

Sister Elizabeth Raffo, CSC

(Sister Ronald Mary)

October 29, 1932–July 3, 2023

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Karla McKinnie, CSC, and Sister Joan Marie Steadman, CSC. Sister Joan Marie read them at Sister Elizabeth’s funeral on July 11, 2023.

Elizabeth May “Liz” or “Betty” Raffo was born on October 29, 1932, in Washington, D.C. This memento is a tapestry woven together by Sister Karla McKinnie with reflections from those whose lives were touched by Betty.

As you listen, you will hear her called Liz and Betty.

Liz and her parents, Aloysius and Ruth, chose St. Patrick’s Academy in Washington, D.C., for her high school. There she met the Holy Cross sisters and liked them from the beginning. She received a first-class education and often considered a religious vocation. However, her mother, who was not Catholic then, did not like the idea and asked her to wait until she was 21 before giving it any further thought. Upon graduation, Liz had no problem obtaining a position as a typist with the U.S. government and started working shortly after receiving her diploma. The thought of entering Holy Cross continued. When she was of legal age, she applied and was accepted. Her mother was disappointed, but gradually warmed up to the idea.

Liz had two interesting hobbies. She made lovely and unusual scissor holders, using a system patterned on one her mother followed. She also made unique decorative candle-shell arrangements with help from her brother, Ronald, and his wife, Kathey, who collected and sent the seashells from the Gulf of Mexico near their home in Florida. The completed items were donated to the Saint Mary’s Christmas bazaar.

Betty loved her brother, Ronald; he was not just her brother but also her friend. She cherished her relationship with Ronald and Kathey.

Betty loved teaching and served as an elementary teacher and principal at schools in Virginia, New York City and Washington, D.C. She received her bachelor's degree in elementary education and religion from Dunbarton College of Holy Cross, Washington, D.C. She had a reputation as a strong, well-respected, compassionate educator.

Chris Brandt met Liz at Holy Cross Nursing and Rehab in Burtonsville, Maryland. Liz was an outgoing and generous spirited individual. Sister Vivian Mary Mastromatteo, CSC, was recuperating, and Liz came faithfully to visit with Sister Vivian and tend to her needs until Sister Vivian was able to return home. She was attentive, caring, dedicated to giving support.

Sister Mary Louise Full, CSC, expressed gratitude for Betty's kindness to her during a difficult time in her life. Betty was principal of a big school, an involved and participative member of a large community; she was assisting in the care of her mother and aunts at that time, and she made time to attend to Sister Mary Louise as well. Sister Mary Louise remembered Betty's thoughtfulness and kindness to others. While Mary Louise was recuperating from an incident with a dog, she lived at St. Bernard's Convent in Riverdale, Maryland, for several months, receiving physical therapy at a nearby hospital. The hospitality, care and concern from Betty and the sisters was wonderful. She was included as a member of the community and felt at home. Even with her full schedule, Betty was very solicitous.

Sister Vivian shared that Betty was loving and forgiving. Betty was a faithful friend to Vivian. She graciously shared her time, energy and expertise when needed. She was a good listener. Betty had a loving heart. She unselfishly took a leave of absence to care for her parents in their final days. Sisters M. Stella (Haske), CSC, and Vivian came to sit with her dad on Friday nights so Mrs. Raffo and Betty could go shopping.

Betty's dad was a gentle man. He could not walk as a result of a stroke, so was wheelchair bound all day. Mrs. Raffo was the "commander in chief." She knew what had to be done for him and how to do it. Betty went to Holy Cross Hospital, Silver Spring, Maryland, to learn how to carefully take him from wheelchair to bed and vice-versa without hurting herself or her dad.

Vivian expressed profound gratitude to Betty for taking care of Betty's parents and for being her loving and forgiving friend. They shared and supported one another through times of joy and sorrow, grateful for the gift of a long-lasting friendship.

When the time came for Betty and Vivian to leave their apartment and move to Saint Angela convent, Betty was always generous as a driver for others. She was known as a can-do type of person. She made trips for appointments, the mall, sightseeing or even to the casino for an afternoon adventure. She loved to be able to have a good time too!

Betty was asked by the community leadership to oversee the repairs and maintenance needs for the Bay House property in Annapolis, Maryland. This was a service which she took on as a ministry of love and care. Much gratitude and appreciation go to Liz for her unending labor of love and care with this property, which sisters still enjoy.

Sister Rachel Anne Callahan, CSC, shared that a mysterious illness marked the beginning of Betty's cognitive decline, first robbing her of the ability to read. Betty's acceptance of her condition was remarkable. At the same time, it was heartbreaking to see this very mentally sharp energetic woman start to decline.

Betty loved the D.C./Baltimore area and spoke often of her famous crab cakes. She shared how much fun she had in her ministries as a young sister with her great friend, Vivian. Throughout her long illness, Betty never lost her love of people, music or simple things.

Jamie Caporizo shared that Betty loved music, and so they made a quartet with Sisters Julie McGuire and Judith Ann Murphy, CSC—singing, laughing and sharing stories together. When Sister Vivian relocated to Saint Mary's, they became a quintet, supporting each other.

Betty never lost her beautiful blue eyes and her love of music. When Jamie visited with Betty this past April, remarkably she remembered who Jamie was when Jamie started to sing and kept holding her hand, stroking her arm. When Jamie shared her news of joining a religious community, Betty squeezed her hand and shook it with joy.

Leslie Ramm, a care partner, said that Betty brought a quick wit, calm presence and music wherever she was living. During multiple moves and renovations over the years, Betty lent a lot of strength and good humor to staff to help everyone focus and get through even the most stressful times. She schooled many with her knowledge of music in multiple genres, and all enjoyed hearing her singing or whistling to any tune we put on. She was always thoughtful and giving. Her laugh touched everyone. The relationships Betty formed with the nurses and care partners were powerful and beautiful and words were not necessary to express her love and concern for each of them.

Betty, you are at peace in God's embrace, praying for all of us and singing with the angels.