

Memento for Sister M. Joseph (Sullivan), CSC (Catherine Margaret Sullivan)

December 10, 1924 – April 21, 2019

These memories were lovingly prepared by those who knew Sister M. Joseph, CSC, and shared their reflections. They were written and read by Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, at the funeral on April 24, 2019.

Sister Joseph was born on December 10, 1924, to Tim Sullivan and Dora Moriarty Sullivan in Chicago, Illinois. She was baptized Catherine Margaret Sullivan but was known to friends and family as Peg. She was the youngest child; Eileen was three years older and Jim just one year older. Both her parents were immigrants from Ireland who arrived in America a few years apart. They met and married soon after World War I.

Life was not easy after the boom of the post-war era and the slide into the Great Depression. People worked very hard to keep the family going. Tim was a milkman and Dora ran a boarding house for a few years. They finally saved enough to buy a small bungalow in Chicago. The church played a big role in the lives of the Irish community on the South Side. It was their church, their family and their village all rolled into one.

After the stock market collapsed in 1929, the young Sullivan family had a tragedy of a more personal and intense nature. Dora Sullivan died at the age of 37 on December 10, 1931. It was Peg's seventh birthday. Later Sister Joseph wrote: "These were really sad days for us." Tim found the task of raising his children overwhelming. Dora's sister Catherine and her brother Tom, better known as Con, both stepped in to help, welcoming the Sullivan children into their respective families. Eileen went to live with the growing family of Catherine and Dan Callahan, while Jim and Peg joined the household of Con and Bridget Moriarty. Jerry Moriarty writes, "I was an infant when Peg joined our family. I never thought of her as a cousin, but she always was our sister. Have childhood memories of her scrubbing the dirt off my knees."

Peg and Jim were enrolled in St. Theodore Elementary School in Chicago where they met the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Peg's vocation to religious life blossomed at St. Theodore's. She greatly admired Sister Angelista, CSC, her eighth-grade teacher, and Sister Rafaelia, CSC, the moderator of a group of

girls interested in religious life. Peg applied to St. Mary's Academy, here at the motherhouse at the time, for her secondary education. She entered the juniorate as preparation for her admission to the convent. After the first semester of her senior year, she entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross as a candidate. Peg graduated in the spring. She entered the novitiate in August and was given the name Sister Mary Joseph. She made her initial profession on August 15, 1945, and perpetual profession on August 15, 1948. Before long she was just Joe to her friends. Later she would be Sister Joe to thousands of first-graders.

There are stories galore about Sister Joe and her students, more stories than time to tell them! Here is just one among many. In Michigan City winters every child wore a snowsuit. Guess who put them on the first-graders? Right—their teacher Sister Joe! One snowy day, she put on a little boy's leggings, boots, jacket and scarf. Just as she put on a glove, the boy said, "Sister Joe, this isn't my snowsuit." Off came the jacket, scarf, boots and leggings. Then the boy said, "It is my sister's. My mom told me to wear it today!"

Another time on the playground, a child went to the principal Sister M. Catherine Dolores, CSC, and asked her if she had any hair. Sister explained that indeed she did—the same color as her eyebrows. Sister then asked the student why she wanted to know. The child said, "Sister Joe told us she had feathers on her head!"

In 1968, Sister Joseph became a principal and enjoyed that ministry through 1984. She was a beloved teacher and principal, touching many lives.

Sister Joseph's family also has a treasure trove of stories about Aunt Peg. Jerry Moriarty commented: "She had great love and devotion to our parents (Aunt Bridget and Uncle Con). She visited frequently. After Dad passed she would take our mom to Sunday Mass, then stop at Long John Silver's for brunch.... After our mother and father had both passed, Peg remained very close to us. One time she stayed with our children, then 12 and 11 years old, while Mary Ann and I were at a business convention. Later we learned that as we drove away, she said to the kids, 'If they are on vacation, we are on vacation!' That meant that every night she ordered pizza and rented a movie! Our children adored her from that day forward!"

Sister Joseph's great-niece, Marie Colleen, is the daughter of Donna and Myles Moriarty. She writes, "Aunt Peg was an important part of my life since I can remember. My father was the youngest of the Moriarty's and passed

away very early. I was seven years old, and my brother had just turned three. When my mom decided to return to work as a nurse, she worked the night shift, so she could be home with my brother and me during the day. We had three overnight sitters who would rotate, and Aunt Peg was one of them! She was our sitter who broke all the rules, let us stay up late, would bring special treats, and would tell us the most amazing stories....

“As we got older, she would come and stay at our house for weekends, just as part of the family. I believe the last time she drove to Chicago was the weekend my daughter passed away. We didn’t know she was coming, and she wasn’t told how sick my daughter was. My daughter passed away during the night and Peg showed up that day. She said she just knew she needed to come.

“Whenever we were having a hard time and we spoke with Peg, she would be sure to remind us that we were always in the prayer book. All the sisters were praying for us. This always provided comfort, and somehow, things always worked out.”

Sister Joseph served as a councilor with Sister M. Rose Edward (Goodrow), CSC, Angela Area Coordinator from 2005 to 2010. Sister Rose was grateful for Sister’s presence on the team, especially her dedication to the sisters. She was on the floors in Saint Mary’s Convent every day, visiting the sisters, checking in with the staff, and being an affirming and encouraging presence to all. She brought the same love of life and lilting laughter to Saint Mary’s Convent that she had shared with students and family over the years. In 2010, I had the privilege of being mentored by Sister Joseph as I assumed the duties that she had had in the convent. She clued me in, letting me know the drill, as we say, with a smile and a chuckle.

The truth is, Sister Joseph continued her warm and loving ministry of caregiving until her death. About two weeks before she died, I was with her at lunch. She saw another sister across the table who needed some assistance and reached out to help her. She also pointed her finger at me, indicating that I should do something as well. Sister Joseph was forever overseeing the needs of the sisters. She never stopped caring.

Years ago, Sister Joseph said that she wanted to die on Easter, and her risen Lord gave Sister Joseph her heart’s desire. Surely heaven became even more wonderful and more fun when Sister Joe arrived. May she now celebrate with all her loved ones. Let the family party begin!