



Sharing of Memories of Suzanne Stopper, BVM (Carmelita)

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 15, 2024

Mary (Stopper) Alexoff, Niece, Daughter of Jack Stopper

I am the daughter of Sister Sue's oldest brother, Jack. This is my husband, Mike. We are so happy to be here and honored to be representing over 40 of Sister Sue's nieces and nephews which include greats and great greats. If we add in their spouses, a few cousins, in-laws, and a slew of lifelong family friends, that number easily doubles. The point I'm trying to make is we are bringing lots of love from all over the country. So many wonderful memories, so it's hard to come up with just one. I think I will go with my childhood, which is also going to include her sister Mary Jeanne Stopper. They always seemed to be a package deal back then.

When I was growing up in the sixties and attending a Catholic grade school, I loved telling my classmates that I had two aunts that were nuns. I'm not talking about everyday nuns like at school. I'm talking about very cool, not one, but two aunts that were nuns. For example, when our family would have a holiday gathering, many times my sister Susie and I would beg them to stay and spend the night with us. Even though they were completely unprepared, they would finally agree. This slumber party meant that they had to endure wiener dogs sleeping on their bed with them and a crazy cat that liked to purr and drool all over the blankets. Funny thing is that they did this more than once! They really must have loved us to go through that just to make us happy.

I loved to brag to my classmates that sometimes my aunts would join us on vacation in a little town up in the mountains called Green Valley Lake. Their sense of adventure was contagious. I will never forget seeing them out on the lake cruising in our little sailboat with my then teenage brother John at the helm. The silly thing leaked like a sieve so one of them had to bail out water constantly. Now picture this: they were in full habit! Needless to say, they were the talk of the town and, of course, the pride of our family. I hate to boast, but I think my Catholic school friends were a little bit envious.

It warmed my heart when I heard a story recently involving my Aunt Sue's eight-year-old, great-great-niece Ellie Jo who attends a Catholic grade school in San Diego. Apparently, she had been bragging to her classmates about her very special aunts. She had given them quite the upgrade. She was telling everyone that she had two aunts who were saints. Her parents had to set her straight, but the rest of the family all seemed to quietly agree, winking at each other, and saying, "Nope, Ellie got it right the first time."

Our family and friends have been so blessed to have had both these amazing women. But my Aunt Sue, in particular, will always hold a special place in our hearts as the energetic, card playing, adventurous nun with the iron clad memory. She will be dearly missed.

Mike Alexoff, Nephew-in-law, Husband of Mary (Stopper) Alexoff

I have known Aunt Sue well over half my life. Aunt Sue had this amazing ability to take an everyday situation or event and bring excitement to it. She could make it a "thing." To that point, I am going to share a short story with you.

One of our favorite things to do over the years is to all gather around a fireplace or maybe a firepit in a campground. We would build a big fire, circle around it, and start talking about anything and everything under the sun. Mind you, these fires were not small fires. They were bonfires. We would load them up four or five pieces of wood high. We would get the fire roaring pretty good and just sit around and start talking. Shortly, there would be a lull in the conversation. Out of the blue, out of nowhere, Aunt Sue points to a piece of wood and says, "Hey! See that piece of wood right there? I predict that piece of wood will be the first piece of wood to fall off the top of that fire." We were like, "Really?" OK, game on.

The next thing you know, we are all arguing about which piece of wood would be the first to fall off the top of that fire first. One person said, "Oh, no, Aunt Sue, that's not going to be the first one. This one here is going to be the first one." Then somebody else chimes in, "No, not those two. It's going to be this piece of wood that fall off the fire first." That goes on for a while until everybody has put in their two cents. We finally decide to agree to disagree about which piece of wood will fall off the top of the fire first.

So, we go back to talking, but still watching this fire a little bit more closely now. We are all rooting for our piece of wood to fall first. The conversation was not much and there was another lull. Then out of nowhere, as if we don't have enough excitement around this fire, Aunt Sue says, "Hey, do you see that piece of wood that's going to fall first? I predict that when it falls, it's going to fall to the right." You know what's coming next, right? Game on again. Now we are all arguing not only about which piece of wood would fall first, but what way it is going to fall. Somebody says, "No, that's not right, Aunt Sue. My piece of wood is going to fall first and when it does, it's going to fall to the back. Someone else, says, "No, my piece of wood is going to fall first and will fall to the front." This goes on and we finally agree to disagree. To her credit, Aunt Sue was usually right. Usually, it was her piece of wood that fell first exactly the way she said it would.

That women had a competitive bone somewhere in her body. You didn't want to get sideways with her at the card table either. The point of the story is that she had this amazing gift of being able to take an everyday life situation that most of us would think nothing about, and bring it to life, make something exciting out of it. She had enthusiasm that she brought to everything.

Anne Kendall, BVM

This story about Suzanne Stopper goes way back in time to the day that she entered the BVMs in 1946. Having been on a train to see relatives in Pennsylvania, upon her return to Chicago, she said goodbye to her mother and her sister Betsy and boarded the Zephyr to Dubuque. On the train were other girls who were entering the BVM convent that day. In Dubuque, the other girls went to Clarke to visit. Sue, instead, put her suitcase in a locker and went to a movie. The movie was *Of Human Bondage*. She peacefully watched the movie and then took a bus to Mount Carmel. As she puzzled where to go, a woman leaned out of a window and said, "It's over there," pointing in the direction of the Motherhouse. Sue went to the front door and was let in. Immediately, the postulant mistress wanted to know where she had been and who she was with. Sue replied that she had seen the movie and then taken the bus to Mount Carmel. I think in her 77 years in the BVM community, she resolved any doubt about seeing the movie *Of Human Bondage*.

Sister Victoria Smurlo, BVM

I counted that between Holy Family in Glendale, Calif., and Holy Redeemer in Montrose, Calif., I lived with Suzanne 25 years, so she was special to my heart. No matter where you would be with Suzanne - a grocery store, a farmer's market, a theater - some woman would come up and say, "You taught me, Sister Suzanne and you look just the same." And she did! The next sentence would always be, "You were the best teacher I ever

had." One of her students wrote to me, "How ironic that she died during Teacher Appreciation Week." That was really special.

For me personally, I was in charge of the house annals. I did that for 20 years. Suzanne was my sidekick and my editor-in-chief. She would read everything and correct my grammar, spelling, everything. We were a team. I have great memories and many laughs of her stories and how she appreciated life.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

I met Suzanne as a freshman in English class at Bishop Diego HS in Santa Barbara, Calif. She certainly was someone who endeared herself to me with her great smile and energy. I have always said that two of the three reasons I chose to enter the BVMs were that they were great teachers, and they were happy women. Thank you, Suzanne!

Sister Roberta White, BVM

I was so blessed to live with Suzanne for more than 20 years. She died on April 7 which was Teacher Appreciation Day. How apropos! She was not only the best teacher, like everybody talked about regarding acting out scenes from plays and books. She was the drama queen. The girls would say that sometimes she would get so involved in a Shakespearean eulogy. One time, she jumped up on top of the desk and spurted out the entire poem. She did things that caught their attention and made English so exciting for them. She made everything exciting.

When I was sick, she sent a card. It really meant a lot to me. Sue never talked about her illnesses. She was very private. She had more than her share of difficulties in her life. This is why it meant so much when she sent this to me. "Dear Roberta, I hope you get well soon. You are in my thoughts and prayers. Holy Week is upon us. It's good to feel physical weakness at this time. Don't you agree? It keeps us closer to the suffering Christ and his Mother. But wait! Here comes the Resurrection. We all can feel stronger and more alive." For me, this is Suzanne. Thank you, Sue. You are one of the most alive people I have ever known.

Sister Anne Buckley, BVM

I was in Peter's Belt which was a sharing group. Suzanne was in the group. You could always count on Suzanne to have an observation, an insight, a critique about whatever we were talking about. Frequently, she would break the ice and start us off for the morning. The group met the other day and left her chair empty because she really belonged there. She wasn't here long, but she really made an impression every day. Thanks, Suzanne.

Gina Siembieda, Niece, Oldest daughter of sister Elizabeth "Betsy" (Stopper) Gower

My Aunt Sue! "Your aunt is a nun?" they would ask. She just was Aunt Sue to me and one of my favorite people. She always kept up with all the family, even when she moved to Iowa. You always got an honest opinion from her, and she was always interested in your life.

I can't remember a time that she wasn't a part of my life. We shared February birthdays and many years we celebrated together with my cousin, Mary, the other February birthday. I take comfort in the many memories we have with her in it.

When I was a child, she and my Aunt Mary Jeanne took us on the bus to visit my grandparents in Reno, Nevada. We got to go for sleepovers at the convent too. Such fun! Hide and seek in the convent! When my kids were little, I tried to talk her into taking a sabbatical to live with us for a year and help with the kids. She wouldn't do it because she didn't want the school to replace her. She liked teaching too much to give it up. My daughter, myself, and my two aunts took a trip to England and went on a literary tour of all the places that had been a part of their teaching of English for so many years. She attended many family reunions and the last few years; she took pride in being the oldest in our family.

I will miss the calls from her. I will miss playing cards with her. I will miss all the details that she could recall. She was my role model, always pragmatic, never complained and always looked on the bright side. I love you, Aunt Sue.

Susie Amato, Niece, Oldest daughter of John "Jack" Stopper

My memories are many because growing up we were fortunate to have her as part of our family. Especially our holiday gatherings which always involved music. At the end of the night, we would beg her to stay the night. I know she didn't really want to, but she did it for us. She would also invite us to her house at Holy Family Convent for sleepovers with all the nieces, which was always such a special adventure!

She was also a big part of our family vacations which usually involved playing cards, music, hiking, fishing, and lots of kids. She went with us to Green Valley Lake, Lake Arrowhead and lastly Camp LaSalle at Huntington Lake.

But the memory that will come back every year, is her annual phone call or card on my birthday...telling me what she was doing on Easter Sunday, April 21, 1957, the day I was born. Apparently, after 4 boys, I was a big deal!

Aunt Sue, you will always be in my heart, and never forgotten.

Julie (Gower) Gagnon, Niece, Daughter of Elizabeth "Betsy" (Stopper) Gower

Oh precious Aunt Sue, we love you
You were one of the six
In the middle of the Stopper family mix
Oh precious Aunt Sue, we love you
You taught all the kids Gaigel to play
That was just your way
A teacher through and through
Not only Gaigel, but math skills too
We learned from our dear Aunt Sue
Her age, no one knew
Oh, our precious Aunt Sue
Her memory was sharp as a tack
And her kindness, there was no lack
Oh precious Aunt Sue, we love you
Say hi to Betsy, my mom, for me
Give her a hug from Julie, your niece
Oh precious Aunt Sue, we love you
Rest In Peace

Letty, Lisa, Warren, Billy & Ben, Joe, Joey, John & Julia, Tracey, Bob, Bobby & Michael

My dad, Bill, Sister Suzanne's youngest brother, moved us to Connecticut when I, Lisa, was 3, my brother, Joe, 2, and my sister, Tracey, 6 months old. We didn't get to see Aunt Sue often, but our memories are very fond.

A	always a birthday card
U	undeniably the family genealogist
N	never a harsh word
T	Trips to Ralston, PA
S	supportive and interested in our lives
U	unforgettable
E	everyone's birthday in her memory.

I wish she had a G in her name. She taught us to play Gaigel!

I spoke with her daily until she couldn't speak at all. One of the greatest gifts she gave me was inducting me into her "Determinator's Club." Aunt Sue was certainly the most determined woman I knew. We will miss you tremendously. Aunt Sue!

Amy Ingram

Dearest Sue, thank you for all the wonderful memories we shared over the years. Spending time with you, Mary Jeanne, and the entire family every Sunday at the Woodbury Roadhouse, playing Kings in the Corner and Gaigel together, sitting on the couch and talking, decorating for the holidays together. I have so many wonderful memories growing up as a kid, and you were and will always be such an important part of those memories, and the person I am today. Thank you for all the laughs, care, wisdom, and love. I love you, Sue, and will miss you dearly.

Margaret Lohmiller Heringer, Former BVM SM Benedette, Set of 1958

"Rescue." A bit dramatic perhaps, but it's the word we both used.

In 1963 I was assigned to Holy Family High School in Glendale, Calif. It was my first mission, and this new life was at times somewhat difficult, confusing, and overwhelming. Where was our ever supportive and encouraging Sister Mary Leo? I wondered. At Christmas break, enter Sister Mary Carmelita. Unexpected. She was warm, outgoing, interesting, affirming, and enthusiastic. As we interacted at the high school and at the convent, a life-long friendship began to develop. Her father lived close by, and I sometimes helped her clean house for him. She included me in their family gatherings. Her large, lively, and fun-loving family welcomed me with open arms. The family sing-alongs with Pop Stopper at the lead were epic! He actually got me to start playing the ukulele. I didn't read notes, but somehow that didn't matter. During those two and a half years, I was nurtured (rescued) by Sue's acceptance, affirmation, and encouragement.

Fast forward many years. In one of our phone conversations, we were reminiscing about our Holy Family years. I mentioned how grateful I was that she "rescued" me. She vigorously replied, "**NO**, you rescued me!" What? She then explained how stunned she was being unexpectedly changed from one school and convent to another at mid-year. Her world was temporarily turned upside down. She was not angry or resentful, but felt upended. I guess having me as a project "rescued" her.

As we visited at Mount Carmel during her last week of life, the two of us still joked-argued about who rescued whom! What a beautiful, loving, and dedicated soul! I am forever grateful for the wonderful, life-long friendship we shared. Rest in peace, Suzanne!

Joan Sullivan, Friend

I've realized that God uses good people to do extraordinary things. I may not have known Sister Suzanne for as long as most of you, but nevertheless she left the imprints of her kindness, faith, and love on my heart.

Sister Suzanne and my mom, Bernie, became roommates at Montrose Healthcare [in California] in 2022, after both had taken bad falls. I recall my sister phoning me in New York to warn me that "mom's roommate is a sister from Holy Redeemer – like a nun – like from church, so don't do or say anything weird; she taught me at Holy Family." Thank goodness I had been warned. Sister Suzanne was a gift.

Sister Suzanne quickly became part of my life, our lives. She joined us watching Notre Dame, UCLA, "Jeopardy!", the horse races, and soccer on Sunday morning, but only after Mass on TV had concluded. Sue put up with Bernie's impromptu playlists with Billy Joel, Elton John, and Carole King and I finally was able to get them both to sing a few lines of the Eagles' "Hotel California."

Sue really enjoyed **hot** coffee which was frowned upon in their rehab setting. She delighted when I appeared with steaming cups of coffee and fresh fruit which I had conveniently “stolen” from the United Airlines Club at LAX.

Sister Sue celebrated Thanksgiving 2022 with our entire family in the Montrose rehab, toasting our unconventional Chinese meal with cups of contraband rosé wine. The rehab staff had their hands full with these two strong-minded, liberal, and independent women.

Over the time I spent in Montrose, Sue became a wonderful friend and confidant, sharing her lessons in faith that brought me reflection, laughter, and wisdom. This serendipitous connection (divine intervention) introduced me to BVMs Vicki [Smurlo], Anne [Kendall], and Mary Beth [Galt], who I have come to love dearly and who have helped me more than they know.

Just this past April, I visited Sue at Stonehill. We were discussing Holy Family and she admitted she should not have been teaching drivers ed back in the day because she didn't have a license. Apparently, her father did not feel women should drive! I told her she just solved a long-standing mystery in our family – why my sister drives totally crazy – her instructor did not have a license!

Another day, we spent a couple hours reading poetry – me reading and Sue reciting from memory - always the English teacher. Presumably, she is gazing down from heaven right now, with a red pen, ready to mark up my poor punctuation and dangling participles. When I had to leave for O'Hare that day, I hugged her knowing, fearing, it might be for the last time. Sue replied simply with “Thank you, God bless you.”

My heart is full of gratitude for the cherished memories and the profound bond we share. Sister Suzanne's bravery over these last few weeks, her grace, her faith and unwavering love for all of us, served as the ultimate lesson of her life.

Sister Cindy Sullivan, BVM

Suzanne and all at Montrose were so welcoming every summer when I would stay with them. Great conversations with Suzanne and fun card games with her, her sister, and their sister-in-law! Very fond memories of Suzanne and the Montrose community. Hugs.

Grace Mendez, BVM Associate

Sister Suzanne and I were co-moderators of the senior class at Holy Family High School in Glendale, Calif., for several years. When I was stressing over getting all the girls through the ceremonies and projects, she reminded me, "Just say to yourself, ' This will be over in a week' or 'in 24 hours.' " I still use that when deadlines start to stress me.

Suzanne was a great game player. I was her opponent in many a match of Gaigel [guy-gel], her family's German card game, somewhat similar to Euchre. She could be very dramatic when things did not go her way in the game...all in good fun! She said, "This is cards. Leave friendship at the door!" I still laugh, remembering her good humor and joyful spirit!

Nancy Niles, BVM Associate

My first memory of Sister Suzanne was sitting around the breakfast table at the convent in Glendale with Grace [Mendez], Sister Mary Jeanne, and all the others. They made me feel so wanted. Sister Suzanne would talk about the book she was reading. She got Grace and me to read the books and we had our little three-person book club at the breakfast table. The next thing I knew I was being invited to play Gaigel, the German card game that the two Stopper sisters Suzanne and Mary Jeanne were taught by their family. They taught us about Gaigel, and I have continued to try to teach my family, trying to keep the game going. Sister Suzanne is loved and missed.

Sister Kate Hendel, BVM

I had the gift of being Suzanne's Council Contact. I didn't know Suzanne until two years ago. I had lived with Mary Jeanne, but not with Suzanne. Of course, we had a little conversation about when she might like to come to Mount Carmel Bluffs. No, that was not on the agenda at that time. Then the day came that she joined us which was wonderful. A couple of weeks ago, I visited her in the hospital between trips out of town. She was talking about the IV being an albatross, the ever literally image was there. When I got back from my travel, she had returned to Mount Carmel. I walked into her room, and she said, "Well, Kate, I'm officially on hospice." It was as if she was made queen for the day. I said, "Well, that's wonderful, Suzanne." We chatted briefly until the hospice people came in and then I left. We've heard a lot about Suzanne the teacher today. I think Suzanne did some teaching, at least for me, about how to die well. I thank you for that.

Sister Anne Kendall, BVM

I have another card story. She was competitive, as you know. I was her partner in crime. I made extra cards so she could win. I took my computer and made some cards and put the backing on. In Gaigel, one wins if one has sevens, so I made a set of sevens for Suzanne. She was waiting for the appropriate moment to use these sevens. If you get 101 points, you also win. My partner said, "I have 101 points." Suzanne said, "But I have five sevens." Now, this was almost an impossibility. She had secretly stored these sevens in her pocket and waited for the appropriate time to show them forth so that she could win the game.

Sister Patricia Tang, BVM

About three years ago I was visiting the Sisters at Most Holy Redeemer Convent, Montrose, Calif. I saw Suzanne, who said to me, "Now that I'm 94 1/2 yrs. old, I think it's time for me to go to Mount Carmel!"

Dan and Betsy Clark, Cousins

We have very fond memories of Sister Sue and MaryJeanne's visits to Ralston and Williamsport, Penn., to visit their Bertin and Stopper cousins, and the area where their parents were born and raised. My grandmother, Laura Bertin Mansuy, and their mother were sisters. It was a special time for all of us.

Teresa Nelson, Former Student

Sister Suzanne was my inspiration in becoming a teacher. She was my English Literature teacher as well as Greek Mythology teacher where she used many strategies to keep her students engaged. From her acting out the parts of *The Miracle Worker*, to dressing as Medusa when reading our texts. One could tell that Sister Suzanne loved teaching. . . .and we all loved her so.

Nancy McClelland

Sister Suzanne was one of my mentors, along with Sister Maureen Maloney, during my three years on the *Response* yearbook staff. Every Friday afternoon for many months we descended into the room down in the basement to work on layouts and photography. We enjoyed a weekend retreat in Oceanside. In the summer we went to USD for yearbook workshops. We became a close-knit family who celebrated relationships and our creativity. It was a wonderful respite from my family's struggles when my dad was enduring his strike at the *Herald Examiner*. Sisters Suzanne and Maureen became our big sisters who supported us and became our friends. I will always treasure those special memories that shaped my creativity with loving care.

Cathy Burke Caples, Former Student, Holy Family High School, Class of 1973

I could not have had a more wonderful yearbook moderator from 1970-73. She was the perfect combination of guidance, teacher, and fun. She loved our antics to a point! May she rest peacefully in the arms of our Lord!

Laurie (Payne) Novak Former Student

Sister Suzanne was such a gifted teacher. She instilled in me a love for language, writing and literature. In great measure, she is the reason I eventually became a teacher. Her smile was contagious, her wit, endearing, and her kindness, extraordinary. Dear Sister, may you rest in the eternal, joyful peace you so deserve.

Dianna Fowler

Sister Suzanne's wit and wisdom were true blessings. Sharing a Christmas morning with her after Emmalee was lector at the 6:30 a.m. Mass is a treasured moment for me. Thanks to her for helping me learn the groundwork to teaching is more than the textbook. Your life touched mine and Emmalee's which in turn helped us shine your spirit upon others.

Emmalee

This is such sad news! Sister Suzanne and the other BVMs used to babysit me. I remember that Sister Suzanne loved films. She once told me that it was her one indulgence in life, and that it was okay to have something you treasured like that. She would walk to the local theaters, and I thought she was so cool for that.

She and her sister, Sister Mary Jeanne, used to teach me all kinds of card games. One night I got to stay for dinner with them. I was so excited! They taught me how to play poker with corn chips. Sister Suzanne always made me feel welcomed and safe, and made religion seem like a part of everyday life, not just something to have on a Sunday. I will miss her dearly, and I will carry her stories and her memory with me in my heart for the rest of my life.

Margaret Stanners Boyd, Former Student

May she rest peacefully. She was a wonderful woman, very intelligent. She was the best teacher I ever had. She made a difference in this world. God bless her!

Carol Eckenboy Buckland, Former Student, Class of 1965

Sister Suzanne (Carmelita) was wonderful, caring, and always there for us to communicate. Rest in peace.

Jennifer Adriatico-Westad, Former Student, Holy Family High School

Thank you for being a wonderful and memorable teacher at Holy Family High School in Glendale, Calif. I loved seeing your outfits after you did not have to wear a habit for your order. RIP, Sister Suzanne.

Jay Tirado, Former Student, Holy Family High School

I am so saddened to hear of her passing. She was my favorite teacher at Holy Family High School. She taught me to love to read and write. I enjoyed every single book she recommended and have continued to read all these years later. She was such a vibrant force in and out of the classroom. I know she will be missed greatly. Rest in peace.

Amy Combs, Former Student

You were a wonderful teacher. My favorite teacher. You had a kind heart and I loved English because of you.

Jo Clauer, BVM Associate & Mount Carmel Bluffs Life Enrichment Department

Suzanne Stopper and I are definitely cut from the same cloth. Whenever she would see me go by, she would say, "Jo, you got to come here. I've got a good one for you." She would tell me a funny little story. Her eyes would just twinkle. Afterwards, we would laugh, and she would say, "I knew you would like it." When her family was coming to visit her here for the first time, she said, "They won't know where I am." I said, "Look for the red sweater." She stood outside in of the entrance wearing her bright red sweater. When I came out, I said, "I saw you standing out there in your red sweater." She said, "I know. They saw me."

I want to play a little song. She always came with Mary Jeanne to our sing-a-longs in the Gables. The song I want to sing is one that Dolly Parton wrote for her mother. I changed the words a little to fit the red sweater story.

There's a wreath on her door
She don't live here no more
As of today, she flew home.
We've all gathered here

In sorrow, in tears
It won't be the same with her gone.

There's a place on the hill
That's peaceful and still
Where she will sleep with family and friends.
The old family tree is shedding its leaves.
But we will all meet in Heaven again

And, oh, she's an angel.
Let her fly! Let her fly!
She's gone home to glory,
To her home in the sky.
When God sees her coming,
Heaven's choir will smile and sing.
Oh, she's an angel.
Let her fly! Let her fly!
Oh, she's an angel, Lord.
Let her fly!

She joined the Sisters
When she was a child
She sang peace on earth
In the sweet by and by
Her life was so happy
Filled with laughter and smiles
You know she's an angel, Lord
Let her fly!

And, oh, she's an angel.
Let her fly! Let her fly!
She's gone home to glory,
To her home in the sky.
When God sees her coming,
Heaven's choir will smile and sing.
"Oh, she's an angel. Let her fly!
Let her fly!
Oh, she's an angel, Lord.
Let her fly [in her red sweater]!