



Sharing of Memories of Edissa Mary Szczepanski, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 9, 2025

Paula and Jim Hays, Cousins

Jim and I were so very sorry to learn of Sister's passing. Sister will be missed by the "cousins" and all who knew her. I recall growing up when there were times Sister would take the bus to visit our family. Of course she had to have a traveling companion. We played in front of our home so we could watch for her. When we looked down the block and saw them coming, we'd run into the house to tell Dad and Mom. I felt special to have nuns come to our home. My dad, her Uncle Joe, would have some very vocal discussions about politics with her.

There was another time when our grandfather Peter died. At the funeral home the little cousins were being too loud, so Sister made us all sit quietly in the outer room. If we behaved, she would give us a nickel. No one argued with a nun!! Peace reigned.

Sister enjoyed being with the family, especially the cousins camp outs, even in North Carolina! I'd like to close with 2 Thessalonians at 3:16. "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way." The Lord be with you all.

Sister Mary Healey, BVM

Edissa was a few years behind me in high school and the novitiate. Later we lived and worked together before moving here. Until I prayed for her while she was dying, I never saw her when she wasn't busy.

Sister Sharon Rezmer, BVM

My recollection of Edissa is that she was a great help in emptying out Wright Hall, especially the kitchens on the many floors and packing up the linens after Wright Hall was sold. We enjoyed sharing our Polish heritage. One lesson she taught me, and I've never forgotten, is how to neatly fold challenging fitted sheets.

Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

I lived with Edissa at St. Augustine's in Memphis, Tenn., and Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago. She was great to live with. I want to support all of her good reputation about being a hard worker. St. Augustine's in Memphis was an old building that had been a hospital for unwed mothers. It was converted into classrooms. We lived on the third floor. Edissa was wonderful because she was such a good cleaner. There was a lot in that old building to clean and she did it. And not only that, she had a good sense of humor. We who lived on that third floor in St. Augustine's needed a good sense of humor. Our fire escape was a coil of rope under an old rusty radiator. It was attached to one leg of the radiator. If there were a fire, we were to grab the rope and jump out of the window. Fortunately, there were no fires. Living at St. Augustine's with Edissa was a very good experience that I will always remember.

Kevin Stevens, Nephew

Edissa had a small family, so I want to say thank you to her BVM family, especially Alice [Caulfield]. She would let us know how Auntie was doing. I know about her cleaning. When we were a bunch of bachelors in one household, Dad didn't have a lot of rules. But when we were told that Auntie was coming, we had to get our act

together. We had to clean that house. When she came, it got even cleaner. She meant business, but it was business with love.

When she came over, the other thing we would expect besides cleaning was her homemade cheesecake. It was so delicious; it was good. She passed that recipe on to my wife Jen. Jen tried to make that cheesecake. It never tasted the same. It wasn't as good. It hit me today that it was because that cheesecake was made with so much love, the love she had for us. Thank you to all the people who have known her through the years.

Ed Stevens, Oldest Nephew

Auntie taught at St. Tarcissus. Both my brother and I went to St. Tarcissus after she was there. So, we were marked men when we went there. I don't know how you [sisters] did it, but you are faster than a telephone, getting information back to my father about what we did in school. By the time we would get home, he knew everything we did.

We had a hamster. When Auntie cleaned the house, she would put that hamster in her pocket. She would walk around the house and that hamster would sit in her pocket. She loved it!

The cheesecake was the biggest thing. We wanted her to come over. If she came and didn't bring it, we asked, "How come no cheesecake?" I do have the recipe. I haven't tried making it yet. Hopefully, I can keep up to her standards.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

As part of the Assembly Planning Committee's outreach to the sisters in Gables and Arbor to bring them printed copies of communications that were sent via email, I had multiple opportunities to visit with Edissa.

On one of my first visits, I noticed the large, framed poster hanging on her wall. It was a bird's-eye caricature drawing of the main streets, businesses and buildings of Los Gatos, Calif. Knowing nothing about her history of ministries, I inquired and found out that for a short time in the early 1980s, she lived at Guadalupe College there. As I was one of the few BVMs who had entered and completed my novitiate there in the mid-1960s, we struck up a conversation. We shared memories of that amazing location with breathtaking views overlooking all the Santa Clara Valley, as well as our congregational history of hope and expectation, then change and eventual loss. But there was something particular and tender about two people sharing their experiences of the same place from perspectives of youth as well as retirement, both now mere memories.

Thank you, Edissa, for your open door and open heart.

Ro Palmer, Mount Carmel Bluff Employee

We used to sit in our rooms. She asked, "What do you have over there?" I would tell her what I had be it McDonald's French fries or a chicken leg. She could tear a chicken leg up. I am going to miss her just like you. I am going to miss her. I loved your auntie.

Sister Alice Caulfield, BVM

There are many stories that could be told about Edissa, and many that shouldn't be told about Edissa. She made me promise not to say anything. Those of you who know me know better than that.

Besides being a lovely, wonderful, gentle woman, and extremely organized. What Karen didn't realize is that Edissa had a photo album with a picture of every room at Guadalupe College. And they were all labeled with every sister's name. Beautifully done for every year up until she went to Wright Hall.

I not only entered with her but lived with her twice and worked with her. The story she doesn't want me to tell was when we were at The Immaculata where there were 50 people. We rotated house duties. It was her turn for the kitchen. Being Miss Cleaning Lady like she is, she thought of a program. There were loads of cupboards –

low cupboards, high cupboards. They needed to be cleaned regularly. On Sunday, she would put out a set of Post-it notes. We were to write our name on the set of cupboards we were going to clean. We could clean them anywhere from Sunday to Friday. Everything had to be done my Friday night at 8 p.m., at which point, she threw a wonderful cocktail party. She invited everyone to the party, even those who didn't help with the cleaning. There was a huge island in the center of the kitchen. It had cupboards and drawers below. I was doing my share one night when she was there cleaning an island drawer. She pulled it out. She had a screwdriver and took out the screws in the back out of the drawer. She cleaned the grease off the screws with a toothbrush. She would deny that, but it is true. I witnessed it with my own eyes. Something some people don't put with Edissa is that she had a very subtle sense of humor, and I don't want that to be lost.

Sister Anne Buckley, BVM

You may have heard that Edissa was a very good cleaner. I had a great blessing in my life. When Edissa retired from Wright Hall, I followed her. Thank you, Edissa, for everything.

Sister Mary Martens, BVM

I visited with Edissa periodically here at Mount Carmel Bluffs. The quiet person that she was, but the loving way she spoke of all the family, particularly the cousins, the nieces and nephews. I met Kevin when he sat with her on one of the final days of her life. It's a wonderful outpouring of family love that she gave you so often in telling BVM friends about family members. It is wonderful to see so many here today and to hear from some of you today. Thank you for all you meant to Edissa.

Sister Ann Credidio, BVM, Guayaquil, Ecuador

Edissa was my pray-er! With each visit to Dubuque, we shared stories about her life and the life of our Damien House mission in Ecuador. She loved to receive the handmade crafts made by the residents!

I feel so fortunate to have been home in Dubuque while Edissa was in hospice. When I went into her room, although her eyes were closed, I could see them moving as I thanked her for her prayers throughout the years. I told her that we were now praying for her on her journey home to God. She is now our Saint, and we shall pray to her! Rest in peace, our dear friend!

Sister Carol Spiegel, BVM

For many years, Edissa has lived with health challenges. Yet, it often seemed that she didn't let that interfere with having quality of life. What was her secret that she had such a high degree of acceptance? Whatever helped you, Edissa, thank you for your example. Now, may you enjoy the fullness of life.

Muriel Robertson, Former BVM Alonzo

Edissa and I were pew partners in the novitiate so we spent much time together. She was so excited when her nephew was born. [She didn't mention which nephew] that I named her "Unc" [for uncle] and have called her that ever since.

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

I have two very short memories of Edissa. We were traveling on a bus. There were three sisters I met on the bus, so I sat with Edissa. We had probably eight hours of conversation at various times with somebody I had never met. I was just delighted. One of the things she told me was the correct pronunciation of "Szczepanski." She said she didn't bother correcting people in the community because of the way it is spelled, it was too much trouble.

The other story, we had two projects teaching women to sew. She gave me her sewing machine for this project. I thought, "What a sacrifice! Could I give up a sewing machine?" She told me that it was kept clean, it was kept repaired, it was kept in good order. There was not a speck of dust on that machine. I don't remember which project that it went to, but I know they were glad to have such a well-maintained sewing machine. Sewing was her favorite hobby, but she had come to the point where she couldn't do this anymore. Just saying goodbye, I'm sure, was a sacrifice.