



## **Sharing of Memories of Pat (Frederick Mary) Nolan, BVM**

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Aug. 19, 2025

### **Sister Mary Nolan, BVM and Sister Donna Day, SL**

This poem was one of Pat's many favorites. "When Great Trees Fall" by Maya Angelou.

When great trees fall,  
rocks on distant hills shudder,  
lions hunker down  
in tall grasses,  
and even elephants  
lumber after safety.

When great trees fall  
in forests,  
small things recoil into silence,  
their senses  
eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die,  
the air around us becomes  
light, rare, sterile.  
We breathe, briefly.  
Our eyes, briefly,  
see with  
a hurtful clarity.  
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,  
examines,  
gnaws on kind words  
unsaid,  
promised walks  
never taken.

Great souls die and  
our reality, bound to  
them, takes leave of us.  
Our souls,  
dependent upon their  
nurture,  
now shrink, wizened.  
Our minds, formed  
and informed by their  
radiance, fall away.  
We are not so much maddened  
as reduced to the unutterable ignorance of  
dark, cold  
caves.

And when great souls die,  
after a period peace blooms,  
slowly and always  
irregularly. Spaces fill  
with a kind of  
soothing electric vibration.  
Our senses, restored, never  
to be the same, whisper to us.  
They existed. They existed.  
We can be. Be and be  
better. For they existed.

### **Sister Kate Hendel, BVM**

Mary asked that I share this story. I received word of Pat's final journey during a lunch break when I was attending the "Women and Water Symposium" in Hayward, Wisc., a few weeks ago. We were returning for the afternoon session. Because of the surroundings, I took the tobacco and performed the smoke ritual, offering a prayer for Pat in her final journey. I held the tobacco in my left hand because it's closest to the heart and then dropped it over the burning logs in the center of the lodge. A small cedar branch was added which created a sizzling sound and sparks rose out of the ashes, symbolizing our prayers rising to the Creator. Our indigenous brothers and sisters believe that when we offer tobacco, the request is binding on the receiver.

During most of the gathering, I had the good fortune of being right in front of that fire. That afternoon, I was very aware of the prayer offered and the smoke that continued to rise through the opening in the lodge.

Ironically, the speaker that afternoon was a poet. How appropriate! Pat so loved poetry and taught it most of her life. I remember wishing she could be there. I found it difficult not to think about her as one poem after another was read.

The use of phones is not appropriate in the lodge of the indigenous peoples. Finally, I could no longer resist the temptation; I slipped my phone out of my bag, and as inconspicuously as possible, looked to see if any updates appeared among my emails. Sure enough, Pat had completed her journey. My first thought was, "She is with all of us gathered and is listening to this poetry. I smiled and welcomed her to this sacred circle.

Migizikwe, also known as Mildred "Tinker" Schuman among her family and friends and those of us attending the Women and Water gathering, shared a poem. I couldn't help but hear Pat speaking to us.

My dear ones,  
I am thankful to each of you  
For the love and the support in my  
Final Earth hours.

I am happy and guess what?  
I can be wherever I want to be.  
I'll be with you in spirit.  
Don't be afraid, as I am not far. . .  
Chances are daily life thought.

Although some of you haven't seen  
Or talked to me a lot. I often  
Thought of you each and prayed  
for each of you especially  
And your [loved ones.]  
And I will continue to do so.

### **Norm Freund, BVM Associate**

The fall of 1981 was an interesting time at Clarke College. Clarke was much smaller then and yet there were six new full-time people starting that fall. They included [BVMs] Mary Ann Zollmann, Kate Hendel, Pat Nolan, and me. Pat used to joke that we were the Clarke "Set of 1981." For the first three years, Pat and I were roommates. We shared an office – 367 Rose O'Toole Hall. That room had been subdivided into two offices that were separate rooms. But the wall between Pat and I was plywood. When you talked, especially if you had a Germanic voice, you could be heard on either side. Though we never discussed who would answer the phone when it rang, it became my habit to grab it first and to say, "English. Philosophy. Norm speaking." If Pat heard after a moment, "Hi, Honey," she knew it wasn't for her and I was talking to Marabeth, my wife. If it wasn't for me, I said, "Pat, it's for you." We did that for three years until the fire ended that joint phone relationship. But then, we spent the rest of our time together serving at Clarke on the same floor in the same building, Mary Josita Hall.

I remember in 2001 at the Honors Banquet, Pat and I were being recognized for 20 years of service. [BVM] Sara McAlpin was being recognized for 40 years of service. When Pat and I were called up together, I quietly said to Pat, "Pat, it takes two of us to make one Sara McAlpin." Pat chuckled.

Over the years, I learned many things from her and other BVMs. I learned that being passionate about teaching because of what you got out of it, was not the most important thing. I learned that service was important. Students and their futures were important. Working at an institution united in mission behind the core values

was a privilege. On August 5<sup>th</sup>, that phone rang one more time. "English. Philosophy. Pat, it's for you." May she know a joy and a peace beyond our imagination for an eternity with our Creator.

### **Sue Dolter, Graduate Writing Assistant, Clarke University**

I am a deviant. You heard that correctly. Admitted and unapologetic. Deviant. To whom do I owe much of my status as a deviant? Pat Nolan.

In 1973, this Clarkie, English major, secondary ed and history minor, was given to Pat Nolan as her student teacher. Pat gifted me with autonomy despite my ignorance, despite my lack of skill, despite my lack of experience. She let me have a class, a class that, in those days, was called "Black Literature." She didn't invent that for Clarke. She invented it when she was teaching at Wahlert High School.

The problem was that in those days, very little literature by Black authors was included in literature anthologies. So, one day Pat said, "You are going to have to find some material to teach this class." 1973. Did I go to the internet? No, I went to the Clarke library into the stacks and gathered materials. She asked me to construct the unit, so I did. We didn't even have xerox machines back then. We had mimeograph machines. Do you remember the purple copies? They would smell after running them through the copy machine. So, when I was given charge of the unit and after umpteen hours of work, I put together a packet that had about fifteen pieces of work, mostly poetry, by our noted Black authors. To make the unit look good, I sat down with those purple ditto masters and a pen, and I laboriously drew figures to illustrate my unit, in addition to laboriously typing all of those poems. I ran them off using different colored paper. Anything to garner attention from teenagers, right?

The day I introduced the unit to the students, I told them what we would be covering in the days, and perhaps weeks ahead. By that time, the class was over. The students did not look particularly impressed at the amount of effort I had put into this particular task. When they got up to leave, one student left the packet underneath the desk. I was crestfallen. Pat noticed the expression, took me aside and said, "Sue, don't ever put more effort into your work than what you think students are going to derive from it." I'm here to say, Pat, I never followed that advice. That became my routine – to do the best that I could, all the time, regardless of any kind of payback.

Pat also taught me about choice. She said at one point, "Give them choices." This in an era when the teaching of English was all about assigning the reading and then having students answering the questions at the end of the story. If anything will deaden an appreciation of literature, it is the questions at the end of the story. So, Pat said, "Give them choices." That advice I did follow throughout my entire career

When I was teaching in the Western Dubuque Community Schools, *Romeo and Juliet* was on the tenth-grade curriculum. I taught the lesson. For their culminating project, I said to students, "I would like you to respond in some way to this story. How you respond is your choice. You will share your response with the class." The students, of course, were dumbfounded. We never answered the questions after the play. One young woman came up afterwards and said to me, "I would like to compose a piece of piano music. I've been taking piano lessons for ten years." This was a fifteen-year-old. About a week later, I took the group down to the vocal music room. We sat on the floor and Jackie Smith played an original composition that she entitled "Sweet Sorrow." She had the choice to do that in an era when choice, to a certain degree, was also regarded as deviating from the norm. In retrospect, all positive change seems to be a matter of deviance. Thank you, Pat, for making a deviant out of me.

### **Katie Fischer, Friend**

Nobody mentioned Pat's cooking, so I had to stand up. Early on, I seemed to follow Pat around quite a bit. Pat hired me at Wahlert High School to teach English. When Pat left, I became chair. Pat hired me at Clarke College to teach English. When Pat left, I became chair. Then, Pat conned me into teaching Creative Writing at the Roberta Kuhn Center. This time she didn't leave. I did, so that was different. Here with me are my five adult children and my husband Jerry. Pat was our family friend. She came to weddings, baby showers, and regularly,

especially when the kids were younger, Pat would come over carting mashed potatoes, roast beef, pies and cookies. The kids all remember the cookies. She just embraced us, all of us. She was such a blessing. When our kids heard that she had passed on, they wanted me to extend their greetings to all of you and their appreciation for what a grand, grand person she was in all of our lives.

### **Christina Castaneda, Former Student**

I went to Clarke College because my mom, Sheila, taught at Clarke. Mom got to be in the Stonehouse Women and I got to pop in a few times. I would like to share an eleven-word sentence that Sister Pat said in class. It was an African American Literature class. I don't recall which piece we were reading, but there was a passage displaying some kind of incredible misjustice. She paused, put her hands on the book and there was a big moment of silence. She looked at the class and said, "If that doesn't bother you, work on it so it does." Those were breadcrumbs for me understanding that there is a place to put disruption in our hearts, to listen to my intuition, and to know there is a place, an outlet, be it in art, in writing, in speaking up, in activism, in using my voice for social justice. I really thank Sister Pat for that. I just wanted to be around her all the time. She felt like a friend. Going into my 20<sup>th</sup> year of teaching now, I think about that sentence often and I certainly do hand it down to my students. Thank you, Sister Pat. I love you!

### **Rachel Daack, Friend & Clarke University Colleague**

A few of us were in a reading group together. There were a lot of women being angry. It really was our group. These were smart women. We discussed very challenging things. Then Pat would laugh. Oh my, could she laugh! Her laugh is not like any other laugh that I could describe. One thing that she taught me was this beautiful, ringing, joyful, "I've got to get to the bathroom fast" laugh.

### **Jeanie Lorentzen**

My story is very secular. How many of you remember Sonia Hickson? If you knew Pat, you probably remember Sonia. Sonia was my friend and Pat was my friend because of Sonia. She had qualities way beyond teaching. She was so warm, so loving, and so authentic. You could talk about anything with Pat. We had many, many discussions at Sonia's house. As Sonia aged, Pat lived there a lot. She took care of so many things. She was a wonderful nurse. She was a wonderful cook. Believe me, I got a lot of those meals. I went there often for dinners, and they were always delicious. She was always bringing people together. We just had a lot of really good, solid fun together. She could make something fun out of almost anything.

However, it came to one point, I said, "I never studied poetry." She said, "Well, we're going to change that." She put me in her class at the Roberta Kuhn Center, and I learned about Mary Oliver like I never knew before. Pat was a dear and loving friend. I love her with all my heart. When it came time for Sonia's funeral, Pat called and said, "Would you sing for Sonia's funeral?" I said, "Whoa, that's a big order, but I'll do it." It was a joy. They were such dear friends, and they taught me a lot about friendship and just how really, really important it is in our lives. I love her. God bless her. May she rest in peace.

### **Sister Mary Elizabeth Galt, BVM**

This happened a long time ago. Pat and I were on the Government Committee at the Senate. At the time I was teaching first grade. On the committee were all the PhDs from Clarke and Mundelein Colleges. They would often get into very intense conversations about decisions and how our government should be designed. Being a first-grade teacher, I was working hard to follow what was going on. One time, Pat leaned over to me and said, "What are two nice girls like us doing here?"

### **Kelly Patricia Rinehart**

Patsy Nolan was my first best friend. From the moment I came into the world, Patsy was looking out for me. Officially as my godmother, but unofficially as a bonus grandma for me and my sister. She taught me how to embrace all that I am and enjoy life to the fullest.

Growing up, we would head to Dubuque to visit Grandma and Patsy, so there's not a core memory I have of Dubuque that doesn't include her. She would play with us, teach us how to cook, and was always interested in what we were doing - even if that meant listening to two rambunctious kids sing along to pop-hits in the car for several hours. I remember going to Clarke with her, attending church, moving her into a new apartment on the hottest day of the year, celebrating her Golden Jubilee as a BVM, and surprising her for her 70th birthday at Anita and Rosemarie's house. From my smallest memories to the biggest, Patsy was always there.

She would always call on my birthday and tell me to not get into too much trouble, and I'd respond that she didn't have anything to worry about because I'd get into just the right amount of trouble. She proudly displayed pictures of my family on her fridge like we were her own children, bringing us into her family so that Tim, Peggy, and Mary were my family too.

One of my favorite things was calling Patsy to just chat. It could be about anything and oftentimes covered a vast range of topics from politics, papers I was writing in school, to Food Network, TV personalities, to what I was reading, what I was up to with friends, and at times, incredible grief as she helped me process losing my Grandma and then my dad - even when she was processing the losses herself.

Patsy also taught me about patience, friendship, and having a strong, unwavering belief in what I set out to do. She never judged, always laughed, and made sure everything was taken care of before indulging in the finer things. I hope everyone gets to have someone like Patsy who just loved so deeply and without judgement - a true safety net. I'll look for her in the sun (and in a glass of brandy) and hope that I make her proud every day. I'll miss her forever, but grateful to have had the most perfect godmother.

### **M. Trinity (Rosales) Kelly, Former BVM**

I would like to share a few of my memories of Sister Pat Nolan with her sister Mary Nolan and the BVM Community.

Pat Nolan and I entered the same year 1955. We went through our novitiate and Scholasticate together. After graduation, three of us from the same set - Pat, Carol (Molyneaux) Dillon, and myself - were missioned at The Immaculata H.S. in Chicago. We were assigned as Freshman homeroom teachers. My best memory of Pat was her beautiful smile and striking appearance as a young BVM sister. She was a gifted teacher and friend. My condolences to her sister, Mary Nolan, also a dear friend to me and Dennis.

### **Lori Ritz, BVM Associate**

I first met Pat when I was the Director of BVM Life and Mission in 2017. We were celebrating Catholic Schools Week, and I needed three sisters to judge the essays written by high school students. I approached Pat, whom I did not know--and without hesitation she said yes. That began my short visits to Pat in Gables each time I came to Dubuque. I would stop in just for a few minutes, but always left with a smile and warm heart. Thanks, Pat, for the moments and words we shared.

### **Maggie McMahon Wood**

Pat Nolan (Sister Frederick Mary) was 24 when she was my freshman English teacher at Immaculata High School. It does not surprise me that she later taught English at Clarke University. She was a very good teacher, giving us an essay to write every week and correcting it. (There must have been 150 essays she corrected every week.) This was in addition to the literature we needed to read. I asked for help to write better, which she provided. I saw her at Mount Carmel when I was there for another event. She was 80 at the time and I was 70. She remembered me, where I sat in class, and some comments I made. I was amazed at her memory. I am so indebted to her and all the wonderful high school teachers who taught me.

### **Marty Roddy**

Pat was the head of the English Department when I studied at Clarke and had taught my older siblings at Wahlert HS. One of the kindest and empathetic teachers I ever had.

**Mike Hager, Nephew**

God bless you, Aunt Pat! So happy you are now in heaven with Fred, Dot, Tim and Peggy. Thank you for all the great work you did for those in need! What a wonderful example you set! May you rest in peace, but knowing you, you will have a party with all your family, friends, Jesus and the saints!

**Sharon Kress**

I met Pat when I audited a short story class at Clarke. As the two "elders" in the class we related to such things as "housedresses" and events surrounding World War II. She was an outstanding teacher, and I loved the class--so much so that when I saw she was teaching poetry and later short stories at Roberta Kuhn [Center], I immediately signed up and enjoyed at least 2-3 years of each. There was such a great feeling of community and acceptance in those classes that I remember nearly all the people who were there--where they sat, their insights, their writings. Those poems or brief stories were not required but many participants were inspired by Pat to share. I also remember some great discussions (usually after class) about religion and spirituality. She was a kind and wonderful woman.

**Sister Carol Spiegel, BVM**

When my sister Ginnie moved to Dubuque to teach at Wahlert High, she joined [BVM] Barbara Cerny and Pat in an apartment on Belmont Street, across the street from the statue of Bishop Loras. (They always said he was pointing, "two doors down.")

Pat was part of two events, in particular. She was with us the day we met Fred Woodard, whom Ginnie later married. Ginnie had received a state teaching award from the University of Iowa, given from Fred's office, and we met Fred afterwards. That fall, Ginnie began graduate studies at the University of Iowa and got acquainted with Fred's family.

Later, Pat hosted a dinner that included Fred and his wife Barbara. Had Pat not offered that meal, we would never have met Barbara, because she died before Ginnie finished her studies.

Thank you, Pat, for all the ways you reached out in love and friendship. You were a delightful part of our lives.

**Hannah Little Spalding**

I always looked forward to seeing her at set gatherings. Heaven - how great to be there on the 70th Anniversary of becoming a BVM! What a fine Nolan family gathering it must be.

**Karen Kane-Herber**

Pat was my Advanced Writing instructor at Clarke. Her methods of teaching and the way she interacted with her students definitely affected the way I taught writing throughout my teaching career. How fun to encounter Pat again after I left the classroom and began work at Mount Carmel directing the Roberta Kuhn Center. Pat was a popular instructor, and her classes filled to the limit each semester. I usually called her during registration asking/begging her to take a few more past her limit because I knew how much her class meant to her students. Pat was smart, witty, sincere, and hilarious. Rest in peace mentor, friend, colleague...until we meet again.

**Brenda Duster Mosher**

Sister Pat brought joy and laughter everywhere she went! She was always an encourager, helping students to be better versions of themselves. On January 22, 1986, I wrote in my journal words she had shared with me that day: "Go out on a limb, take a risk, and just jump!" May she rest in poetic peace.

**Liz Johnson**

I met Sister Pat when I took her Short Fiction class as a junior at Clarke. While I had been an avid reader entering the course, she taught me how to simultaneously love and critique writing— how breaking down the structure of narrative, of the mechanics, could aid my understanding of why I enjoyed some writers more than others.

She also had such a love for all of us in the course that shone through her teaching and her interactions with us. I left that course a better reader, a better writer, a better human. Rest easy, Sister Pat.

**Travis Gabehart**

Sister Pat Nolan was my Cornerstone teacher during my freshman year at Clarke in fall 2008. Although I was raised Catholic for most of my early life, I had never attended a Catholic school. It was really cool to have a nun for a teacher, even though they didn't wear the habit I saw in so many movies.

I remember one of the first major assignments was our "This I Believe" essays. She really took interest in my thesis and encouraged me in ways I hadn't previously encountered. This was a very powerful moment for me, and I'm grateful for the confidence she instilled in me as I began my time at Clarke. I can also recall Sister Pat's frustration with our class because so many didn't know how to properly use "it's" and "its" in our writing. We may have been the class that hastened Sr. Pat's retirement plans!

God Bless Sister Pat and all the other women who consecrated their lives to Christ and devoted their lives to serving students. May eternal rest be granted unto thee. Ad Jesum per Mariam.