

Remembering JoAnn (Thomas Ann) McAnoy, IHM Oct. 3, 1926 – May 24, 2017



Good morning, I chose to remember my sister JoAnn because even though I only lived under the same roof with Jo for nine years, I do believe I know her better than anyone in this wonderful gathering.

Jo was the oldest child of four in the family. My father emigrated from Scotland and my mother from England. Mom was born in Ireland but taught school in England so we always knew we were a Scotch-Irish family, though at times my brother would tell my mother that “Irish was our lower nature.” When he said that, my mother would act as if she was going to smack him and he would hold up his hand and say “Stop! To hit a priest is a mortal sin.” And she would say, “that would just be a

love tap – maybe a venial but it would feel so good.” Mom and dad met in Akron, Ohio, and JoAnn was born there. The story goes that dad and Aunt Martha sang in the choir at St. Mary church. Martha brought dad home to meet her family and he met my mother. That would be the rest of the story but in 1950 when dad died, Aunt Martha moved in to live with us.

Our young family moved to Detroit and was one of the founding families of St. Gregory the Great Parish. We always thought “The Great” referred to us members of the parish and not the saint. The four of us were all educated in the parish school. When Mac visited Scotland, he met our cousin, last living relative in our family. He told Mac that the family in Scotland thought my dad was very wealthy because he sent his four children to the Catholic school. Mac told Bill that dad was not wealthy and that the tuition was a dollar a month for each child. However, when you think we were all in the school through and after the Depression, that \$40 dollars probably represented a lot of money!

Before I leave family life, I must tell you that one of the absolute joys of my sister’s life were her five nieces and one nephew. By now, you know that three of us were chosen for celibate vocations and Jane would have “none of that” so she had six children. JoAnn lit up whenever they were around. When the two youngest grand-nieces were born, she enjoyed buying Easter and Christmas dresses for them.

Because JoAnn skipped the seventh grade and her birthday was Oct. 3, she entered the community at 16 years of age. I am not exaggerating, but for the first few years she would cry EVERY time we left her after visiting. My dad told her that he would teach her to drive if she wanted to come home (she WAS the apple of his eye) but she persevered

and I thank God for that! Actually, she HAD to stay because she was MY inspiration. Many the day in my years of formation my overwhelming thought was, “If she could do it, I can do it!”

With the exception of her three years in Chicago, where she was one of the founding members of IHM High School, Jo’s entire teaching ministry was in Michigan and the majority of those years was spent in her beloved Detroit. She, Mac and my sister Jane shared a fanatic love of Detroit. Her last high school ministry was at St. Martin de Porres High School. While Mac was principal, JoAnn taught math. When he left to become pastor of Our Lady of the Rosary, she became the principal. Had I followed her as principal we could have had a “McAnoy Dynasty” but somehow “McAnoy” and “Dynasty” just don’t fit and I stayed in Atlanta.

While Jo was at DePorres, finances were never where they needed to be and Sister Nancy Fearon, who had taught there, opened a Bingo to support the ministry she had to the homeless. She invited JoAnn to run a Bingo to support DePorres and Jo took it on with gusto. Of course, she recruited a LOT of IHMs, some right here in the Chapel, to assist her. Jo continued to run the Bingo when she left the school, and by then it benefited Our Lady of the Rosary where Mac was the pastor and JoAnn was a member. She probably did that for at least 20 years and I believe many times she kept the parish afloat by those Friday-night Bingos.

For many years while she ran the Bingo nights, she was responsible for the math lab at Marygrove, and, along with Norbert Kidd, she was the primary caregiver for our brother who had lost both his legs and was in a wheel chair. He and my sister Jane, who had been in a terrible accident, both needed care and she was ALWAYS there to help them.

JoAnn was a deep lover of our community and shared many endeavors of leadership. She was part of the Northeast Provincial team with Sister Luanne (Yocke). She began the Committee for Peace and Justice Office with Sister Peggy Schmidt and it continues today. She began the Mission Integration with associate Jean Rooney and it, too, is active today.

JoAnn with Jeannette Walter, was asked to lead our open placement efforts. ‘Y’all’ remember that – not being assigned to ministries and seeking equal pay for equal work with lay members of faculties? One of their first forays was to a group of pastors who had schools in Atlanta. We had many schools then staffed by religious. Jo and Jeannette (?) were to meet with the pastors at one of the schools. The one that was chosen for them was Saints Peter and Paul, which was staffed by the Philadelphia IHMs. As Jo told me, “I did my presentation and thought that it really went pretty well.” After I asked if there were any comments or questions and the pastor of the parish we were in stood up and said: “That was very nice, sister. Now I’d like to speak for the

sisters WHO HAVE NOT GONE ROUND THE BEND!” You know how I reacted but when I asked her how she reacted she said, “Oh I just smiled and said, ‘thank you, Father.’”

JoAnn was one of the first members of EBICS, that is, Executive Board of IHM Community Schools. The first members were: Sisters Thomas Aquinas, JoAnn McAnoy, Jackie Cullen, Ann Marie Hughes and Fran Mlocek.

She was called on many times by leaders in the community to facilitate meetings. Jo was a natural at it and did it with her own finesse. She got us processing before we realized we were processing and she always did it with a sweet smile.

JoAnn was on so many committees over the years. Members of the committees always wanted to be on the sub-committee with JoAnn because she held the meetings in her home and meetings were ALWAYS around the lunch or dinner table. JoAnn was really a gourmet chef and never claimed the title! JoAnn could make cheesecakes in her sleep and if you go into the parlor with pictures and memorabilia you’ll see her cheesecake pan.

In JoAnn’s *“Book of Life”* she wrote: “How blessed I have been by the gift of love! Throughout my life, in happy times and dark, I have been sustained by those who loved me, especially by significant women in my life.”

I want to say to the sisters with whom she lived the last years of her life: she did not come to Monroe with a joyful heart – she just realized with the quiet urging of Mary Ann that she needed to be here. I can honestly say that I saw my sister grow to happiness in the love all of you showered upon her. You invited her to play cards, even though YOU won most of the games. When I came for visits with Jo, you always invited me to join you in cards and STILL won most of the games. You watched out for her when she began failing and you kept her involved as much as she could be by your visits and magazines and Richard Rohr dailies. I think she died so peacefully because she knew how much she was loved while she was with you. I thank you for all your love and prayers over the years for both JoAnn and me.

I will close this long remembering by quoting from a letter by our associate Beverly Tosch, who wrote:

I attended St. Matthew Grade School in Detroit in the 1940s and 50s and I had sister in seventh grade. My brother Paul, two years older, also had her in seventh grade. We both remember what a beautiful person she was both inside and out. My brother was shy and she taught him self-confidence and later in life he became vice-president at General Motors. I did tell sister about his success and she was thrilled for him. Her stature, beauty and caring ways have stayed with

me. It is amazing that she was in her early 20s when she came into my life and now I am able to say, "Goodbye and thank you" to her in her 90s". Thank you for the wonderful memories, Sister Thomas Ann. Love and prayers always."

Written and delivered by Margaret McAnoy, IHM, May 30, 2017