

Sister Mary Ellen McGlynn, CSC

(Sister M. Grace Alma)

January 31, 1937–March 2, 2020

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Ann Therese Sinclair, CSC, who read them at the funeral on March 10, 2020.

Trees

by Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast.
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

As her dear friend Sister Amalia Marie (Rios), CSC, says, anyone who knew Sister Mary Ellen knows that Mary Ellen would recite this favorite poem to anyone who would listen.

Perhaps it was the fact that Mary Ellen McGlynn grew up in Washington, D.C.—a city filled with beautiful and magnificent trees—that nurtured her love for trees and endeared her to this lovely poem.

Indeed, Mary Ellen called herself a “dyed in the wool Washingtonian,” having been one of those rare persons born and raised there—with her father and mother, Edward and Grace McGlynn, and her three siblings, Edward (Eddie), Patricia (Patsy), and Grace (Gracey). The children grew up in an Irish family surrounded by love. Mary Ellen was the apple of her Daddy's eye, and when he died, when Mary Ellen was 11, it was a loss that

never left her heart. Born January 31, 1937, Mary Ellen grew up going to Catholic school and becoming one of those famous “St. Patrick’s Academy girls.” After graduating from high school, she worked for a short time as a stenographer before entering Holy Cross in 1955. She completed her formal education years later at Dunbarton College in Washington, D.C.

The remembrances shared here come from the many friends who knew, lived with, and loved Mary Ellen over her many years in community and ministry, as well as her final years here at Saint Mary’s. They reflect the long, loving friendship of her dearest friend, Sister Amalia Marie.

Mary Ellen spent most of her community and ministry life in Maryland, Virginia, and New York. She is remembered as an excellent junior high teacher and principal. She made learning fun, taught students well, and was a good administrator. She was someone who got things done—and done well.

Mary Ellen was generous and hospitable, and she loved a good time. Her mantra was “live life to the fullest.” She had an upbeat personality and it embraced those with her. For better and for worse, Mary Ellen was a risk taker and sometimes paid the price.

In tune with Mary Ellen’s love of a good time, Amalia recalls one of many stories from their years at St. Paul the Apostle School in New York City. It was the first time the sisters had been given a personal budget. Mary Ellen, Amalia, and a third sister (whose name could not be recalled) were the “house council.” Unfamiliar with having personal money they pondered how to respond to this. The third sister said, “Maybe we should have a Mass said.” Mary Ellen said, “Heck no! Let’s have a party.” So, they planned a grand party for the sisters in the house, and they had a great time celebrating together that evening. The next day the house council was dissolved.

As an Area councilor in the East, Mary Ellen related well to the sisters and enjoyed attending to the many details of chapters, assemblies, and meetings that enhanced these experiences. On the other hand, Sister Marie Julie (Shea), CSC, remembers with gratitude, that during the years Mary Ellen was ministering at Saint Angela Hall in Kensington, Maryland, she got Julie out of going to some of those meetings. She was very kind to the sick and generous, giving her time to help others.

One of Mary Ellen’s special gifts was her love of poetry and music and

her amazing ability to remember the words of seemingly endless songs. She was Irish through and through and especially enjoyed Irish music and culture. In these last years, when conversation with Mary Ellen was challenging, she could always respond with a song and enter in with the words that were just a part of her. She always had a song in her heart.

Amalia Marie recalls that she and Mary Ellen were blessed to journey to many pilgrimage places: the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, Mexico; Our Lady of San Juan del Valle, Texas; St. Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal in Montreal, Quebec, Canada; and to the holy places of Blessed Basil Anthony Moreau around Le Mans, France. These were faith-filled, hope-filled times for them. Their last pilgrimage was to Ireland. Mary Ellen's brother-in-law, Jim Larkin, surprised Mary Ellen and Amalia by coming to Saint Mary's and taking them on a two-week trip to Ireland. It was a celebration of Mary Ellen's love of all things Irish, a grand culmination of the travels they had enjoyed so much.

Mary Ellen's rich and full life of community and ministry was not without its difficulties and challenges. She struggled with an addiction to alcohol, a disease which required medical treatment. With the support of her community, family, and friends, she bravely completed a recovery program at Emmaus House in New Jersey and thus began a 20-plus year journey of sobriety. She credited the support of community and her faith and hope in God's love for her for this tremendous grace.

Another life-changing event was the terrible auto accident that took the life of her dear friend Sister M. Alice Teresa (Hoy), CSC, as they were driving to our vacation house at the ocean. Mary Ellen, who had been driving, was badly injured. Anyone who heard details of the accident and saw pictures of the car claimed it was a miracle anyone survived. They were crushed under a truck that had failed to stop and pushed them into another car.

Most difficult for Mary Ellen and for Amalia was Sister Mary Ellen's long journey with dementia and the ways that life changed for her. As mentioned before, the bright spot was her memory of poetry and song, which lifted her spirits when other things escaped her. She lived valiantly with this disease because of the wonderful care of the staff on the third floor of Saint Mary's Convent, who loved her and cared for her so faithfully over the last years. Her dearest friend, Amalia Marie, was her daily and ever faithful companion.

Amalia expresses gratitude that Mary Ellen went home to God gently and peacefully on the evening of March 2, 2020, surrounded by her sisters, and the nurse and companions who had so lovingly cared for her. She held her rosary and those around her prayed and sang the “Hail Mary,” her favorite prayer. She would be reminding us now to sing the songs in our hearts as a remembrance of her.

Sister Amalia Marie asked that this poem, written by Mary Ellen’s dear friend Sister M. Dorothy Anne (Cahill), CSC, and which so describes Mary Ellen, conclude this remembrance:

Magnificat

My soul proclaims God’s glory,
God’s goodness to me!

All the days of my life

He has blessed me with love,
From the warmth of the womb

To the warmth of the sun:

Parental, familial, the many

Friends, and the precious few

Whose love has been special

And deep:

My eyes and my ears

Have been attuned to beauty:

The way a pine tree grows

Or the crash of waves

upon a wind-swept shore;

the lilting loveliness of the
white birch

Dancing on a hill-top

In the spring.

I have known the pulse of life;

...music piercing the heart

With the magic of melody;

And I have known the

tenderness

Of circling arms, ...

The understanding and forgiving
Hearts

Of those who walked with me
through life.

I have known darkness

And wounds so deep

That only a laugh

Could cover up

The scars;

I have been lost

In treacherous ways

That mind may turn to,

Have fled from the light

Of the seemingly distant

Stars.

Yet still have I trusted in love,

In love, the Word,

In love, the Spirit.

For whatever clay-footed idols

My heart has reached to,

Still you, my God, are always

Within me,

Waiting, and loving me home:

Magnificat!