

Sister Mary C. McGovern, BVM (Clemento)
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Aug. 22, 2017

Mary Hacker, Former Student (Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)

Sister was my first piano teacher at St. Joseph here in Sioux City. I was in first grade when I started and I was in the little choir she started. She taught me that singing was the greatest prayer to God we could have. I stress that to my kids in the youth group. God bless you and all those great sisters who have been there with her in this final journey home.

Associate Norm Freund

I served with Mary, I knew her as Clemento, at Clarke College, now University. I started in 1981 along with Sister Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM and Sister Pat Nolan, BVM. Clemento was in the Instructional Resource Center, which was part of the Education Department at that time. I would like to share three things. First, she always had a smile. The word sweet is an apt description of her; I would call her a peach in terms of her friendliness. Second, I remember very vividly May 17, 1984. It was a difficult day in the history of Clarke because of the great fire. There were pods of people in the Clarke community who gathered across the street that afternoon when the buildings were burning. Clemento was part of a group of mainly other BVMs; Vinnie (Sister Vincentia Kaferstein, BVM) was among them. She was fervently praying during the course of the fire for all those who were fighting it and for the losses we were experiencing that day. Lastly, but not least, if you know anything about me, you know that I love all things BVM, especially history and institution. Clemento was a graduate of St. Joseph Academy in Dubuque. Some years ago, I had the chance to interview her about what life was like at St. Joe's Academy.

Sister Barbara Jean Tascher, BVM (Jean Vincent)

My parents believed in Catholic education. We had a public school one mile down the street, which I did attend in first grade because I was supposed to be in kindergarten. I went to two Catholic schools before I went to St. Gilbert in Grayslake, Ill., the second year after it opened. Mary was my piano teacher in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. That school was more than 10 miles away from my home. We got there on the city bus. Mary was very good to me. She helped me get ready to enter the BVM community. We were always great friends.

Carrie Wemmer Schmid

I was a student at St. Raphael when Clemento was the principal. She was tough. I was there until seventh grade when the school had to close. I also knew her at Clarke University. Norm Freund was my teacher so it is great to see Norm today. She was different at Clarke; she was very happy. The common thread was the music. She was our choir director. My love of music from second grade on was because of her. Being a choirgirl at St. Raphael was very special.

Shirley Brown, Development Office

I work for the Sisters of Charity. Clemento was the first BVM that I met when I was a mere child starting my life at Clarke in the education department. I am so grateful that I got to meet her.

Sister Mary Angela Buser, BVM

I, too, began my friendship with Mary during my years at Clarke. As Norm said, she was in charge of the resource center, which was an integral part of the education department where I served, so we worked together. That resource center was always in perfect order. She was always very attentive to whatever students needed or wanted. One could ask no more of her. She was a wonderful person.

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM (Mercedie)

I had the privilege of serving as Mary McGovern's letter writer. I really didn't start that service until three or four years ago, so Mary was never able to tell me exactly who I was writing to or who the people were from whom she received letters and notes. At the same time, when I would tell Mary that she had a note from so and so, there was always that beautiful smile and acknowledgement. Of course, I would try to respond in some way to the individuals who did keep in contact with Mary. If any of you have ever had the privilege of having dinner over at 930 C. Carmel Dr., you sat at the Mary McGovern memorial dining room table. When Mary's mother died, she had to dismantle the house. Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM received the dining room table and a beautiful china cabinet. Carolyn had them for many years, but when I moved to St. Columbkille in Dubuque, Iowa, in 1992, I inherited both. It was a little marred, so I, who have no creative or artistic ability in her bones, decided to refinish the table. With the help of George Formby's wood refinishing products, I did refinish the table and the wood on the china cabinet. All of you are invited to the Mary McGovern memorial table and cabinet. We are delighted that they are being passed on from one generation to another in our BVM family.

Bushra Karim, CNA at Mt. Carmel

I have known Sister Mary from the time I started working here. I remember Sister's eating habits; she was always a really good eater. She had a very good appetite and was always full of life. You never knew what to expect or how she would respond to you. You could go up to her and say, "Sister, would you like to have something to eat?" She would look at you and say, "Oh, go away." You could come back 30 seconds later and say, "Clemento, would you like something to eat?" She would look at you and say, "Oh, I love you!" and take a bite.

Sister Kathleen McGrath, BVM (Johnine)

About 30 years ago or so, four of us went out to the fairgrounds for a concert. We came out of the fairgrounds and it was raining. The first person we dropped off was Sister Rita Clare McDonald, BVM on the top of Cardiff. We started down Cardiff to Third Street and the car went sideways on the ice. We managed to walk over to a grassy area, the only place we could stand up, and said, "What do we do now?" Just at that moment, a car came up the hill and parked in one of the driveways. We said, "Sir, can you help us?" This young fellow, about 20, came over and said, "Sure, I can help you." He took the car down to Third Street and said, "It isn't bad. Third Street is all salted." Then he took each one of us by the hand and walked us down to the car. We used to tease Clemento about coming home late at night after the concert when she couldn't stand up on her own. We said we would tell the pastor at the Cathedral. She always answered, "You wouldn't dare."

Sister Bertha Fox, BVM (Dolorose)

You have heard about Clemento and music, but she also taught basket weaving at the Roberta Kuhn Center here at Mount Carmel. Her students made beautiful, beautiful baskets of all sorts. She also painted the picture on the cover of this worship aid.

Sister Julie O'Neil, BVM

A couple of speakers ago, Bushra mentioned that Mary always had a surprise. The surprise I most remember is one that was part of a sing-a-long. A group of us would go up to Caritas 4th floor where Mary was a new resident at that time. You never quite knew what Mary was going to do. She loved to sing. Usually she would sing for the whole hour, but this particular night, for whatever reason, she decided to wander away from the group by herself, which she could still do at that time. So she left the group to go to bed while the sing-a-long continued.

A little later, the aides took another one of the residents to prepare her for bed. Coming out of the room, we heard a conversation something like this. "There's somebody in her bed and I think it's Mary McGovern." There was a discussion of whether to leave Mary in that bed since she was sound asleep. "Should we leave her there for the night? Will it confuse the night nurses?" One of the aides said, "I know how to get her up." So she began very gently saying, "Mary, if you wake up, we'll give you some ice cream." That was her favorite food. They repeated it a few times, but when we left sing-a-long, Mary was sitting at the dining room table eating ice cream just as happy as can be.

Sister Donna Schauf, BVM (Blanche)

Clemento told me this story quite a while back. She was a piano teacher. She went to a new mission and the principal said to her, "Sister, tomorrow you will teach violin." She said, "Sister, I don't know how to play the violin." "Sister so-and-so will teach you tonight and you will teach it tomorrow." I guess she did.

Sister Maureen Patrice Fury, BVM

When Mary was retired at the Motherhouse, she always came over and played the organ for our wake services. She was a very generous woman even to the end.

Sister Susan Rink, BVM (Michaela)

I never really knew our lovely deceased friend until recently. I used to visit Caritas 4th floor frequently. She would be sitting toward the window looking like she was sound asleep. She probably was asleep. There was no sign of life at all until someone mentioned music. Immediately, she woke up and started to sing, and even started to direct the singing. Her singing and her love of singing never left her.

Lucinda Turnis, Med Aide, Mount Carmel

I met Mary on Caritas 4th floor about six years ago. It was very evident that music was a huge part of her life, not only her singing, but also playing the piano. Up to about two-and-a-half years ago, every once in a while when Mary was having a good day, we would lead her over to the electric piano and put her fingers on the keys. At first she would give a look like "What's

going on?” Then her fingers would start moving and she would play from memory. It was a huge blessing to witness her amazing talent. It was evident that the music would stick with her until the very end. Several times, she would be sitting in her chair moving her fingers and tapping them on a table with memories of notes and music in her mind. God bless, Mary.

Sister Brigid Mary Hart, BVM

My memory of Mary is a little bit different. I was teaching at St. Raphael in Dubuque. Mary came two years before I left to teach sixth grade. She was quite the perfectionist as I remember. When I saw the work from Springbank, a retreat center in South Carolina, the clay pot and the basket weaving, I thought, “This is perfect for her.” I didn’t know her as a musician, but I knew her as a teacher.

Everything she did—her bulletin boards, herself—was perfect. What was really nice back then is that after school, she could walk home and see her mother. I was quite young at the time and I think I was jealous when I look back on that. It was such a treat that she lived right down the street and her mother was there and present to her. That was a special memory of Mary. To see her work from Springbank and to hear that it was taught in the Roberta Kuhn Center was just a thrill for me. I’m so grateful that so many of us had the experience of doing crafts at Springbank.

Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM (Lester)

I was principal at St. Pat here in Dubuque when she was principal at the Cathedral. It was her love of the Cathedral and the parish that really caused her to be the principal at the school. I think that those were very hard times for Mary. She was also taking care of her mother. Mary, once again, did everything that she could to keep up with the requests in demanding times. We then had to close the school. I think that was probably the hardest part of Clemento’s life. She never held back; she gave it her all. I think she was probably delighted to return to music and do the things that really gave her life.

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

When I came back to work at Mount Carmel, Mary was still playing keyboards. The other thing I remember her doing was arranging flowers. I think there was little money for flowers some years. She would gather wild flowers and flowers from a number of us with small gardens. On Saturday, I would bring in whatever flowers I had. She would make them look like they had come from a florist. Those bouquets would be the flowers for the altars, something from the field and something from our gardens. This talent of hers probably didn’t get a big notice, but it was certainly there among all the others.