



Remembering

Sister Carol Francis Crowe, CSJ

June 18, 1934 – June 27, 2019

As with everything in her life, Sister Carol Francis liked to do things her own way. So it was no surprise to find she had made all the plans for her own funeral—readings, hymns, even the liturgy booklet computer-ready to be printed out. She had also written her own necrology. So here it is, just slightly edited, with a conclusion Carol could not foresee.

Carol Ann Crowe made a spectacular entrance to the Crowe family on the morning of June 18, 1934. Her father, Francis, always called “Red” Crowe, rushed her mother, Zita Duffy Crowe, to St. Mary’s Hospital in East St. Louis, Illinois, on a very hot humid morning before the sun even thought of rising. Arriving at the ER, mom was placed on a gurney, and a very pale and shaking intern pleaded with the patient, “Lady, please stop, the doctor is not here yet!” Zita’s simple reply was, “I can’t stop!”

There was no stopping Carol’s entrance. In a very short time, she entered this big, wide, wonderful world in the hallway, mother on a gurney, with only an intern standing by! A bit nerve racking but the parents appreciated the discounted bill which totaled only \$25 since there was no labor room, no delivery room, nor doctor service.

Two weeks later, she joined her big two-and-a-half-year older brother, William Francis, known to family members as Billy. They became fast friends on a love/hate basis in a normal brother-sister relationship. Later in life, he confided to her, “I don’t know why I even like you much less love you!”

Three years later, Red and Zita bravely packed up their family and their belongings that would fit into the car and moved west to Southern California to find work. Coming from a large poor family, where as children an orange was their Christmas present, Zita wrote

back to her sister in Illinois, “Mae, you won’t believe it; California has oranges in the gutter!”

Settled in San Fernando, the Crowe family’s social life centered around the extended family, parish, school, Girl and Boy Scouts, Knights of Columbus, and Catholic Daughters. Carol received a twelve-year education at St. Ferdinand’s Elementary School and St. Ferdinand Mission High School under the direction of the Sisters of Divine Providence. From her junior year in high school, Carol worked part-time and then full-time for two years in a local insurance agency.

After her 1952 high school graduation, the Sisters of St Joseph arrived to staff the St. Ferdinand’s schools. The high school soon after became Alemany High School. Carol’s first introduction to the CSJs was visiting the convent with information that Sister Davida Joseph needed regarding Student Council, Sodality, GAA, etc. Sister Davida Joseph discovered that Carol could drive, and thus the friendship with the CSJs began. Twice she was their chauffeur to St. Mary’s Academy on March 19th, and there the seed was planted! Meanwhile, after studying at Valley Community College, Carol joined her long-time friend since second grade, Anna Mae Anesi (Sister Anna Mary Anesi) at Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, Texas for a fun-filled college experience in which she made friendships that endured. Every Christmas, four of them kept up with each other.

In August, 1954, in response to Sister Davida Joseph’s question, “When are you returning to San Antonio?”, Carol responded,

“I am not returning, I am going to enter the convent.” Sister Davida Joseph, a bit surprised, asked which order; to this Carol responded “yours”! After recovering, Sister explained that one does not just ring the doorbell at St. Mary’s Academy and enter. One had to be interviewed, fill out papers, and be accepted! Surprise, surprise to Carol. Thus a hurried process began so that Carol, as well as her friend Anna Mae Anesi, could “enter” on September 15, 1954, at Slauson and Crenshaw.

The evening before Carol entered, the family gathered for a farewell dinner at their favorite restaurant, the Smoke House. Carol’s dad made the following toast: “I know her mother is not happy with her entering the convent, but I am delighted. She has the same poor taste her mom had, and would probably have married somebody like me as her mother did!”

Carol Ann received the habit and the name Sr. Carol Francis on March 19, 1955, at St. Mary’s Academy. First vows took place on March 19, 1957, at Mount St. Mary’s College. Final vows were made on August 6, 1962, in the new Carondelet Center chapel.

Writing about her ministry, Carol said, “Education has been my main love.” In 1957, she began her long career in elementary education as a teacher and administrator throughout the Los Angeles Archdiocese with just one year elsewhere--St. Joseph Cathedral, San Diego, in 1963. She served at St. Patrick, St. Martin of Tours, St. Jane Francis, St. Joseph, St. Brigid, St. Odilia, St. James, St.

Jerome, Our Lady of the Valley, St. Joseph the Worker, and St. Cyril. Her first year as principal was in 1963, and typically of Carol that carries a story! When she was named as principal, Carol had only been a teacher for six years and felt there must be some mistake. Sure enough, it was a mistake. Mother Josephine, the Provincial Superior, had intended to appoint Sister Carol Anne O’Marie. But this late, she felt it would be too embarrassing to change, so Carol remained as principal. This mistake turned out to be a happy fault; Carol continued as principal for many schools during her years of ministry.

In 1998, Carol mentioned to the Director of Ministry that she had been a principal for 33 years and even Jesus got off the cross at 33! Could she? Permission was granted, and Sister joined the Chaminade Middle School family for the next very happy twelve years as Admission Assistant and then 6th grade counselor. In 2010, after a cancer diagnosis, she “retired” to become a three-day volunteer in the school and parish offices at St. Cyril.

St. Cyril became home for her. After her eleven years as principal of the school, she continued to live at St. Cyril for a grand total of 32 years. Many friendships flourished there in the community of St. Cyril’s—priests, teachers, parishioners, parents, generations of children she taught. There were many happy memories and great stories she could tell in her matchless style.

Sister was never bored. During her active ministry, as well as in retirement, she served on several archdiocesan, parish

and community committees. She enjoyed reading, especially mysteries, playing computer games, staying in touch with her friends through email. She was addicted to The Bold and the Beautiful, enjoyed visiting, eating out and attending movies with her friends. She loved to putter and considered herself Queen of the Putterers!

Death came suddenly without much warning. Carol was diagnosed with acute aggressive leukemia at Providence Hospital in Tarzana, and after several days of intensive treatment, Carol’s body could take no more. She died on June 27, 2019 with her good friend Sister Donna Anne Bachman sitting quietly with her.

We pray that the Lord will find plenty of puttering in heaven for her. May she rest in peace. ❖

~ Written by Sister Carol Francis Crowe, CSJ and enhanced by Sister Mary Williams, CSJ

