



**Sharing of Memories of Mary Rosemunda Besch, BVM**  
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Aug. 27, 2024

**Julie Hamm, Niece-in-law, Wife of John Hamm**

As I got to know her through the years of being in the family, I loved her. But I can tell you, as a small child, I would have been scared to death to have her as my teacher!

**John Hamm, Nephew, Son of Marcella Besch Hamm**

I can never thank her enough for what she did for my mom. She was a wonderful sister. I don't know how many people realized that when I was a kid, she would come back in the summertime from where she was teaching school. She would show up on a Friday coming in on the train, would get picked up and go out to her mom and dad's house on the farm. By Tuesday, she was on a hay rack in a chambray shirt and her dad's bib overalls with me and her dad throwing hay bales. She was a wonderful aunt. I can't thank her enough for what she did.

**Grandniece**

Sister Rosemunda was my grandaunt, my grandfather's sister. I remember as a young kid that when she was back in Sioux City, Iowa, we would have Christmas in my grandparents' basement. They were there, she and Clarenita, Marcella, whoever could be there. As you all know, she was hot and heavy in her games. She would say something and Clarenita would say, "You know you have to go to confession for that!"

**Sister Katherine Keating, BVM**

I was her teacher, sort of. I taught her how to play poker. She really was a good student, but she wasn't a good loser. During the pandemic lockdown, she called me and said, "You've got to figure a way how we are going to play. So, we did. For that whole year we did it without seeing each other. But we had to be honest about winning. She was a fun person.

**Sister Ann DeLeeuw, BVM**

I should follow up on the poker remarks. When I came to Mount Carmel Bluffs about a year and a half ago, I didn't know Sister Rosemunda. I had never met her nor heard anything about her. After I settled in, I started to visit some of the sisters in Gables. Sister Rosemunda was one of the first people I met. I had a very pleasant visit with her. Normally when I would go to see her, she was doing a jigsaw puzzle. She enjoyed doing them. We talked about family. The things people would normally talk about. For some reason, one day I asked her, "What do you like to watch on television. I like to watch PBS. I enjoy those programs. She said, "Polka." She enjoyed watching polka and knew the names of some of the couples. That's what she really enjoyed. On a subsequent visit, I said to Rosemunda, "Did you enjoy polka this weekend?" She said, "No, we play on Thursday nights. If you would like to come, you need to bring \$3 worth of nickels. We play for nickels, and we play over in Vista on Thursday nights". That's how I became a poker player. Now, I want to put this out publicly. Every one of you sisters know that all the poker players have a nickel stache someplace in their apartment. I think it is time for someone to step up and say where Rosemunda's stache went because by rights it should come back to the group that still plays because Sister Rosemunda won all that money from us!

### **Sister Emelyn Malecki, BVM**

I always called Rosemunda "Rosie." The day she died, I had gone to see her before the Memorial Mass for Pat [Fitzgerald, BVM]. All during lunch, I gnawed. I was supposed to go to Walgreen's, but something told me, "No, go and see Rosie again." I was so grateful, because when I got there, she had just passed away. I dissolved into tears. I said to her niece, "I always called her Rosie." The gentleman with her said, "Can you imagine *us* calling her Rosie?" I understand that nobody in the Set ever called her Rosie either. I am grateful that I went, and I was there. We never lived together but both of us lived in Chicago for many years. Every month we would take turns driving down Sheridan Road, having a nice visit and a lunch together. After she left, we always kept in touch by phone or email. When I decided to come to Mount Carmel Bluffs, I called Rosie first. I said, "Rosie, I'm coming to Dubuque." She said, "Oh, thank God!" People have said to me that Rosie couldn't wait until I got here. Rosie was a very loyal, caring person. People called her a teddy bear; and I do too. Rosemunda, I thank you for your wonderful loyalty to me for 74 years.

### **Cathy Mortimer, Niece, Daughter of Veronica Besch Little**

We have a big family ourselves. We moved to Denver many years ago. Every summer we would come to Sioux City to see the family and stay with Marcella. The minute we got there, as soon as we put our luggage away, we played cards. That was the thing. All my aunts were very bold and competitive. We wouldn't be playing for 10 minutes, and the fighting would begin. My mother would say, "Bill, get the kids. We're going home." That meant that she was losing. That's the way cards always went as long as I can remember. Yet we always played, and we always had a lot of fun. We just had to put up with whoever was losing!

### **Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM**

In 1997, I was moving from St. Louis to California. Yvonne Mattioli was my companion as we traveled across the country. I looked at the map and noticed that we would be close to Sioux City, Iowa. I didn't know Clarenita or Rosemunda very well, but I called them and asked, "Could we stay with you?" They were so excited because they rarely had BVM visitors. We had a great time. After supper, Clarenita said, "We will fix you a lunch." That lunch lasted four days.

Rosemunda liked to play pinochle. On Sunday, one of her favorite activities was to play pinochle. For approximately the last three years, Rosemunda and a variety of sisters played pinochle. Later, some of our Terrace residents joined the pinochle club. Should I say that Rosemunda did not have a poker face? You *knew* when she wasn't happy. And then she had a sweet smile when she had a very good hand!

One of our Terrace residents couldn't be here, but she said, "I always admired Rosemunda's courageous spirit and her sweet smile."

### **Mary Rettenmeier, Mount Carmel Bluffs Resident**

I moved here a little over a year ago. I played poker with the sisters. Sister Rosemunda did not like to lose. You knew by the look on her face when she was going to lose, which wasn't very often. I also played pinochle with her and loved doing that. She was very stern, so I started calling her "cranky." She got a big kick out of that and would laugh. I look at the wake and funeral program and her memorial card. There's a nice smile on her face. This *is* Rosemunda.

### **Anna, Great Niece**

I'm sorry, but this is more serious. I was struggling through my life and thought I was ready to give up. Sister Rosemunda and Sister Clarenita had this uncanny ability to know when people needed them. They stopped by my house and visited with me. They saved me! They reinvigorated my faith in God and in life. She was an amazing woman. I can never thank her enough for everything that she did for me.

### **Sister Brigid Mary Hart, BVM**

I was living in this city when Rosemunda and Clarenita moved from Sioux City. I know their sadness of leaving their family and leaving their friends. I experienced that for a while, too. When I moved into Vista, Rosemunda

had a special place at her table. She would get there early and put her walker out of the way. When we joined Rosemunda for lunch or dinner, there were farm stories. She could tell a story. Sometimes we laughed until we cried. Sometimes she had a joke. She was a wonderful woman to be around. I will miss you, Rosemunda.

### **Sister M. Colleen McGinnity, BVM**

I have a very brief story that Rosemunda shared about herself. I don't remember what brought it to her mind the day she shared it, but it was a memory she enjoyed sharing. As you know Rosemunda and Clarenita worked in a parish in Sioux City. One day we had an event here at Mount Carmel where she met one of the parishioners from Sioux City. They had a good conversation. After he left, she turned to me and said, "One day in the middle of this group of parishioners, he comes up to me and says, 'Oh, sister, it's so good to meet you with your clothes on.'" She thoroughly enjoyed my astonished look and then told me he was one of the people she would meet when she went swimming at the Y.

### **Cathy Mortimer, Niece**

I just want to say one more thing. I had a lot of conversations with Sister while she lived here about how she loved living here and all of you and everything you did for her. She didn't feel like she could be in a better place or have more loving friends. Thank you from all of her family for taking such wonderful care of her.

### **Sister Carol Marie Baum, BVM**

I had the privilege of meeting Clarenita and Rosemunda in the early 2000s. I was a Regional at that time. I can certainly attest to the hospitality which was always at the forefront of both Clarenita's and Rosemunda's minds. We had a meal like you would never believe. There were three of us. We could have fed ten at the table. Clarenita was a wonderful cook and loved every minute of entertaining others.

I don't know how to put the other part of my sharing. Rosemunda was one who was very straightforward. What she said was what she meant. The interesting part was if she was with someone who would counter her response. She loved every minute of the banter back and forth that took place. So, I gave her a name. She was a bear, yes. Not a teddy bear, but a bear with a marshmallow heart.

### **Sister Jean Beste, BVM, Member Set of 1950**

When we finished our novitiate, we were able to go home for a visit, but we had to have a companion. When Rosemunda said she wanted to go home, a companion was appointed to her - Elaine Wojcik. She was a *real* city girl. Rosemunda and Elaine took the train to Sioux City. On the way, Rosemunda thought, I better tell her this. She said, "Elaine, we don't have a bathroom in the house. We have an outhouse." This city girl just looked at her. Now this was in the 1950s. When they got to Sioux City, her parents had wallpapered the outhouse and put a light in it. When they came back and Rosemunda told us this, we just laughed.

### **Sister Margaret Mary Cosgrove, BVM**

One thing that attracted me to the congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was their love for each other and their obvious friendships with each other. Their devotion and friendship were inspiring. The friendship between Clarenita and Rosemunda was such an example of this. They loved each other, they cared for each other, but they weren't exclusive. Anybody was welcome to sit at the table with them or be part of their activities. Their devotion to each other and their friendship was inspiring.

### **Virginia Nathe, St. John's Parish, Meire Grove, Minn.**

Sister Rosemunda was part of a team with Sister Clarenita that came to St. John's-St. Andrew's school when there was a great need. These angels were the turning point in keeping our Catholic School which is still open. They became an integral part of our parish and community by being present and helping whenever they could. Sister Rosemunda's fiery spirit came forward as they accepted snowmobiling rides and fishing experiences from parishioners. Her reminiscences from these and other experiences in her life had us laughing into tears. She was an effective teacher and cared deeply about her students.

### **Sister Josette Kelly, BVM, Set of 1951**

When Helen Emerson and I entered in February 1951, Rosemunda's Set was still in the postulancy at the south end of Letter Wing until March 19<sup>th</sup>. Their immediate proprietary attitude engulfed us with kindness, information, support, and fun. This varied with the strength of that Set member's personality. Rosemunda, with her powerful pragmatism and determination, was one of my advocates. There were 66 of them and 12 of us. If she could have grabbed my sleeve and put me where I was supposed to stand, or walk or kneel, she would have preferred it. I followed the routines they had learned in spite of myself. I missed her terribly when they were received and moved to the novitiate, the present Prairie Dining Room."

### **Tom & Cindy Tiedeman, Okoboji, Iowa**

Sympathy to all the Sisters and the family of Sister Rosemunda. Sister Rosemunda was a great mentor, friend and was always available to listen. Her leadership at St. Michael School in Sioux City was a blessing to all. We are fortunate to have known this outstanding lady. We did enjoy visiting her at the gorgeous BVM Motherhouse. While there we saw the excellent care that was given to all. We will continue as "Companions on the Journey" for life. Thank you, Sister Rosemunda, for everything you have done for all. We love you! Greet Sister Clarenita for us! We miss her too! Now you are always together again doing God's work! Much love.

### **Michelle (Bonner) Hudson and Lance Hudson**

Sister Rosemunda Besch was one of my teachers in elementary and middle school. She and Sister Clarenita Froehlich left a lasting impact on my life. I will never forget the stories they told, the lessons I learned from them, nor the memories I have of them. May she rest in peace.

### **Pam Wilmes , Former Coworker, St Michael School, Meire Grove, Minn.**

I met Sister Rosemunda and Sister Clarenita when I began working at St. Michael's School. We all loved working with Sister Rosemunda. She was so much fun, and I loved to tease her. When the sisters decided to retire, she trained me for the library position. I was so happy to be able to continue our friendship with chats on the phone, going out for dinner, etc. The sisters continued their Christmas parties in which Sister Rosemunda oversaw the games and prizes. There were so many laughs and wonderful memories made at those parties. I will always cherish Sister Rosemunda and my years of friendship with her. She will always have a special place in my heart.

### **Mike & Janet Augustine, Merville, Iowa**

We were so very sorry to hear of the passing of Sister Rosemunda. Our two children were taught by her at St. Michael's Catholic School in Leeds (Sioux City, Iowa) so many years ago. Sister Rosemunda was such a kind person, and boy she had a great poker face! LOL. We enjoyed stopping over to their condo in Sioux City after they had retired, and brought them garden goodies, homemade jams and of course biscotti. Sister's face always lit up when she saw the goodies. We enjoyed spending time with them both and are sad that they are no longer with us, but we rejoice in the fact that they are now in heaven, and at peace. We are better people for knowing them. Rest in peace, Sister Rosemunda!

### **Margee Krapfl, Former Coworker**

Sister Rosemunda was a unique lady. I was privileged to know her as a fellow teacher and friend. May she rest in the arms of Mary.

### **Sister Veronica "Ronnie" Higgins, BVM**

I met Rosemunda Besch about ten years ago. I already knew Sister Clarenita and now Sister Rosemunda. Rosemunda was faithful to her call, loved her family deeply, cherished the BVM community dearly, and promised prayer and presence to everyone she met along the way. Rosemunda enjoyed puzzles, puzzles, and more puzzles, a variety of card games, polka shows, and rodeo shows. What a good and faithful servant you were, Rosemunda. Thank you for your friendship. Rest in peace.

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

My enduring impression of Rosemunda is show up, speak up, see what needs to be done, and do it! She and Clarenita came to community meetings as much as they were able, which was sometimes a long drive from Sioux City. Rosemunda seemed to get to the heart of the matter, to what was important or needed. She and Clarenita came to Mass, and most often sat in the back row on the left side of the chapel. One morning when a "quiet Mass" [no music] was scheduled, as I walked up the aisle before Mass, I heard Rosemunda's loud whisper. "I hope she's not going to play!" She was there for Mass, the heart of the matter, music was extra. Another day, as I walked through the dining room, I heard Rosemunda's voice call, "Sister... Sister... Sister Music!" The heart of the matter was her question, my name would have been an extra. One day when out doing errands, I opted for lunch at Culver's. As I parked, I was surprised to see Rosemunda, Johanna, and Clarenita arriving at the same time. Culver's was a favorite spot of theirs, and as we went in, they invited me to sit with them. I think community and inclusion were the heart of the matter. I was not "extra" that day. And we had an absolutely pleasant lunch.

### **Sister Mary Healey, BVM**

Rosemunda was the year behind me. She was my partner in line for a long time because we were the same height, not the same width. I always enjoyed her dry sense of humor although I can't think of an example.

### **Sister Mary Anne Bradish, BVM**

Rosemunda lived with Clarenita for many years. Claire wanted to see and share with Sister Eleanor Craggs who was at Mount Carmel. I think she visited Eleanor monthly, coming from Sioux City. Rosemunda was very caring. She drove, and Claire was very grateful.

### **Nancy McCarville, BVM Associate & Former BVM**

I didn't get to know Sister Rosemunda when she returned to Mount Carmel, but I tried. I had hoped that she might get me up to speed on the Sioux City Diocese and the people we might have known in common there.

Over the years, Sister Rosemunda, Sister Clarenita, and BVM associate Donna Ortt made up a little circle of friends. When Donna died, Rosemunda called the associate office to inform us of her passing and for us to know how excited Donna had been being an associate.

I appreciate that Rosemunda and Clarenita were the last chapter of BVM ministry in the Sioux City Diocese. They left 156 years after Mary Frances Clarke began the first chapter, saying "yes" to opening the first Catholic school in the diocese. That was Corpus Christi School in Fort Dodge to which she sent Sisters Regina Cosgrove, Cassiana Devlin, Michael Nihill, and Hildegard Whelan.

Rosemunda was the last but not the least of many characters who made up the cast of BVM teachers in western Iowa. Many of them were my teachers and a tribute to Rosemunda is a tribute to them, too!