild! Judith did *not* like that set for the same reason – *too* many pieces. Judith liked simplicity.

I transcribe the Sharing of Memories whenever a sister dies. In the past, my supervisor, the Secretary of the Congregation, would proof-read the transcriptions. When Kate Hendel's election as a vice president left a void in the Secretary position, Judith graciously agreed to be my proofreader. She always used a red pen to make corrections. If no corrections were needed, she wrote a big "A+" and "Nice job!" on the document. I certainly can see that she was a very encouraging teacher.

I thought it was funny how Judith would comment about Eliza always wearing brown while she herself was always blue. When Eliza died, Judith gave me two ceramic eggs that Eliza's father had given to them. One belonged to her and one to Eliza. One had a sunflower, the other forget-me-nots. She asked me to match the egg to the person. No brainer!

Judith died on my birthday. The last thing I did that day was to check my email. It certainly was a shock. It's still hard to believe it. I was so looking forward to seeing more of Judith after my office moved back to Mount Carmel next week. Now every time I think of her, I see her in the Letter Wing walking towards me with a smile on her face, and wearing a blue shirt, of course. Her spirit is still so very much present at Mount Carmel.

Tomorrow [September 23] is Eliza's birthday. They must be so thrilled to be together again. And while they didn't care for fanfares during their time on earth, I can imagine a huge party to celebrate their reunion. The music certainly will be awesome!

Helen Kulpa

I met Judith when some of my family attended my Aunt Bernadette McManigal's Diamond Jubilee, and several times after that when we would visit. The last time was over Labor Day weekend. Judith was a delight to be with and was a dear companion to my aunt. I know she will be missed. She and all the sisters and staff are in my prayers.

Mary Hough

Judith was a hoot. Always full of energy. Some of our best pranks at Mundelein had her as an accomplice. She would always take extra time with any student who just wanted to chat. She can now be back with Eliza, her good friend. I hope they are making great music up in heaven.

Jennifer Leonard

Sister Judith was my piano teacher at Loyola from 1998-2002 and we've stayed in touch. She was my teacher, my mentor, a colleague, and friend. My life was set on its course with the help of her steady guidance and steadfast care. I will miss her very much.