



Sharing of Memories of Donna (Blanche) Schauf BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, May 16, 2025

Sherry Robben, Sister

Sister Donna was a very good big sister and as we got older my children and I got closer to her with laughter and tears and many prayers.

Rene Huslig, Niece, Daughter of Sherry Robben

Sister Donna was my aunt. I looked up to her and admired her. As a child, I always enjoyed her stories from her time teaching in different places. I remember when she brought me a little wooden elephant from Africa. She was always thoughtful like that and remembered us on her journeys. It was so nice having her visit when she lived out of town. It was really special when she lived in Wichita, and we could see her more often and enjoy more time together. She will be deeply missed but remembered often and fondly. Thank you to all who took care of Sister Donna. We will forever be grateful.

Thomas Schauf, Brother

I'm Donna's baby brother. When I turned 70, she stopped introducing me as her baby brother.

My earliest memories of Donna were when the three of us were preteens. Dad would take us on summer vacations to places like Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, Estes National Park and Pike's Peak in Colorado, and Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri. The most vivid memory of our Colorado trip was that we had to be back at the motel by 1:00 p.m. every afternoon so that Dad could take a nap during the daily rain showers. Mama, Donna, Sherry, and I would play board games during Dad's siesta.

During some of her high school years at Mount Carmel [Academy], Donna was an elevator operator at a downtown department store. This was back when there were no automatic elevators. There was a manually opened gate on both the floor and the elevator side. There was a big giant handle that she turned to make the elevator go up and down.

During my last three years of high school, I had an eight-hour layover in Chicago between trains from Wichita, Kans., to Wisconsin. Each of the three years I made that journey, Donna was missioned in Chicago. I got to take 'The L' up to visit with her. I believe she was at St. Callistus in Chicago those years.

I got married in 1966. Donna visited us in each of the seven homes we lived in from 1966 to our last home. I remember a lot of laughter during those visits. She always seemed to genuinely enjoy herself. Always the educator, she taught us the dice game Zonk, which is still a favorite of the Tom Schauf family.

I always knew she was a lover of fun times, but it wasn't until her passing that I discovered what a party animal she was. Knowing that there was a "Welcome Home" celebration in heaven for Pope Francis, she asked to be invited to the festivities and God granted her wish.

Curtis Schauf, Nephew (Read by Thomas Schauf)

To many, she was a woman of faith, a teacher, a sister. But to me, she was my dad's oldest sibling and my fun, playful, storytelling, loving aunt. I have such warm memories of her visits to us in California. She wasn't the kind of adult who would just watch from the sidelines. She would get right in there with the kids playing, laughing, and always making us feel like we were the most important part of her day. One of my earliest memories of her was when she took us to see *E. T., Extra-Terrestrial* movie. I was just a little kid, and I remember turning to her at one point and whispering, "Aunt Donna, it's about to get scary." She just smiled and stayed right there with us. That was her way – calm, present, reassuring. She always made us feel safe and seen. Aunt Donna also had the best stories. She would talk about her life, the places she had been, the people she met. You could tell that she carried a real sense of wonder and joy with her. She lived a life full of purpose, curiosity and heart and she shared it generously with everyone around her. Even as a kid, I could sense how special she was. As I have grown older, I have only come to appreciate more just how much of a gift it was to have her in my life. Thank you, Aunt Donna, for your laughter, your kindness, your stories and your love. We'll miss you, but your spirit will be with us.

Rhonda Hageman, Niece, Daughter of Sherry Robben

Sister Donna was not only my aunt; she was my godmother. I thank her for all the prayers for my family and me. I would also like to thank her caregivers and fellow sisters. In July 2019, my sister Renee, my daughter Rebecca, and I, brought my mother to visit her sister, Sister Donna, in Dubuque. We had a great time on our visit to the Motherhouse. We took Sister Donna on some adventures. We went to a museum, watched barges move on the Mississippi River, and went to a winery which seemed to be in the middle of nowhere. I am so grateful that we were able to spend that precious time with Sister Donna.

My fondest memories growing up were when Sister Donna was in Kansas and we shared holidays and meals together. When it was time to wash the dishes, Sister Donna would want to hold a baby instead of doing dishes. When the babies were grown, she would ask the youngest child to sit on her lap. That became our joke about Sister Donna not doing dishes.

We love her and she will be deeply missed by our family.

Gwen Hall, Garden Plain, Kans., Friend

Sister Donna taught kindergarten to three of our children at the David Preschool in David, KY at a time when kindergarten wasn't available locally and her teaching role included driving a van to pick the children up for school and dropping them off afterwards. She helped our oldest child overcome a stuttering problem and was quick to celebrate his counting skills with odd and even numbers. I'll never forget him telling her, "But Sister Donna, that's how you keep score in basketball!" She also taught him to read. She put together Christmas programs and graduation celebrations at no cost for the parents using simple supplies for costumes and graduation hats. She affirmed the children's talents with written awards; our daughter, a gifted writer and graphic artist, got one for "Good Writing" in kindergarten. I can't help wondering how much that early affirmation led to her later school and professional success. Our third child described his kindergarten experience at age 5 as "the most funniest thing was when we did Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer Show." His graduation included a series of skits using nursery rhymes set to music and a rhythm band concert. A plaque awarded to Sister Donna that night commended her "gentle presence," an apt description of how she positively introduced the children of our little rural community to education. Several of our children's classmates went on to become teachers and, of the ones I know personally, her kind of gentleness permeates their work with children. Sister was a great comfort and guide to me as a young mother, and I suspect she was that to the other parents as well. May she rest in peace, and may her heavenly joy include knowing how greatly she influenced our lives and how dearly she is loved by us all!

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

I did not really know Donna until I came to Mount Carmel to serve in Support Services almost ten years ago. At that time, she was living here in the motherhouse. As I was getting settled, I was missing my charismatic prayer

group from San Francisco, so I thought that surely there must be some sisters who had been part of prayer groups in their parishes who might be interested in forming a group. Over the years, Donna and I and one or two others met regularly a couple of times a month for prayer and song and, surprisingly, given the charismatic tradition, with lots of quiet. It was just good to be "at prayer" together. As we brought our concerns for personal, congregational, and world needs, she regularly lifted up her brother Tom and sister-in-law, with all their health challenges. It was good to be able to support Donna and her family, whom she loved in this way.

Donna always impressed me as a sensitive, caring, gentle woman. She was quiet and unassuming, I never heard her calling attention to herself. In the last couple of years, as I came to visit her in Gables, I could see her strength waning. Eventually, she rarely left her room. But she was always welcoming and glad for the company. Pray for us now, Donna.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM

I lived in the Bootheel with Donna, Flo [Heflin] and Mary Frances [Reis], for one year. Early on we were invited by one of the three parishes that we served to a potluck and a game night. From what you heard this morning, you know that Donna had lots of gifts. I had a few gifts to share as well. But neither of us had the gift of art and drawing. We joined a group of parishioners who were playing the game of Pictionary. You picked a card with a word on it and had to draw while the others tried to guess what the word was. Well, I don't remember my word, but by the end of my drawing, someone said, "Well, it's a good thing you're not an art teacher." Donna's word was "rodeo." She draws this thing on the chalkboard. She turned around and people said, "What is that?" Donna says, "It's a horse." Somebody said, "That doesn't look like a horse." But she proudly said, "Well, that's what horses look like in Wichita."

Sister Roberta White, BVM

I didn't know Donna until I lived here at Mount Carmel. I've been here about seven years. Donna was in our cluster. She was a beautiful addition to our cluster. One time I remember how she really was an example and an inspiration to me. She came to the cluster and at the end when we were asking for petitions, she said, "Please pray for me. I think I need to move to Gables. I don't want to, but I think it might be time." We prayed together. In the next few weeks, that's what she decided. It was time for her to move. I am really so inspired, Donna. Thank you so much. You made decisions that were hard. Thank you for all your life with us and your sharings.

Mary Ann Fremgen, Mount Carmel Bluffs Volunteer, Former BVM

Many of you know me as a volunteer here. My first memories of Donna are from the time I moved here in 2018. During that time, we came to find out that we knew each other from long ago when we were both on the BVM Senate and served on the Government Committee together. The stories we told about that were very delightful.

My fondest memories of Donna are in relation to my volunteering with my little dog Bronx. When Donna lived in the Motherhouse, I was only visiting Marian Hall and Caritas Center, but we would see each other around. One day she said to me, "How is your dog, Brooklyn?" I said, "Donna, his name is Bronx, but I understand the association." Her memories, especially after moving to Gables, were really of her family. We would talk often about her family. Prior to that, I had met her sister and nieces. Again, it was Bronx who brought us together to chat and share about dogs.

Donna shared that one of the places where she lived - I don't remember where, either Kentucky or Missouri - that she would visit homes. Because there were a lot of stray dogs around, she wore high boots because they would always nip at her feet. She was so happy to have Bronx not nip at feet, but rather to be able to hold him, stroke him, and feel the peacefulness this wonderful dog is able to give to people. Our conversations in Gables would always end with, "I'll pray for you. You pray for me." Then, "Love you." Donna, I hope you are still praying for us.

Sister Mary Frances Reis, BVM

From our years together in Missouri's Bootheel, I like to think of Donna as a quiet, supportive person, always believing in the goodness of others, very generous and trusting! As health coordinator for HeadStart, she learned about the lives of poor children. One time during the Christmas season, she brought the children to the public library and asked the librarian to provide picture books about the Christmas story. Not a single child could recognize the crib scene or story, which she then told them for the first time. This experience touched her deeply!

Sister Veronica Higgins, BVM

I knew Donna in the Chicago area. When I moved to Mount Carmel, there were many jigsaw puzzle corners. The second floor of the Motherhouse has a turret at each end. At one end, there was a table behind the chairs just big enough to do some really good jigsaw puzzles. So, while the others were in the Community Room on first floor, Donna and I used the table upstairs. It turned out to be just the two of us. She could do half the puzzle in ten minutes. It would take me ten weeks. She could do it my shape, by color, by lettering. You probably could turn it over to the back side and she would have been able to do it quickly.

I experienced her as a very spiritual person. She did chair exercises with great dedication. Unassuming, in the best, purest sense of the word. I will miss her. She made a great contribution to us on the hill.

Sister Kathleen Mullin, BVM

I got to know Donna in the 1970s through spiritual things. Sister Evarita Graham, BVM was in Fort Dodge, Iowa, at the time. She mentored both of us on our spiritual journey. I never lived with Evarita or Donna, except in the novitiate. I want to affirm that Donna was a seeker. She wanted to go deeper into her relationship with God, and she wanted to share her God with other people in whatever she did.

There was a reference by the family to a time when she was in Africa. When she left to give service, she took most of the clothes from her closet because she had heard that the people were in great need in the place they were going. I don't recall which country or city, but I do remember when she came home, she had to go to the Salvation Army and other thrift shops to get herself outfitted again.

Suzie Coulthard, BVM Associate Coordinator

Whenever Donna saw me, she always made sure to tell me how much she valued the work I and the rest of the coalition were doing against human trafficking. She would often ask me when I would be speaking next so that she could be in prayer for me. Whenever I sent out an urgent prayer request, she was sure to follow up.

Virginia Piecuch, Associate

Over the years I always felt close to Donna Schauf. We originally met when she was on the pastoral care staff at Marian Hall. She was a wonderful, caring person who devoted herself to you when you spoke to her. Often, we had lunch together in the Caritas dining room to catch up on our news. In her sweet, quiet way, she could perk up your day with her engaging listening and her beautiful smile.

Grace Mendez, BVM Associate

I wanted to share with you how Donna touched my life. A few years ago (I want to say nine), at an associate summer retreat on joy, Donna brought a smiling baby picture she found in a magazine to represent joy to her. My grandson Aaron had been born the January before, and I showed her his laughing baby picture. She asked for a copy that she wanted to keep in her room to make her smile and think of joy. I shared that picture, and she reminded me of it every time we visited.

Lois Marie Gaskill

Rest in peace. She will be sorely missed by this former student.