



## **Sharing of Memories of Jeanne Mary Miller, BVM**

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Nov. 8, 2023

### **Sister Mary Agnes Giblin, BVM**

Jeanne Mary Miller, a quiet, behind the scenes person who was a passionate, creative educator and a marvelous storyteller.

Jeanne Mary's hands were never still. She was either playing the ukulele, knitting, soaking, or sorting stamps, writing letters, or working crossword puzzles. In her years teaching sixth grade in Iowa City, she invited any of the students who were interested to join any of the clubs she had initiated for these activities.

She was an avid sports fan, especially the Los Angeles Dodgers. She did root for the Cubs as long as they were not playing the Dodgers. We also attended many Hawkeyes Football and Basketball games, even when the only excitement was watching the Marching Band.

Her former students remember and still talk about how Jeanne Mary made learning fun. They also remember the many different methods she used.

Jeanne Mary had the ability to reach people of all ages. She was able to engage and involve Pre-Schoolers to Adults. When she retired from Full Time teaching, she returned to Iowa City and immediately volunteered at Regina. This time she assisted the students of teachers whom she had taught and were now teaching in the Primary Grades. She assisted and encouraged young people who needed a little boost. Jeanne Mary wasted very little time.

About five years ago, she encountered a detour on her journey. The detour led to Mount Carmel Bluffs. From the moment she arrived, she felt welcomed, safe, and secure. From that day on, she was loved, cared for, and received many blessings.

Jeanne Mary, we hope you are dancing in the heavenly halls, playing your ukulele, and telling outlandish stories. Jeanne Mary, thanks for the Memories. Rest in peace.

### **Sister Vicki Smurlo, BVM**

I lived in Southern California, but I did not get to see Jeanne Mary too often. However, I did attend her farewell party. It was packed. The theme was Hawaiian because she loved Hawaiian, and everybody knew it. The blessing of this party was when the men wore their grass skirts and did a performance for her. That showed me how much they really loved her. At Holy Redeemer, one of the teachers there teaches at St. Monica Academy. When he found out that I was a BVM, he said, "Do you know Sister Jeanne Mary?" He said, "She taught me how to pray. I am forever grateful for that." I kept him abreast of any news I would hear about her. He even came through Dubuque on a trip across the country. Now Dubuque is not on the beaten path, but he made sure he would get to see her one last time. Now she continues to teach prayer; she is the pray-er to all whom she taught.

### **Sister Anne Buckley, BVM**

Mary Jeanne really was creative and a wonderful, wonderful teacher. When I arrived to live with her, I found that she had divided the whole school into little family groups. There was one person from each grade level and a parent or a teacher facilitating them. Every first Friday, she prepared a puzzle or a game for them to play. It was all outside because it was in Southern California. She brought the whole school together. She also had a little candy store that she created. She kept that aside in case we had an earthquake so that we would have "real" food.

### **Dorla Marquis, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Tujunga, Calif.**

I wanted to tell you how sorry I am for your loss. My family and I loved Sister Jeanne Mary. She taught my children English-grammar skills, writing and editing skills that they use every day with their careers today. She also taught them about her faith and how to be a good, compassionate, and loving person. They said she was stern, consistent, but fair and caring. She also was my mentor while I taught 1st grade at O.L.L. I learned so much from her.

We as a family will always remember her as a loving and a wonderful person. Our Lady of Lourdes parish were so blessed to have known her. May Sister Jeanne Mary Rest in Peace. I know she is with our Lord.

### **Daniel Fresquez, Our Lady of Lourdes, Class of 1991**

Jeanne Mary was the 8th grade teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL) school and church in Tujunga, Calif. She was respected and loved by parents and the kids, including myself. She could command a room to silence just by standing still, waiting, then smiling. She could end a child's hiccups by inviting them to stand in the "magic square" at the front of the class. She occasionally helped kids when their baby teeth came out. She was sweet, kind, lighthearted, and firm, direct, and clear. As a young child, I felt respected and cared for and encouraged. She taught "the big kids" – the 8th graders! Over the years when I've thought of her, it has always been with a smile, knowing I was lucky to have a few classes with her. I don't know what she taught at other schools, but I can only imagine the size of her legacy, having taught – and demonstrated kindness towards – thousands of children over decades. A legend in my mind and heart. Thank you, Sister. Rest.

### **Sister Marcella O'Rourke, BVM**

I lived with Jeanne Mary in Hawaii at Holy Cross. I remember that Jeanne Mary took over the whole school and had a Christmas program. On the night of the program, everybody was there. The men were always out on the lanai smoking. Everyone performed and then the big event – "The Drummer Boy." When the whole school sang "The Drummer Boy," the men came into the auditorium because she did such a marvelous job. I love you, Jeanne Mary. Thank you for being part of our lives.

### **Sister Roberta Ann White, BVM**

Jeanne Mary Miller was three years ahead of me. I think she went to St. Charles for eighth grade and had Sister Jean Dolores [Schmidt] for her teacher. I followed her to Corvallis High School. I remember my mother talking about Mrs. Miller. I think this is where Jeanne got her great generosity. There was a very active Mothers' Club at St. Charles. My mother was in it, and she often mentioned Mrs. Miller doing this or Mrs. Miller doing that. Yes, that's where Jeanne got her leadership and her great generosity – from her mother.

### **Sister Anne Buckley, BVM**

Just a little bit of trivia. Jeanne Mary was a bridesmaid for Ann Blyth (*American actress and singer who was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in the 1945 film Mildred Pierce*). She and Jeanne Mary grew up together in Southern California).

**Joan Ochoa, Regina Elementary, Iowa City, Iowa**

Sister Jeanne Mary helped me in my classroom of 2nd grade students for several years. She's the one who could have taught me! She also spent time each month teaching 2nd graders more about Catholicism with all her vast knowledge, making it fun and engaging. I loved hearing about her time in Kauai and her family. I've missed her talks, her smile, and her marvelous humor. Rest in peace Sister, you worked hard while you here were with us.

**Doug Vollstedt, 1st Grade Teacher, Regina, Iowa City, Iowa, 1991-present**

Sister Jeanne Mary was a tremendous teacher at Regina [in Iowa City, Iowa]. I enjoyed seeing her bright and smiling face every day. I'm not positive, but I know she rarely missed a school day. She was always willing to help anyone that needed it. Her love and care for all the students she worked with was well known.

I enjoyed all her stories from Virginia and Hawaii. She was blessed her entire career. May God bless you, Sister Jeanne Mary!

**Mary Rockafellow**

Sister Jeanne Mary was one of the first sisters I knew after they stopped wearing their habits. She was a tall lean beautiful person with curly red hair, freckles and smiling eyes. She was an incredible teacher, friend, mentor, and volunteer in the many years I got to know her!

Jeanne Mary was my 6th grade teacher. This was back in 1971 at the Iowa City Catholic Grade School. I have so many wonderful memories of my 6th grade year because of Jeanne Mary. Sixth grade was the oldest grade in the elementary school and it was responsible for Safety Patrol at the beginning and end of each day. In the winter months Sister would have a hot chocolate station set up so when we came in from morning patrol, we could make a quick cup of hot chocolate with marshmallows to sip on at our desk as we got started with our school day. It was the best thing. We never complained about being cold outside because of this special treat she provided when we came in from our duty!

After school, Jeanne Mary had special clubs almost every night of the week. She led Ukulele Club, Stamp Club, Knitting Club, and Cooking Club. (I think there may have been other clubs too, but these are the four clubs I took part in with her.) She included multiple grades in her after school clubs and that meant many students. I don't know how she managed all of us, but there was never a cross word or worry when we were with her. She never charged anything for these clubs, and it was all on her own time after school. I don't know how she managed all these special projects! When we got to be good – in our minds – at playing the Ukulele, we would play each morning for the 8am Mass before school at St. Patrick's Parish.

Sister Jeanne Mary was also in charge of the school newspaper that came out once a month and was written by the students under her guidance. It included poetry, seasonal stories, and news from each of the grades. She taught us how to be reporters, to go and interview the students or teachers in the classrooms and write the articles for the paper. We would make an assembly-line and collate the pages of the newspaper, staple it and then one day we would get to go around to all the classrooms and sell the newspapers. Students could bring a nickel to school and buy the school paper each month.

Sister Jeanne Mary was also in charge of the Student Council. Sixth graders would write nomination letters for the officer positions and Sister would let us go around and campaign for the positions during our recess time. When it came time for the election, we would read our campaign speeches to the whole school and all the grades would vote to elect the officers for the school year.

Another big, exciting part of 6th grade and Sister Jeanne Mary's teaching us was running the candy store! Jeanne Mary would purchase candy and have it available in a little closet on the first floor. The store would be open for 10 minutes after school and anyone could bring a penny or up to 25 cents to buy something from the candy store. The 6th graders and student council officers ran the store, but Sister Jeanne Mary was the

reason all these special activities and projects worked. She made us feel so responsible like we were doing everything! But many years later, I know, being a classroom teacher myself over the past 41 years, all the time and energy she had to put in to make school special for every student she ever worked with.

Sister Jeanne Mary had family in Hawaii and when she would go to Hawaii once or twice during the year, she would bring back sugar cane for us to taste and little candies. We even learned some Hawaiian songs that we could play on our Ukuleles. We would have Ukulele concerts for our families a couple times a year and we would play many of the songs we learned. I think we learned to play over 50 songs in Uke club. We played songs that we played at Mass and also many other tunes and songs from the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the songs we sang and played, we probably wouldn't be allowed to sing in schools these days! I'm so glad Sister Jeanne Mary was my 6th grade teacher and I have all these special memories of her.

Later when I was in college, I was working at Mercy Hospital at the information desk. I don't know how Jeanne Mary knew I was working there. Maybe she just came in one day to visit someone in the hospital. I saw her and we sat and talked about family and students she had taught, or we both knew. I told her she was a big reason why I was taking classes to become a teacher.

Many years later, after I had been teaching for over 25 years, Jeanne Mary moved back to Iowa City. She was retired now from her own teaching career, but still wanted to be a volunteer in the classroom, so she started volunteering at Regina Elementary School where I was teaching. She volunteered for 4-5 hours a day in sometimes 12 different classrooms in one day as long as she could stick to her schedule and still leave in time to get to 12:00 Mass at St. Mary's Church. She helped all the teachers so much those volunteer years and like the energizer bunny she just kept showing up almost every day. She graded papers, listened to students read, helped kids learn their math facts, listened to their stories and their problems, cut things out for class projects, and every other little thing anyone would ask of her. She would leave for the day, but she would come back one or two nights a week to teach the CCD classes over that time or to tutor a student who couldn't afford one but needed the help.

Jeanne Mary volunteered at Regina for maybe ten or more years when she was in her 70s and beyond, until her health started failing a little and she started having more memory issues. That is when she retired to her motherhouse at Mount Carmel.

I think about Jeanne Mary often and all the wonderful things she taught me, and all the many students' lives she touched in her lifetime. She was remarkable! I know she is in God's loving arms now and so many of us will never forget her. Sending you prayers and love, Jeanne Mary.

### **Mary Kay Wissink**

So sorry to hear of Sister Jeanne Mary's death. She was the music teacher for our children after returning from Hawaii. We will never forget their first ukulele concert. White shirts/blouses and dark colored skirts or slacks. Lovely pompom tissue leis. We had reconnected in the last few years at Regina/St Mary's Church [in Iowa City]. She was a beautiful example of sisterhood. Rest in peace.

### **Brian Godsave**

This is sad news. Sister Jeanne Mary was my 8th grade teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes in Tujunga, Calif. She was more than an educator. She was a mentor and a support system for kids. Rest in peace.

### **Dawn Alandy**

Sister Jeanne Mary was such an amazing person and was there for my family during my mother's death. God bless you and thank you for being an amazing guide throughout our lives. GREEN APPLE JOLLY RANCHERS FOR LIFE!

### **Steve Morin**

Sister Jeanne Mary was the 8th grade teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes elementary school [in Tujunga, Calif.] who took me under her wing when I started as a baby 7th grade teacher there. Two phrases stand out in my mind that capture the best of her. One was the exclamation "Oh My Word!!" that she would utter whenever something tickled her sense of humor, or proceeded one of her fabulous stories about the antics of students of all ages. Sister said that at one time or the other in her long teaching career she had taught every grade from Kindergarten through 8th. She often referred to her 8th graders as kindergarteners in big clothes.

Her sense of humor and creativity were limitless. At almost every Halloween carnival she would entice me into joining with her in a hilarious group costume. My favorites were when we dressed as doctors and challenged the students to figure out what word we represented, a paradox. There was also the year of Sonny and Cher where Sister and I dressed in full on sixties regalia with Sister as "Sunny" complete with a black wig and large fake mustache, while I was in long flowing black locks and bell bottom jeans as "Share". Those were not typos; they were Sister's clever play on words that were on name tag placards that hung around our necks.

Sister Jeanne Mary was a larger-than-life persona. She would always tell someone asking for her name that she was "long Jeanne" to ensure the proper spelling. Sometime before I arrived, she had adopted a large hairy lovable cat who she named Monsignor. Monsignor would roam the junior high campus and often spend many a class period asleep in a cardboard box on a blanket on Sister's desk and occasionally answer Sister's or students' comments or questions with a meow on command. This once led to a humorous call from the local pet hospital to the church rectory regarding the need for our current Monsignor, pastor of the parish, to come in for his rabies shot.

I mentioned two phrases. The second is the BVM motto "Live simply so others may simply live." Sister Jeanne Mary completely embodied this motto, and it ties into her boundless creativity and fantastic organizational skills. Sister Jeanne designed our school monthly "family days" that involved her creating enough school families to include one student from each grade K-8. All faculty members and school staff were inducted as family moms or dads including outside parents or grandparents who could come for one Friday a month to participate in the family activity and lunch with their family of students. New students and kindergarteners were adopted into families each year replacing or joining the family who had sent their 8th grader on to high school. Sister Jeanne kept meticulous records of the families trying to make sure that every family had at least one student from every grade and very few doubles. The families and "parents" stayed together year after year as much as possible. The activities were created, run, and judged by the Student Council which was moderated by Sister Jeanne. She received several special awards from the association of Catholic student councils and the archdiocese for this unique and special school bonding activity that created many school-wide friendships for life. Sister's Family Day tradition is still carried on at Our Lady of Lourdes to this day.

Sister was famous for her daily lunches which consisted of one cheese sandwich, no condiments, a glass of iced tea and wheat thins. I remember at Christmas and on her birthday, she always asked for no presents but for donations to the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sister always kept an eye out for any kind of store, warehouse, school, or garage sale that were offering any kind of materials or supplies that she could envision as being repurposed someday at the school. She had a knack for finding parents who could drive and bring often huge loads of supplies that went into every spare room and corner that Sister could find on campus until they ultimately would become part of her "no fail art projects" or costumes for the annual 8th grade living nativity pageant at the school Christmas concert or props and aids in the many retreats and activities she would organize for the school and parish.

One student council activity that Sister Jeanne created was a school wide talent show, titled the Saint Patrick Day Review which always culminated with a finale performed by the 8th grade. Many of us have fond memories of Sister having cajoled, coached, and challenged big lunky 8th grade boys/men into performing Swan Lake and Fred Astaire routines on the stage. The 8th grade girls were a much easier group to sell on these productions. Sister was also willing to move with the times, and I remember my second year where she

agreed and helped to create a very moving production to the song "We Are The World" that had just been released and left many of us in tears.

Sister Jeanne Mary was always available to counsel and talk with any student, parent or fellow staff member who was going through troubled times. She guided me through the grief of losing my mother. She created many memorable staff and junior high religious retreats.

I cannot end without mentioning how much fun and delight I had sharing so many Dodger memories with one of their Super Fans. Sister could be quite the character. I remember parents and parishioners would often give her Dodger tickets that were not being used. If there were two, she always tried to take me, much to my delight. We both grew up being lifelong Dodger fans. I remember when we would go to day games, she taught me to bring school papers with me to grade and record as we sat in the stands and cheered our team.

Many times, when she would get night game tickets for a weekday game, she would have me drive and we would park on a little side street she knew about, and we would walk up a long hill and into the stadium to avoid the parking fee. We would use the tickets to go in and buy a Dodger dog. We would sit for one inning and then leave so we would be able to wake up and teach the next day. She insisted that we listen to the radio on the way home and memorize any big plays and check the newspaper the next morning if the game went late. We would pretend we saw the whole game, so as not to offend the people who had given us the tickets. I remember one year she got tickets to the end of the year Fan Day giveaway game that fell on a Sunday, and she giggled about sneaking away from a church activity and hoping she wouldn't win a new car or the big boat, so nobody would catch us. I also remember the night of Kirk Gibson's miracle home run. I was talking to her on the phone and she insisted that it was her father, who had recently passed away, in heaven making sure that the Dodgers would win this World Series, which they did.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share so many of my fondest memories.

#### **Anonymous 1, Former Student, Our Lady of Lourdes, 40<sup>th</sup> Class Reunion Attendee**

I proposed a toast for you since we missed you. One of your previous students told me where we could contact you. We were a bit of a challenge, but thanks to your influence, we turned out OK. My friend is a wonderful, loving mother and I became a registered nurse. You are such an inspiration. You touched our lives with your wisdom and teaching. We will never forget you. Thank you for being a wonderful mentor and friend. You are loved.

#### **Anonymous 2, Former Student, Our Lady of Lourdes**

You are my greatest role model. You are always in my heart.

#### **Sister Vicki Smurlo, BVM**

The Our Lady of Lourdes students would remember Jeanne Mary's fanny pack. She always wore a Dodger blue fanny pack. Sure enough, when some of these former students came to visit her in Dubuque, she had the fanny pack on.

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

In reading and hearing all of these stories, I couldn't help but being reminded that perhaps Mother Clarke walks in people like Jeanne Mary. I can't quote the letter that Mary Frances wrote exactly, but it said, "Make every effort to win the dear children. If they love you, they will love God." If Jeanne Mary didn't consciously live by it, she certainly lived it.

#### **Debby Felkel, Our Lady of Lourdes, Tujunga, Calif.**

It with great sadness, but also joy in rejoicing with our new Saint Sister Jeanne Mary. Unfortunately, I received the email to share too late. I want to thank you for the live stream which enabled me and my family to be a part of the service. Steve Morin and Dorla Marquis are our dearest friends. Sister taught all nine of my children

at OLL in Tujunga. I was a family leader with Sister. I was her room parent many years, and had the privilege of being her aide one year in 4th grade. We both have red hair. When we lined up in the morning I would bring up the back while she led the class in. One new mother to the school asked if I was her daughter! She was a very dear friend. I would bring a baby or two to school in a stroller to supervise lunch time to break the teachers. My little ones loved yogurt, so Sister dubbed them the yogurt kids. All of them were grateful; for the writing skills she instilled in them. To us she is an icon. She has been sorely missed. Ahh, but Heaven rejoices!! God bless you all.

### **Hannah Little Spalding - Set of 1955**

Always enjoyed visiting Jeanne Mary. She was a great contributor to the set. She probably has the angels laughing as we regret her leaving us.

### **Vanessa McEwen**

Sister Jeanne was my junior high school teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes. She was a tremendous role model for me. I looked up to her more than she could ever know. She touched so many lives and now I pray for her eternal peace.

### **Lora Duffy-Danker**

Sister Jeanne Mary Miller was my sixth-grade teacher at St. Patrick Catholic School in Iowa City, Iowa. I am now 64 years old so that was quite a while ago, but I still remember her warm heart, great sense of humor, and how she made all the kids in my class feel special. I appreciated her great energy and her willingness to create opportunities for us to help us to learn and grow together. I remember the ukulele club (we played at mass in the mornings before school), knitting club, our candy store, our class newspaper, and I recall how cool it was to change the entire classroom into a castle when we studied Charlemagne. Sister was loving and I remember that I couldn't wait to go to school each day to see her and what she would dream up next. At our class reunion years ago, I was delighted that sister attended. She was a wonderful person, and the fond memories I have for her will last forever. God bless you, Sister Jeanne Mary Miller.

### **Mary Duffey**

Sister Jeanne Mary was a Godsend! She volunteered in my third-grade classroom at Regina Elementary [in Iowa City, Iowa] helping my little ones for many years. She was a wonderful addition to our classroom, an excellent educator, and the children adored her!