Sister Joan Ronning, CSC

(Sister M. Vivian)

July 7, 1933—February 3, 2025

These memories were lovingly prepared by Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, who read them at Sister Joan's funeral on February 13, 2025.

While sitting in my room thinking about Sister Joan Ronning, unexpectedly the words to a Roger Miller song, "Walkin' in the Sunshine," came to mind:

> *Walkin' in the sunshine, sing a little sunshine song*
> *Put a smile upon your face as if there's nothing wrong*
> *Think about a good time had a long time ago*
> *Think about forgetting about your worries and your woes*
> *Walkin' in the sunshine, sing a little sunshine song*

I was rather surprised to hear this melody and lyrics in my head. I looked up the song on Amazon Music and listened to Roger Miller's version. Then I sat for another long while trying to understand, "Why now? Why had this music come to mind?"

Ah, this is Joan's message to us all. Joan walked in the sunshine and brought a bit of it to everyone she met along the way. I could see the twinkle in her eye as I listened to the song. Thinking about a good time long ago brought forth sweet memories of Joan's wry sense of humor—the same sense of humor that helped her accept life's challenges and give encouragement to others to do the same.

As Madisen Toth noted in Joan's obituary, students would return to thank Sister Joan for making them do their classwork. She would always assure them that she had only helped them get started.

Students always responded to her gentle persuasion, completing their assignments and deepening their knowledge.

Sister Joan used this same approach in many different circumstances. When working with some unwilling members for an adult choir, she cajoled them into giving it a try. Lo and behold, the choir grew in both numbers and quality!

Sister M. Carlita (Hammes) and Joan met each other during the days of Carlita's early formation. They met again during summer school classes at Saint Mary's College. Sister Carlita tells the story of how she would bring boxed meals to Joan, who didn't want to take time away from her studies to go to the dining room. We now know for sure that Carlita has been caring for Joan's needs for quite a while!

When they were missioned together at Saint John's Parish in Peoria, Illinois, Sisters Joan and Carlita renewed their acquaintance. Through the years that followed, they worked together, supported each other and strengthened their friendship. As we all have witnessed, Sister Carlita was a staunch and faithful friend to Joan, especially during the years Joan struggled with illness.

Family was very important to Sister Joan. She was particularly close to her mother and her brother Dick. Both Joan and Sister Carlita were, you might say, adopted by the other's family. They all enjoyed good times together. When Joan and Carlita lived at St. Stanislaus' parish in South Bend, Indiana, Carlita's brother Henry and his wife Patricia would come over for a meal after which they would play dominoes all afternoon. Sister Joan really enjoyed those games!

Puzzles were another source of relaxation for her over the years. In every convent there was always a puzzle out on a table. When Joan was in Saint Mary's Convent, she and Sister Barbara Hahl often worked together on the current puzzle. Care providers would stop by to hunt for a piece or two. As many of us know, puzzles can be addicting!

Sister Joan returned to Woodstock, Illinois, her birthplace, to teach at Saint Mary's School, where she herself had attended. Joan actually taught the children of some of her classmates. It was also in Woodstock that she and Sister Grace Watson became friends. Sometimes Grace would reminisce about how both she and Joan loved the people of Woodstock. They also appreciated working together and relaxing on a Friday afternoon at the close of a school week.

Another close relationship Joan enjoyed was with Sister Mary Alma (Peters). They called each other "outlaws" because Joan's nephew married Mary Alma's niece. Joan and Carlita maintained contact with Sister Mary Alma over the years, visiting her weekly when she moved to Saint Mary's Convent.

Sister Joan also relaxed by playing with her dogs. Her succession of miniature schnauzers provided many an hour of enjoyment over the years. When she and Sister Carlita moved to Saint Mary's, a good friend, Gerry Zabrowski, from St. Stanislaus Catholic Church, took their last dog Ozzie. Of course, the sisters maintained visiting rights.

Another talent Joan had was crocheting towels to hang in the kitchen for drying hands. Joan usually crocheted a one-layer towel, but for her friend Grace, she would double the towel for her preference. This is just a simple example of how Joan aimed to please. I remember the last time I asked Joan if she could do another towel for Grace. She smiled and said, "I think this will be the last one." She gave her all to the task at hand, especially for a friend.

Sister Carlita recalls that Joan would often say, "If you don't try you will never know if you can." Joan applied these words to herself as she ventured into a wide variety of needlework projects over the years. She did both needlepoint and cross-stitch. She worked on one item for two years—the weathered face of an old sea captain done in cross-stitch.

She also enjoyed the challenges of hooking a rug. Many times, Joan designed special items to be used with Sister Carlita's senior citizens in the nursing home, as well as items she made for her own students.

As we have noted, Joan's talents were manifold, and she put them to use for the benefit of others. When the Saint Mary's Convent Boutique was moved from the main hallway of the convent to the Center Building, Sisters Carlita and Joan took on the responsibility of the boutique. Joan continued to make items for the boutique, especially some lovely dolls dressed in the clothing of colonial days.

I have enumerated just a few of the many talents Joan had. The items she made were always lovely and exquisitely done. As beautiful as her handiwork was, what was most important was the love with which Joan imbued each piece. All of her efforts were put forth on behalf of others.

Joan, your life is an expression of the creativity and love of our God—made manifest in your heart and soul, which you shared with all of us through your handiwork. May you rejoice in the heavenly choir of which you are now a part, for surely you are walking in the Son-shine today!