



Sharing of Memories of Patricia Ann (Marjorie) Donahoe, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Feb. 19, 2026

John Donahoe, Nephew

Growing up in the 1960s, I readily admit I was a little afraid of Sister Pat. That was the era of nuns in black habits, and Sister Pat carried a bit of that no-nonsense “oldest sibling” teacher vibe. But as I grew older, I slowly realized how wrong I was.

I watched Sister Pat’s care and compassion as she cared for my Granny Donahoe—her mother—during Granny’s final years. I saw the same devotion in the way she cared for my Uncle Tony. For a long time, I was a little puzzled by the relationship she had with my own dad, until I came to understand that they were cut from the same “stern” cloth. Over time, I broke their “code” and I saw just how much they cared for one another.

I was always pleased when Sister Pat remembered every one of my birthdays, even though, as an obstinate teenager, I pretended I didn’t really care. I saw Sister Pat warmly welcome my wife Julene into our extended family, and I saw the joy and pride she displayed when my daughters, Annie and Megan, were born. Sister Pat was a constant source of books that my girls loved, cementing their lifelong love of reading.

In the end, the firmness that once intimidated me became something I came to understand as quiet strength - strength rooted in loyalty, family, and an unwavering commitment to her spiritual faith. As the years passed, my childhood apprehension gave way to deep respect and gratitude, and I now realize how fortunate we all were to have Sister Pat’s steady presence guiding and caring for those she loved. Her example of devotion, generosity, and quiet compassion will remain with our family for generations.

Anne Donahoe, Daughter of John Donahoe

Sister Pat was my great aunt, my grandpa's sister. I have known Sister Pat my whole life, and she was my favorite pen pal. Even though I enjoyed sending letters and cards via the postal service, she was more than happy to email!

Sister Pat gave me a deep sense of the importance of service to God and to others. A clear voice and sense of self without pride. Being an engaged listener without anticipating a transaction. Living with intention, though action not words. I don't want to mourn what we have lost but remember a life well-lived and a very special person.

Megan Donahoe, Daughter of John Donahoe

Sister Pat was my grandpa’s sister. I just wanted to say I often exchanged emails with her and even through email, she always had so much warmth, joy, and curiosity about what we did and where we

were. Also, she had so much attention and empathy for so many different causes and people she knew and didn't know. I'm really going to miss her.

Dan Donahoe, Nephew

The eulogy was great, but I probably need to make a correction to it. I had asked her how she came to be a BVM. She said that when choosing her order, she actually considered joining the Sisters of Mercy. I think that was based on her mother being a nurse and wanting to carry that on. She told me that the Sisters of Mercy were really tough. I tried to point out that "mercy" is in their order's name. She told me, "I know that."

Sister Pat always had a great sense of humor. She was very stern. We visited her the last time a couple of weeks ago. My daughter Molly thinks I'm a great joke teller. She asked Sister Pat which of her nephews and nieces is the funniest. She thought Sister Pat would name me, but she just said that I was the weirdest. I said she was spot on.

We are going to miss Sister Pat in every way. She loved being a BVM. She loved the opportunity to be close to her mother. I appreciate that the opportunity was provided to her and her mother.

Mark Donahoe, Nephew

Thank you for the wonderful eulogy. You took a lot of words out of my mouth. There were so many wonderful things that I wanted to say about Sister Pat, and you covered a lot of the bases. She meant so much to so many people, both the sisters and our family.

I came here because I felt like I had to pay a special tribute to Sister Pat on my own behalf. As a young man I was really good in school. I was quite bright and into electrical engineering. I was going to Des Moines Technical High School. At about 13 years old, my parents divorced. My father moved to Indianola, Iowa. My mother met a wonderful man who would go on to become my stepfather. My mother, my stepfather and my two younger brothers moved to the Twin Cities.

I, however, was so focused on my electrical engineering and getting great grades that I didn't want to leave that behind. I elected to stay behind in Des Moines, Iowa. I had the opportunity to live with my Granny Donahoe and Sister Pat.

I like to think that because I was so focused on school and my studies that I was a pretty well-behaved boy. However, I was still a 14- or 15-year-old young man. I was not without my mischievous ways from time to time. Sister Pat took that all in stride. She really served as my surrogate mother. We developed an extra special bond that followed us our entire lives. I think that for my part I became the closest thing a nun would have to a 15-year-old son. I gave that gift to her!

As time went on, I got near to my thirties. I developed a real interest in general aviation. I wanted to get my private pilot's license. I studied and studied and studied. I took the written exam and got great grades. I went to tell Sister Pat that I am going to get my pilot's license. I thought she would be really excited about this, but she was absolutely against it. "No, Mark, no. Please don't do that." She implored me, "Do not do that. Please stop. I don't want to see you orphan your children." I thought about that for a little bit. While I felt a lot of confidence to fly a plane, and I wasn't typically very superstitious, I couldn't help but think Sister Pat had a hotline to the Lord. I'm still not convinced that you don't have a hotline in this building. Somewhere. I took her advice heart-to-heart and went on to have two wonderful children.

After my children grew up a little bit, they had a school assignment to communicate and collect information from Flat Stanley. Sister Pat, being the teacher and librarian that she was, threw herself into the role. My kids were bombarded with Flat Stanley information coming through mail. They were absolutely fascinated. She had such a wonderful enthusiasm for teaching and children. We really appreciated her for that.

Thank you to everyone for being here. Thank you to Sean [Bradley] and Dianne [Grace] for your help and communication with us through all of this. Dianne called me on February 12th and informed me that the nurse thought Sister Pat's time was near. Of course, I didn't enjoy hearing that. It is always hard. At that moment I had a thought, "I bet Sister Pat will pass on February 14th." And indeed, she did. She was always in our hearts so much for our entire lives. We will always remember her. It just felt like Sister Pat and the Lord had a little conversation and he said, "February 14th. That's the most beautiful, most poignant time to plan your trip home." And so, it was to pass.

Thank you, everyone, for being here. Special thanks to Dianne and Sean and to all you sisters who I know were her very close family. She loved you all very much. She was very proud to be amongst you all.

Sister Judith Callahan, BVM

I would like to share an experience I had with Pat many years ago. Probably most, if not all of us, sometime in our life when we have been through a period of transition when we are not sure what is next and we are dealing with all kinds of conflicting ideas. Or maybe have been or still are helping others in that same kind of transition. Actually, I see that happening here all the time as people deal with health issues and other people helping them through it.

I want to share an experience I had in 1987 when I was in a funny place. I had just come back from five years in Ecuador. I had a mini sabbatical at that time. I thought, "Oh good! I can sleep late. I can go visit people. I can travel a little and I should do something holy. I thought I would audit a couple of current theology courses and get caught up on my theology. But mostly I'm going to have a good time and rest."

I went to see Sister Carol Frances Jegen, BVM to see what kind of classes I could snooze through easily. She said, "No, you are not going to just sit in a class. You are going to get a master's degree." "What? I'm 47 years old. I'm way too old to start a degree program." If you know Carol Frances, you know that you do what Carol says. But it was very good advice. She said to get a master's in Hispanic ministry and religious studies.

So, where do I start? I didn't even know how to take a book out of the library. I never even touched a computer. I don't know anything about them. What am I going to do?

I signed up for a master's program. I went to the library with trembling knees the first day. I was not encouraged by a young student who said, "Are you one of the teachers here?" I said, "No, I am a student." She said, "What? Well, better late than never." I go to the library. Three people there were my saviors during this difficult, transitional time. It was Pat Donahoe, Joan Newhart, and Frances Loretta Bergen, the three librarians. Frances Loretta showed me how to check out a book. Pat sat with me at the computer multiple times teaching me how to use the old Apple IIe. Do you remember that? You had to have your little disk. She told me 5000 times to save before I leave. Of course, I forgot several

times and lost my work. Joan Newhart took me into her computer games and showed me how to use a mouse. All of this was new to me. At that time, I really needed someone to help me through this anxious period. I give thanks to God for Pat and the other two women for recognizing a need, responding to that need in a very personal way, even though they didn't know me, with love and compassion. They carried me through until I was OK. Thank you to all of you who are doing that for someone in your life.

Sister Alice Caulfield, BVM

Pat was a very private, humble, compassionate person. She always wanted to be hidden. She never wanted to be acknowledged. She will be upset with all she said about her and what I'm going to say about her.

She did everything subtly in her own way. On the back table where her pictures are, there is a little dish with a little top that says, "You are forever carved in a space in our heart". Inside are tiny stones with names on them. Pat made all of those. If you look closely at the tiny tones, you will see the first and last name of every sister for whom Flo Heflin and I were their first congregational reps. The role developed into life facilitators, which developed into what we now call BCLS (BVM Community Life Services). You can see how it enlarged. We had Motherhouse, Caritas Center, and Marian Hall from 2004 to 2010. At the end of our term, Pat gave us a basket with the name of every sister with whom we shared those six years. Flo Heflin has one just like it. Imagine the amount of time and love that went into that.

Pat sort of fell into things. She became in charge of the small computer room we had at Wright Hall. It was wonderful because I knew nothing about computers at all. Pat took over and made it OK. She did our library the same way.

Pat had compassion for other people. She sensed when somebody had a bad day or got word about a sibling. You know that she was the queen of Post-it notes. Without putting her name on it, there would be a note for that sister left in her room or on her desk. Or it might be a very tiny little vase with flowers. All things that she thought would help the person but would draw no attention to herself. I was a recipient of that kindness. I had shelving next to my desk. I know that all of you are faithfully updating your directory when Chris sends out those changes of address. I never did.

Pat always worked at night; she was a night owl. She would creep around and do her thing. She was also my security guard. She checked all the doors at Wright Hall several times during the night. One night I was working late and had a very tiny office with my back to the door. I was typing on the computer. I sensed something, but I didn't quite know what it was. As I went to turn, I caught Pat leaving my office. She was returning my community directory which she had been taking and entering every change. If you look at the beautiful calligraphy on those stones, my directory was the most detailed community directory in the entire congregation. I love Pat for it.

Sister Kathleen Mullin, BVM

Pat and I were both academic librarians. She stayed at it for a long time and was a "Wow!" at what she did as these stories have suggested. She also was the pray-er for the house I lived in in Rock Island, Ill. The community has practice of sisters at Mount Carmel adopting a sister out on mission or in independent living. She had our house for a long time after we had several people who only lived a year or two after they were assigned our house. We were getting a little nervous about that, but Pat

persevered. One after another my sisters in community moved to Mount Carmel or on to a new ministry. I had Pat for over two decades.

Since her death on Valentine's Day, I've been trying to think what I could do in her name. The community at Mount Carmel Bluffs has been asked to help an agency in Dubuque, Iowa, called Resources United which provides for the needs of people who are struggling. Every month we have been donating something. This month, two things were asked for. One of them was for children's books, called chapter books when they pass beyond the picture book level. I couldn't go down to the bookstore and buy very many, but St. Vincent DePaul has a collection of children's books. So, I bought a huge pile of children's books – Beverly Cleary, other noted authors, Newberry Award winners. I thought, "This is in honor of you, Pat. This is your donation to the children of Dubuque who may not have had his or her own book. I am excited about that, and I am grateful to Pat for all she has done secretly and publicly.

Dennis Markham

Sister Pat was my buddy. She came to live with us and helped us through a tough time. I was six and I cannot imagine a better time to have Sister Pat in my life. She was kind and giving but had no intention of letting you run amok. She taught me to read and to this day whenever I write P-E-O-P-L-E, I do it to the same rhythm that she taught me.

But I'm sure there are many, many, people out in the world who can say the same thing. She was a wonderful educator. But she was my buddy. My memories of Sister Pat are full of puzzles and scarves and her little tan car. We watched mysteries together and for years after we would sign letters to each other as "Morse" and "Lewis."

I loved it and love her and will always keep my buddy with me for the rest of my life.

Cari Simpson, Congregational Secretary

As you know, Pat lived on the third floor of the Motherhouse. She organized the kitchen, often leaving helpful notes and instructions throughout the floor. When we were removing all items from the third floor to prepare for the renovation, the BCLS team chose to adopt the long dining table that we were told has a long history. It is now a table where all can sit together as one team during mealtimes. There are multiple drawers on the sides of the table. Soon after inheriting this table, we explored the contents of the drawers and in one of them was a note that Pat had left. It reads: "You don't have to be crazy to live here, but it helps!" We know it was Pat's because of her distinctive handwriting! As you can imagine, our team loved it and that note has a place of honor on our breakroom bulletin board.

Lori Ritz, BVM Associate & Former BVM

When I first went to work at Mount Carmel in Life and Mission, I would often encounter Pat in the Motherhouse library. She commented to me that she knew my dad, Loren Ritz, from her time in Des Moines where he was a deacon. She told me what a fine man he was, how he always talked to her when they met, and that he always had a smile. I have no idea how or where Pat and my dad met--I just know that each time I saw her she would remind me that she knew my dad--and she would tell whomever she might be walking with or helping in the library--that she knew him. That was such a special connection for me with Pat!

Sister Mary Martens, BVM

I had been looking for a particular book in the library. I had given a sufficient amount of time for whoever had the book to finish it and return it. I encountered Pat during one of her walking trips around campus. She started the habit early in life and certainly kept it. I mentioned the book title to her and told her that everything is shelved so carefully that I know I didn't miss it. Shortly thereafter, the book appeared with my name on it in the Terrace Apartments mailroom. I knew where it had come from. Pat knew I was looking for it, and she very quietly tracked it down and was able to get it back. As we sang the first hymn "Gentle Woman, quiet light," it certainly was an appropriate start for everything that has followed. I thank Pat for her friendship and the care with which she did her ministry. It certainly was appreciated.

Sister Patricia Ann Donahoe, BVM – A "Snoopervisor" Note

This all started with Halloween. I didn't have a costume, so I put on my Donahoe sweatshirt, made a sign "Construction Snoopervisor" and wore it around my neck. I put a white plastic serving bowl on my head. I said, "If people weren't so stingy with the hard hats, I would have had a decent costume!"