

Reflection on the Life of Sr. Mary Andrew Matesich, O.P.

Funeral Mass, St. Mary of the Springs Chapel, June 21, 2005

by Mickey Matesich Edwards

She lies here in the sacred space of this chapel that she loved more than any of the hundreds of churches and cathedrals she visited in a lifetime of travel! She especially savored the images of *water* – in Sr. Thoma's exquisite stained glass windows, in the flowing holy water font, even in the waves in the herringbone pattern of the floor. I invite you to reflect with me on the life of our sister Mary as a vessel of "living water" flowing from the loving heart of Jesus.

Our story begins in a town where two rivers converge under the famous "Y" bridge – Zanesville, Ohio – where at 3:30 a.m. on Friday, May 5, 1939 the first of four daughters was born to Matthew Matesich and Margaret Gonda Matesich. She was named Mary Frances for her maternal grandmother, Mary Bän Gonda and her paternal grandmother Frances Draskovitch Matesich. But other names soon followed. When she learned to talk, she called herself "Girl," and that name persisted for so long that when I first said my nightly prayers, I said, "God bless Mommy, Daddy, *Girl*, Gigi, and Marty." But eventually even for me she became "Mary."

I should add here (how shall I put this?) that owing to the fact that her natural leadership skills blossomed at an early age, there were some occasions on which I addressed her as "Bossy Mary." She would respond by giving me the "look" – that arching of her left eyebrow that registered emotions ranging from amused skepticism to outright disapproval.

With her Dominican profession came a new name, Sister Mary Andrew – "Andy" to so many who have known her and loved her over the years. And to five very special young people and one cat, she is known as Aunt Mary.

Mary was washed in the waters of baptism on May 21, 1939. Her godparents were her Aunt Barbara Madore, still living and with us today in spirit, and her Uncle Charlie Mahaney, gone to eternal life but very present here today in his sons John and Jim. There were other sacramental milestones: First Communion on April 27, 1947, and Confirmation on October 2, 1950.

Early on Mary's stream of living water was fed by plenty of creative juices. She loved music: she played the piano and the violin, and she sang in St. Francis de Sales girls choir and the school glee club. She loved art projects, sewing, crafts, and baking. She was the creator of Christmas festivity in our home every year with ten different kinds of home-baked cookies, elaborate decorations throughout the whole house, and unforgettable gifts – hand-sewn dolls, doll clothes, ballet costumes, horses made from socks, skating skirts for the new roller rink. Even as a child she demonstrated her lifelong aptitude for shopping – she loved nothing more than finding the perfect present

at a bargain price! We were all jealous of how far she could stretch her allowance – a trait that served her well in dealing with Ohio Dominican's budget later in life!

First grade marked the momentous intersection of Mary's inquiring mind and Dominican education. For the remaining six decades of her life, her own living water was infused and replenished from the "springs" of St. Mary's. She soared academically, and not one of her three sisters matched her school record. By the time she reached high school Mary fully shared our father's passionate interest in politics. Under Dad's tutelage she learned about legislators and lobbying – knowledge she would later put to good use in the interest of higher education. A diary that she kept for all of four days in her freshman year of high school notes that she wrote letters about some issue to "Ike and Dulles" – that would have been President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles! At fifteen Mary was unafraid to take on the Executive Branch!

And she was *funny*. No one loved a good joke or good story more or told a good story or a good joke better! As I sifted through hundreds of photos of Mary since her death, I was struck by how many of them show her laughing.

All the while her admiration deepened for those remarkable Dominican women who taught her. She recently described them in these words: "They were fun; they were educated; and they lived lives of significance." The lure of their world was greater for her than any dreams our parents could conjure for her future. So with Mom and Dad's reluctant acquiescence, Mary left home after high school to join this congregation on the banks of flood-prone Alum Creek. During the car trip to Columbus she tried in vain to stop Gigi's sobs by jabbing Gigi in the ribs with her elbow (a gesture she had perfected during their many years of playing piano duets).

On July 9, 1959, Sr. Mary Andrew professed her vows as a Dominican. Andy graduated from St. Mary of the Springs, and taught seventh grade for a year in Pittsburgh ("Bossy Mary" as a seventh grade teacher?! I knew those kids were in trouble!). And then Andy was off to engage a much wider world at Berkeley.

In 1965 she returned to Columbus to join the chemistry department of her alma mater. Over the next thirty-six years at Ohio Dominican as professor, dean, and president, she showered her gifts on students, faculty, staff, children in the 43219 zip code, the city of Columbus, the associations of private colleges and universities, and this congregation of Dominicans.

Surgery and chemotherapy for breast cancer in 1993 barely slowed Andy down, and it added a new constituency – fellow cancer patients – to the ever-widening group of those she served. When her beloved friend and mentor Sr. Suzanne Uhrhane suffered a stroke, Andy devoted herself to Suzanne's rehabilitation and care. They took many trips together including Suzanne's final vacation at the Delaware shore – an event in which Marty and I were privileged to participate the summer before Suzanne died.

On April 4, 1970, Andy became "Aunt Mary" with the arrival of her niece and godchild Jae Gruenke. There followed Elaine Gruenke in 1973, Matt Gruenke in 1977, Jessica Seidman in 1980, and her godchild and namesake Andrew Seidman in 1983. How totally she cherished and enjoyed her nieces and nephews! She instituted the practice of "4 presents for a 4-year-old" increasing the number of gifts for each birthday up to age 10. Gigi and Marty and I had a great time preparing 50 gifts for a 50-year-old on May 5, 1989!

When Aunt Mary's meetings in Washington coincided with Valentine's Day, she would arrive at my house laden with paste, paper, stickers, jewels, ribbon and doilies to make Valentines with Jessica and Andrew. A photograph confirms that on one trip out west, Jae, Elaine and Matt successfully coaxed Aunt Mary into riding a horse – she later swore "never again!"

Travel was Andy's delight. She visited Marty in Germany many times; she also went to Japan, Spain, France, Eastern Europe, Italy, Scandinavia, Russia, Turkey, and Greece. She was accompanied on many of these trips by her felicitous traveling partner Joan Connell. Andy took scads of pictures and made albums; she sent scores of postcards; and she always returned with gifts for everyone – she was truly a world-class shopper!

In August, 1981 when we learned Mom had terminal cancer, Mary and Marty assumed the role of primary caregivers with help from Gigi and me whenever we could get to Newark. Mom – and later Dad – taught us by example to face death with honesty, courage and trust in God – lessons Mary took to heart in September, 1999 when she discovered that her breast cancer had returned. In the five years and nine months following that diagnosis, Andy's living water poured out in a flood of self-giving.

Andy went to El Salvador where Gigi was working as a Maryknoll lay missionary, and the spirituality of Oscar Romero and the Salvadoran martyrs opened a new and deeper channel in the flow of living water. She returned from that trip determined to support Gigi's work, and for next five years – no matter how depleted she was from cancer and chemotherapy – her sewing machine hummed as she made and sold hundreds of handicrafts – all proceeds to El Salvador.

In the midst of her own cancer treatment in 1999, she cared for Dad as he recovered from radiation for throat cancer. And she shared our vigil when Dad slipped away after emergency surgery in December, 2001. Andy retired from her beloved Ohio Dominican, and began her rich new life in this motherhouse community.

During the final years of her life, Andy's fountain of living water was most dramatically symbolized by a tiny drip of liquid flowing through the minute diameter of an intravenous line into her weakening veins. At the invitation of Charles Shapiro – her doctor, research partner, and friend – Andy undertook punishing chemotherapy clinical trials. She knew that at best they would only temporarily fend off her cancer. But as a

scientist herself she also knew that the data from these trials would someday bring hope to other cancer patients. And so she poured out her life in loving service.

In an interview just two months ago in *Columbus Monthly*, Andy compared her relationship with God to a long marriage where love and faith are tested and there are highs and lows – a familiar metaphor in scripture and tradition. That marriage was nurtured by many second honeymoons at (where else?!) that legendary honeymoon destination, Niagara Falls! Since 1977 Andy had made eight retreats of a week or more at Niagara Falls and other shorter visits there as well. In 2001, inspired by the St. John's Bible, she used her own photographs, selections from scripture, hymns, and poetry to create for family and friends a little book of morning and evening prayer she called the *Niagara Falls Prayerbook*. It includes the familiar hymn "Day is Done" which we will sing in a few minutes as this service concludes.

Andy's description of her first visit to the Falls with Joan Franks expresses the essence of the faith and trust that sustained her a quarter century later when she faced her own death. She wrote: "We sat high above the Canadian Falls watching the water hurl itself over the brink. Suddenly I realized that the dizzying drop did not destroy the water. Abandonment to the force of gravity did not pull apart the molecules of H₂O. Abandoning myself to God's call would not pull me apart either."

Today, through our tears, we give thanks for the gift of Andy's outpouring of the life-giving water of God's love – confident that our dear sister has not been shattered by illness and death, but is today whole and gloriously beautiful. **ALLELUIA!**