

(Eulogy) for Sr. Mary Ann Haug

My first encounter with Sr. Mary Ann came when I was 13 and preparing to enter eighth grade. It was about a week or so before school started and some of us went up to help the nuns distribute books. If truth be told, we just wanted to get a look at our new 8th grade teacher and principal. What I remember most about that day was her smile, her sparkling blue eyes, and her gentle presence. She really had my heart from that day on and became not only my teacher, but my mentor, my second mother, and of course, as the years went on, my Sister in community and my friend. And you know what, in all these years she never told me her middle name was Barbara! I think that was her little joke on me!

Sister Joan Albaugh and I sat and talked last Sunday morning about Sister Mary Ann and what we wanted to say about her. If Joan were in better health herself, she would be the one writing and giving this eulogy. So what I share today are combined thoughts and perceptions.

Sister Mary Ann was a wise and wonderful woman. She had a great love for her family both immediate and extended. She kept up with what was happening in their lives. She was so proud of her priest brother, Bill, especially when he became Chancellor of the Springfield diocese. Her beloved sister, Sister Mary William, preceded her into the community of Divine Providence and was not only her sibling but her lifelong friend. When Sr. Mary Ann was novice director, her sister was elected as Provincial. Because of canon law, this meant that Sr. Mary Ann needed to leave the Novitiate ministry and go back to teaching. (Truth be told, she was just as happy to go!)

Over the years she served the community in many roles. She was a teacher, principal, musician, Novice director, Assistant Director of the Motherhouse, and Provincial Councillor.

She had many virtues that each of us have experienced over the years. One of those virtues was patience. She never seemed pressured or at least she never showed it, never made a big deal out of what she had to do. She just quietly went about doing whatever it was that needed to be done.

Joan said that the novices in the classes of 1956 and 1957 agreed that they made it through because she was their director. Maybe they would have made it anyway. What was so special about it was that Sr. Mary Ann never thought it was her job as a novice director to tear people down and rebuild them into the perfect religious, as was some of the thinking back in those days. Rather, she took people where they were and built on who they were, utilizing their giftedness. People felt accepted, affirmed and loved.

In her teaching career, many of her students remember the patience she showed in the classroom, too. She wanted you to succeed and so no matter what it was, she was there for you, to give you any extra help you needed. And she did it in such a way that you never felt stupid or singled out....she was so sensitive in that way. Her students loved her because of her gentle presence, patience, compassion and quick wit.

As a principal she was open to her staff's suggestions, supportive of new ideas they wanted to try, and gave them room to do it, all the while supporting them. When Joan wanted to start doing a spring musical program at St. Mary's in Madison, Sr. Mary Ann never questioned the feasibility of doing it and supported all the efforts to raise funds to help it happen.

Another one of her virtues was perseverance. When she believed in something you knew it and she always held her ground. There's the Novitiate story about the Christmas decorations, and a story related to the building of a float for St. Mary's 100th year. After having spent months working on a replica of the church there, she wouldn't accept the truck flatbed they first sent, but made them take it back and bring one that would be better suited to show off the float for the parade.

Sister Mary Ann was also a woman of deep prayer. She was faithful to her daily spiritual life and in her younger years always eager to read new spirituality books. She taught and shared the Novena to St. Joseph with many of her friends, had great devotion to Mary, and prayed the rosary often, having been born on the feast of the Holy Rosary. In these last years of life, spent in prayer ministry, she prayed for her beloved community, for her family, and for her friends. Her daily, faithful companion, especially in these last years was Sr. Agnes Marie. Just over a week or so ago, when I stayed with her on Thanksgiving night, we talked about all the things we were grateful for in the years of our friendship. She also told me how grateful she was for everything you did for her, Sr. Agnes Marie, and then

she added, and for all the love she received over the years from so many of us. Here was a woman who had the ability to walk through this world having made such an impact on the hearts of so many and not even knowing it.

Though there are many thoughts I could relate from conversations over the years one that stands out in my mind was during a walk she and I took during our 1970 Chapter and it appeared that we were not on the same side of an issue....what the issue was I don't even remember. I was so afraid that maybe I would lose her friendship over the disagreement. I was young and naïve. But I will never forget what she said to me that day: "We can agree to disagree, Barb, but no disagreement can ever destroy the love in which our friendship lives. Be your own person. I'll always love you, no matter what." I suspect that is what she said in different words to so many of us.

So now her suitcase was packed for this final journey with all the people who loved her, all the good memories of 97 years of life, with all its ups and downs, and all the good times. She wasn't afraid to go...she was ready and at peace. We who are left behind, mourn her passing and the hole it leaves in our hearts. But we also rejoice, knowing she is in the loving arms of her Provident God where she lives for all eternity.

by Sr. Barbara McMullen, CDP
December 7, 2011