



Sharing of Memories of Elizabeth (Elizabeth Mary) Huber, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Sept. 9, 2025

Sister Susan Coler, BVM

My first encounter with Liz was my sophomore geometry class at Our Lady of Peace High School. She was soft-spoken, but a good teacher, and made geometry way more interesting than algebra. When I moved back to Minnesota as a BVM, I got to know Liz as a member of our Minnesota community.

What I remember about Liz is that she really loved her work teaching and tutoring Latino teens in math and computers—especially her work with Sister Giovanni at the Guadalupe Area Project in Saint Paul. Although soft-spoken, Liz was firm in her beliefs and resourceful. She lived simply. Liz was a devoted caretaker for her priest brother through his death and talked of her family including nieces and nephews with affection. As she moved more into retirement, her meditative spirituality and appreciation of beauty was reflected in her love of icons and photography, which she shared with many. I can imagine her excitement that now she is face to face with those people of spirit honored in her icons.

Sister Marcella O'Rourke, BVM, Set of 1955

Even though we knew someone in the novitiate, and then for the seventy years following, we often discover that we didn't really get to know them individually. However, my opportunity to get to know Liz came in our later years here at Mount Carmel Bluffs and I am grateful. When I moved to Gables, I was grateful to Liz for welcoming me and introducing me to the others at the dining room table. She enabled sharing and conversation for me as we shared breakfast and lunch.

I so much appreciate and admire her beautiful artistic ability, especially in drawing original icons. She studied and mastered this skill in Eastern art. Her beautiful artistic cards with pictures of her icons, her nature photographs, and her other art have been a blessing to send and to receive. She has been very generous in sharing these with her set. Today we're able to use and appreciate her icons in the community.

Because Liz was an introvert, and I was never on the same mission nor in a city where she was, I am grateful to know her now. In recent weeks, it became apparent that Liz was less and less able to respond. Even though she left us just six days before our jubilee celebration, we know she is celebrating in heaven.

Liz Huber Harley, Niece

My brother John is here. We also have a sister Katherine who the family calls Mimi. She lives in Madrid, Spain. She couldn't make it, but she did send me a brief memory of our aunt to share. I thought I would address a part of my aunt that you may not know as well, that is as a daughter, a sister, and an aunt.

To understand Aunt Rita, you need to know a little bit about her mother Elizabeth. Our grandmother was the youngest. She had eleven older brothers. My grandmother was always tough and knew how to get her own way. She was very firm and assertive. I think those characteristics also passed on to my aunt.

Both loved photography. Many of the pictures displayed in the back were photos my grandmother took. She thought nothing of making her three children stand in the middle of the street during a snowstorm in Iowa for 20 minutes while she posed the perfect picture.

My grandmother loved getting a deal. She raised three children essentially on her own for most of her life. Her husband was a railroad mail clerk who passed away with young children at home. My aunt also loved getting a deal. She would always tell me about them.

You know her birth name as Rita Marie. Actually, that was not her birth name. Her original birth name was Ella. About two weeks after she was born a circus came to Sioux City and the elephant's name was Ella. My grandmother changed her name immediately to Rita Marie.

My aunt had two brothers. Our dad Robert "Bob" was the oldest. Leo was the middle child. We called him "Joe." He was always "Uncle Joe." Our family has a weird thing about names. Nobody's called what they were born. They were devoted to one another. My dad and his brother were devoted to my aunt. They sat with her through much of her chemotherapy for ovarian cancer. They were just by her side. She was also devoted to them. I think she was particularly close to my uncle probably because they both were very contemplative. A house full of three children is not particularly contemplative.

As we grew up and became even more boisterous, there was a Catholic retreat center not far from my parents' home. Both my aunt and uncle would always choose, for some reason, to stay in the retreat house and not with my parents. I can't understand why!

My uncle became a priest. He asked my dad to go to bat for him. They were both at Iowa State. My dad did go to bat with his mother about agreeing to let Joe become a priest. My grandmother sent all three children to Catholic schools even though she had this love-hate relationship with the Catholic Church. She wasn't super excited about Joe becoming a priest, but she supported it.

My aunt was still very young and in college when she asked my dad to go to bat for her to become a nun. My dad said, "I'll make you a deal. You must finish college and then I'll get Mom to agree to it."

My first memory of my aunt was when she swooped into my parents' house in this black head-to-toe habit. She had no hair, no legs. I remember wondering, "Who is this?" As a child, I was grateful when the BVMs gave up the habit because then she became a person to me.

I come from a long line of women who don't like to cook. My aunt was no exception. She loved Lunds Grocery Store in the Twin Cities. She would get take-out food all the time. When she was taking care of Grandma Huber, she took her every day to the Sioux City Hospital for dinner because she didn't want to cook. When my brother and I helped clean out her apartment in Saint Paul when she moved here, there were closets full of take-out containers. However, she did have two dishes that she made, as my brother reminded me. She made ice box pickles, which were sliced cucumbers and about four cups of sugar with them, and a seven-layer desert. We both remember those fondly.

She also had this expression “To die for!” There were a few things she just loved. One was the turtle pie from Café Latte in the Twin Cities, and the other was ice cream. She and two brothers loved ice cream. There was a place in the Twin Cities that gave you giant ice cream cones which she and her brothers enjoyed. Lastly, she loved See’s candy. Every year we would send her See’s candy. If we forgot, she would let me know. “Oh, my birthday is coming up.” In honor of that, I picked up some See’s candy for all of you so you could have one last piece for her.

My aunt had a really caring nature. You heard in the eulogy how much she cared for her students and they for her. I witnessed that. She and I were driving in a snowstorm. It was cold and the snow was swirling. She kept looking at me, rolling down the window, looking at me, and rolling it back up. I said, “Aunt Rita, what are you doing? It’s freezing!” She replied, “My car leaks carbon monoxide and I just wanted to make sure you are not getting sleepy.” She cared for me.

I know about the Guadalupe school where she had her picture taken with President Bill Clinton. She never realized that his arm was around her until her brothers pointed it out. She was so mortified that she took the picture away.

Aunt Rita was a force of nature. She just got things done. She had this huge former doctor’s office in the Twin Cities that she used as her art studio. She told me she got a deal on it because no doctors wanted to be in that part of town. Every single room had different art supplies and books. There was the watercolor room, the color pencil room, etc. My kids – I have three children – came out to the Twin Cities to do a canoeing trip in northern Minnesota. They were about 3, 6, and 8. They thought it would be so great to take them to her art studio. She loved high school and college students. She didn’t have a lot of experience with young children. She set up this art project that involved blowing India ink from a straw. My kids finished the art project in five minutes. She commented, “This was supposed to take two hours.” Anyway, she gave it her best.

As she grew older, when my dad was still alive, he kept saying to her, “Sister, what’s going to happen to your art studio? Sister, what are you going to do with the art supplies? Sister, what are you going to do with the icons? Sister, what are you going to do with all these cards? You can’t leave it to your superiors.” Well, Sister Kathy [Kandefer], John, our sister Mimi and I spent a few very, very cold days in January in the Twin Cities going through art supplies. Thank you so much, Sister Kathy! I am sorry that it did fall on your shoulders. It was a bonding experience for us.

My aunt loved combining her faith and art, which she passed on to me. I was an art teacher. I’m also a person of faith. We had lovely conversations about that. I would search really hard to find the perfect Christmas present for her. One year I found a calendar from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It was photos of icons. This was perfect! I sent it to her. It gets there a few days before Christmas. She calls me December 20th, “I love my Christmas present!” “Aunt Rita, you weren’t supposed to open it until Christmas.” “Oh, it’s already cut up and I’m turning them into icons.” It sounds like many of us were recipients of her icons and cards. I’m sure there are still cards to be given out. You will have them to send to people and think of my aunt.

Her memory was sharp until the very end. She remembered my three grandchildren – their names and ages. That was pretty great. I can’t even remember that!

In closing I would like to read a quote by Henri Nouwen. Both she and I shared the enjoyment of Henri Nouwen. “People who have known the joy of God point each other to flashes of light here and there and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God. They discover that there

are people who heal each other's wounds, forgive each other's offenses, share their possessions, foster the spirit of community, celebrate the gifts they have received, and live in constant anticipation in the full manifestation of God's glory."

Katherine Lowe, Niece, Madrid, Spain (*Read by Liz Huber Harley, Niece*)

A meaningful memory of Aunt Ria for me was her interest in my husband and I choosing to send my boys to the Friends school. We spoke at length on the value of Quaker education and what resonated with Quakerism for her as a devoted Catholic sister. I enjoyed our deep conversations on spirituality within this realm, including discussions on books she had read on Quaker beliefs and practices. This led to one Christmas when I gifted to her a well-known book on Quaker education. I will always appreciate her deep interest and respect in our boys attending a Friends school. I will treasure my memories of our long and thoughtful discussion on Quaker education.

Judy Booth Andrews, Former Student, Our Lady of Peace, Class of 1959

Sister Mary Elizabeth was one of the biggest formation forces in my high school years at OLP. She supported me and made learning fun. That was one of the biggest reasons I entered the BVMs after graduation. Thank you, Elizabeth!

Sister Laverne Dolphin, BVM, Set of 1955

Liz was a member of our 70th Jubilee set who celebrated so joyously on Sunday. We had hoped and prayed that she would be with us, but it was not to be. Liz had been with us during our monthly birthday parties and always joined in the festivities until she was no longer able to come. We missed her. She was a wonderful artist of icons and had a collection of amazingly beautiful flowers photographed by her and generously shared. No doubt, Liz had a joyous celebration in heaven with our recently deceased set members Pat Nolan and Donna Schauf, and all who have gone before us. Rest in peace, Liz.

Sister Anne Buckley, BVM

I met Liz when we shared an experience at Stonehill [Care Center in Dubuque]. I'm not sure why she was there, but I heard she was down the hall. I was there because I got a new knee. I went down and met her. She was the loveliest person. Honestly, I thought I had known her forever. Our opening song, "Hail Mary: Gentle Woman," was so perfect for her. She was the loveliest person I could meet and the sunshine in my rehab.

Sister Jacquelyn Cramer, BVM

Ann, I am glad to mention "Hail Mary: Gentle Woman." It struck me as we began this morning how perfect that song is for the woman that I knew. I didn't really know Liz for a long time, but when I visited her in Minnesota about 10 years ago, she was in the middle of her exploration of painting icons. We went to her studio where everything was out and displayed. There was a vast difference between some of them. A lot of the icons were in the traditional, solemn expression of saints and other holy people. Then there were others that expressed tenderness, warmth, and even a low level of energy moving forward. My favorite is Moses at the burning bush. The expression on his face is very tender and expectant. He is taking his sandals off to follow the way. I thought it was evocative of who Liz was. She let me take this one home. It sits on my desk all the time right at my left hand.

Sister Brigid Mary Hart, BVM

My memories of Liz are more recent. The first one is a lesson I need to learn from Liz. It is the discipline and patience with which she worked on the icons. She used egg tempera paint and gold leaf, both

were very, very challenging. When Liz was thinking of moving to Dubuque, I was living in the Applewood apartments. We thought maybe Liz would like to have a two-bedroom so she could have a studio, but Applewood was too much for Liz. This summer I shared a book by William Hart McNichols, who is an iconist. It was very interesting as I looked back. She said that she had no time to waste on that type of book at this point. I think she was very much in preparation for her death. Liz, I am most grateful for those gifts to me and to us, and to know that you are in the embrace of God.

Sister Patricia Kerz, BVM

I sat at the table with Liz in the dining room. There were six BVMs that sat at our table. On the Feast of the Sacred Heart, Liz came in and sat down and started singing "O Sacred Heart of Jesus." So, we all joined in the singing. She must have had a lot of devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

I'm going to share a kind of quirky memory. I was doing the sewing and mending for Sisters. Somewhere back in April 2024, I remember that two pair of black jeans came to me to repair. I learned that Liz was concerned that they were now too tight around the waist, so she had taken a pair of unfortunately, obviously dull scissors, and while wearing the slacks, had simply sliced and gnawed in a jagged manner through the waistband and down about four inches, so that it opened the whole front. The note affixed from the laundry person said, "Can you *do something* with these?" Well, I went to talk to Liz, and I even teased her a bit about the "hacking and whacking" job she had done; she did give me a wry smile. She then agreed with my proposal to do some repair to the two sides of the open gash and to add a piece of black elastic to keep the two sides of the cut waistband from flopping open.

However, once the finished products received her approval, I learned there were *seven* more pair of exactly the same color and design, and she wanted me to alter all of them in the same manner. You guessed it – over a 2-month period, I did them all, but with a bit more care about where the opening was located and how it was cut. You might ask, as I did, why not just get a larger pair? Liz was *convinced* that there was none available in the next larger size in exactly that same design, fabric and manufacturer, and those she had, she wanted altered. I suspect that she continued wearing those altered pairs of jeans for a long time. This was one of the funny things we did together. Thanks, Liz.

On one of the days that I sat quietly and prayed with Liz as she was dying, I looked through her copy of Selected Poems of Jessica Powers, reading the ones she had marked with a tiny blue tab. I found her pencil markings of parts that struck her. I will finish with the part of the final section of a poem entitled "Wanderer" that she had bracketed:

*How did I ever come then to the light? ...
Simple the answer lies: down cliffs of pain,
through swamps and desert, thicket and terrain,
oh, Someone came and found me.*

Yes, Liz, Someone (as Jessica Powers wrote with a capital "S") -- Someone came and found you and wrapped you into LOVE eternal. And now you are found ... forever.

Sister Roberta White, BVM

I have to tell you that Sean Bradley [Spiritual Care Minister] had an art exhibition for Liz and it was beautiful. We were able to go through Gables and see her art exhibit. Thank you, Sean! Thank you, Liz! It was a beautiful gift she gave us.

Sister Kathleen Mullen, BVM

I am speaking for JoAnn O'Connell, BVM. JoAnn and Liz were both at Our Lady of Peace High School throughout the 1960s. They had some contact in the following years. Before the pandemic, there was a group at Our Lady of Peace who had a reunion to which JoAnn was invited and decided to go. JoAnn was thrilled with the visit she had with Liz.

One day here at Mount Carmel Bluffs, I was walking through Gables and encountered Liz. During our visit she asked, "How's JoAnn doing?" I responded, "We can go over there right now and find out." She said, "Oh no, you don't have to do that. I can wheel myself there. And she did a couple of times. Although JoAnn has trouble remembering details, she does remember how nice it was, how generous it was, of Liz to come and visit. Thank you, Liz, for your kindness and your caring.

Francie Sullivan

I knew Sister Elizabeth during her time living in Mendota Heights, Minn., with the Visitation Sisters. Since I had studied with BVM Sisters in grade school, we had some people in common. Plus, Sister was the most gentle and peaceful person one could know. Her kindness in community helped the Visitation Sisters at a difficult time when the Monastery was closing.

What always stood out to me was Sister's happy and peaceful approach to life. She was satisfied with her life. She cared for her brother in his illness then went on with her own vocation.

After the Monastery closed, Sister Elizabeth requested from the archbishop that she have access to the Eucharist each day. Archbishop Hebda was open to her request and Sister was able to receive the Eucharist every day in her own home, even when she didn't live in the Monastery. That was a precious gift to Sister.

Sister never forgot her students, and they never forgot her. I will miss Sister. May she rest in wonderful peace.

Nancy McCarville, BVM Associate & Former BVM

In 2016 Sister Liz and I first met at an associate commitment ceremony in Saint Paul. We discovered that we had in common a dear high school teacher friend, SM Joan Patricia Reilly, BVM. Both of us admired our history teacher, "JP" as we nicknamed her, and the impression that she made had lasted a lifetime for both of us. Liz knew Joan Patricia at Heelen High School in Sioux City, Iowa, and I at St. Edmond High in Fort Dodge. Iowa.

When I connected with Liz here at Mount Carmel Bluffs in 2023, we revisited our memories of and appreciation for Joan Patricia. And then we found that we were both involved in the genealogy of our families. I offered Liz my access to Ancestry.com and we unearthed more of her family history. Those were some good sessions. Though our time of getting to know each other was brief, we shared important things of our lives and that was meaningful to her and to me.

Sister Carol Spiegel, BVM

It's no secret that Liz was a quiet person. Yet, when we were both in the same Twin Cities Cluster and when we sat at the same table at Gables, I felt welcomed by her. In Saint Paul, Liz had a wonderful art gallery. She was able to share her sense of beauty and love of icons without being extroverted. Liz, thank you for bringing beauty into our world. And now, may you delight in being with the Source of All Beauty!

Anonymous Staff Member

The Liz Huber we knew since she moved to Mount Carmel Bluffs nearly four years ago was quiet, retiring, and yet fiercely independent. She was also generous.

I remember the look of quiet pride on her face as she sat beside a display we created one Monday morning in the Gables entryway. Many sisters had heard about her icons, but few had seen so many at once. Liz was anxious to share them with the community, and many responded to the invitation to come see them that day.

Liz shared her love of beauty, too. She made hundreds of greeting cards out of photos of flowers she had taken over the years. She generously offered these cards to others, and they now carry birthday messages, condolences, congratulations, and cheery notes. Their simple elegance lends a brightness that enhances every message.

Thank you, Liz, for sharing your love of beauty and of the holy. Now enjoy a cup of tea in heaven with all the poets you so admired!

Sister Joanne Lucid, BVM

Elizabeth chose and created a ministry of spirituality as she carefully provided the gift of icons to many. She cared about making icons available to all. I believe Elizabeth's desire was to live a life of contemplation and service through art and in teaching the poor or those unable to speak our language. Elizabeth was so quiet in her generosity that we did not know all that she was doing.

She was gifted in speaking Spanish and used this gift to teach math in Sister Giovanni's school. Those who lived in Saint Paul knew Sister Giovanni was a very strict and respected principal. Elizabeth worked well with her.

Elizabeth was a member of the Minnesota cluster for many years. She followed our discussions of community news and learned a lot from the cluster, as we did from her.

When she was in Saint Paul, she was good friends with [BVMs] Mary Stokes and Christine Athans. They would meet at a lovely place called Cafe Latte. This was a very special place for the three of them. We were happy that Elizabeth found such enjoyment in these meetings.

Elizabeth enjoyed living with the Visitation sisters. They were most generous to Elizabeth both in offering hospitality and giving her space to do her art. Elizabeth had a studio that she decorated with her icons. She enjoyed having people come and look at these icons. For this we are happy.

We will miss you Elizabeth and know you are experiencing the gift of joy as you reunite with your two brothers.

Sister Bernadette McManigal, BVM

When Liz moved from Minnesota to Dubuque, she resided at Stonehill for a while in order to get the therapy she needed. Periodically I used to visit her, and she spoke of how grateful she was for the therapy. She also talked about her art. I could sense that she considered art as a way of prayer and her connection to her Creator. Rest in peace, Liz, and enjoy that union with God that you longed for.