

**MAMA AND WE TWINS**  
**A Memoir of Three American Women**  
By Arleen McCarty Hynes OSB

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## Preface

The following is a story of a heartland – my twin Eileen's and mine. I am Arleen McCarty Hynes, my twin was Eileen McCarty Yeager. And any heart Eileen and I have always includes our Mama, Josie Dunn McCarty.

Like most tellers of tales I can use "my", "I", and "me" to describe my point of view. But because I am an identical twin, and because we twins were raised by our Mama, I have additional perspectives. "We", "us", "our", "Eileen's", "hers", and "she" are all part of any story I can try to write about Mama and we twins. Precisely because Mama kept us aware that we twins were each a unique person, always, the three of us are intimately, lovingly bound.

The telling of this story grew from several seeds. Around 1976 I had been asked by Reverend Tilden Edwards, who in those years was forming Shalem, a great ecumenical spiritual center in Washington, D.C., to give a talk on the topic of spiritual development within family life. I chose to write about Mama's influence on us. I had asked Eileen to write her version of the same topic while I was writing mine. This gives readers a means of checking the validity of my interpretation. Eileen's account is Appendix I.

We twins grew up knowing our lives were a daily miracle. This was because Mama kept us alive in the first place. She did not gift us with life itself – Mary Grace Gannon McCarty and Veatus Cletus McCarty, our birth parents, did that. But her strong will and unflagging care kept us kicking and crying, and lapping up milk, till we could survive on our own.

As Mama preserved our existence, so she kept us in love, faith and grace as we evolved our early experiences together and went on to carry out those loving values through the rest of our separate lives.

We are still bound in love and faith – and God, the continuous source of graces given us to live in and through whatever each of us had to experience, endure, or transform. And it is through God's help that, however often we failed to achieve the standards we longed to live by, we were helped to return to the ideals.

Since the century has turned to 2000, I am the only one of the three still maintaining the struggle of living out these values. Mama has been gone long since in earthly time, over a half century ago; actual date, 1946. Eileen has been gone only since 1995. They are together now, continuing to hold my heart, and very often, my head, in the beauty of the life lived, as I shall try to reflect in this story of Mama and we twins.

Epiphany 1998 brought forth another seed for this story. At that time, I thought I would be able to finish rewriting the earliest version and send it off to our children. But with the re-writing came the realization that the first draft of 1976 was very specifically centered. My task then had been to write about parental influence on spiritual development. Finally, I felt I could do in 1998 what my classmate in Benedictine life, Sister Ruth Bodigheimer OSB, had always urged me to do: "Tell the story of Mama."

To do so broadens the tale considerably. The subtitle of the 1976 version was "Family Life and Spiritual Development." It was the very essence of life with Mama that "life" and "spiritual life" were synonymous.

A further seed is the story of "The Mothers" that I finished on our birthday in 1990. That "story" about our birth seems to me to have a life of its own. While it is a true story, it is told from the point of view of an anonymous observer. But I loved writing it. I want to leave it as it is. It will be the first chapter of the present work. The rest of "Josie and the Twins" is told from my personal observations and insights, a different genre.

As I explain the origins of these memories, it seems appropriate to me to include the deep influence that Shalem, the "first cause" of the first version, had on my life in the seventies. Shalem, in 1998, celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary of functioning as a significant source of spiritual formation and information in the Washington, D.C. area, as well as nationwide. They started, and continue to conduct, training programs for those interested in becoming spiritual guides to other searchers.

My dear friend, Delores Leckey, was on the board of Shalem from the beginning. She, as always in many ways, and in numerous influential places, has been an instigator of various stimulating spiritual projects. We were in the first Scriptural prayer-group in the then-Richmond Diocese during the years of Vatican II. Scriptural study groups were common and as part of that movement we began to "pray" Scripture. From 1979 to 1998 Delores served as the Secretariat for the Laity in the National Council of Catholic Bishops. Rhoda Nary, another member of that Scriptural prayer group, has also been active in Shalem.

It was Delores who suggested I might be interested in attending the second annual term of weekly sessions which reverently familiarized us with many ways to pray, among them, forms of Eastern prayer. Tilden Edwards led the group.

The first abiding benefit of that Shalem experience is that by the end of the several month-long series, I came to recognize that the Divine Office, made up of the Psalms and Scripture readings, said three times a day after Vatican II, was my calling. On the basis of that conviction, I retired in 1980 from St. Elizabeth's Hospital Circulating Library and my new career in training biblio/poetry therapists, and came out to our old home territory near St. John's University. I was not "coming home again." This time I came to St. Benedict's Convent (now Monastery) in St. Joseph, Minnesota to live the communal life and to pray the Divine Office under vows. Indeed, it has been a great blessing.

The second vitally significant achievement that sprang from my association with Shalem was the writing of a biblio/poetry therapy textbook for trainees. Delores had told me of Dr. Gerald May, M.D., who had chosen to utilize his psychiatric training as a spiritual guide. It was through God's help, during his months of spiritual counseling after my husband's death in 1971, that I could go on.

Then, when Frederic Preager of Westview Press asked me to write a biblio/poetry therapy textbook for trainees, I asked Jerry to be my reader, to detect if I was making gross psychological errors. I was not a trained therapist, the biblio/poetry field was just developing, and anything I would write needed professional review. Jerry May agreed to read the early drafts. So I had a goal to prepare a chapter each month. He was amazingly generous to read those rambling scripts and gently guide me. I benefited immensely from the discussions about each chapter and especially from Jerry's insights. Before I left in 1980, I was able to finish the early draft of the fifteen chapters I had planned.

As I would drive around the six-lane freeway from Virginia to Jerry's home-office in Maryland, I also learned something I should have known about myself – that if I wanted to do something badly enough, I would bring about whatever seemed significant. That became clear as I pursued this truly dangerous, life-threatening freeway driving.

With my daughter Mary Hynes-Berry's help as editor, I came to realize that she and I could also do all the rewriting necessary to publish the textbook. Through the entire process, Mary and I spent many hours on the long-distance telephone while I tried to both learn the computer she gave me and straighten out awkward sentences.

In my first three years in the Benedictine community I spent several hours a day adding new materials. I am grateful to Sister Evin Radmacher OSB, our then-prioress, who directed this to be my daily work. I now recognize that both the brash courage to start the book and the persistence to finish it is another of Mama's influences on my life.

Thus it is also clear that I owe a great debt of gratitude to Gerald May, Tilden Edwards and Shalem.

In 1976 time had limited what I could include in the Shalem-inspired document. Now, in this re-writing, I am trying to be more comprehensive and recall incidents of our lives as well as Mama's in order to exemplify the many ways she influenced us through her deep, pervasive spirituality and love of God.

In the course of this re-working, I have concluded that Josie Dunn McCarty, Mama, communicated four major things to us.

- The obligation and personal need for prayer; for communicating with God several times a day. This was a tangible reality in her life.
- The obligation to wisely use God's unique gifts to each one of us. They were God's Gifts, not the result of personal achievement. Gratitude to God was the basic understanding.
- The obligation to see God's creative hand in all things, including scientific contributions and cosmic reality. Continuing to study and learn throughout one's lifetime demonstrated that.
- The obligation to respect all persons, God's creatures, and thus to treasure and protect our own integrity.

We all appreciated these beliefs and attitudes. Not that we carried them out perfectly in our lives. But Mama was no perfectionist, and she knew God had sent His Son, Jesus, to save all of us imperfect humans. Knowing us well, God gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to use freely and gladly.

I am also aware of the perduring source of strength and purpose that my husband, Emerson Merton Hynes, and our son, Michael, provided me. They both died before I began writing the textbook, and, of course, before the change in my life-style from library to convent. When I pause to think of it, I also realize that my four parents have, indeed, been supporting me in prayer during my life on earth without them.

It has been a deep pleasure to have written this. I have always loved recalling incidents of our life with Mama. I highly recommend writing memoirs to people of whatever age. The lovely intimate memories may bring tears and a fresh sense of loss. Some things will be left unsaid. They are too close to the heart, or your depiction of how you perceived an event might hurt someone else, or someone's memory. The less fortunate situations can be clarified, or lived through again in sadness and regret, possibly bringing about accommodation in your own heart. In any case, all the memories can be acknowledged, reconciled, and lovingly savored. Or so it has been for me with this work.

*Preface completed on December 22, 1999*

*At the winter solstice and the lunar perigee -- (the brightest moon in 133 years.)*

**Arleen McCarty Hynes OSB**

*St Joseph MN*

**Note on the illustrations:** The illustrations were found and chosen by James McCarty Yeager, Eileen and Francis's eldest, who also performed the text editing for this memoir. Though the dates and places of the pictures are not strictly limited to Sheldon or to the period of my residence there from 1916 to 1940, they have been selected to accompany the text because they embody, or at any rate show, aspects of the ordinary world as it existed around that time and place when the twins were growing up. In accordance with good library practice, every effort has been made to describe the source for each image as fully as the originating collection would permit. As this memoir is, strictly speaking, not being published, no attempt has been made to secure copyright permission to reprint the illustrations. Just enjoy them.

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## **THE MOTHERS**

Mary Grace Gannon McCarty, exhausted by the work of caring for the six living children and the pain of childbirth, lay in the tiny bedroom of the four room farm house. Her heavy, curly auburn hair, soaked with perspiration, lay upon the pillow. It had been bright gold when she came from Ireland, a young girl. As the years passed it had darkened, but people remembered her for its striking quality.

It was barely spring, early May of 1916, the lacy days of budding trees were just beginning. The fields were not all plowed, but the fence lines stretched straight ahead, mile after mile over the rich, flat Iowa land. Only the planted groves around the farm homes broke the level fields. That night it was cold enough to need a fire in the cook stove to warm the house. It was the season when birth, death, and resurrection are simultaneous.

Dr. Cram went home that night from the dying mother's ninth delivery to his sister's bedside. She, too, expected death--from a lingering cancer. Sadly, before he left he told the father, Veatus McCarty, to have the neighbor make the casket for Mary Grace big enough to hold the new-born, premature twins.

Veatus McCarty was struggling to make the mortgage payments on his poor land, and glad to have four young boys to help him farm. The two daughters, eight and ten, were old enough to help with the housework. Because Mary Grace had had a difficult pregnancy, she needed all the help the children and Veatus could give her to pump the water, bring in the wood for the stove and help cook and scrub. They could not afford a hired girl until the actual time of delivery.



**Figure 1 - Farm on Nebraska State Route 94, Thurston County, 1983, by Carl Fleischhauer, Library of Congress, Omaha Indian Music, American Memory Digital Collection**



Mary Grace's three sisters did not live nearby, and she was the oldest in her family. Everyone on both sides of the family had worried for the last seven months because Dr. Cram had predicted she would not live after the delivery. Her sisters wrote to each other and each had made the difficult trip from the Dakota's to visit. Each said she could take one of the expected twins, but not both, for they each had babies of their own.

That brisk, sunny day in May, Veatus had stayed in the house the morning before the delivery and sent the children out to play. The boys were old enough to climb the trees in the grove and do the chores alone. The four year old boy, Xie, (for Xavier), wandered in and out of the house. That evening when he heard his mother's weak moans, he put his blonde head on his arms and cried softly. He knew something was terribly wrong and he sensed everyone had forgotten that it would be his fourth birthday the next day. Trudy, the oldest girl, tried awkwardly to comfort him. Since the girls were also frightened by seeing the foot of their mother's bed up on bricks when they peeked into the bedroom, and had noticed that she was paying no attention to them, they were too upset to play with him as they usually did.

The hired girl, Ella, had been there for two days, but they did not know her yet and she felt strange to them. Ella lived south of Sibley. Hired girls were reluctant to come to a family with six children in a childbirth situation but Ella desperately needed work. The girl admired the pretty china she saw in the small glass-doored china closet. But she also saw that nothing else was fancy in the kitchen-living room. The bedroom Mary Grace was in, the only other room downstairs, had plain, and mended, muslin curtains. Two rows of dark blue rickrack trimmed them. The muslin curtains in the two upstairs rooms were absolutely plain. The hired girl shared the west room with the two girls and the little boys. The bigger boys all slept across the hall. And now that she was here she was angry. Mr. McCarty had not told her the wife might die, but she could hear the doctor as well as everyone else in the house.

Dr. Cram did not take Josie Dunn McCarty into account when he predicted the death of the twins. She was called "Aunt Jo" in this family of McCarty's. All along, Aunt Jo said she could not bear to think of the twins being parted. She felt they were to be her twins; she would raise them--together. No one knew how Uncle Jim, her husband, really felt about it. He was a stout man, balding, but with kind eyes and a gentle smile. Aunt Jo, taller than most women, was regally erect and had blue eyes. She wore her graying hair in a soft pompadour. She had been a sickly woman all the years Dr. Cram had practiced in Sheldon, Iowa. Jim was still getting used to her not having to help around the house as he had ever since their oldest son, Lyle, had been born forty years before. And their oldest daughter, Vivian, still lived on the farm with her parents. Of course, she helped around the house, although she went to work in town daily at the Farmer's Elevator.

Aunt Jo had been at the house all day. Uncle Jim brought her over, went home to plow, and then came back. Veatus had reluctantly been persuaded that the premature twins should be removed from the too-small house where other women would be coming in to help the dying woman. Aunt Jo could see that the only place to put the wailing babies was on the kitchen table, out of the way of the draughts from the opening and closing door.

Veatus was numbly desolate. He and Mary Grace had talked, but restrainedly during the last months. Veatus could not bring himself to give up the twins, he last tie to Mary Grace. He held stubbornly to the hope that he and some hired girl, with his two girls, could manage. But he had not dealt with this

premature birth and the twins weighing three and three and a half pounds. The sight of the babies -- without fully formed finger nails, no eye lashes, almost no hair, and large open mouths crying out -- unnerved him.

He had to give in to Aunt Jo. Out of her own strong need she drove a hard bargain. Veatus said she could take the babies home now, but could he expect to have them rejoin the family when they were two or three years old, strong enough to survive? Aunt Jo had given much thought to this tragic moment, the mother's death that Veatus and Mary Grace could not bear to speak realistically about. Aunt Jo had spoken once to Mary Grace of her desire to take care of the twins. Aunt Jo, for all her physical sickliness, was emotionally straightforward and never evasive. She told Veatus that she knew she would love the twins too much to give them up if they survived. They were to be hers, or Mary Grace's sister would have to decide who would take which one. If they stayed in the crowded farm house, they would probably die as Dr. Cram predicted. Veatus, with his energy drained out of him, agreed.

Aunt Jo was not insensitive to Veatus' predicament, but she felt compelled, as she told the story later, to insist they come with her. So Uncle Jim had come in the 1916 open Hudson touring car, the latest model, with extra pillows and plenty of blankets. Their daughter, Vivian, left her work in Sheldon early and came along to hold one of the twins on a pillow, while Aunt Jo held the other and Uncle Jim drove the ten miles to Sheldon.

Before they left, Aunt Jo, Uncle Jim, Vivian and Veatus crowded into the bedroom where the midwife was constantly changing the blood soaked sheets for clean, but worn out sheeting. She was trying to deal with the hemorrhaging. Aunt Jo and Vivian held the babies while their father baptized them, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Mary Grace whispered the names she had chosen--the oldest, by an hour, was named Mary Arleen, the weaker, younger, left-handed one, Brigid Eileen. Both were named after the saint of the day. In those World War I years, May third was the feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross by St. Helene. In her home village of Lisduvoge, Ireland, on the east shore of Lough Conn near Ballina in County Mayo, as a young girl Mary Grace had loved the names derived from Helene. As they put each twin in her arms for a few moments, Mary Grace wept silently.

It was not quite dark as Vivian and Aunt Jo, each carrying one of the carefully bundled twins, and Uncle Jim left -- being careful not to slam the door. The twins almost disappeared in each pillow as they lay curled in the tiny blankets and well-worn kimono Mary Grace had prepared. Each woman draped a larger blanket over her head and the pillowed baby to keep off the evening's brisk breezes as they started down the absolutely straight road in the open touring car. By dawn the next day the twins were motherless.

That evening and for the next couple days, Aunt Jo and Vivian tried giving the twins a bottle of water and milk. The nipples of those years were made of hard, black, ribbed rubber. The twins refused them, again and again, and continued the weak cries. If one stopped for a few minutes, the other kept up the cry. They both wailed -- night and day. Dr. Cram could suggest nothing; he said they were starving to death.



**Figure 2- Third Avenue, Sheldon Iowa, circa 1916, as shown at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/ia/obrien/postcards/3rdav.jpg>**

Aunt Jo deliberated. She thought of putting white sugar in the corner of a clean dishcloth and letting them suck. And they did, hungrily. But it was not enough. They were blue, their veins pounding at the temples of the hairless heads. So Aunt Jo knew she had to get some milk and water in them, somehow. She thought of the farm animals and pets. They could drink out of pans of milk almost at birth when their mothers had died. She carefully blended a bit of milk with the water at first and, holding the tiny, squirming baby with its back to her lap so it would be erect, she put the baby's face into the liquid. It lapped it up, eagerly, thirstily. If it seemed that the twin was going to choke because of too much liquid, she removed the saucer and let her catch her breath. Vivian also learned how to balance the twin, the saucer, and the milk. One arm surrounded the twin, with that hand grasping the kimono to keep the baby upright. The other arm and the hand brought the saucer to the twin's face. The caretaker had to be quick and clever not to spill the milk, and yet to get it positioned so the twin could lap up the liquid. As the twins finally got stronger, the helping one grew agile at controlling the squirming bodies and the milk and the saucer. But they had to then learn how to grasp the flailing arms to keep the milk from being spilled.

Eileen and Arleen were always hungry because they did not get much food at each session. So Vivian and Aunt Jo developed a schedule. Aunt Jo went to bed about eight in the evening, after Vivian had some home from her day's work, had eaten her supper, and sat quietly in the rocking chair resting for about a half hour. Then she took over the care of the twins. Uncle Jim was back to doing all the housework and most of the cooking as he had for so many years because the twins demanded full attention.

Vivian's brother, named for his uncle, Veatus, (both my father and this cousin were usually referred to as Vete) also lived on the farm helping Uncle Jim work the growing acreage. Soon, he too became part of the twenty-four hour care of the twins. Veatus went to bed early, when Aunt Jo did. He slept and got up about two in the morning and relieved Vivian who needed to get some sleep in her own bed before going to work the next day in town.

Young Veatus also learned how to feed the twins from saucers.

But he complained that his overalls did not provide a "lap" for the squirming, tiny twin. He had to fold a large blanket across his knees to keep the twin from sliding to the floor between his legs. Veatus fed one twin and the other, changed them, patted them to help them burp, and laid them down if ever one stopped crying. His schedule ran from two a.m. to five-thirty a.m., when Aunt Jo got up for her day's care. He and Uncle Jim had to do the milking. And since it was spring, the work in the field had begun. But he got a couple hours of sleep after lunch each day.

In June the pussy willows came out along the bank of the creek. Pig weed came up, pungent and prickly, in the sunny spots of the grove. The corn was planted, sprouted, grew to knee high by the Fourth of July. The days were steaming hot at times, and at other times a dry scorching wind swept across the former tall-grass prairie.

On Sundays Veatus and the six children came over after Mass at Sibley. So the children were very hungry for Sunday dinner. It was a very plain meal that Uncle Jim fixed, but it tasted so good, more like the meals Mary Grace had made than the ones the succession of hired girls made.

The children, except for the girls, were not allowed to hold the tiny twins except when Vivian put Eileen in Trudy's arms and Arleen in Varnius' for a short time each Sunday afternoon. The boys, especially Xie, could reach into the laundry basket they lay in and let the twins grasp at their index fingers. Each boy took his turn. As the summer went on, Vivian's young woman friends also came out to see the babies that all Sheldon was talking about. One of the young women looked at the scrawny babies and turned away. She said they made her sick. But one of Vivian's friends helped her wash the mound of baby diapers that was always waiting to be washed and hung on the lines to dry.

And each Sunday the twins were weighed. Veatus took part and the children watched as the weekly weighing began. The twins were always wrapped in the same blankets. Their father held one and then the other, as he stepped on the live stock scales. Its wooden platform was on the floor of the granary. The planks of the flooring of the scale vibrated inside the iron frame when it was stood upon. When the heavy wagons drove on it to be weighed that was not noticeable. Young Veatus and Uncle Jim lead the animals on the hoof to its palpitating surface. On Sundays, for the last several months, the McCarty twins, Eileen and Arleen, were also weighed. Each Sunday, all summer long, the watching group waited for the announcement that one of them, at least, had gained some weight. As Veatus pronounced, "Three and a half pounds, Arleen," and "Three pounds, Eileen," the little group said nothing, but silently started back for the house.

By mid-August, when thrashing time arrived the twins were not crying quite as much. But the twenty-four hour schedule still held, though there were longer periods of quiet and the babies' watcher could catch a short nap on their scheduled duty period.

The weather grew cooler, which the twins and all the McCartys enjoyed. They could rest better when they had time to rest. One bright October Sunday the ritual began again.

Aunt Jo and Vivian stepped on the scales first, as they often did. They had discovered by June that they were losing weight from their rigorous caretaking. Month after month, they went on losing. Vivian had lost eight pounds; Veatus, five; and Aunt Jo, ten.

The twins' weight all along had held at three and three and a half pounds. Aunt Jo's heart sank when they did not show a gain, though she was beginning to see some faint blonde hair and eyelashes, and the flaying of the tiny arms in anger at the constant hunger was stronger.

This brisk, sunny Sunday Veatus stepped on the scales, checked the weight of the twin he held, and looked up in happy surprise. He stepped off again and then back on. He needed reassurance. Then he announced that Arleen had gained a pound! The waiting family smiled and Varnius gave a little leap of joy--even an eight year old could sense that everyone thought this was important. But Trudy, with the burden of being the oldest girl, was cautious. Then the next bundle was handed from your Veatus to the father. Aunt Jo and Vivian, and all the adults, knew the real test would come with Eileen's weight. She continued to be more frail than Arleen, who had a one-hour and one-half-pound head start. Eileen's cry was a little weaker, but she ate as eagerly and as often as Arleen. Veatus held the blanketed baby, looked carefully at the scale, looked again, and turning to the waiting group, smiled broadly and said, "Eileen has gained one pound!"

Aunt Jo had won the battle. In six months she and Vivian and Veatus had lost a total of twenty-three pounds. The twins had finally gained one. And the twins lived.

## **MAMA AND DADDY**

### ***Beginnings***

Johanna Dunn McCarty was called "Aunt Jo" by her many nieces and nephews who somewhat feared her. At least Trudy, our sister, said our brothers and sisters did. Her thirty-some grandchildren called her "Grandmother." My twin and I never called her anything but "Mama" until we were teen-agers. Then we would laughingly kiss her on the top of her silvery hair, leaving a pink blur from our Tangee lipstick on the crown of her head. As in the 1930s we went off to dances sixty miles away, three nights a week, we would admonish her. "Josie," we'd say, "be a good girl while we are gone." She'd smile and we would feel her deep love for us. We had heard her contemporaries call her "Josie" and we used it occasionally.

I told my children as they set off for an evening in the 1960s, "Have a *good* time!" since that was what Mama had said to us as we dashed off to dances with the "gang". "Twins," Mama would say, "have a *good* time." We knew what she meant. She really meant us to have fun enjoying the skill and art of dancing as we did almost every evening at our home until nine-thirty p.m.

She meant that we should enjoy being with our friends. She wanted us to see God's beauty in every good thing, and, thereby avoid the temptations to impurity, envy or anger. She wanted us to treat all people with respect and to delight in being alive. We had recognized what she was saying when we were teen-agers, and I dearly wanted those same things for our children on their outings.

Johanna Dunn McCarty was born in 1860, married James McCarty in 1886, and had four children, Lionel, Vivian, Veatus and Loretta McCarty. She suffered from long years of ill health as a younger woman. Then in 1916, at age fifty-four, she insisted she would raise us twins after her sister-in-law had died in childbirth.

Our mother, Mary Grace Gannon McCarty, died of "childbed fever," an infection, common in older times, consequent upon an incomplete expelling of the afterbirth. It took two days. They knew within 24 hours that she would not live. The story my twin Eileen told her children was that the parish priest or the doctor warned James McCarty, "Don't bother to write those twins into the family Bible. They cannot possibly live now that their mother is dying." Somehow coming to hear of this, Josie Dunn came right over from the farm to James and Mary's house in town and said, "You give them to me and I will take care of them." When Eileen would tell this story there would be an edge to her voice as she quoted Mama, implying both Josie's acquiescence to the will of God but her determination to do what those men said could not be done.

Because we essentially had two sets of parents, we developed a naming convention to keep them straight. Josie Dunn McCarty was always "Mama," while Mary Grace Gannon McCarty was "our mother." Our uncle, Josie's husband James McCarty, was "Daddy," while his brother, our father Veatus Cletus McCarty, was "our dad." The multiplication of names is like a Russian novel only pronounceable.

Josie Dunn was a lovely "lady," when that term meant something about behavior and was not restricted to "having money and servants." She combed her soft, wavy, white hair straight back. She allowed it to gently frame her face with waves, and casually twisted it into a bun at the nape of her neck. Mama's eyes were wonderfully blue, her gaze always direct. I do not remember her laugh, but she often had a gentle smile. She was clearly a fine and earnest woman.

For most of her life, until her broken hip in 1928, Mama had a graceful, and purposeful, long stride. She was a slender person but not thin. She seemed tall to us. I suppose she was someplace between five feet five or seven inches tall. In her eighties she had shrunk considerably from the very severe arthritis in her spine. But she always walked erect, even when she limped. We thought of her as looking almost elegant in whatever she wore.

Daddy was about five feet nine or ten inches tall, rotund as he got older. He had the McCarty round head, sparsely covered with grey hair when we knew him in his sixties. I remember his sixty-fourth birthday. I decided that he had become "middle aged", and that continued to be my notion. I felt I had turned middle aged when I became sixty-four and entered the Benedictine order. It still seems sensible, if not mathematically viable.

Now I see my eldest Denis with his white-hair crew cut, my sons Hilary and T.More, balding and both with round heads and full oval faces as they are entering their fifties. My second son Pat, with his sparse red hair and off-again-on-again red-grey beard, also has a full face. I am surprised to see my family's photo with a group of McCarty male faces like dear Daddy's.

My own father, Veatus McCarty, looked different. His complexion was darker, he was shorter, though broad shouldered, with a strong body, and he had distinctive features. One time when we were teen-agers Dad came to visit. He knocked at the door in the evening, and I answered. I was startled to see this man with dark hair and a bushy white beard. I did not recognize him for several minutes. Somehow, it was always good to see that Daddy and our Dad did not look alike. They were quite distinct persons in our lives. I always appreciated that our son Timothy looks like our Dad.

Daddy had paler blue eyes than Mama's and they were not as piercing. When Daddy took care of us while Mama was in the hospital for six months with a broken hip in a cast when we were about eleven or twelve, I remember Daddy scolding us for something. But I said, "Daddy, you are not really cross with us. You are laughing in your eyes."

Actually, Daddy was usually very patient and mild. In no way was he the stern disciplinarian Mama was. She would send us out to get a small willow growth at the base of the tree in the back yard. That was the worst part of the punishment, which I think she knew. She had a good strong swing when she switched our legs – but only a couple of times. It was clear to us that she did not punish us in anger, but out of a sense that we would do better about correcting the fault if we remembered the sting. I do not remember what the punishment was for most of the time, nor was it frequent. But I have been deeply convinced that lying seemed to be the most serious fault.

Caution about lying carried over in our family's discipline. When our children were growing up they did not get punished for misdemeanors when they told the truth about it, only if they had denied or lied about the situation.

After my husband Emerson died, and I had to leave for work before the boys woke up to go to school, I would get calls about nine in the morning. The woman who called about attendance would say, "Your boys were caught smoking this morning and were late. There will be detention tonight. But at least Hynes boys never lie about their activities." The calls created both embarrassment and assurance.

So we thought Mama was lovely to look at but a somewhat stern parent, while Daddy was patient and easy to please. And we loved them both, different as they were. For we were always aware of their love. After all, Mama had deliberately chosen us.

Daddy always wore a suit, shirt and tie, like a small town business man. I never remember seeing him in overalls after we moved to Sheldon, Iowa when he retired from the farm. We were about four. Daddy often spoke of going over to the Farmer's Elevator to see his friends, where Vivian, their daughter, had worked before her marriage. She was working there when we were born and when we were tiny she spent part of each night taking care of us.

The Farmers' Elevator was a fixture in almost every town, and actually was an architectural feature of Iowa farms in the area of Northwest Iowa and Southwest Minnesota, where the soil was very black and extremely fertile. Many kinds of grain, and especially, good corn, grew there – over one hundred bushels an acre of corn was the yield in the nineteen thirties.

Grain elevators are wooden structures, the main part a tall rectangle, with a steeply slanted roof on one side only, above the top of the rectangle was a smaller rectangle and another small, slanted roof. The "tower", about five stories tall, stored the grain. A lower building, about two stories high, had a less steeply slanted roof and served as business office. I think elevators were a cooperative venture of the local farmers with a manager hired to see that it was economically successful.



**Figure 3 - Elevators at Wood River, Nebraska, circa 1910, Nebraska State Historical Society**

They were in contrast with another rural architectural feature of farms in the Midwest where the soil was perhaps less rich and each farm had its own silo. Silos are cylindrical towers of wood or metal, in which green fodder for silage to feed the livestock is stored. After World War II silos of deep,



shiny blue appeared. They seemed to me to be made of a ceramic, and we were told they were very expensive. My interpretation is that if the soil is as good as the McCarty farms in Iowa, and the Hynes-Willette farms in southern Minnesota, the farmers did not have large numbers of cattle or pigs. But when the soil was not that productive, it would pay to raise grains to feed animals, and make more money by selling the livestock. Thus, farmers bought their own silo to prepare food for the cattle.



**Figure 4 - Silo and Corn Crib, Black Hawk County, Iowa, circa 1939, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection**

Daddy had lots of friends, it seemed to us. He would speak of having met someone at the Knights of Columbus Hall where they played cards daily. He went to the pool hall, a large building along Main Street in Sheldon. It was fine for retired men to play pool, but not considered quite acceptable for young men, and never for women. He was also gone playing golf in the nice weather.

It seemed that retired farmers plan how to keep in touch with each other. Years later, my contemporaries, the boy McCarty twins, Lionel's sons who were a year and a half older than we were, often spoke of arranging for "Board Meetings" at their favorite cafe in Sheldon at eight in the morning. They ordered the best sweet rolls and chose the place for the coffee. They were in their seventies then.

I think Mama was glad Daddy liked to do these things with his friends. I remember her talking about

how healthy, and like his years as a farmer, it was for him to be outdoors for hours playing golf.

Mama did not go "visiting" very often, as I remember. She and Mrs. Sweeney were friends, as was a widow, Kate Hunt. Kate and Mama always talked of spiritual matters. Another friend was a Downs woman who had married and came back to town to town as a widow to visit. Her name was Mary Barry. For some reason we did not like Mary Barry – I suspect she did not treat us, as others did, as if we were special. Mama's friends came over to visit during the daytime. Actually, there were several Irish-Catholic ladies among Mama's friends; most of whom were widows.

One exception was Katie Burns. She was thin and wiry, and very cheerfully took care of her bed-ridden husband, Jack, for his last twenty years. Everybody loved Katie Burns, there was something very endearing about her.

For example, our brother, Jack, died in 1953. He had been a wanderer all his life after recovering from some crippling disease as a boy. He and Lourdes, the oldest, had T.B. as teenagers, and with Jack it reoccurred. Jack was the one who told us that our Dad found it very hard to visit us, and that he was despondent each time he came back to the Minnesota farm after a trip to Sheldon. He missed us so much. At the funeral home, I remember Katie Burns leaning over, patting Jack's cold cheek, and saying, "It is alright, Jack, you are home now."

We treasure a photo of Mama celebrating her eightieth birthday in 1940. Someone from the *Sheldon Mail*, our local paper, even came over to her daughter Vivian Weir's house to photograph them. Considering the number who had gathered that day, and these were just the older Catholic ladies in a town of about three thousand, Iowans must have always been a sturdy lot. Eileen remembered that the sign outside town said, "Four Thousand Friendly Folk," but in those years before reliable statistics we always thought they were exaggerating.

Our dearest friend among Mama's friends was Kate Downs. She was some older than Vivian but had never married. Kate was fun to be with and we could persuade her to visit in the evenings after Daddy died. We'd ask her to come so we could go out to play with the neighborhood children sometimes. Once in a great while she would say she could not come over because she had to stay home "to take care of her fifteen children." Other times she would take us to the Chautauqua in the evenings during the June week it was in town. Mama approved of Chautauqua, after all it was really an adult educational opportunity, and we did go with Mama to the morning and afternoon programs, but she did not like staying up after nine-thirty or ten in the evening.

Chautauqua was held in the very large pitched tent in the Sheldon Park. I particularly remember the lecture about the life of the natives of Uganda. Both men and women, with their extraordinary enlarged lips, were present. We also heard the Swiss bell ringers with their lovely range of tones and saw a demonstration of glass blowing. I wonder if we actually heard William Jennings Bryan, or only heard about him. Now I realize that going to two programs a day must have tired Mama. And she did not like to have us outdoors alone after dark. But Kate could chaperon us. We dearly loved Kate, and enjoyed being with her.

## WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

Fort Worth (Tex.) Telegram — Dr. Mattison Wilbur Chase delivered a lecture at the Christian tabernacle Saturday night, under the auspices of the Fort Worth Lyceum. His subject was, "Why, or the Problem of Life". In the beginning of the lecture, it was philosophic, but after it had progressed for about fifteen minutes, the speaker branched off on a humorous vein in which he is particularly entertaining. He is eloquent and interesting and possesses the peculiar faculty of combining serious topics with the lighter, presenting deep ideas and also amusing his audience.

Charleston (S. C.) News and Courier — Dr. Chase is a brilliant speaker. His periods are pointed and never fail of their mark. He does not allow his hearers to become weary with dull argument, but introduces into the intellectual menu the spice of humor and the essence of good-natured criticism. His words were frequently applauded and he was made to feel that his audience had thoroughly enjoyed the moment.

Sheldon (Ia.) Daily Sun — The second number was the lecture given by Dr. Chase of Chicago last night, and fully sustained the high character of the course. In point of power it was the equal of the best. It abounded in wholesome and practical philosophy, set in choicest diction, brightened with humorous anecdote and turns of wit. The repeated bursts of laughter and rounds of applause gave evidence of a delighted audience. It was a fine audience; it went for pleasure and profit, it came away to praise.

Macon (Tex.) Times-Herald. — A well-rounded, convincing, pleasing and helpful lecture, lighted all the way through with touches of wit and pathos, carrying the central thought home many times and lodging it in the minds of his hearers.

Reading (Pa.) Times — Brim full of eloquence, wit and humor. His telling thrusts at many of the weaknesses of human nature provoked frequent outbursts of laughter. It was one of the best of the course.

Evansville (Ind.) Courier — His entire address was finished and scholarly, and held the closest attention of the audience to the end.

Tuscaloosa (Ala.) Times-Gazette — It has never been the privilege of Tuscaloosa's people to hear a more eloquent lecture than that given Wednesday night by Dr. Chase. He held his large audience spell-bound from beginning to end. He is one of the most fluent speakers ever heard on the platform, and his vocabulary the most extensive and pleasing imaginable. His mixture of ludicrous and humorous anecdotes with the serious phases of life were a happy blending that could not do aught else but make good and lasting impressions on his hearers. It goes without saying that if Mr. Chase can be secured next year on the Y. M. C. A. Lyceum Course, the largest auditorium in the city will not be adequate to accommodate the large number who will want to hear him.

Burlington (Ia.) Hawkeye — Last evening at the Presbyterian Church Dr. Chase, of Chicago, delivered his lecture on, "Why; or the Problem of Life", before a large Y. M. C. A. audience. It was a finished and scholarly address, abounding in interesting incidents which kept the audience in good humor and proved an evening's treat.

Jacksonville (Ill.) Courier — Mattison Wilbur Chase is a stranger in this part of the country, but by his well-displayed fund of eloquence, logic and humor in his lecture last evening, he established himself a favorite from whom Jacksonville audiences will hope for regular visits in the future.

Figure 5 - Review of Chautauqua Lecturer Mattison Wilbur Chase, "the Silver-Tongued Orator of the North," Sheldon *Daily Sun*, 192?, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries

Mama and Daddy were the center of our lives as young children, as would be the case in most healthy families. We did not think of them as "old", though Mama and Daddy were the grandparents of all those cousins. After Daddy died and Mama stopped putting embroidery on each of our identical dresses, we protested once when she talked of making quilts. I remember saying indignantly, "You are not old, Mama. Only old ladies make quilts, and we won't let you make quilts." Really. Without saying much Mama turned to heavy embroidery on priests' stoles. This was certainly before the days of middle-class women making quilts as a hobby.

We always thanked God for giving us to Mama and Daddy when our own mother died and it was impossible for us to be raised with the rest of our family. In fact, I clearly remember when we would be out at our cousins Lionel and Mary's with their large family, how glad we were that we could live in our quiet home.

### ***Home Life at 712 Tenth Street, Sheldon, Iowa***

Home life with Mama, Daddy and we twins was quiet and peaceful. We all loved to read. Except for a chuckle or two, reading is a noiseless activity. I don't even remember a radio when Daddy was still alive. He died in 1928.

Our daily schedule was uncomplicated. We all walked the four blocks up the hill to morning Mass, at eight o'clock. We ate breakfast after that, although Daddy went to Hunt's store to buy the daily groceries. The Hunt's, also Catholics, lived a couple of blocks up Tenth Street in a lovely yellow house. Hunt's and Starret`s were the two largest stores in town that we frequented. Since Hunt's was strictly food, it did not hold much interest for us twins. Wolff's was also a department store, but we went there rarely. Mama probably did not have a charge account there, as she did at Starret`s where we could charge yard goods if it was around twenty-five cents a yard. Eileen remembered a sign, "the Big Busy Department Store," which seemed exaggerated and untrue even to our small-town minds. And after Daddy died we picked up the groceries at Starret`s. James McCarty, one of the boy twins, worked there when he went to high school.

The rest of the daily schedule was not rigid in terms of time, but was consistent. Mama and we twins did an hour of religious reading each day, which I will mention later. And in the evenings we said the Rosary aloud and other prayers, on our knees around the library table.

It seemed that we were only four or five when we moved to town. At some point, it seemed a sudden upheaval to us, the house got refurbished. Eileen and I had been sleeping in our old iron baby bed, with the high sides we could pull up if we wished. We were now established in the front bedroom, looking out on Tenth Street, a large and sunny room. We found a new double bed one day with a matching vanity and tall mirror, and a dresser to hold our clothes. We loved the little bench to sit on in front of the mirror. There was new wall paper and new curtains too. We were happy about it but soon took it all for granted, as children do.



**Figure 6 - Ninth Street, Sheldon Iowa, circa 1935, as shown at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/ia/obrien/postcards/sh9st.jpg>**

And downstairs all the rooms were newly wall-papered and the woodwork painted to blend in. The parlor had vague soft pink and purple flower forms on a grey background; new lace curtains; and a three piece "suite" – a deep red mahogany framed settee and two chairs, with black "leather" seats, one was a rocking chair. The piano we started to practice on for an hour a day when we were seven was beside a window in the west wall. Eileen would tell the story that Mama would make sure both of us practiced every day. Well, Eileen hated practicing and would persuade me to practice for her. When my "real" turn to practice had finished, I would get up, leave the room, and then return as "Eileen" to practice another session. Meanwhile Eileen would sew or do whatever chore she had offered to perform in exchange for my practicing for her. Mama never could understand why, at lessons, the teacher would say that I was doing well but that Eileen needed to practice more.

Eileen also remembered a time when we were maybe six years old and we both had been dressed up, wearing what her youngest daughter Delia recalled being told were big-check gingham dresses with large bows at the back and ruffles on the sleeves; one twin in yellow, the other in blue. Mama was visiting a Protestant lady, not known for having Mama over, in a big house with pillars. So it was a special occasion. While she was gone, we played building a leaf house in the yard, piling up the leaves about three inches to show where the walls should be, and then making leaf pile beds in one "room," a leaf pile stove in the "kitchen", a leaf pile table in the "dining room." After a while we didn't think Mama had come home soon enough, so we went over and sat on the porch at Mrs. X's. All the society ladies came out and saw us, our finery all bedraggled and dirty from playing in the leaves. Mama said she was, in her shocked and pained word, "Mortified."

There were a couple of art reproductions in the parlor. One was a very popular one of that time. It was "The Horses" by Rosa Bonheur. They were huge, prancing horses. Were they for Daddy? Or had Mama heard of the woman painter? We never mentioned them that I remember, but I loved

their energy.



**Figure 7 - Rosa Bonheur, "The Horse Fair" 1853, Metropolitan Museum of Art**

Later, when we were in school, some company held a kind of art "fair" in the gymnasium with the large prints of paintings hung all about. One ordered what one liked and they were mailed, framed, to one's home. So we got a modern, but not impressionistic, woods and fields scene. The copy in the show that Eileen and I admired most was Rembrandt's "The Man in the Golden Helmet." It was great to see it years later at the National Gallery of Art.



**Figure 8 - Rembrandt van Rijn, "Man in the Golden Helmet" circa 1650, Staatliche Museen, Berlin**

I also remember the copy of Our Lady of Perpetual Help on the landing going upstairs, where we could stop and enjoy it. I remember asking Mama, before we were in school, if I could have that when she died. She had a wry smile as she said, "When do you think that will be?" I do not remember a clear "Yes" for an answer.



**Figure 9 - Our Lady of Perpetual Help Icon, circa 1490, Church of San Alfonso, Rome, Redemptorist Fathers**

In front of the bay window and the new lace curtains, Mama had many plants. We awaited the blossoming of the huge Christmas cactus yearly, and carefully avoided touching the tips of the wide-spreading ferns. We had been told they would wither up and die if we did. The coleus and other plants added color and variety to the leafy mass across the front of the room. In addition to the bay window, each side of the room had a rather large window. More than once I recall Mama standing in front of her plants: the huge ferns, the Christmas cactus, the coleus in the bay window on a winter day. This room, too, seemed open and bright. But besides dancing there, the only other thing I remember the room being used for was to practice the piano.

The house was forty feet long, which was an asset when the "gang" came to dance in our teens. Each of the three rooms in the center of the house was spacious. In the middle was the "living" room, true to its name, because that is where we spent most of the time.

The room toward the back of the house was the dining room. We ate there at Christmas when Lionel and Mary O'Kane's children came over, Veatus and Agnes Cajacob's, and Vivian and Matt Weir's gathered for a noon meal on that day only. As we were growing up, so were those families. Ultimately, Lionel's family had fifteen children, Vete's ten, and Vivian's, six. (Loretta had four boys but she lived down around Des Moines and almost never came home. But I do remember how sad Mama was when her four year-old grandson was drowned playing in a rain barrel.)

The only other thing we regularly used the dining room for was to cut out dresses of an afternoon, and sew them on the sewing machine which was along the wall where the china closet stood beside the west window. A full-sized walnut wardrobe, which actually served as a closet, was beside the wide double-sliding door opening between the rooms.

The same size double-sliding door opened between each room of the three rooms. The living room was the center of family activity and because the wide doors gave an air of expansiveness, the whole house seemed accessible and friendly.

Along the wall between the parlor and the doorway, there was room for a five-foot, very stable davenport of golden oak. The living room furniture and the dining room table and chairs were all golden oak. The sturdy wooden frame, with broad, square, four foot high arms, and a brown leather solid cushion and back the full length of the sofa, could easily accommodate four people. However, for the most part only Mama sat there.

The magazines Mama read were stacked beside her. The only secular magazine in the house, beside the daily *Sioux City Journal*, when we were little, was the *Pathfinder*. I remember Daddy reading the weekly sequel of the novel aloud to all of us. It was titled "Black Soil" and was about a pioneer farmer. There was political news in that paper as well. It seemed to be of general interest.

The other magazines were all Catholic: The *Sacred Heart Messenger*, *Ave Maria*, *Tabernacle and Purgatory*, *St. Anthony's Messenger*, and the Sioux City diocesan paper. Mama read aloud from one or the other when she found something she thought was really interesting.

The davenport where Mama sat was thus almost in the center of that side of the room, facing the golden oak library table. On either side of the table were the matching straight-backed, slatted heavy chairs. This room also had a bay window-on the west. And Mama's plants framed its base. There was a more colorful array here than in the front room.

I remember a snowy winter day. The air was filled with large, fluffy snowflakes. Mama called, "Twins." That always heralded some meaningful remark. It was not always an unpleasant conversation, but we became tense when Mama called, "Twins," in a certain way. This time I remember vividly being asked to come look out that window at the Vermeer's yard.

Mama just pointed outdoors. "Look at those wonderful snow flakes! Think back, through all of Time, snowflakes have been falling. And yet, they say, no two snowflakes are identical. And you two, you are identical twins. Some people can't tell you identical twins apart. You are as alike as two people can ever be. Yet each of you is unique. In many ways you are each different. God made each of you to do something special. Don't forget that." It was, indeed, a very effective lesson we did not forget.

The only full-length mirror in the house was heavily gold-framed. It was beside the window on the west wall. This room, too, was welcoming. Each of the three rooms had large size carpets, stylishly beige floral ones, and not beautiful, subtle Oriental ones as Eileen's husband Francis Scott Yeager later accumulated.

Parallel to these rooms on the west side of the house were the other rooms. The entrance-way, with the stairs leading up to the three large bedrooms and bath, was a small room in itself. Behind it was the small downstairs bedroom, which I only remember after it became Mama's room when she came home from the hospital with her broken hip. She never walked up or down stairs after that. There was only one window and, fortunately, a very small bathroom off that room.

At the back of the house was the kitchen which must have been an oblong room because it seemed large to us. Each of the rooms on the west side of the house was almost square, but these east rooms were less wide.

When the house was re-done, I remember being fascinated by the oilcloth wallpaper in the kitchen. It was so easy to wash, including the ceiling. The lower part of the room was covered with a patterned series of blue lines making two-inch diamond-shaped frames around small bouquets of blue flowers and leaves. About five feet up, the oilcloth became plain, very light blue. The back door was beside the entrance to the dining room.

We must have had what would be characterized as "two lots" because the back yard was very large, with apple trees and a willow. There was not a lot of room on the west side of the house, where Dr. Vermeer lived with his wife, Vashti, and their daughters -- Marguerite, a couple of years older than we, and Helen, a couple of years younger. Marguerite was very pleasant, but Helen, unfortunately,



was a person who seemed prone to find the least gracious way of expressing things.

Since Mama believed in having us stay strictly within the confines of our territorial yard, Mrs. Vermeer would not let her girls come on our lawn either. So there we sat, by the hour, as we got older, drawing for the most part and dressing our hand-drawn paper dolls. The trees had been planted along the property line, so we sat, the two Vermeers on their side, the twins on our side.

We twins loved designing clothes for the slender, long-legged beauties we drew. This preoccupation with designing dresses was really our basic recreation. It led directly to our enrolling at the Vogue School of Dress Design in Chicago, Illinois. Mama thought we had artistic abilities and encouraged any art activities. Actually reading occupied more of our time and energy -- it was not "recreational," it was essential. We needed to read as we needed to drink water or eat food.

Mrs. Vermeer subscribed to *Vogue* magazine so our creations were in impeccable style. I do not think we saw the Vermeer's much in the colder months. We rarely went into the Vermeer's, nor did they often come into our house.

One of the aspects of "home" on 712 Tenth Street that Eileen and I were delighted with was the sleeping porch. It was on the east side of the house, off what was Mama and Daddy's bedroom before Mama's accident. After Daddy died we slept on the porch from May to October, watching the myriad shapes and colors of the leaves, listening to the birds, peevied at the woodpecker in the early morning hours, enjoying the breezes on hot summer nights.

There was a West bedroom too. So as teenagers Eileen might be sleeping for weeks in the West room or the South room, or sharing our own room. And I choose whichever room I wanted for the time being. The bathroom upstairs was an ordinary sized room, not a modern bathroom, efficiently sized. The tub stood in the middle, dominating the room.

For we twins the very best addition to the house in that renovation project was the front porch. When we moved in there was only a tiny porch, past the parlor, up to the front door. Now the porch ran all across the front of the house and around the parlor windows up to the side front door. The house was newly painted grey and the dark red brick, four-foot high sides of the porch, topped with two inch unpainted cement, looked very nice. That porch was our gathering place during the day and after the dancing when we were teen-agers. There must have been a swing there and a couple of chairs.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Barringer lived on that east side of our house. He died and she continued to live alone. One wonderful summer when we were about fourteen or so, the Barringer twins came to stay the summer. I think they were eighteen, maybe they had just graduated from high school. They lived in California and had a roadster which they seemed to spend the hot summer days washing with the hose. That gave us a chance to be out in the yard too, on that side of the house. And we could talk. About what, I have no idea. I am sure we had what was called a "crush" on them. They teased us, we thought. I do not remember talking about any of this to Mama. And when the summer was over, they left, and we never saw them again. But once in a while Mrs. Barringer would mention them when we were all outdoors.

Sheldon was a nice shady town, with large lawns and wide, clean streets. There were some poorer sections of town, I suppose, but until Eileen and I were in senior high school, we were really only familiar with Tenth Street and Main, the business street at right angles to it at the top of the hill.



**Figure 10 - Sheldon, Iowa circa 1907, Library of Congress Panoramic Photographs**

Was it like other Iowa towns of the twenties and thirties? I suspect so. Social lines were clearly drawn between people of the different church denominations. I gathered that the few Yankees were the elite, whichever church they went to. A family named Frisbee certainly had the most pretentious house in town. It was a large brick colonial house, with at least eight pillars across the front. It was up toward the end of town, on Tenth Street. The Diamonds had another "new" stucco house up there.

I never knew the social rankings of the churches. But Catholics, we felt, were near the bottom. Remember that New York Governor Al Smith's campaign of 1928, when he became the first Catholic to contend for the Democratic Presidential nomination, took place in those years. And when Hoover was so ill-regarded because of the Depression, I was glad Al Smith had not won. Daddy remembered something about a cross burning in some one's yard, and the Klu Klux Klan in their white sheets, even in the Midwest in the twenties. Eileen remembered Josie saying she had seen signs in her youth, "No Irish Need Apply."

In grade school we took it for granted that we did not really know any Protestants, except the Vermeer's. We knew only Catholics, whom we met at the Thursday night church supper.

We did not know any Methodists, Lutherans, or Congregationalists. And we certainly did not know any Dutch Reformed or Hollanders. People from Holland immigrated to the good farm country of O'Brien County, Iowa after World War I.

As Emerson pointed out to me years later, I was defiant about defending Jewish or Negro people all along, but I really was prejudiced against the tall, ruddy-skinned, often blonde Hollanders. They went to church three times a day on Sundays, and did not smoke or drink, or even try to speak to most of us.

Of course, in those days, Catholics could not go to weddings or funerals of friends in Protestant churches. But I made a good friend in senior high school in Frieda Guetzlaff, whose father was the Lutheran minister. She lived in the Lutheran parsonage a block up the hill, next to the Lutheran church. And her brother, Al, and I also became somewhat friendly.

I did not mention it to Mama, but I went to the Lutheran church one Sunday when Frieda told me her brother was going to preach. I refused to think about what people might think, but I am almost sure now, that lots of the Lutherans knew I was a McCarty twin, of the family who walked to daily Mass each day. Frieda told me that her mother did not like to have either of her children associating with Catholics. Mama liked Frieda, and never mentioned any objection to any Protestants. She explained about not being able to go to the Protestant churches, but only because the Church said we could not, not from personal conviction. But she always asked if a new fellow we were going out with was a Protestant. She explained that mixed-marriages often caused people to fall away from the

church. She did not want to happen to us. I'm almost certain that that was Mrs. Guetzlaff's feelings too.

On the whole our childhood was uneventful and pleasant, even though Daddy's death when we were eleven or twelve was a sad and lonely time. I still feel most comfortable in large, square rooms, although I adjust easily to smaller rooms when necessary.

Life changed after Daddy died. Mama no longer had to get meals for his manly hungers, and Eileen and I were no more interested in regular meals than Mama. Mama believed in eating lots of fruits, which we loved, any time of the day. We simply did not have meat-and-potatoes meals. Everything about housekeeping also became more casual. Eileen said that when she got married in 1947 she knew how to boil water to make oatmeal or soft-boiled eggs, and that was the extent of her kitchen interests. It seemed that life was more focused on us and our friends.

### ***Mama's Love of Learning***

Mama's idea of something worth doing was to turn to reading. After she broke her hip at the age of sixty-eight on the way to Mass one morning, Mama always limped and was in pain. Never having really liked housekeeping, she accepted the fact that cleaning the house was not something she could do. She expected us to do it, but rarely directed us to do it.

But she loved learning. Her one regret in life seemed to be that she had only one year of high school classes before the Dunns left Michigan and came to Iowa.

It was not mentioned, but it seemed that Mama's father had left the home before they moved from a coal mining town to become homesteaders in Iowa and acquire farm land. Mama's oldest sister was Maggie, a tall, erect woman who wore housedresses of small white flowers on black. She was very quiet, but also very kind. She took care of her sickly mother after they moved to Iowa. She also cared for the youngest brother in the family, Pat. He might have been in his forties or fifties when he had to go to the mental hospital in Cherokee, Iowa because of "hardening of the arteries." He was tall, genteelly handsome, and not very talkative. I wonder if that was Alzheimer's?

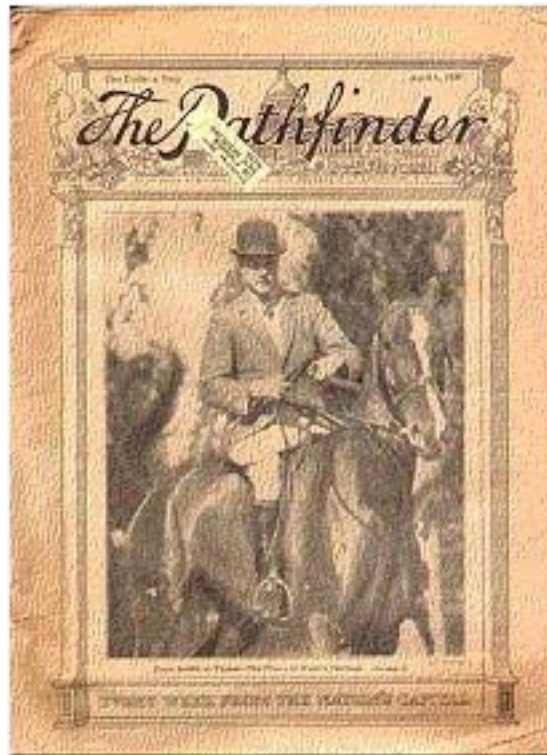
Mama had another sister who lived in Akron, Iowa, very near Sioux City, Iowa. Mary had married a big, handsome, stern man named John Agnes. They had several children, of whom three daughters became high school teachers as B.V.M. nuns. The youngest son, also tall and handsome, became a Jesuit priest of some note. These educated relatives were very attractive to Mama. We went to Akron every summer for a week or so, and after Daddy died, one of Mama's sons must have driven us down there.

I think Mama's family was fairly typical of pioneer farm families. They homesteaded, made money, and lost it periodically as farm prices rose and fell. The women taught school, often with only an eighth grade education. But they did prosper, indicating that they were indeed "bright," as Mama would say.

I wonder what Mama's mother thought when her daughter took us twins home at the time her daughter's youngest child was twelve. Eileen speculated that it must have seemed an awful burden to take on two motherless infants just at the time you had almost finished raising your own children. It seems that I might have a brief memory of Mama's mother, but nothing I can describe visually. Aunt Maggie, Uncle Pat, and Aunt Loretta Dunn Redmond, Mama's youngest sister, are the people I remember best. Aunt Maggie and Uncle Pat lived in a snug little house, near the church, in Akron.

The rocking chair that has been in the Little House (since it became that in 1980 when I entered the community at St. Benedict's Convent) at Kilfenora in Colleeville was one that Grandmother Dunn brought on a train and an ox cart from Canada, through Michigan, to Iowa. After the Akron house was closed when Aunt Maggie died, the old rocking chair was stored in Veatus' barn, on the family farm. Eileen remembered it before Denis was born and asked Vete if she could give it to me. I rocked my children in it and recovered it. As a memorial, I hung up the small piece of burlap with the angular print that had been on the bottom layer of the chair in the bathroom of the Little House. I thought people would like to see it. The bathroom and the upstairs living/bedroom in the Little House were added as a place for my children to stay when they visited me. Who and when and which Dunn rocked in the chair in Canada, in Michigan, and in Iowa would be a good story. Were some of them reading as they rocked?

When we were little girls I can remember Daddy reading aloud to the three of us. What I remember best was a serialized story of pioneer farming in the *Pathfinder* magazine. The title of the story was "Black Dirt." There was a description of a dust storm raising the black soil through the air.



**Figure 11 - *Pathfinder* Magazine, Washington DC**

Mama often spoke of Daddy reading aloud to Mama during her childbearing years when she was very sickly, and could not read for herself. She said both of them had enjoyed *Pollyanna*. It was in the bookcase in the living room on the wall opposite the davenport as we were growing up, a rose-moiré leatherette cover. We enjoyed reading and re-reading it.

Another book in the bookcase was a small, brown paper-covered book. It was titled *A Living Wage*. Monsignor John J. Ryan wrote it. Msgr. Ryan was a professor at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., though he was originally a priest from St. Paul, Minnesota. I forgot to check the copyright date, but I think it was about the early nineteen twenties. It was certainly one of the first of

the materials on the social doctrines of the Church. Written in the tradition established by Pope Leo XIII's great labor encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, not only did it influence Mama but, independently, my husband Emerson and Senator Eugene McCarthy as well. It was one of the very earliest books on the social teachings of the Church. I wonder if Father John Agnes, S.J. had not told Mama of it. We never really talked about it; its presence certainly intrigues me more now than then. And I've often wondered how Mama happened to know about it, and buy it.

Was it he or Father James McCormack, the local pastor, who told Mama about the first Missals for daily Mass in English? Mama got a Children's Missal for us before we got the adult St. Andrew's Daily Missal. Somehow I think the children's missal came out around 1929. Sometime later, Eileen remembered Father McCormack saying in his slight Irish accent to Josie, "Sure and the Church must have been Divinely inspired, otherwise how did she ever survive all those Popes?"

Mama subscribed to several Catholic magazines: *The Sacred Heart Messenger*, *Tabernacle and Purgatory*, *Ave Maria*, the local Diocesan Catholic newspaper. The one secular magazine was the *Pathfinder*, about the same size as *Time* is now, but no photos inside or color. And we did take the daily newspaper, *The Des Moines Register*. Ronald Reagan was the Man of the Year one year, and then he went to Hollywood. When we got our first allowance from Mama, a dollar a month when we were in high school, we heard of a new magazine, *The Reader's Digest*. So we subscribed for Mama because she was interested in so many things. She read it, but we did not -- too plebian for us. Lois McCulloch, our typing teacher who was a great influence on the twins' taste in reading, had "intellectualized" us.

Eileen remembered that one of the things we did with our allowances was contribute to the building fund for the National Shrine in Washington DC. Josie sent money too; the crypt below the main church is lined with many plaques with the names of donors, and one of Eileen's children found the plaque naming Josie Dunn McCarty of Sheldon, Iowa as a contributor. The National Shrine, a pseudo-Romanesque pile that is much too gaudy with gilt and colored tiles, is located across Michigan Avenue in the District of Columbia from Trinity University, from which my oldest daughter Mary graduated with a BA before going on to get her PhD at Wisconsin. Mary expressed her opinion of the Shrine's architecture and decoration when she told the story during her college years that one day a Trinity girl was praying in the National Shrine when the Blessed Virgin appeared and instructed her to "go to the Bishop and tell him to build a beautiful church on this spot."

Mama was interested in many things. She could talk on a par about the crops and prices of land with Daddy and Jim Donohue. She sounded pretty knowledgeable to us. Mama also listened to the prize fights with Max Schmeling, and later, Joe Louis. Mama was interested because a black man had achieved fame as a prize fighter.

Mama often said, "An education is something no one can take from you. Get an education at all costs." She insisted that her grandchildren go to high school. I believe she lent our oldest brother, Lourdes, some money to go to Trinity College in Sioux City soon after our mother died at our birth. He was eighteen at that time.

Mama urged everyone to get specialized training as a better way to utilize specific talents God had given them at birth. She certainly broadened our capabilities by insisting that we take typing, "in case you ever have to earn your own living." She mentioned more than once that one might have an unfortunate marriage and have to support oneself. "Don't expect to come home to live." Without the typing, I would never have tried learning the computer when Mary, and then my youngest

daughter Brigid and Mary, gave me the first of many Word Perfect 5.1 machines. I am still using that system in the year 2003.

Sloth was certainly not to be tolerated, nor time ever wasted in "day dreaming." Josie also thought that reading novels was a waste of time, though I tried to point out to her what I had learned about other cultures from reading novels. She had been cautious about our checking out books from the library. She feared that some books might be a bad influence. As we got older, and started talking regularly to our greatly influential typing teacher Lois McCulloch, she said less about that. We were not good at typing, nor arithmetic nor spelling, but loved history, geography, and literature classes. As the parents of some grandchildren started learning more about dyslexia and learning difficulties, I have come to think we had some dyslexic problems. But Mama never scolded about our C's and B's since it was clear we liked school and she felt she had taught us well about using the talents God had given us. It was our responsibility to learn as much as we could. When it came time, she thought taking Library Science at St. Catherine's College in St. Paul, (then a 2-year junior college but now the largest Catholic college for women in the country from which my son T. More and Mary's daughter Kylah proudly graduated in 2002,) was a very practical thing to do.



**Figure 12 - College of St Catherine, St Paul, Minnesota, as shown at <http://minerva.stkate.edu/aboutus.nsf>**

It seems to me that Mama's warning us about the peculiarly drab heresy called Jansenism can serve as a model for all of Mama's intellectual interests. To her all knowledge was a reflection of God's attributes and she pursued that knowledge even down the dusty paths of theology, where women were unused to travel.

More than once Mama would feel that she should warn us not to think in a Jansenistic pattern. When raised in a care-full attitude that God's presence is everywhere, and that all one's actions relate to God, being aware of the falsity of Jansenism is not only prudent but wise.

She explained that the English, after the Dissolution, as the English express it, of the Roman Catholic Church which had built all the ancient cathedrals, had made practicing Catholicism a matter of death in both England and Ireland. Thereafter the young seminarians of the British Isles for three hundred years were sent to France, where Jansenism flourished, to study for the priesthood. Thus it was that many Irish priests thought "the body" was evil, and only spiritual thoughts were holy, and generally speaking, joy was not the path to heaven.

How Mama got this information, or how much she actually knew of the history of the Jansenistic movement in France, or in Ireland, or England I do not know. I am guessing that some confessor

explained a problem of conscience to her in those terms. But with Mama's intellectual interest, I think she read something further to explain in it a clearer fashion.

One example she used to make it clear to us was the only occasion on which she mentioned sexual relations and marriage. One afternoon she called, "Twins," in that special teacherly voice. She showed us a copy of the *Extension Magazine* (a magazine still being published, though with a more specifically missionary slant.) In this 1930's issue she chose to read us one of the "Question and Answer" items.

A wife was writing to gain guidance. If she and her husband had sexual relations on Saturday night, was it possible to go to Holy Communion when they went to Sunday Mass? Mama cautioned us to listen carefully to the answer, which she read word for word. What remains clear to me, and remained so all through the many years, was that sexual relations in marriage are a Sacrament. The Holy Eucharist is a Sacrament. There could be no conflict when two Sacraments were involved. Eileen and I had a strange lack of curiosity about some things, sex among them. We were just dumb. It was many years before it was clear what she was talking about. But the concept of Sacrament was something she had made seem very special and lovely. Sacraments seemed to have some practical relationship to our lives, they were not just a miasmic happening, unrelated to real life. They were something you could study and read about.

Everything Mama learned, or thought about, had some relationship to God.

## **Mama's Human Side**

But Mama had her human side too. Mama did not like to cook or clean; I think that in those years of illness that Daddy did most of that for her. Now, meaning after we were twelve when she broke her hip, she was really handicapped. She was indeed a shanty housekeeper, and only half-heartedly taught us to do housework. We did it when it so moved us. Eileen remembered one of our Mother's sisters, Aunt Duddy (Deila) Dignan, saying she would give the dusting chore "a lick and a promise." That was about our style too.

Beyond making five loaves of white bread daily -- as soft as angel food cake -- she was also indifferent about eating. We learned to boil or fry eggs, make applesauce in the summer, can peaches and jars of tomato sauce, and make jellies and jams. But since we rarely had meat, knowing how to cook that kind of thing was a blank. It was probably exactly that indifference to how the house looked that helped her tolerate having the twenty-four members of the gang over night after night. They ate all the fresh bread, and jams, they wanted to. We rolled back the carpets in the parlor, the living room, and the dining room and had forty feet to dance in, after sprinkling a can of wax flakes on the narrow hard wood floors to make them more slippery.

But she did love clothes. She made us beautiful dresses, just alike, with extravagant embroidery, until she said that we should be able to make our own clothes in high school. She let us buy any amount of yard goods, if it didn't cost more than twenty-five cents a yard. But we had to make up each piece of fabric as we bought it. No unfinished garments around. She taught us correctly. When we were six we made -- by hand -- a simple smock dress. When we were around ten, we used the sewing machine to make a full-skirted cotton dress with dainty yellow and black flowers. The real test was to hand-hem the long black sash which tied in a large bow at the back. We thought we'd never finish the sash or hem, which must also be hand-done. After that she taught us how to cut out patterns, put in sleeves, baste up the side seams, do a fine hand hem. She taught us all that very carefully, then when her policy of letting us live our own lives came into play, she truly let go. Eileen remembered that we would avidly look at the *Vogue* pattern catalog every week and order what we wanted to make at the beginning of the week. The patterns would come from Chicago on the train in the mail during the week, and we would have until Saturday to make the dresses. I seem to remember patterns were fifteen cents and stamps three cents. Or we'd buy some material and a pattern in the morning, charging them at Starret's store, and commence to sew it after noon, intending to wear it to whatever dance at night. When I think of how shoddy our efforts were I am aghast. Even we knew our standards were hopeless, but Mama made no comment. We wore them off to the dance. I often remembered that when I felt obliged to nag my children about something.

I feel almost certain that one constant form of self-denial for Mama was in not having lots of pretty clothes. She vocally admired her friends' clothes. I once bought a secondhand, hand-embroidered Philippine pongee blouse because I knew it was the kind Mrs. Dougherty had bought. You could tell by the softness in her tone as she described it that Mama would have loved to have that blouse for herself.

When Mama was younger, she told us, she and Mrs. Downs would call each other on the new gadget: the telephone. Picture the landscape of Iowa in the early 1900s. Flat black soil, rich and productive. A few newly planted groves around the houses. A few flowers near the house, but not extensive lawns with flower gardens. The rows of corn were even and straight. We, for example, could almost see to the end of the straight, narrow road from the McCarty farm to Sanborn, ten



miles away. Farm houses were usually a full mile away from each other. The house, rarely large in those years, the grove, the wind across the plain -- these were the constants, while the small towns were the exceptions.



**Figure 13 - Sanborn Iowa circa 1915, as shown at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/ia/obrien/postcards/samnst.jpg>**

The homemakers rarely left their children to go to town, although Mama's diary records that Daddy went the four miles with the team to Sheldon almost daily in the years she kept the diary -- 1898 to 1906. He must have needed to do that with a constantly sick wife. But then this new development appeared, the telephone. Another adult voice in the house. Anyway, Mama told us, she and Mrs. Downs would call each other up, knowing that everyone else on the "line" could hear what they said because they were "rubbering." One of them would start out by asking the other if she enjoyed the ball last night. They would proceed to tell about the gown that was pale blue, with an extravagant number of ruffles. Or another rose colored gown with bunches of lace at the neck and down the bodice. Apparently they kept up this pretend socialization till they tired of it. It was clear Mama enjoyed the game.

But even though Mama's sons protested that they were ashamed of her wearing that long, brown pillar of a coat, and begged her to get another, she only smiled. She never explained anything. I made her a couple of dresses when I was in Junior College and she wore them with little fanfare.

Mama's sense of obligation about using God's gifts to each of us was as strong as her attitude toward prayer. She thirsted for learning of all kinds. While she put learning about spiritual matters first, as she demonstrated by the number of religious magazines she subscribed to, she also had a high regard for secular learning.

She said her one regret in life was that she had not had more education. She was proud of the fact that she had one year of high school before her mother and sisters and brothers moved from a mining town in Michigan to an Iowa farm. (She was able to be a school teacher with the education

she had, and that was how she met Jim McCarty.)

Her intellectual curiosity was life-long. Whenever she had a chance to visit with Emerson she would say, "Tell me something I don't know much about." Often Em would tell her about the social encyclicals of the Popes or some issue he was teaching in his ethics class. He took her seriously. Mama's son, Veatus, had that same inquisitiveness about ideas.

She enriched our lives by making us aware that we, who know our own capabilities, were to be our most severe judge as to whether we had performed according to our own God-given talents or not. Sloth was not to be tolerated, nor time ever wasted in day-dreaming. The fact that we twins could not spell, or do arithmetic very well, she could not understand. But she did not fuss about the grades we got since we seemed to like going to school.

Josie Dunn McCarty's thirst for spiritual learning was life long. I distinctly recall the embarrassed way her nephew, a Jesuit, Father John Agnes, and his three sisters who were B.V.M. nuns, would laugh off her request. "Tell me about God," she would say. She asked all priests this question, but I never heard one respond seriously to her. Granted that is a big item with which to be confronted. However, as the years go by, I feel that is the question of all of us who are trying to be attuned to spiritual things. Yet most of us are too embarrassed to ask.

## ***The Art of the Unspoken***

Mama practiced what I call the Art of the Unspoken. She was not numbly or dumbly silent, nor sullenly or glumly so. Rather than speaking out, sharing every reaction, every sensation verbally with others, Mama was often silent.

It was not that Mama was void and empty, that she said nothing. In the art of the unspoken, communication takes place, but not verbally. Communication is important, as our modern psychosocio trend tells us. But she used a smile, a frown, a tense body or a relaxed one, a soft touch or a turning away which indicated a reaction that can be easily read by one who was attuned.

Mama practiced this art. She rarely explained things to us. Ordinarily, however, we learned by her very silence in the context of her actions, although sometimes we had to mull over the meaning.

In this art of the unspoken there is no resentment, no holding-in because of anger, no rejection of those present, but a silent recognition of a reality. However, there is also recognition that many words do not adequately express one's deepest truths and that a bodily silence can express a judgment suspended, a depth of reality too poignant for words, a gentle spirit of acceptance of a harsh actuality. Sometimes her silence was a dignified way of acknowledging a sorrow too deep to utter.

But always, the art lies in the clear communication of empathy, of compassion, of high regard for those concerned, never a harsh judgment or rejection. However, the partner in the conversation has to lay aside self-absorption in order to "read" the language of the body and the heart of the other person.

Another aspect of the art of the unspoken has to do with consciously practicing a restraint about having to know about other's affairs. And that includes, of course, more restraint about having to tell others what one knows.

You never know who is practicing the art of the unspoken unless you are very astute about reading body language. It is rather like my complaining to Mama one day when I was about ten. Maybe Mama had just said to me, "Do not say unkind things about others, if you cannot say anything good about others, do not say anything at all." Of course she said that often, all through the years I lived in Sheldon. It was probably when I said, "Why does Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ go to Mass every day? She is a very gossipy lady and says mean things about others." And Mama said, "How do we know what she might say if she did not go to daily Mass?" It is probably like the art of the unspoken, one has to know how to practice it in order to recognize that others do so.

These teachings probably explain where the awareness of the art of the unspoken came from. Mama's example would have a deep affect. Perhaps it came also from Rodriquez' *Christian Perfection* sinking in -- we had read it when we were eleven or twelve. For some reason when I was in Junior High, I thought I should be extremely observant and learn a lot about people, be sensitive to them. I seemed to have gained the sense that how I treated others was an important spiritual value. Later, in high school, I changed my mind and thought I should acquire intellectual information from being observant and attentive in classes, but not try to gain information about people. It was as if I had gained the insight that too much inquisitiveness into others lives was not a balanced way to live, helpful neither to myself or others.

Was it that I did not come to that growth through reading books but by observing both Mama and

our older brother Veatus' wife, Agnes Cajacobs McCarty? Veatus and Agnes moved to the family farm after Mama and Daddy retired to Sheldon. I remember being out at the farm, now a Century Farm in Iowa, recognized for having been operated by one family for over one hundred years. I noticed Agnes's kindly reticence.

There was some gossip about one of the Cajacob cousins that I had overheard -- maybe from Vivian, Mama's daughter who helped keep us alive as infants. But Agnes by neither word nor by manner paid any attention to it. Over the years I noted that same kindness of deliberately "not knowing" in several of Agnes' and Veatus' McCarty's children. I, who am naturally quite gregarious, remember as it were turning my back on seeking out or listening to talk about others. Not that it was anything of significance, but as if it was the right thing to do -- quite ordinary. The occasion at the farm struck me forcibly. Mama's consistent observance of the same "not knowing" was bred in my bones.

Years later, I remember Emerson, who certainly practiced matter-of-factly the art of the unspoken, pointed out, in a kindly way, the value of the practice once when I criticized Vivian for gossiping. He said that some people are idea-oriented, as perhaps I was, and others are people-oriented, and therefore want to share "people information," the potential gossipers. He said that one would make better judgments about people if one had noted those characteristics about persons. Emerson never brought home interesting tid-bits about other faculty families. The only way I knew what was going on in other's lives was that Stephen B. Humphrey, an English professor, came down on Sunday evenings and discussed who and what and why was happening among the small lay faculty of the time. He was not vicious or mean, but was certainly interested and entertained by human frailty. I listened, with more interest than Em, but Emerson and I did not discuss what Steve had said later.

Modern people who practice the art of the unspoken are often those in the mental health field. Their role is not to deliver advice based on what they have come to know about the client, but to help the person grow into finding new ways to deal with their own reality. In the mental health field the focus for helping others' change is on the personal perceptions gained through the therapeutic modality used.

Ordinary people of faith are to help others if possible, but not to intrude, unasked, into others' lives. The therapist has been asked to help. The commonplace neighborly role is to quietly ask God to help and to be open to offering small services. Members of Alcoholic Anonymous, and other wise persons, recognize that first of all they must change themselves, with the help of the Higher Power. Usually, only then, can we help others to see where changes might be made in their lives.

As I have acquired information and experience in my development as a practitioner of biblio/poetry therapy, I have come to better understand Mama's practice of the art of the unspoken as a matter of conscience. As a biblio/poetry therapist, the focus of the discussion and writing is on the participant's response to the poem, film, or legend, or article. (Those practitioners who use mostly poetry prefer to use the title of our national membership organization, the National Poetry Therapy Association. It is recognized, however, that the use of any literary genre refers to "biblio", any "book" media, while "poetry" narrows the field. But the process and focus of the therapy, whatever literary media used, is the same.)

As a biblio/poetry therapist, the focus of the discussions I led, and the writing I suggested the participants might want to do, was my professional way of being of help. I was to help them discover what the material had evoked in them personally. What the material stirs up in the

facilitator is of little significance. The facilitator's role is to help the participant find a significant individualized meaning about his/her life experience -- something that would have an influence on his/her behavior or attitude. The goal is not to "find out" about the participant. "Not knowing" for many has become an ethical issue.

One week-long workshop informing interested practitioners in other fields how to carry on biblio/poetry therapy groups stands out in demonstrating the significance of the therapist "not knowing." Mary was a social worker therapist. She had appointments from 5:30 AM on throughout the day. She was good.

We used a poem in our workshop by Wendell Berry titled "To Know the Dark." (*Farming: A Handbook*: N.Y., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970.) It begins with the observation that to go in the light is one way to go. To go in the dark is entirely different. "To go in the dark, go dark," and discover that the dark also "blooms and sings." Mary did not seem to be verbally engaged in the group discussion. After the writing period, in which she did not write, she waited till the time was almost up and just said she had gained a lot from the discussion.

However, about a year later I saw her when I was visiting in Washington, D.C. She told me how very grateful she was for that workshop session. She had always prided herself on gathering as much information as possible about each client and checking and rechecking to see if she had it right. But the revelatory experience she had gained from Wendell Berry's poem was that it did not matter what she knew about the client. She could not make the client change unless the person wanted to change. And the client could go with "dark feet and dark wings."

Or, as we might say about "not knowing" other's people's business or feelings -- only the individual can bring about change in his or her relationships with God and other persons. It is not the human observer's right or privilege to know. One benefit, I think, she gave her clients by her persistence in acquiring her information, was that it may have also enlightened them about their own lives as they told her what she was asking about. They "heard" themselves. However, the professional interjections are usually quite different if one is seeking information for the practitioner's sake, rather than to help the participant discover insights for him or herself.

To conclude this specific commentary, I would like to tell you of a new slant I recently gained. I used the phrase I had made up, "the art of the unspoken" and "not knowing." Joie Heaton Willette, married to Emerson's nephew, recognized this concept as something her grandmother in North Dakota had told her years ago. The significant implication of her grandmother's tied it in with the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. A very astute observation that I had never heard about or thought of.

The focus here is on the word "Knowledge." In Eden, Adam and Eve were blissfully unaware of Good and Evil. After they were forced out of the Garden, they and their children, specifically Cain, who killed Abel, came to know and experience Evil. In their lives before the Fall, Good and Evil did not exist for them. But when they came to Know both Good and Evil that knowledge (and its experience) changed their lives deeply.

So two women in the Midwest of the United States, back in the early 1900's, appeared to carry out in their lives, without either naming or proclaiming a theory, a similar practice. As far as I know, neither of them had more than a good basic *McGuffey's Readers* education. Those early grade school level readers contained quotations from classical authors that would not be presumed to be either capable of being understood, or of interest, to modern high school students. But those two country

women practiced a very remarkable Christian mode of life that steadied and made peaceful the paths of many lives, even when they were unaware of its practice.

This is not to say that learning good ways to communicate verbally should not be learned or practiced. But this means of silent communication also has value.

## **SPIRITUALITY**

### ***Mama's Basic Beliefs***

It is out of love and gratitude that I am writing about Mama's influence on our lives: Eileen and Arleen, the McCarty twins. Thus I feel I need to be specific about Mama's basic beliefs.

As I wrote this I often wanted to turn to Eileen to verify, or restate, what I have said. But Eileen is not physically present any more, so I have to check it out intuitively. And I do. There is no way any of us can verify her agreement with what I say, but I do know when to be comfortable with my statements. And, I fear, that is all we can go on.

A modern writer has summarized how a loving parent forms the influence he or she has on the values a child treasures for a lifetime. Love is "transcending one's self for the purpose of nurturing...another's spiritual growth." Having experienced the demands of parenting, I feel certain Mama very clearly, and consciously, placed our spiritual growth as her primary responsibility. I am certain she often transcended impatience and pain to silently give us a good example.

Josie Dunn McCarty put her rights from, and her responsibilities to God, first and foremost. God's wonderful graciousness to us gave us the right to praise God and to worship Him, human beings though we are. She had a sense of wonder about all things in life that stemmed from her sense of our proper relationship to God and His magnanimity to us. Since He allowed us to praise Him, we very clearly had that responsibility to worship Him as He had devised, particularly in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and especially on the Lord's day. No effort would be too much to fulfill that responsibility and only serious illness would keep one at home on Sunday.

Mama told us that before she was married, when she was teaching in a country school, she used to walk four miles from Hull, a tiny town Matt and Vivian Weir later lived in, to Sheldon in order to go to Sunday Mass. She walked along beside the railroad tracks to take the shortest distance. One Sunday four horsemen came up suddenly on a gallop, pounding along the track. They looked dirty and tired, she thought, and she was afraid. But she kept on walking. No one said anything, and although they looked at her intently, they continued on past her. Later there was a story that Jesse James and his brothers had been seen in the area.

If we had to miss daily Mass, we prayed the Mass prayers from the missal at home to keep us in touch with the Church's liturgy. We each had our own daily Missal from the time it was translated into English, in about 1929. That habit of perusing the daily Scripture readings when we could not get to daily Eucharist was distinctly a comfort and a blessing throughout the years when the children were little.

A post-Vatican II Benedictine revival has focused on "lectio divina," the early term for the daily practice of reading Scripture. Now we often center on praying the scriptural readings of the daily Eucharist. One prayerfully meditates for some minutes on those passages, and interprets them in a way that is relevant to one's own spiritual growth. Eileen and I, however, simply read the readings in

the Missal in a very unsophisticated way.

Mama loved the Eucharist. She often spoke of Pope Pius X, who, around 1910, restored frequent Holy Communion to the people of the Church. She spoke of what a gift it was to her personally and how people "ridiculed" Mr. O'Kane, Mama, Janey Burns and a few others who would go up to Holy Communion at Sunday Mass. But they persisted in following Pope Pius X's new teachings. Eileen remembered that the Jansenists among us didn't believe in going to Holy Communion more than once a year, and were "more Catholic than the Pope" in resisting Pius X's initiative and clinging instead to the "old ways," no matter how heretical.

When Daddy retired from the farm and moved to Sheldon when we were four, Mama and we twins walked to daily Mass. I think Daddy must have driven up and stopped to get the groceries on the way home. Mama probably preferred to walk each way. She had usually went for a mile's walk after a day of teaching in the country school.

People predicted that we would fall away from the church as a result of an over-dose of religion. But neither Eileen nor I have ever even momentarily been bored by religion or things spiritual. Nor has our deep reliance on our personal relationship to God been shaken. That relationship is a lovely gift God has granted us. It was not a hardship to go to daily or Sunday Mass, it became a natural, customary thing to do.

Mama conveyed the obligation and need for prayer. Communication with God was a tangible reality in her daily life. Prayers of reverence and thanksgiving were exemplified in our family prayers. In addition to saying the three full Rosaries -- the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious, five decades each, to memorialize the Passion and death of Jesus -- we also said special prayers each night. Both of us treasured, throughout our lives, the Pentecost sequence we recited aloud: "Come, Holy Spirit, Creator come from your bright heavenly throne, Come take possession of our hearts, and make them all Thine own." Pentecost was always a special feast.

In later years we spoke often of still hearing the cadence of Mama's voice reciting, "Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord," and much, much later we recited it several times at Eileen's deathbed. I did not realize for years that it was Psalm 120 that bound us in beauty to reliance on God's providence. From somewhere the phrase, I think, perhaps, the Stations of the Cross, comes the reoccurring phrase, "We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless thee." And we said the Angelus each noon when the Methodist church bell rang out.

I remember, however, that as a young married woman I felt I did not know how to properly express prayers of praise. I knew a bit of the psalms so I felt that if I used the psalms in the Short Breviary, I could become familiar with those of praise. So I started making some of the many Hours for each day as my private prayer. Emerson had brought home a small brown book titled The Short Breviary, which the Liturgical Press had translated into English in 1940. It was for the brothers at St. John's Abbey to say for their official prayers while the priests were saying their prayers upstairs in the Abbey church in Latin. We kept buying copies as the family grew, and before we left for Washington, D.C., the Liturgical Press was selling them out cheaply because by then the brothers were saying the Divine Office with the monks, in English in a new translation. So each of our children still has their own copy. They each wanted their own as soon as they could hold the book, usually before they could actually read, but they wanted to take part in the family prayers.

When we moved to Arlington, we purchased some old pews from a Congregational church. Our nightly family prayers, using the Short Breviaries consisted of two "choirs"--like the monks. Each

pew faced the other in the rather large living room. Emerson led one "choir" and I led the other. The children could join in any place they chose. ( I think Mama would have enjoyed our family prayers.)

The opportunity to have these curved pews for davenports in our house came about in our on-going search to furnish our home with interesting pieces, but also inexpensively. We were pleasantly impressed with the age and charm of second-hand things, now that we lived "out East." One day I saw an ad in the *Washington Post* that all accoutrements of the Congregational church were to be sold that day -- right there in the church itself. It had been a very elegant church where I think President Hoover had worshiped. It was across G Street, on 9th Street from where a once fashionable large department store, Woodward and Lothrop, was then. This church was unusual in that the pews surrounded the central altar area in a totally circular arrangement. Each pew was curved.

I thought the padded pews would be great for the number of people we had to seat whenever we had company. So I bought them, they were delivered, four sections instead of only two. The delivery men begged us to keep them -- too much work to take them back. So we had three "davenports" instead of two.

Prayers of petition were one of our rights as God's children; but all requests were to be made within the context of, "If it is for the best", or "If it is your will, O God." Nor was Mama ever superstitious; in fact, she cautioned against that. She felt God wanted us to use our minds first, and then turn to Him. She applied her vast fund of common sense to what the Church taught us as well as guiding the way she lived. Her all-pervading sense of reality led her to properly distinguish foolish religious talk from what some people thought the Church taught. When I hear some of the Catholic "horror stories", I can't really comprehend that anyone would have believed that kind of thing. We certainly never heard the stories of fear or prejudice.

For example, when some priest would forbid Saturday night dances, because they might be an occasion for sin, Mama declared, in her very positive fashion, that either dancing was in itself wrong or it was not. If it was an occasion for sin to dance before going to Mass on Sunday, it was equally wrong to go to a dance any other night of the week because we could never do what was wrong. She felt some people might abuse dancing for impure reasons, but that it was a good healthy recreation and as good on Saturday night as Tuesday. So off we went, if we choose. She felt that good sense was God-given, as was Faith, and God meant us to use both. Showing the persistence of Mama's teachings, late in life one of Eileen's favorite jokes was that she believed the reason hard-shell Protestants were opposed to premarital sex was because it led to dancing.

Prayers of thanksgiving and of reverence pervaded Mama's day. Because she mentioned it once as something she did, I, too, now, especially when I am very thirsty, take a drink of water in three sips, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." She also mentioned putting off taking a drink sometimes, to say, "Teach me to thirst for you, dear Lord." Periodically she fasted on bread and water, always on Good Friday, but she never asked us to join her. Wednesday, Friday and Saturdays we did not eat meat in memory of the Passion and death of our Lord, and for the Holy Souls. (Not the suffering souls, they were in Purgatory, but those on the way to God, they were the Holy Souls.)

We said those prayers when Daddy was alive, and later. If some of the gang came too early, they would walk in without knocking, as was everyone's habit, but Mama would just indicate with her head that they were to kneel down and join in. I am ashamed to say that more than once we hid a



book on the seat of the chair we were kneeling against and cheated on the Lord's time.

As we would begin a task, possibly scrubbing the floor, or making a dress, she would say, "Do it in His name and for His sake." I have found that prayer helpful when attending boring meetings or doing something I dislike, as much as it enlivens the things I enjoy doing.

## **Daily Spiritual Reading**

Just when we started doing our hour of daily spiritual reading I do not recall. I suspect it was when we were in the third or fourth grade. And somehow our exceptional speed and dexterity at reading might have something to do with this practice. We do have some evidences of dyslexia. Moreover, there are many, many words I would like to use in conversation that I feel familiar with, but I fear that my pronunciation would be way off.

I associate it with my sister Trudy telling me about the treatments for her lupus when she was in her late sixties. "Oh, the brudens of life!" Clearly, she had problems with discerning letter-order. That made me think that Dickens was describing a friend of his with dyslexia when he created Mrs. Malaprop.

With Mama's zest for learning and pride in having been a good school teacher, reading aloud would be a good activity for us, and certainly something we could do together. Maybe we started with a catechism. I have no memory of most of what we read.

It never seemed to occur to Mama that we might not be able to grasp or be interested in what she wanted to read. We were somewhat interested, we would read anything -- we even read the cereal boxes. We certainly were not rebellious. (My twin and I had only one quarrel in our lives. She was waiting for me at the train that I was to take to Chicago to learn about dress designing. I was late, in fact, almost missed it. And Eileen was mad.) But there was a bit of tension among us when we read aloud. Truth was, we each wanted to read aloud as long as possible. Mama was time-keeper and she would say, "Alright, Eileen, it is your turn now." Mama liked to read aloud as much as we did -- she did indeed model for us how to read well.

There were a couple of books we do remember. Four, in fact. One titled *Humility*, in three volumes. Another by Rodriquez, *Christian Perfection*. And a series of small books, about three and a half inches square, bound in red buckram. I think the title was *Rabboni*, certainly the word was used frequently throughout the books, written by a Jesuit.

The fourth was the New Testament. When we were in high school Mama said she thought we ought to have the experience of reading the entire Bible aloud. However, she said she did not believe that, at our age, we needed to read the Old Testament. Did she agree with St. Benedict that the book of Kings was not suitable for evening reading? We simply read it aloud, no commentary.

Over the years I have come to think that I did gain something from those three volumes on humility. I remember arguing with Mama, and her smiling silence, because, I said, "How can you be humble if you know you are?"

Now I think, however, that we did get the basic message of humility. All creation comes from God, everything is God's good gift. We are not responsible for having good looks or bright brains. God gave them to us. We are to use them for God's good.

Perhaps it was that line of thinking that guided Mama to tell us, frequently, that we had an obligation to comb our unruly, coarse and curly, dark brown hair carefully. Many times a day. As teen-agers she even tolerated Tangee lipstick -- out of consideration for others. Though she thought God had gifted us with Gannon (our birth mother's maiden name) rosy lips. Her point about our best appearance had to do with showing courtesy toward others -- they had to look at us, we did not see ourselves. Later, it became clear that a husband was the most important person who had to look at

us. It was very supportive and helpful to remember that obligation in the busy years of child-raising. Could it be that a good act could turn, over the years, to simple vanity?

In Eileen's memoirs of Mama (see Appendix I) she thinks that we read Tanquary. I think that is because her husband, Frances Yeager, had been a seminarian in the Basilian order. He probably mentioned that often. But I used my old librarian tricks and checked them both out of the library. Tanquary was written in an outline form and thus could not possibly be the book we remember. I thought the author's name was Rodriquez, which, I have been told was a book popular with lay persons in the beginnings of the nineteenth century. If so, one can see a similarity with the style of the *McGuffey Readers*.

I cannot recall when we started our hour of daily religious reading. I suspect it was in the third or fourth grade. At thirteen we were reading *The Practice of Christian Perfection*. It was by a Spanish Jesuit, Rodriquez. I understand it was a "popular" work for lay people. We read another three volume work on Humility. While I do not recall any specifics of the content of either, I do recall with pleasure how much fun it was to read Rodriquez aloud. An ordinary sentence was usually eight to ten lines, or longer, often a full paragraph. We devised a game we played against ourselves. As one read aloud with intelligible inflection, which Mama insisted upon, the reader raced ahead with the other eye, so to say, to see how soon she could grasp the final clause, far down the page, and thus understand the purport of the entire sentence. If it only took three or four lines of reading aloud one could congratulate oneself and go back to reading in a normal way until it was time for the next sentence. It never seemed to occur to Mama that we might not be able to grasp or be interested in what she wanted to read. We were somewhat interested, certainly not rebellious. My twin and I never quarreled, but I do know that the only tension in that hour concerned which one of us got to read out loud the longest, and Mama wanted her turn too. Mama was the time-keeper, she would say, "Alright, Eileen, it's your turn," or hers. When we read duller stuff than Rodriquez, Mama would often stop whoever was reading aloud and query the other to make sure we were paying attention. We could embroider, but nothing else went on during the time devoted to reading.

I do recall fierce feelings that *no one* was ever going to tell me what to do when I grew up. That's what adulthood meant to me. I must acknowledge that sometime as a teen-ager, probably between sixteen and eighteen, I became rebellious. Not that I dared actually disobey, but my tone of voice to Mama became rude and sharp. I struggled with these seemingly spontaneous caustic remarks -- went to confession, prayed to the Sacred Heart -- because I knew Mama did not deserve this. Sometime as a Senior in High School, it seemed I was able to stop. Mama never spoke about it, and neither did I.

The experience was probably a good preparation for parenting because I told my children I understood about their being mad when they rebelled. Mama was a strict disciplinarian. When she said, "No," she meant it. We were not allowed to stay outdoors playing in the neighborhood after nine p.m. until after we were sixteen. And I do remember hating to get out of bed at seven a.m. for eight o'clock daily Mass, especially when we got home from those dances at two or three in the morning. But I don't have any memory of ardently disliking either going to daily Mass or to the reading. In fact, St Pat's, and the statute of the Sacred Heart, was a homey place for us and we stopped in whenever we went uptown or to the public library across the street from the church, or to Starret Brothers' "Big Busy" department store. That might have been two or three times a day in summer.

## **Mama's Attitude about the Sabbath**

The joy of Easter extended to each Sunday of the year, since the Resurrection was the basis of Christian joy. Each year the Responsorial in the time after Easter says, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it!", I remember the joyous sense of skipping up the hill to St. Patrick's Church and our singing-off key those lovely words, the happiness of which did reside in our hearts. That joy is still remembered.

Mama would say mildly that we should not sew on Sunday -- we were to keep the Sabbath holy. But we would argue with her. "Sewing is fun, it is not servile work. We are not forced to do it. Besides sewing is creative and we ought to be able to do it." Sew we did.

As an adult I wanted to write about the meaning of the Hebrew Sabbath for my work as a National Chairperson of the Family Life Committee. I loved learning more about it. Observant Jews were to rest from all kinds of labor, particularly the labor of creativity. God is the true creator and he rested from his labors of creation on the Sabbath. Visiting, or writing letters to family and friends as a substitute for visiting was allowed by some, although not by Orthodox Jews. It seemed to me to have something to do with the concept of hospitality in God's name. Since Jewish women did not prepare the Sabbath meal on that day, but the evening before, we did not emulate them in that way. Midwest farm families almost always had special meals and family gatherings on their Sabbath, Sunday.

Preparing the big meal was not my idea of enjoyment at any point. But it became a real issue when we moved to Arlington, Virginia in late 1959. We had, since June of 1941, always subscribed to the Sunday Edition of the *New York Times*. But in Minnesota when to read it was a non-issue because it arrived on Tuesday, and I could make time all week to read it. However, in Arlington, it was a different story.

As a Christian mother it was my role to prepare the Sunday feast-day meal and it was to be ready when we came home from the "late" Sunday Mass. Therefore, I was much too busy for any real reading after getting a peek at the *Times* before breakfast, when it was delivered to our very door about 8 on Sunday morning. When I emerged into the kitchen about nine a.m., I had to get going on Sunday dinner. The partially-read paper, and the drawings in the advertising on each page, still gnawed at my curiosity. My mind was totally distracted from my noble principles of being a good Catholic wife and mother.

Now Emerson carried out his role as wage-earner during the week, and he worked long hours as a teacher, and in Senator Eugene McCarthy's office. He clearly was justified in intently reading the *New York Times* on Sunday mornings.

I was small-minded enough to be continually rankled about having to wait till afternoon, or evening, to get back at the *Times*. What probably allowed the Sunday meal, as a symbol of the Jewish Friday night Sabbath-eve meal, to survive was not a spiritual motivation, but Irish bull-headedness. Mama would have been torn, as I was. She thought her spiritual development came before everything else, but she loved the world of ideas as well.

And I had picked up both her love of ideas and her lack of interest in cooking.

What saved the meal for us all was other women. Some feminists of those days were quite strident. Vicious male-bashing was in. But I was married to a wonderful man who was not an arrogant male.

He was very loving, very intelligent, wonderfully fun to be with, and exciting. I also had eight very lovable young sons. And I found men's conversation, on the whole, to be more interesting than that of many women I knew. So I swallowed my envy, and went on preparing the Sabbath meal. Something of Mama's attitude about doing the Right Thing influenced me. And grace. Some aspects of the significance of the Sabbath remain with me. I do not "write" on Sunday, or sew, nor clean. Writing and sewing are both creative activities -- imitations of God's creativity which I want to honor. Mama did know best after all.

Eileen and I at some point noticed a beautiful Sunday light that pervaded everything up and down Sheldon's Tenth Street as we walked along to both Sunday Masses. We called it to Mama's attention but she rather laughed at us when we insisted she comment on the peculiarly radiant Sunday light. However, it was very real to us. We spoke of it then and years later. We noted that we did not see it when we went to Akron, Iowa to visit Mama's family, nor when we went to Omaha, Nebraska to visit our sisters, Trudy and Varnius, although, of course, we went to Sunday Mass there as well.

I saw it once again, many years later in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. I was startled to see it in a painting of Thomas Eakins. It was a special gathering of Eakins' paintings from many galleries.



**Figure 14 - Thomas Eakins, "Thomas Max Schmitt in a Single Scull" (1871)  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**

Among them was a painting of one man pulling on the oar of a scull on the Schuylkill River. There were several paintings of the same river and the small, special boats. But only one painting had the Sunday light. I sent a copy of it to Eileen. Disappointingly, the light was not in the reproduction, only in the original. It was an effulgence too lovely to describe. Mama truly made Sunday the Lord's day for herself, as well as us.

## ***Lent and Holy Week***

How we loved Lent, but especially Holy Week! The days had an air of excitement derived from the uniqueness of each feast day. Joyous Holy Thursday, the foundation of the Eucharist. God's sufferings on silent Good Friday and the long and empty Holy Saturday, followed by the delight of Easter Sunday -- "This is the day the Lord has made!"

We went to Mass Holy Thursday, with no special prayers then, but Mama told us it was the real feast of the Holy Eucharist, the sacrament closest to our hearts, Christ's gift of himself, present, somehow, to us. An incredible gift of God to us.

During Good Friday morning before the noon-to-three devotions, Mama would say, "Let's keep silence for an hour or so." We'd say quietly, "Oh, Mama..." But we did not make a real protest. At first it was hard to be silent. I'd start to say something to Eileen and then remember, and be quiet. She did the same. And then, before long, Mama would say, "Alright, twins, It's been an hour." And, amazingly, our voices seemed loud and raucous. We liked the silence after all, till we got used to our regular chatter again.

Mama would leave before noon for St. Patrick's Church, four blocks up a gradual hill, on Tenth Street, on the edge of Sheldon, Iowa's business district, and across from the Carnegie Library. Since the weather was usually nice, she could walk alone without fear of slipping on any ice. When we were about eleven she had slipped coming home from Mass on a tiny piece of lightly covered ice, and lived a life of severe pain since from a broken hip. She would indicate by her voice that we should come along quickly, and not be late.

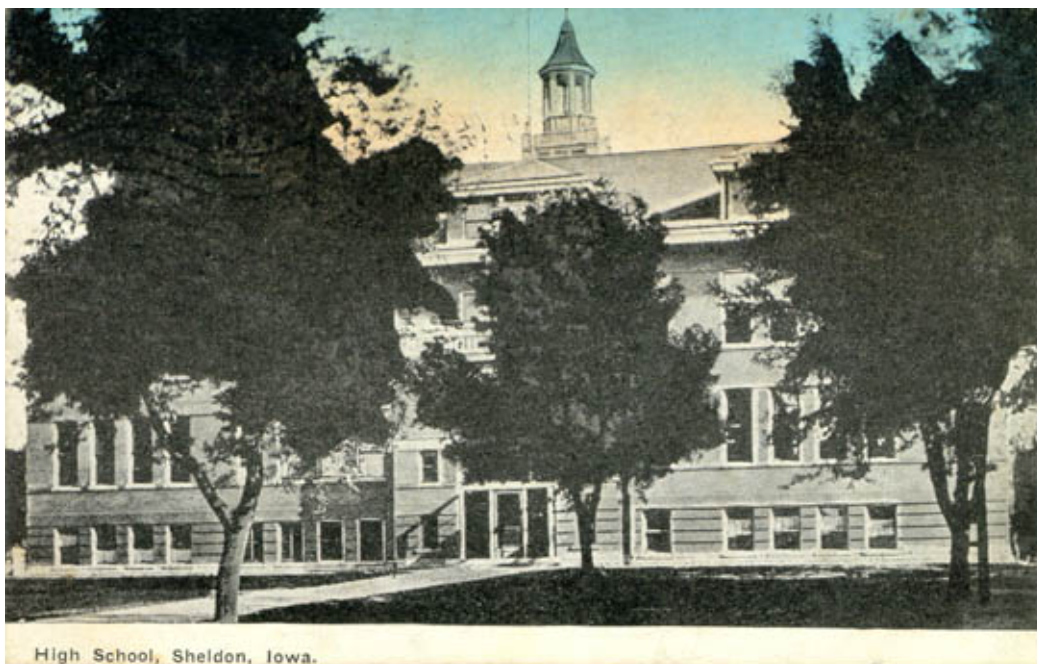


**Figure 15 - St. Patrick's Church, Tenth Street, Sheldon Iowa, as shown in the history of the parishes of Sioux City Diocese at <http://www.catholicglobe.org/parhist/NW/sheldon.htm>**

But we enjoyed being able to loiter a bit, reveling in a sense of freedom. We would be there about a quarter of an hour after she arrived, and we would go up into the choir loft. Our pew was the third one on the right-center aisle and only when we sang in the choir did we not sit there with Mama. It seems as if we were the only children in the choir. The organist was Doris O'Donnell. Her aunt had been the organist for years and years and now Doris had graduated from St. Mary of the Woods, near Notre Dame University, with a music major. What a change that must have been. Doris told us she had dated one of the "Four Horsemen" on Knute Rockne's football team. We knew vaguely who the "Four Horsemen" were because Mama liked to listen to the football game on the radio on Saturday afternoon. (Later on my son Patrick worked at the Senate with Frank "Nordy" Hoffman, who was the last surviving member of the "Seven Blocks of Granite" that played the line in front of the "Four Horsemen.") We were also very excited about Joe Louis winning the boxing matches, the first Negro to do so. And Mama liked listening to Will Rogers. We all wept when he was killed in a plane crash.

During Lent we sang all the verses of the "Stabat Mater" on Wednesday and Friday afternoons at four, after school was out. There were only four or five of us up there as Father McCormack, down below, went from station to station. Perhaps the church was half full. Eileen and I could not carry a tune, and knew it, so we did not really know why we were there. Only years later did it occur to us that Mama must have wanted us there. Good Friday, after three o'clock, was usually long and quiet.

We were always glad we did not have a Catholic school in Sheldon, although we liked any nuns we met at the week-long summer retreats we made with Mama in Cherokee, Iowa or at Briar Cliff College in Sioux City. We did not mind the three sermons we got daily, and the silence of all the adult women. (I am sure we brought some library books along to read.)



**Figure 16 - Sheldon Public High School, 1920s [?] as found at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/ia/obrien/postcards/ppcs-obrien.html>**

But by the time we were Juniors in the Sheldon Public High School the Griffins would come to spend Easter with their sick mother. They and their dad lived in Stevens Point, Wisconsin while

their mother was cared for by her mother, Mrs. John O'Donnell, and her sister, Margy O'Donnell. (The two O'Donnell families were not related.) Margy O'Donnell was in her late twenties then, working in Tobe Diamond's law office. She helped us a great deal to mature socially and stayed a life-long friend. The two handsome, fine boys were just older and just younger than we.

We would say to Mama, "The Griffins are in town. We must have everyone over to dance tonight." Mama would say, "But do you think you ought to dance on Good Friday?" We'd say, "But the Griffins are hardly ever here, and dancing is a good thing to do. Please." So everyone came, as usual, to dance on Good Friday evening.

It was very relevant to our development of tolerance, that, on occasion, Mama would give us little sermons about our attitude toward Jews. Good Friday would be one of those opportunities.

She always pointed out that Good Friday was historically a day of persecution for Jews, and that we must never think or act in a derogatory way about Jews. That especially included the two Jewish families in Sheldon, the Diamonds and the Wolffs. Jesus was a good, practicing Jew.

Margy O'Donnell worked for a brilliant Jewish lawyer, who had married into one of the leading Yankee families. The Diamonds had four children. When we read *Merchant of Venice*, we thought that Portia, beautiful with smoky black hair, must have looked like Marian Diamond. Bob, tall and lanky, was a couple of years younger and was a friend we talked to about books and ideas, and played Monopoly with. We twins and Bob met as upperclassmen in high school, and in Junior College with an exceptional typing teacher. Lois McCulloch was, in truth, a writer, who sought to imbue us with a love of current literature, about which we knew nothing until we met her. She lent us the *New York Herald* and *New York Times* Book Review sections, and the recent novels from our excellent Carnegie Library. Eileen particularly recalled waiting every week to read FPA's column in which the latest Dorothy Parker witticism might be quoted. On Mondays, during the school year, we discussed them, at Lois's apartment. What a gift! Eileen and Lois continued to write and meet after each of us married, and we somehow knew when she died of cancer in her sixties.

Mama's respect for Jesus' Jewishness continued to influence us. When Father Coughlan, a radio-priest from Detroit who had a popular following among Catholics during the Depression, developed his economic theories based on accusing Jewish bankers, we would tell Mama we wouldn't listen to him, and that she should not either because he spoke against the Jews. She smiled, went on listening, and I burst out of the house to go elsewhere on Sunday afternoons. (I think Mama's intellectual curiosity to know what was being said, whether she agreed with it or not, was why she listened.) When, living in Collegeville, I was following the pre-Vatican daily Liturgical readings, often from the Church fathers. I finally quit doing so. There were too many anti-Semitic allusions -- those readings certainly had contributed to the anti-Semitism that led to Hitler.

Emerson and I had the good fortune to join a Jewish-Catholic Dialogue that met monthly over a three year period when we lived in the D.C. area. We became close friends. Only one, Edythe Salzberger, is alive, and we write and talk frequently, continuing to feel a close bond in our deep belief in the one, true God.

The highlight of my two trips abroad is my nine days, alone, in Israel in 1973. I would go back tomorrow, if I could, to walk on those lands where Jesus walked.



### ***Back to Our Love of Holy Week***

On Holy Saturday morning we had to get up before six AM. Mass was at 6:30 AM to allow for all the readings we liked, especially the Creation story from Genesis. Mama, we twins, Mr. and Mrs. Sweeney, Kate Downs, Katie Burns, John O'Kane (all but us in their sixties) were in their regular pews. When Mass was over, Eileen and I would run home to get the candy we had saved during Lent. We would savor its goodness, especially the chocolate goodies. Lent was over!!! And if the Griffins were in town, we danced again Holy Saturday night. Delightful.

Easter Sunday! I only remember bright sunny mornings. Mama and we twins went to early Mass, 7:30, I think. Between Masses Mama's children stopped in. Vivian and Matt and their six children, Veatus and Agnes with their ten, but Lyle and Mary, who ultimately had fifteen children, only came on Christmas day. I think they did not because it was logistically a problem to get them there early for High Mass. Mama's youngest daughter, Loretta, never lived in Sheldon after graduating from college, and marrying. But, odd as it seems now, I don't remember getting food ready to eat. Oh, of course, that was it. Everybody was fasting from midnight in those days.

Then we all and Mama went back up to St. Patrick's. We "sang" in the choir. Sometimes Cecelia Mullen, an only daughter, who lived on a farm, spent a Sunday afternoon with us. She was the Griffin's cousin. A simple, happy day.

## ***Mama's Life of Pain***

Mama also lived in the very much in the presence of Christ's sufferings. Only after she broke her hip do I remember her making the Stations of the Cross three times around. (I don't recall waiting for her to do so in the Winter months when we walked with her.) Of course, we had to get to school, which began at nine a.m., and Mass was not over until about eight-thirty, so we were often late for school. We took Mama home, ate a quick breakfast and ran to school. This habit bothered the principal, Miss Margaret Burns, very much. This was a public school, and the Catholic principal had to be strict. So we came late in Winter often, the fusses went on, even in Junior College. But I can clearly see Mama genuflecting very slowly at each Station, which must have been most painful for her. She never mentioned it. I know she had a huge callus on one of her knees, but I never saw her caring for it in any way.

Mama broke her hip when she was in her late sixties. Before that she and Mr. Sweeney often had a "walking race" as they went up Tenth Street to morning Mass. Mr. Sweeney was a short, stocky man with gleaming white hair. We found him a bit taciturn. Mrs. Sweeney and Mama seemed to be best friends. She was rotund and smiling and didn't seem interested in racing anyone. But tall, graceful Josie Dunn McCarty was justly proud of her agility. Morning after morning Mr. Sweeney rounded the corner from his house half a block away as Mama arrived at the same corner -- but across the street from Mr. Sweeney. Off they would go, not remarking on it, just intent on walking as fast as they could. Often Mama won.

One October day the streets were, to use Mama's phrase, "a sheet of ice." No race on a day like that, they were just intent on getting safely to Mass. The next day the ice was almost one and a powdery snow lay over all. On the way home, a half a block away, Mama slipped on a small snow-covered patch of ice. She broke her hip. She never raced again, but by sheer determination, she walked again, slowly and with a slight limp, those same four blocks to Mass for almost all the 14-some years she lived thereafter.

Daddy, her husband, died suddenly of a heart attack before she was able to walk again. We were about twelve years old and she had to manage everything alone from then on. A bachelor farmer, a friend of both Mama and Daddy, had come over every evening for years before Daddy died. The three of them avidly talked politics -- they were Democrats -- until about nine each evening. But such were the mores of a small Irish community, Jim Donahue never came over again after Daddy's burial. We missed both Daddy and him terribly -- we missed not having a man around. Think what Mama's loneliness was. She did not talk about it. But when she got a severe cancer of the colon a couple of years later, she did tell us that what sent her to Rochester was to find a way to stay alive to take care of us. That was when she legally adopted us, so if anything happened to her, we would have something. She also told us that while she was going through the three operations that she decided she had done all she could in the way of educating us about God and life's values. She determined that from then on she would not insist we come home at any certain hour.

It was in those years when we went to dances with the gang, and were exposed to the drinking of the last of the Prohibition years, and "necking" in the cars, that we relied strongly on the certitude that Mama trusted us to live according to her standards, and God's ways. A couple of the fellows became alcoholics, for which society in those years provided no help, since A.A. had only been founded in 1935 and had barely 100 sober members by 1939. Knowledge and gratitude for her sense of trust actually often did keep me from doing things she would not have approved of. It did bother

her that my twin smoked, but I think it was from the standpoint of not being totally honest with her. I learned for myself not to too readily judge others' "virtues." I did not smoke, but it was only because smoking made me desperately sick. It was no "virtue." Years later Emerson would mention that we did not need to keep reminding the children about mistakes, they knew perfectly well for themselves when they did something wrong. I suspect too, that there was a salutary effect as a result of nightly stopping in her bedroom to kiss her goodnight when we came home. She was always awake and sometimes we would talk about the evening.

Mama was an exceptional woman-in overcoming years of illness, in keeping us premature twins alive, in raising us, in her whole way of life. But what revealed the depth of her relationship to God, in a very minute way, was how she handled the extreme pain of the broken hip and her acceptance, as God's will, of the difficulties of her later life. While Mama did not have a sense of humor and she never told jokes, she was always pleasant and had a lovely smile.

Josie Dunn McCarty's thirst for spiritual learning was life long. I distinctly recall the embarrassed way her nephew, a Jesuit, Father John Agnes, and his three sisters who were B.V.M. nuns, would laugh off her request. "Tell me about God," she would say. She asked all priests this question, but I never heard one respond seriously to her. Granted that is a big item with which to be confronted. However, as the years go by, I feel that is the question of all of us attuned to spiritual things. Most of us are too embarrassed to ask.

## **Daily Mass**

During all the years of our adolescence and until we both left Sheldon, Mama almost never missed daily Mass, even in the bitter cold of an Iowa winter. It very nearly did us teen-agers in. Father Lynch would call up the night before if he heard it was to be below zero and tell Mama not to come to Mass the next morning. Mama never meekly said, "Yes, Father." She'd always tell him she would see in the morning. But she did sometimes stay home. Then we would read the Scriptural readings from the daily missal.

Mama had to walk very slowly on the snowy sidewalks. I've never been so cold as when she took our arms during the Winter walks to Mass. We got something that was very new in the late twenties -- dark brown, wool snow pants. And we swathed our foreheads and mouths in scarves to protect the sinuses and our chests from asthma. Mama did not approve of women in pants, but the greater good of keeping us warm while we walked with her to Mass overcame her prejudice.

Mama had a cloche hat, brown, which pulled down over her ears. The color matched her long, tubular brown wool coat. And she turned up the wide beaver collar around the back of her head and her chin. I finally knit her a pair of long black wool "tights"-- from ankle to waist. They were not as tightly woven as our ski pants, however. The circulation in her feet was very poor. She got chilblains over and over. Lumps of ice underfoot hurt her toes, which turned black and disintegrated from the reoccurring freezing. It was not much help that we twins never quite got the knack of keeping the furnace at an even heat -- so when Mama got home from Mass the house was cold until noon. We'd come home for lunch and shovel coal in, and then in the afternoon, Mama's feet would burn from the house being too warm.

Neither did she complain of the muscle spasms that jerked her leg up in a severe Charlie horse -- or thrust it straight out, flat and rigid if her knee was bent. This went on for years. These spasms occurred mainly at night, at first, and every couple of hours. She would ask us, in the first year after Daddy died, if we could try to massage the muscle into relaxation. But we never seemed to be able to soften it up. She tried chiropractic, went to doctors, went to anyone who might be able to help. Nothing relieved the spasms.

She finally went to the Rochester clinic. They told her the sciatica nerve had been caught when the hip was set. They said they could sever it, the pain would stop, but she would not be able to walk any more. She said "No, I'll walk off my sins while I'm here on earth and go to daily Mass rather than be in a wheelchair." She rarely mentioned the spasms again, but we could see that she would try to walk them off in the daytime. Toward the end of her life, she had the spasms seven or eight times a night.

She mentioned the cold and alternating freezing, burning feet. She mentioned the roughness of the ice underfoot. She sometimes talked of the agony of the night's pain. But she did it lightly, matter-of-factly, never making us feel guilty because we were so healthy, never whining, never anything but accepting what God seemed to be asking of her.

Mama often said, when someone would suggest she shouldn't be walking to daily Mass, "What should I be saving my energy for anyway?" About the house, and always, as she went to Mass, she carried a long, black rosary in her hand, and a large black wooden crucifix. She must have dropped the crucifix one day on her way from Mass for a Protestant gentleman we did not know well stopped at the house to return it. He said he knew it was hers, apparently everyone knew she carried

it. The corpus of Jesus was worn absolutely smooth when we buried it with her. After we left Sheldon different people drove her to daily Mass, God bless them.

Finally, Mama was no longer able to walk. Dr. Samuelson said her spine was incredibly full of arthritis and the ball of the hip had disintegrated so it could not bear weight. She had fallen many times when she lived at Mrs. Donahue's. Today we might refer to that situation as a group home, but it simply came about that several old women were unable to keep up their own houses and Mrs. Donahue had a large house, across the street from St. Patrick's church. They lived together there. We visited Mama there once, Eileen and I, and Denis. It did not seem a very pleasant place to us. I do remember during that visit coming in on Mama in her room. She was sitting very still, her face rapt, withdrawn from the present. I spoke and waited. Slowly she came back. She smiled and did not speak of where she had been. It is that raptness I recognize when people speak of "listening to God's voice."

Vivian and Matt Weir took Mama into their home in Sheldon for the last several months of her life. Vivian was the oldest daughter who gave up a year in her life to help Mama keep us twins alive. Their six children were all grown by this time. Mama was in the downstairs bedroom. Vivian called to say Mama was dying and I caught a train for Sheldon. I could not find a copy of the Prayers for the Dying that Mama talked of praying while she was pregnant with Lyle, her first child. So I took my Short Breviary which I knew had the daily psalms for the November divine office. I felt we could pray those together.

Eileen was in California visiting our own mother's sister, Aunt Delia. She woke in the middle of the night, knew Mama was dying, and through calling our cousin, Charles Gannon, who worked on the Union Pacific railroad, caught a train at three AM for Sheldon. She stood over her baggage near the vestibule all the way across the country -- it was still wartime as far as troop movements by train were concerned. Eileen and I arrived about the same time.

I went in to be with Mama in the morning. She was saying her rosary, and when I asked how she was feeling, said, "I am miserable." But after a while she asked me to tell her about something I had been reading lately. I told her about Father George Dunne's article in *Commonweal*, "The Sin of Segregation." The author was no relative of hers, and the article was one of the very first which directly addressed racial attitudes in the church. She thought it might be too much trouble for the children if there were interracial marriages.

Then she said, "Let me be quiet and pray." Shortly after that all of us in the house gathered around the bed and Eileen and I alternately read the Psalms from the Office for the Dead, on November 1st. This was the seventh of November, 1945. Mama responded softly to all the Our Fathers until we told her it was taking too much effort and to pray silently. We could see she was praying with us until, of a certain moment, Eileen and I both knew she was with God for all eternity. It was a wonderful, joy-filled moment. Mama was where she had always longed to be.

## ***Eileen's Demise***

When Eileen was in her late seventies, she emulated Mama. She had lived in Houston, Texas for about forty years. But she came to visit us almost every year. I did not go to Houston frequently until the last few years when I was in the monastery and she was not well enough to come here. Eileen's husband, Francis Yeager, had died suddenly from an aortic aneurism almost two years before she died. She rather enjoyed living alone, though her illnesses made it taxing.

She did not talk much about how difficult the "dancing legs" were for her, keeping her "walking for God" most of the night -- for about thirty years. Nor did she complain about the flare-ups of asthma that put her on prednisone in the last few years. She did have to carefully follow the count-down chart from the higher dosages of prednisone to the end of the ten-day course of treatment, and sometimes testily remarked on its complexity. I marveled at her patience about dragging the sixty foot cord from her oxygen tank all around the house, and getting it twisted up on the rocking chair or the table legs. She was on oxygen for a time when she read about the possibility of acupuncture helping asthmatics breathe. So she looked in the telephone book and found a practitioner close enough for her to drive to. And for almost a year, while she went to frequent acupuncture treatments, she was able to breathe on her own. Finally, for the last several months before the end she had to go back on the large blue oxygen tank. She also had to lift up the small oxygen tank into the car, switch off the large tank, back out of the attached garage, breathing from the small tank. She had to reach into the back seat, lift it out of the car again, set it upright on its wheels, and go into the church for Mass, or the grocery store to shop. The clerks were kind about lifting the groceries into the back seat, but she had to do it herself when she got home.

I never knew how she got on the long blue plastic "hip boots," she called them. They lay over the wicker chair beside her bed, within reach when she needed to put them on in the morning. She had to sit on the side of the bed, her frail arms reaching out to get them on to the bed. Then she had to get her legs in place, and pull the "boots" into place under her legs. Then she had reach down to her toes and begin to buckle them up from her toes to her hips. How she managed all that before I got there, I do not know. The purpose of this contraption, after she got the tubes all hooked up, was to have the motor push the edema in her legs away with great wheezes of sound. Unfortunately, the rhythmic pressure also set off her being "quick" so she could hardly bear to do it. The personal care attendant she often had was not supposed to help: that was "medicine" and they were not to give "medicine." The edema in her legs was severe, but, though her doctor meant well, it was not a useful treatment for her.

She was often asleep in total exhaustion after a night of being "quick." We began using the term being "quick" early in life. But later we recognized it as the pulsating quivering in our legs that Vladimir Nabokov described so graphically in his memoir *Speak, Memory*. This maddening sensation of interior, irritating tension would usually set in as we began to relax. We often noticed it on the days during high school when we had chemistry labs for two or three hours. And it was noticeable as we relaxed on the sixty mile ride home from dancing at the "Lakes" in high school or junior college.

I have mentioned that we both experienced being "quick" as teenagers. However, I never suffered anywhere near as much with it as Eileen did. As she got older it got increasingly persistent, especially during the night. She would almost always be able to sleep soundly for about twenty minutes just as she went to bed.

But the long hours of the night were difficult. Fran slept well, which meant she could deal with it by herself and not have to worry about his reaction. The insistent tremors meant she could not lie still, nor sit down comfortably. Walking, or marching in place -- movement, in short -- seemed to be the easiest way to cope with the driving force within one's body. Fortunately, we somehow discovered that a warm bath was also helpful. So for many years, Eileen "walked for Christ" for an hour or so after she awakened in the middle of the night. Or she read art books, or others, placed on a lovely music stand they had found in an antique store. She could march in place, there.

Night after night, however, she would wait as long as she could, and then draw the bathtub full of warm water, and read in the tub until she fell asleep for an hour or two. They always had a small bathroom that could stay warm from the little gas heaters that were standard equipment in Houston, Texas houses. And the tubs were never huge, long ones like the tub at 712 Tenth Street.

In the last several years, after an hour or so back in bed after the bath, she would awaken with being "quick" again and have to get up. Then she would put a soft blanket on the floor to kneel on, and put her head down on the cushioned seat of her recliner. She was usually on the oxygen tank, although not when she was in the bathtub.

If I was visiting when she was sick with pneumonia in those last few years, I would check on her occasionally during the night. If she was still awake, she'd be kneeling in the ordinary way against the chair, head up against the back of the seat. But after an hour or so of that, and especially toward morning, I'd find her slumped down on one hip with her head awkwardly askew out on the edge of the seat cushion.

Often, about six-thirty or seven a.m., she would climb back into bed and, fortunately, sleep an hour or so. Mike, her second son, lived in the Houston suburbs and would stop in about eight in the morning on his way to his office. He did not waken her if she was sleeping. If she had thought of something he could help her with during the night, she would leave a note for him on the table. It meant a great deal to him, and to both of us, that he did so after Francis died so suddenly one morning. Fran called out in terrible pain from an aneurysm. She awoke, called the doctor and the hospital, took charge in admitting him to the hospital, calling the children, helping him make decisions about surgery, and arranging with the undertaker when he died within a couple of hours.

After she was widowed and after several bouts with pneumonia we decided I needed to go to help her. She was so grateful when I came, and I stayed a couple of weeks before she suddenly stopped breathing one night on her way to the emergency room. She was so frightened when she came to with a tube in her throat. She couldn't talk but we knew she was begging us to "Pray," over and over. I could only think of the Our Father and the Hail Mary, but that seemed to be enough. She was in St. Joseph's Hospital for a week.

Eileen died peacefully of asthma, March 27, 1995, after a week in Hospice, at home. Her children came each evening and Jamie, her oldest son, led the familiar family prayers. Then different people would read favorite poems: some of the young men who were in her husband, Fran's, A.A. group and had always spent a lot of time in their home, and one evening her long-term women friends, later, my daughters and son, Chris, and her children, Mike, Delia, Mary-o, Scott and Nicky. Her daily prayer for years was e.e. cummings' poem, "be of love a little more careful." The children put it on her tombstone. Eileen died in somewhat the same quiet way as Mama had. I was praying, "May the angels greet you in Paradise" when the chimes in the garden next door began to ring at around 4 in the morning. As she softly breathed her last, the chimes stopped. She, too, had gone home to God.

## ***Our Sheldon Gang***

A special insight into Mama's amazing adaptability to the young girl twins whose lives she succeeded in saving when she was in her late fifties, was how she treated us as teenagers. She was in her seventies in those years. She was amazingly open to letting us live in our present.

As I have said, the framework of our days until we were Juniors and Seniors in High School was daily Mass in the morning, school, daily spiritual reading in the afternoon, and family prayers -- the Rosary and other prayers -- at night.

I do not remember how we acquired these friends, or started dancing with the girls first, and later added the boys. It was not a question of "dating" specific boys. Somehow it became a habit for pretty much the same twenty-four of us to gather at our house to dance in the evening. We spoke of ourselves as "The Gang."

I'm not sure I can even name everyone now -- though I may call Joan Hospers Emerson who lives nearby in Osakis -- to check the list with her. Eileen was the "leader" of the girls. Bob Houlihan, now dead, was the "leader" of the boys. Joan Hospers, Jean Iverson, the girl from Canada -- Janelle - Sissy (Josephine) DeWitt, Maxine Rooney, (Honey) Peggy Houlihan, Laverne Howe, Glenn and Dale Mulhern, Christiani, Chris, these are what I can now recall of so many more...

It was an ecumenical group, both Catholic and Protestant, before we had heard the word. They started coming down about 7:30 or 8 in the evening. Each evening we rolled up the carpets in the three rooms -- parlor, living room and dining room. We sprinkled "dance" wax from a small round can on all the floors almost every night to make it easier to glide smoothly, as was the mode then. The whole object of dancing was to be "smooth." No one was lighter on her feet than Eileen. We twins made no effort to prepare for the gang, whoever felt like helping did so.

Mama made four loaves of white bread of cake-like texture every day, using the same recipe she had used when she lived on the farm. There was usually peach jam, tomatoes preserves, and peanut butter to put on the bread. If someone wanted cereal, there was good whole milk in the cupboard. We went shopping every day at Starret's so the food did not spoil. We did not attempt to act as "hostesses." Persons, usually the boys, helped themselves to the food without speaking of it any one. Eating was done in the kitchen, dancing in the other rooms. We twins and Mama could not possibly eat four loaves of bread a day, Perhaps Mama was glad it was eaten so she could bake the next day.

Mama said she was glad to have our friends at the house. Before she went to Rochester for her colon cancer operation, she had been very careful about our even playing in the neighborhood until nine o'clock. She still wanted to know who we were with and what we were doing. How better than have our friends at our home?

And since Daddy was dead, the gang did not interrupt a conversation, as it would have in other homes where both parents were living.

Mama sat on the leather davenport with her pile of mainly Catholic magazines beside her from which she read. Occasionally she would say, "Please turn off the radio. I want to read you something." No one said anything, the radio was turned off, and people stood around as she read -- never more than fifteen minutes. Had anyone protested, we would have been angry. But no one ever did protest. The reading often had some spiritual content, but it usually had some relevance to our lives.

The wonders of radio made the gang a possibility. We remember when radios came into use. I even



tried to make a crystal set from a *Modern Mechanics* magazine. I can't imagine how I thought I had the capability. But it was engaging to try. Ours was a big Atwater Kent cabinet model. The station we tuned to each evening was Chicago's WLS. The music was "big band" music. Glenn Scott, Guy Lombardo, Louie Armstrong, Artie Shaw, Glenn Miller. The people gathered in the large public dance halls in Chicago seemed to dance about fifteen minutes, with a several minute break.

I think there were ads in between that we never listened to as we stood about talking. Somehow we had a code not to dance all night with the same person. Houlie had gone with Eileen for quite awhile, and then he and Jean Iverson paired off. They called each other, "Ma" and "Pa," which I thought was embarrassing. But for the most part, the rest of the gang was not into "going steady." We were all friends and all good dancers.

When the nightly dancing first began, I often sat in the parlor with a book, and did not dance very often. Eileen was indeed the belle of the ball, she weighed a little over a hundred pounds and danced like a feather, everyone said. All through high school, college, and into my fifties I weighed about one hundred thirty pounds. If people just saw our faces they had a hard time telling us apart, but not when we stood up. Mama said one day, "Arleen, no one is ever going to ask you to dance if you always have a book you are reading." I said I was not a good dancer, and Mama told me I never could be if I did not dance. I did learn to be a good dancer, especially with a boy from Sanborn, Bill Davis, who was as good a dancer as Houlie. In Junior College I went with him to the Lakes and Sibley to dances and we swirled and swayed like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. But that was only once a week or so. Bill was never a member of the gang.

The gang came to our house every weekday night during the school year from the time we were Juniors in high school through my two years in Junior College. Some of the members of the gang were a couple of years behind us in school. That meant that by the end of those four years, almost everyone was getting a job, planning to work his/her way through college, or leaving town for something new. In the summer Mr. Houlihan, Bob and Honey's dad, drove a whole pile of us to the Lakes frequently during the week. We told stories of what Big John and Sparky had said during the day on the radio, from Ohio, I think. And on the way home, we often sang the popular songs. Some of the girls had to sit on other's laps to fit in. Everyone joined in, no coupling off.

The North Dakota band which was beginning to be known nationwide, and in those early days played only at Sibley, Iowa, not at Roof Garden at the Lakes, was Lawrence Welk's. Snobs that we were, we did not really like go to Welk's dances. But not to dance at all on Tuesday nights was too much to give up, so we would go and arrogantly (Ed. Note -- and correctly --) complain.

The radio carried the dance music from the Chicago public dancehalls -- the Trianon and the Argonne. No one we knew ever went there. Neither Eileen nor I ever seemed to think of trying to go there when we did go to school in Chicago after junior college and before going one by one to college at St. Catherine's in St. Paul, Minnesota. Now I wonder why we didn't.

We heard big band music live at the dance hall at the Lakes. Lake Okoboji in the northeast section of Iowa was the only one of two lakes of any size in Iowa. The other was called Spirit Lake. But it was Okoboji that was said to be as blue as Lake Geneva in Switzerland, and was a resort area with cottages spread on the hills around the lakeside. There was a huge wooden building which had a restaurant on the main floor and a number of arcades. What drew the gang most nights of the summer, sixty miles away, was the screened in upper floor -- the dance hall -- the Roof Garden.



**Figure 17 - Roof Garden Dance Hall, Lake Okoboji Iowa, circa 1940**

In those days it was considered alright for people to dance with strangers. Mama seemed to accept that. But I do remember one night when a young man I did not know, took my arm after I had stopped dancing with a swarthy looking older man, and told me not to dance with him again. He did not dance "nicely," he said and he could see that I was not his kind of a girl. This was the only time that happened. And when we did dance with strangers, we rarely saw them again. We always came back to dancing with members of the gang, our friends.



**Figure 18 - Roof Garden Dance Hall, Lake Okoboji Iowa, circa 1955**

Besides dancing, the gang played Monopoly on Sunday afternoons and ineptly tried skiing down the few hills we could find on Sunday afternoons in the winter. Probably Joan Hospers' mother got the idea that we should broaden our social skills, so we had dressy dinners some Sunday evenings. I particularly remember the one or two we had at the Hospers' house. Joan's family had an air of elegance others did not. Her mother was short, stylish, black haired and lovely. The table in their big house was set with lovely glassware and silverware. And our behavior matched the setting.

One tragedy occurred during those otherwise heedlessly happy years. We often went out to Glenn and Dale Mulhern's lovely farm home on Sundays, especially in the winter. Both boys were blond, Glenn, the oldest by a year or two, and taller, had straight hair, brushed back from his forehead. Dale had very curly blonde hair, also brushed back in the style of the thirties. Both were good dancers, quietly fun, very well liked by everyone. Joan Hospers was Dale's special friend at the time.

Word came one day that Glenn had been asphyxiated in his car, in the family garage. I do not recall that the reason was ever very clear. I remember his lovely mother, Agnes. We would speak of her loss, even when I came to Sheldon just before I entered the convent in 1980. There was nothing like "grief counseling" in those years. It was very sobering for the gang, but we went on dancing and supporting each other by being friends. Among ourselves we knew we grieved, but that life went on, so we did not talk specifically about it very much.

The gang gave us a sense of acceptance in the wider world, opened our awareness of people as persons not identified by religious affiliation, and gave us good friends. Some of the gang Eileen kept in touch with all her life. She and Joan and Edwin Emerson went together to the Sheldon High School reunions about every five years in the last many years. While their children were younger, they did not go, but when they were less busy, they did. Several members of the gang moved to California and remained close friends there who correspond with others throughout the country. Thousands of Sheldonites come to the Reunions. They meet as classes by the years of graduation. Because I and Eileen were visiting in Sheldon just before I came to St. Benedict's Convent, I did meet many of the people of our years. It appears that people from Sheldon have a stronger bond than do most "home towners."

The gang was certainly a blessing. We were able to become integrated, social persons, in a way we would not have been without those friendships and development of interests.

## ***Developing Relationships with our Sisters***

Mama sent us off to Omaha for a month every summer for three or four years. She said she was not capable of preparing us for life in the world of the twentieth century but that our sisters, Trudy and Varnius, who were twelve and ten years older than we, would be able to guide us.

We did learn social skills: how to prepare and serve appetizing, well-balanced meals and how to serve and eat graciously. I am afraid Varnius did all the real work, however.

Each evening Varnius, who was on vacation from the college through which she was working her way and Trudy was helping to send her, set the table with goblets, salad plates, and a full complement of silver. They did this because that was the life-style they wanted for themselves. They remembered the Haviland china our birth mother had and used on Sundays. There were a couple of law students from Creighton University. They rented rooms at Trudy's house which helped all of them. The young men took us, with Trudy and Varnius, to dances: a different environment than at the Lakes, but dances.

Trudy also saw to it that we went to the Joceyln Art Gallery which has come to have a good reputation as a small facility. And she took us to the Aksarben horse races, (Nebraska spelled backwards.) We got an inkling of familiarity about betting on the horses, but being prudent about it. Trudy, who may have had her own beauty shop in those years, even paid for us to take horseback riding lessons, so we could learn to "post." Since neither of us has a basic sense of rhythm, except while dancing, we never really mastered it. But it gave us an appreciation for her love of horses because Trudy missed riding in the fields that she had enjoyed on the farm.

She and Varnius came to Omaha as young girls to live with Daddy's oldest sister, Aunt Gertrude McCarty. Trudy immediately went to work, and finally became a very good hair dresser. So we learned something of caring for our wild hair -- like hers, except that she had what we called "orange" hair. We were glad we did not. But when Mary's first son was born, he was stunning with his orange hair and brown eyes, and her third son, as well, with his orange hair and blue eyes. For boys that was a great heritage.

One lesson that stayed with me had to do with drinking alcohol. This was during Prohibition days and there was almost mandatory drinking. Trudy said never to take more than three drinks in one evening, preferably only one, no matter how much urging there was. And that if, in later life, you got to the stage which she and her future husband, Curly Jackson, had been at and stopped, note it well. If you felt you needed a drink after work, and before dinner, Stop Drinking. You are already an alcoholic. Emerson and I never did have a drink before dinner. It did not fit in with our very deliberately simple, rural life style. But I appreciated the advice.

Having been a mother myself, I think Mama showed an amazing adaptability to help us develop social life-style skills, make good friends, and live "ordinary" lives in spite of having a mother old enough to be our grandmother. And one everyone called a "holy" person at that.

We always knew we were loved deeply. After all, Mama had taken us into her life when she was fifty-four. And the difficulties of keeping us alive proved that she was willing to go to any lengths for us. Although most people thought of her as a stern parent, overly religious, very strict and serious, we never doubted that we were loved. More than once that assurance of love-unspoken -- but very clear to us, held us in the palm of God's hand.

## **APPENDIX I – EILEEN’S MEMOIR OF JOSIE DUNN McCARTY**

*By Eileen McCarty Yeager, circa 1976*

Josie Dunn McCarty was a pretty, fine-featured grey-haired lady of fifty-four when she became our mother. Her husband, Jim McCarty, had a brother named Veatus who was married to Mary Grace Gannon. They had eight children when identical girl twins, Arleen and Eileen, were born. Our real mother, Mary Grace Gannon, died of a hemorrhage when the twins were ten hours old. Josie took the premature three and three and one-half pound girls to her farm home about thirty miles away. The doctor did not expect the twins to live but Mama, Josie Dunn McCarty, thought she could succeed in keeping them alive. Of course, she did do so, because this tribute to her is being written by a sixty-year-old Eileen. Arleen is also writing her memories of our spiritual heritage from our dear Mama.

It baffled us twins that Mama’s children did not love her. The Mama we knew was loving and concerned, though she was very undemonstrative. I recall thinking, angrily, that if I ever had children, I’d thank ‘em and tell ‘em they’d done a good job. But then I didn’t either. Why? Are we too busy as parents of young children? It is only when children are grown that we have the time to take time with them. So Mama probably treated us much differently than when she had her own children. She had been sickly then and talked vaguely of having to overcome “dope” – though the Mama we knew considered aspirin as “dope.”

During high school I wanted to write a story of Mama. I hoped to describe this woman from differing viewpoints. The surprise ending would be that each was talking about the same person. We knew she was loving, kind and not so very severe. Her children thought her very tight with money (she was somewhat), very thoughtless of their needs. But she talked lovingly of them to us. She gave most generously to educate priests and to the needs of the Catholic Church. The latter amount was not told to anyone but the priests, but we surmised it was a goodly share. There is a plaque with her name on it as a donor on the wall of the Crypt Church of the National Shrine in Washington DC.

### ***Mama’s Catholic Heritage***

Josie Dunn had such a firm, all-consuming faith in the Catholic church that it pervaded all the hours of our daily life. Hers was such a positive, cheerful faith that doubting it never occurred to me. Of course, part of that was because it would not occur to many of our friends in the 1930s to openly disobey or doubt our parents.

I do not know how old we were when we started reading aloud with Mama for about one hour a day. I vividly recall little square beige thick books of lives of the saints for children. It was all spiritual reading: *Sacred Heart Messenger*, *Ave Maria*, and some “heavy” books. I particularly remember Tanquary. [Note from Arleen: I looked up Tanquary in the Abbey library. That was not the book, because it turns out to be basically a huge outline. Rather, I believe it was Rodriquez, a Spanish writer of that time who was popular – but long sentences, fun to read.] We did not really listen to this material but I do not recall objecting violently to it either. Tanquary was sort of fun. He wrote long, involved sentences so we would keep track of the number of clauses in each sentence. I do recall a bit about humility. We twins even discussed this spiritedly. How do you know you are humble? If you know it, then you are not humble.

We had to say the rosary at night. That was something I really disliked. We used to open a book in

front of us on the seat of the chair and read all through the five decades. Often we would say a novena of some sort. I did like the one to the Holy Ghost; in fact, I still say it. And whenever I say or hear the “De Profundis” I can hear Mama’s voice and cadence.

### **PSALM 130**

(Grail translation, 1963)  
[for the souls in Purgatory]  
*De profundis*

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord,  
Lord, hear my voice!

O let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my pleading.

If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt,  
Lord, who would survive?

But with you is found forgiveness:  
for this we revere you.

My soul is waiting for the Lord.  
I count on his word.

My soul is longing for the Lord  
more than watchman for daybreak.

Let the watchman count on daybreak  
and Israel on the Lord.

Because with the Lord there is mercy  
and fullness of redemption,  
Israel indeed he will redeem  
from all its iniquity.

#### **Figure 19 – *de Profundis*, Grail Text**

We walked to Mass every morning until we were about nineteen or twenty – at least until we left home after attending Sheldon Junior College. After Mama broke her hip, when we were about twelve years old, we had to walk very slowly – one half hour each way – which was most uncomfortable in the snow or heavy rain. But I do not recall feeling any ill will about it, even though I hated to get up early in the morning after being out late at night. I think we were really very proud

of Mama for her stoic endurance.

Fr. McGoey used to call Mama at night if he learned from the news that it would be below zero the next morning. “Mrs. McCarty, I will excommunicate you if you come to Mass in the morning,” he would say. “Sure, you cannot, you are not the Pope!” she would reply.

Usually, she would give in, though, and we would not have to go that day. Even our feet would ache from the cold moist winter mornings. In addition, the church was unheated many of those years so that during some winters part of Mama’s toes would turn black from the exposure. As with any discomfort, great or small, you always “offered it up,” saying, “All for thee, O Lord!” It has become almost an automatic response, and now my children sometimes say it to me, sarcastically, when they have a bad pain.

St. Theresa of the Little Flower seemed to be her favorite saint. The “Little Way” was talked of naturally, in matter-of-fact conversation, like news about the family. One gave up a drink of water, or an orange, for the “poor souls.” Or you could rejoice in the beautiful day, or sunset, and offer it up in thanksgiving to God. Go to the dance or the high school games and have fun – for God. Everything in Mama’s life related to God, the joys every bit as much as the sorrows or pain. Hers was not a pious, long-faced suffering. She smiled a lot, but never laughed out loud.

### **The “Gang”**

She really loved having the “gang” about all the time. The gang was made up of about twenty-four kids. Its presence lasted from our sophomore year in high school to sophomore year in college. They were at our house every single night dancing – unless we all went elsewhere to dance. During basketball and football seasons they had to leave at ten p.m. because all the boys were on the teams.

We danced to the radio, fifteen minutes of music, then ads, then fifteen more minutes. Mama would sit on her davenport and read until about nine p.m. If she found a good article in the *Sacred Heart Messenger* or the *Ave Maria*, or *Our Sunday Visitor*, she would have one of us turn off the radio.

“I would like to have you listen to this,” she would say, and she would read aloud.

Only about half the gang were Catholic but they all stood quietly while she read. If they ever complained, or made a face about it, it was never around us. They all really loved Mama, and called her “the mater.” Some would come by to see her even when we had left for college or during college vacations.

During the month of May, we had to go to Benediction on Sunday nights at seven o’clock. So if they had come over in the afternoon, as they often did, they would have to go to Benediction with us. And then they would come back and we would dance. Of course, they would not have gone if they had not wanted to, but they seemed to accept it – if they wanted to come back later. I think they took her ways for granted and loved her without thinking she was unusual. She was interested in them, in the outcome of the games, and all our activities. But if we spoke unkindly of anyone, she would hush us up.

“If you cannot say anything good about a person, do not say anything at all,” and, “It takes all kinds of people to make a world,” she would say. She never gossiped about anyone, although there must have been some people she did not like.

### **Other Devotions of Mama's**

Pope Pius X was a person Mama revered. She was *so* grateful to him for making Holy Communion a daily practice. She used to tell us twins about getting to Mass and Communion about every two months when she was a young woman. They had to drive in the buggy many miles to Le Mars, Iowa. At least, that is the only town I remember her saying that Mass was available. And even after she married in 1888, one still didn't go to Communion every week apparently – until Pope Pius X. Daily Communion came even later than weekly reception and she always felt it was a *great* privilege. She frequently spoke of the unlimited graces received from Mass and sought to learn and read more about it. In fact, I am sure her attitude of privilege towards Mass and Communion and reverence kept daily Mass from ever becoming a dull obligation to us. It still seems an opportunity in spite of the distractions.

Mama had great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We always made the “Morning Offering” and the first Fridays. I remember her counting up how many she had made in all, as each nine months was up. Praying for a happy death is very important because of her. She did not make death a fearful thing at all, because she taught us that it was going home to God. And her own death was most peaceful and awe-inspiring. She had us twins and Vivian say the rosary with her, she only moving her lips. Then we read Prayers for the Dead from the Breviary and she followed along because she already knew many of the Psalms. Finally she just stopped breathing and we could feel God all around !! I was so awe-filled to realize that she was *now* with Him in Paradise. I have never elsewhere felt so close to God except at each child's birth.

My children say the nuns were always talking about everything being a mortal sin. Mama had a great devotion to the sacrament of Confession and we were expected to go every week. But I do not recall having a fear of being sinful and damned. I think she must have talked more about the mercy of God than she did about stern justice.

The joke at St. Catherine's College in the 1940s was that you could answer every other question in religion tests by writing “the Mystical Body of Christ.” I thought the explanation of it in class was very vague. Gene and Abby McCarthy explained it and it turned out to be just what Mama had taught all along, only she had not called it the “mystical body.”

### **Mama's Cross**

Mama broke her hip one morning coming home from Mass. The doctors said she would probably never walk again. But she walked at first by pushing a straight-backed chair in front of her. In later years she would say she *had* to walk when she was left with two eleven-year-old girls to care for after Daddy died suddenly in the same year she broke her hip. She was always a very composed, regal woman and I never did see her cry, even about Daddy. She told us she was in a state of shock for six months afterwards – and then it began to hit her.

For almost twenty years she had severe muscle spasms about every half-hour. If her leg was bent, she could not straighten it out, even with us trying to pull it down. Or if she was lying down it would jerk into a bent position. She never complained about this, although she would very occasionally mention it. I remember her saying that she had decided at the first that if she frowned when the pain came on, she would have had a permanent frown, so she worked on keeping her face calm-looking. The pain certainly never seemed to make her crabby or irritable. This is amazing to me now, because pain does make me irritable until I (sometimes) remember Mama. In late high school, I remember



reading an article about living with an invalid and the problems it could cause. We certainly never felt or even knew we were living with someone in constant pain and frustration. Occasionally she would say how she longed to go for a “brisk” walk because she had always enjoyed walking. But it was just a matter-of-fact statement, not a complaint.

I am sure Mama was a saint. I think it was from her I learned that a saint was one who lived an ordinary life with extraordinary virtue. Josie Dunn McCarty surely did that.