



Sharing of Memories of Susan (Michaela) Rink, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 2, 2025

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM

It was my distinct privilege, as it was the privilege of many of you who have gathered in this chapel, to journey with Sue during the last days, weeks and months of her life. Sue was a joy to know and easy to love.

When I thought about what I might say this morning I thought of entitling my reflection "The gift of being homeless!" Permit me to explain. Now no one is ever truly homeless in the BVM Community, but in the fall of 1988, I had secured a ministry at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center, but I had not identified a place to live. It was then that wise and wonderful Carolyn Farrell, BVM suggested that I call Sue and Jeanine [Moran] and ask about living with them. They were moving to Dubuque as Sue was about to begin her eight years of service as our Congregational Treasurer. I made the call and of course the answer to my question was a warm YES. That phone call led to a 37-year friendship. I was blessed!

Sue had a special spirit - a spirit she shared generously with others. Not only did she have a special spirit, but she also had innumerable interests. She was a scientist, a lover of nature, a sharp bridge player, a conscientious administrator, a remarkable biology and chemistry teacher, a faithful friend, a sensitive counselor and on and on and on.

Sue, if I were to say to you this morning, "Sue, how are you?" You would respond with your characteristic line, "Better now that I see you." So, Sue, we'll turn your familiar words right back at you and say, "Sue, we are all better because of knowing and loving you!" Thank you, Sue.

Kateri O'Shea, Former BVM

I am happy to make a few comments about my dear friend Sue, whom you have heard so beautifully described in her eulogy and in Mary's comments. I was a friend of Susan's for 65 years and I treasure every one of those years. I want to talk about her characteristics – her welcoming spirit and her ability to be a supportive listener. Not just a listener, but someone who listens and then is willing and able to help and support you when you need it. She didn't hover, but she was there when you needed her.

Proximity enabled us to develop our friendship. It was a mutually developed friendship. It was not a one-way friendship. Both Sue and I and Tina [Stretch, former BVM novice] made opportunities to get together. We lived in the same neighborhood in Chicago when Sue and Jeanine [Moran, BVM] were working in the city and living 15 minutes away from us. We took advantage of all those times. I will mention a few.

I was in the first group of Scholastics. The BVMs were always going to school, studying at night, on the weekends, during the summer finishing their degrees. We were encouraged to go to Mundelein to finish our degree before starting teaching.

I was sent to Boulder, Colo., to the boarding school there, Mount St. Gertrude Academy. At that time in the community, if you went to any place far west, you would just stay there for a while. So that's what I expected.

I went off to the Academy, spent my year there and expected to stay there. But I got a message from Mother Consolatrice that I was being asked to go to St. Louis to teach in an honor's program. That was a major challenge for me. I was just starting to learn how to teach. So, to be asked to teach a college course was a bit of a challenge, to say the least.

Sue was on the welcoming committee as well as other members of the BVM community there the night I arrived. I knew from the first moment that I was welcomed and would be taken care of. I had that sense from her.

The welcome did not end that night. It was a welcome that was extended through the whole first time I was in St. Louis. She would not hover but help me figure out if I had everything I needed to be set for my classes. "Let me know if there is anything I can do to help." I knew she was always there for me.

Her welcoming spirit was always visible after she moved to Mount Carmel. People would go by her room and wave, and she would say, "Don't just wave. Come in!" You knew when she would ask, "How are you?" she didn't want you to just say, "I'm fine." She really wanted to know how you were. She was genuinely interested. That was one of her characteristics.

When I started teaching the college course to high school students, she knew how fearful and concerned I was. She encouraged me and convinced me that I was a good teacher, and I could do it. I knew I was a good secondary Spanish teacher, but to teach a college course was a very big challenge. But Sue convinced me and helped me conquer those fears. And, indeed, those students got college credit much to my surprise and delight. I always appreciated that aspect of Sue, that supportive listening.

I have wonderful memories of her sitting on the edge of the pier at Fox Lake, a home on a quiet Wisconsin lake that we shared for many years with Mary Ann [Maglia, Jeanine's relative] and Jeanine. I have a wonderful picture in my mind of her just sitting at the edge of the pier with her fishing pole. She enjoyed that as much as a party. She just had a way of enjoying life with enthusiasm.

One of my dearest memories of her was after Jeanine had died. We were at Fox Lake. She wanted to come and visit. Fortunately, Fox Lake was a straight shot from Dubuque on Highway 151. We wanted to pick her up, but she said no because she wanted to drive. I think that might have been the last time she drove a long trip by herself. We had a wonderful time. I will treasure her friendship forever.

Sister Agnes "Dee-Dee" Keena, BVM (Read by Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM)

I am Sister Agnes Keena, better known as Dee-Dee. Sue, or I should say, Sister Michaela and I met 69 years ago when she welcomed me into her freshman homeroom at Xavier High School in St. Louis. My relationship with Sue began as a student to a teacher. However, after entering the community, our relationship developed into friendship and eventually, we became spiritual companions.

When Sue and her best friend, Jeanine [Moran, BVM], were moving from the Circle Apartments to Mount Carmel, I was in Dubuque to help them. At that time Sue gave me two special gifts: her fishing tackle box, but more importantly a wooden bowl that belonged to her grandmother.

Sue told me that the bowl was always on her grandmother's table with fruit or cookies. She always looked forward to seeing what goodies were in the bowl. However, when Sue gave me the bowl, I saw no fruit, no cookies. I said, "Sue, the bowl is empty, where are the cookies, where is the fruit?" She smiled, "Oh this bowl is brimming



over with the many blessings you have shared with me and Jeanine all these years. Take it to your home and continue to fill it with your gifts and blessings. Nourish those you serve with the spirit of Mary Frances Clarke, "meek, humble, patient, kind and obedient."

I thank God for Sue in my life, and I know as God called her home, she went steady and quiet, and yes, I believe, all shall be well.

Paul Schultz, BVM Associate

Sue Rink changed the trajectory of my life and the City of Dubuque. We came together in the early 1990s because there was a problem with cancer in the south end of Dubuque. We were trying to figure out why that was. As we did, we became aware that the wastewater treatment plant used a method of burning the solids. They would go up in the air in the smokestack, but workers had removed the air population control devices. They wore out quickly and were too expensive to replace. Well, this was a sin, a structural sin.

Sue and a few other people founded a group "Friends United for a Safe Environment" (FUSE). This was standing up for justice, standing up for health. We blocked the entrance to the wastewater treatment plant. Some of us wore hazmat suits to draw attention to this sin in our city. This led to a change. The issue was investigated, and it was found that we needed to change the system there.

Even beyond that, is the role Sue took on as a guardian. She submitted a petition to establish an environmental stewardship advisory commission so that things wouldn't fall through the cracks as they had done, where nobody knew who should do something about this problem. This changed the trajectory of Dubuque to become a more sustainable community. It started right there. It changed the trajectory of my life. That's one reason why I am here and became a BVM Associate.

Leona Laourus, Mount Carmel Bluffs Resident

I have known Sue for just one year. I came on May 1st of last year. Going into the dining room for the first time, I felt like a high school freshman. I looked around and didn't know anybody. I was wheeled over to Sue's table. There I stayed, sitting at her table for a year. Though when she had a difficult time talking, she might be at other tables. All of us who ate with her for that year always considered her to belong to us.

We found out we had a lot in common. I grew up in the St. Louis area. She loved St. Louis. I heard many stories about her visits to the zoo with her students when she was teaching there. I knew about her family in Elkader. When the bowl was held up this morning, I thought it might have belonged to her Irish grandmother because I knew about her grandmas, her dog, her deep love for her father, her appreciation for her mother. We share a lot. I never knew through Sue about her academic accomplishments because she was very modest. I found out about them through other sisters. I also have girlfriends. Through my fifty years of living in the Chicago area I have known quite a few Mundelein graduates. Some of them steered me in this direction to Mount Carmel Bluffs.

Sue was such a kind person and so deeply intelligent. She was fun. She sang to us often. Whenever we would have spinach, she would sing "Popeye the Sailor Man." She knew verses of songs that were kind of on the edge. One she sang often was "The deacon went down to the cellar to pray. Then he found the booze and he stayed all day." I thought, "Is this a legitimate song?" I looked it up on my iPad and, by golly, it is! I loved Sue and I know she is singing with the angels, although she would be the first one to say her voice should be hidden in the choir. Thank you, Sue. We all love you.

Sister Judy Callahan, BVM

I want to share a short story of how Sue was so tender with Jeanine [Moran, BVM]. Every afternoon she would have a little party for whoever would show up. I was a frequent visitor to their Circle apartment. As Jeanine's memory became more and more limited, Sue got a doctor's prescription for a cat. I was called upon to help find a kitten for her. I went out to my relatives and friends in the monastery area and brought this little striped guy in

who climbed the curtains and jumped up everywhere. I monitored them and helped them to learn how to deal with a little kitten. It was Sue's delight and strong tenderness for Jeanine to provide for her wishes and her comfort that impressed me most.

Sister Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM

Like some of us in this chapel today, I met Sue when I was fourteen years old. I had the Sisters of Loretto in elementary school. I absolutely loved them. When I graduated from eighth grade, I wanted to go to Loretto high school. However, it was quite expensive, and I am the oldest of seven children, all of whom would need a good high school education. So, I ended up going to a place I never heard of called Xavier High School. I went there reluctantly, but I was assigned to Sue's freshman homeroom. I have to tell you that not only did my decision to go to Xavier changed my high school experience, but it changed the course of my life. I know that a big reason why I am a BVM today is because the first BVM I really got to know was Sue Rink. But that wasn't just true of me.

As you know, Sue was a chemist, and my dad was a chemist. Sue and my dad struck up a relationship. They spent quite a bit of time together. My dad would invite Sue's classes out to the water purification plant where he worked. Sue would bring her classes, and my dad would have lunch with her. Through the years they got to be very close, so close in fact that when I was a junior in high school, on the day of Our Lady of Angels fire in Chicago, my dad packed up some beer and pretzels. He took them to Xavier High School so that he could spend some time with the sisters who he knew were grieving.

My final story also included my family. On the day that I was leaving for Dubuque, a woman who lived in our neighborhood and knew our family very well, came over to the house and started berating my mom and dad for letting me waste my life by going off to the convent. Of course, all my little sisters and brothers were hearing this. It was quite a disruptive moment. Anyway, my dad gently ushered her out and we had a few more hours. As my dad and I were walking to the train that would take me to Chicago and on to Dubuque, my dad put his arm around me. I will never forget it. He looked at me and he said what he had learned about the BVMs. He looked me in the eye, and he said, "Don't worry, Mac (his nickname for me). You will be fine. Those BVMs know how to love." He learned that from Sue. We do know how to love. And I never worried.

Sonya Rendón, BVM Associate, Guayaquil, Ecuador

The announcement of Sister Susan Rink's funeral took me back in time to my time at Mundelein [College], where I graduated in 1977. Sue was the President of the college at that time. Besides being a great leader, she was a very understanding and compassionate woman. I am grateful for the opportunity the community and she gave me to get my education degree. Thank you, Sue, for your support to all of us. I will always remember you with gratitude.

Jackie Powers Doud

Sue was a wonderful friend: wise, practical, down-to-earth and unassuming. We lived and worked together at Mundelein [College] and last connected in 2022 when I visited her. She leaves us with an inspiring legacy. May she rest in peace.

Jan Rossow Brautigam

The picture of you, Sue, accompanying your modest obit is the best I've ever seen. Somehow it encompasses a lifetime filled with creativity, intelligence and compassion. Thank you for sustaining me through Xavier High from age 13 on and remaining my friend amidst the vagaries of life.

Sister Regina M. Qualls, BVM

I first met Sue at Xavier High School in St. Louis. Although I was not in any of her classes until my senior year, she taught me quite a bit outside the classroom. Sue was the Student Council moderator, and I was on the Student Council all four years. She is the one who taught me about holding a meeting before the meeting to ensure that all went well, how to allot time for agenda items, how to recruit volunteers with an eye to their gifts for a

particular task, and, of course, the meeting after the meeting to let me know if I did it correctly! She was an excellent teacher, and I will always be grateful for all that I learned from her.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM, Xavier Class of 1961

Sue was the last living BVM who taught me at Xavier High School in St. Louis. I was never among the brightest students in either her biology or chemistry classes, but Sue was always patient, kind and understanding. After I entered the Community, Sue and Jeanine Moran, both became not just former teachers, but mentors, friends and role models. They would often share that they felt there was something special about the students at Xavier. They considered Xavier as one of their favorite missions.

Even in death, Sue continues to be a teacher of biology and chemistry as she was involved for over 30 years in the Rush Study, offering her brain to learn more about Alzheimer's disease.

Thank you for all your kindness, Sue.

Kathleen Lukefahr Jewell, Former BVM

We were given such gifts when we entered Xavier's Hall all those years ago. We were loved and seen for who we were as budding women. The lifelong friendships and guides accompanied us all these years. I send love to each of you as you walk through this sadness and loss but also with such gratitude for Sue, a most loving woman, confidant and soul friend.

Mary Kay Roach, Former BVM Joan Mary Schapp

Sue taught me biology as a sophomore at Xavier High School in St. Louis in 1954. I'll always remember her as one of the best teachers I've ever had. She was kind, patient, friendly and encouraging. Those are probably the reasons I spoke with her when trying to discern my decision to enter the BVMs which I did in August of 1957.

Her outgoing personality and enthusiasm lasted her entire life. What an example of faith, love and friendship. I'm sure she is enjoying her eternal reward with Pope Francis, her parents, relatives, Sister Jeanine [Moran] and all her BVM family. Love you, Sister Sue!

Mary Ann Maglia, Niece of Sister Jeanine Moran, BVM

In the photo I sent, Sue is with my first four of eight grandchildren. She adored their visits and was guilty of encouraging them to run on the stairs of the Motherhouse if we were stuck inside due to the weather.

We are going to miss her smile and positive viewpoint. We are blessed to have been a part of her life, and she has given us more than we can express.

Sue Niemczyk Studziński, Niece of Sister Jeanine Moran, BVM

My Dad, Michael Niemczyk, married Jeanine Moran's sister, former BVM Patricia Moran in 1980. It was through Pat and Jeanine that our family came to know Sue Rink. Jeanine and Sue immediately became "Aunt Sue" and "Aunt Jeanine" to all our family and children.

"Aunt Sue" was a much-loved member of the Niemczyk-Studzinski-Maglia Family. Through Jeanine Moran, Pat Moran Niemczyk and Sue, our families became part of the BVM family, and we will be forever grateful to all of them.

Sue was always interested in what was going on with us and with our children. She particularly wanted to know what the children were up to by asking them "teacher" questions and making positive and humorous observations on their progress in school and in life.

The second page has one of my favorite pictures of Sue with her latest fishing catch. I hope that you can include that as well.

Favorite memories of Sue are her stories of growing up in Dubuque and of course fishing in Dubuque and at the Spiders in northern Wisconsin.

It has been a blessing and our joy to be attached to the BVM community in this way for so many years. We have always loved visiting Mount Carmel. The recent remodel (re-build, re-imagine, re-invent?) is stunning. God Bless!

Sharon Kress

I knew of Sue when I was a student at Clarke [College] but, unfortunately, was never in her classroom. We connected in 1990 when she was the BVM Treasurer, and I was working at a local bank. Eventually, we both were members of the Clarke Board of Trustees. I admired several of her wonderful qualities: straightforwardness, intelligence, quick wit, sense of humor, and kindness.