

Eulogy for Sister Rose Mary Dougherty

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First I'd like to thank Sister Mary Ellen, Kim and all of Rose Mary's family for the privilege of offering these words of remembrance of our dear Rose Mary, and I pray that what I say will be a faithful and appropriate tribute to this incredibly gifted and complex woman who touched so many so deeply, including myself.

ROSE MARY'S LEGACY

Tilden has spoken to Rose Mary's considerable legacy as a teacher at Shalem, including her many writings. In the almost 30 years that I knew Rose Mary, we had a multi-faceted relationship, what one might even call "complicated." She was my teacher, for a time my spiritual director, my colleague, and for a brief time, my subordinate at Shalem. I was a collaborator with her in starting two new ministries, and through all these years she was a dear friend both to me and to my family, to whom she was affectionately known as "Rosie."

I might add here that mine was not the only complicated relationship Rose Mary had. Many of us know how complicated Jerry May and Rose Mary's relationship was—much like quarrelling siblings who knew how to get under each other's skin. I'm reminded that next month will be the 15th anniversary of Jerry's death. When Rose Mary took a turn for the worse not quite three weeks ago, I contacted Jerry's wife, Betty, to let her know, and she came over right here to see Rose Mary. This was mid-day on Thursday, and Rose Mary passed later that evening. The next morning, after I'd gotten word that Rose Mary had passed, I emailed Betty to let her know. She emailed me right back with the following: "*Thanks for letting me know. Poor Jerry. His 15 years of eternal peace are over.*" To which I could only think: *Poor Rose Mary. With Jerry there she may never get any peace!*

I had the privilege of collaborating with Rose Mary both during our time together at Shalem and afterwards as she created two of her "babies," ministries that will survive her passing and continue her ministry for years to come. Those ministries were the multi-faith Zen community she founded in Silver Spring, Maryland, and the program *Companioning the Dying, Opening Fully to Living*.

As many of you know, I suspect, Rose Mary had a gift for inviting others into collaboration. Rose Mary would often persuade you that whatever she was inviting you to do was really for your own good! It wasn't above her to sometimes use what I'll call the "God Card," as in, "God told me to ask you to do this." She often told the story about when she invited Amy Hoey, a Sister of Mercy, to join her as co-director of the *Companioning the Dying* program. Rose Mary didn't know this at the time, but Amy's brother had recently died, and when Rose Mary asked her to join in the new program, Amy protested that it was not a good time, she didn't even like to say the word death, and she couldn't imagine why Rose Mary would ask her to do this. Rose Mary responded that Amy's name came to her in her prayer. Well, how could Amy refuse—God had told Rose Mary that Amy was the one!

She also didn't hesitate sometimes to "leverage" the great devotion that others felt towards her. I recall on many occasions getting a call from her—see if this sounds familiar—where the first words out of her mouth were, "Do you love me?" Immediately you knew why she was calling, and it wasn't for affection—Rose Mary needed you to do something. And yet, it was hard to say no to her because, truth be told, we all did love Rose Mary for all the ways she blessed us.

Rose Mary was both so very gifted and yet so very human, with foibles and a rich sense of humor that she often used to make fun of herself. The stories are endless, but one of my favorites was the time she was walking through a shopping mall and came upon a restaurant, which she just knew must have been owned by a good Catholic who loved the pope, because of its name—"POPE YES." I'll never look at a "Popeyes Restaurant" sign again the same way!

She loved beauty and sometimes saw it in the most unlikely places. Some of you might remember the rooster she fell in love with when she was visiting a Shalem graduate in Canada. Or there was the time when she went to Miami to lead a program at the invitation of Don Krickbaum, a Shalem graduate who was the Dean of the Episcopal Cathedral there. While she was there, she walked by a store and there was a small iguana in a cage. She was captivated. It seemed like the perfect addition to her home.

Now as you may know, iguanas start out small but can get pretty big, and as they do so. I have it on good authority that they can get rather ill tempered. And I must share that I don't know if Rose Mary had thought about the impact that iguana might have on those coming to her for spiritual direction. I often have my dog sitting with me when people come to my house for spiritual direction and many find it comforting. But the thought of Rose Mary doing direction with an iguana in her lap doesn't quite seem to fit, much less having an iguana crawling around during a Zen sit. Whether Rose Mary had thought about any of this, I don't know. But I suspect not—it was love at first sight and she wanted that iguana.

And so she called the airline to see if she could bring it with her on the plane ride home and was told yes. So she marched right back to the pet store, bought the iguana, and went to the airport. But when she got to her flight, the gate attendants said, "Lady, you're not bringing that iguana on this plane!" Much as she protested that she'd been told otherwise, the gate attendants wouldn't budge, and so Rose Mary had to call Don to come get her beloved iguana and take it back.

As you might guess, she was heartbroken. On reflection, however, I suspect the Holy Spirit was working in those gate attendants, protecting Rose Mary as well as everyone who might visit her there on Woodside Parkway.

HER ZEN LEGACY

Rose Mary was drawn to study Zen because of its deep resonance for her with Contemplative tradition. This same resonance has, particularly in the past 60 years or so, drawn many contemplative Roman Catholic and other Christian ordained and religious to study and adopt Zen tradition and practice as a way of deepening and enriching their Christian faith. And so it was that Rose Mary began formal Zen study with the American Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck, whose books on Zen had impressed her. Now Joko lived in San Diego, where Rose Mary's brother Tom lived, and over the years Rose Mary visited her several times. She confessed that when she went to San Diego during those years, she could never bring herself to tell Tom that

she wasn't just there to visit him—she was pretty sure he just wouldn't understand why she was seeing a Zen teacher!

Joko had been taught by the Japanese Zen master, Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi Roshi, founder of the Los Angeles Zen Center and founder of the White Plum Asanga, an affinity organization of Zen teachers who were in Maezumi's teaching lineage. Among the members of the White Plum were the founders of the Zen Community of Baltimore/Clare Sangha, Roshi Janet Richardson and Sensei Rosalie McQuade, both members of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peace. And so after several years with Joko, Rose Mary began seeing Janet as her formal Zen teacher.

My introduction to Zen and the Baltimore Zen Community came in about 2003. Rose Mary and I were at Bon Secours attending a Shalem program and were free one evening, and she asked if I'd like to go with her to a Zen sitting. It sounded interesting and so I went. For the next several years we both attended sittings and retreats there, and even became members of its board of directors.

In about 2005, with Janet's permission, Rose Mary started a sitting group at her home on Woodside Parkway in Silver Spring. She converted a small sun porch into a zendo, and Janet and Rosalie came to formally dedicate the space, as a kind of satellite of ZCB. Rose Mary offered sittings two mornings a week and every Wednesday evening. We were small group at first—I recall nights when there were only two or three of us—but over time word spread and more and more people joined us.

In July 2006 Rose Mary was formally installed by Janet to be a Zen teacher in the White Plum lineage. (You can view pictures of her installation at the reception.) And so Rose Mary became a formal Zen teacher, a Sensei, and, in keeping with Zen tradition, was given a dharma name *Myoan*, which in Japanese means "Amazing Grace."

In early 2007, the Silver Spring sitting group became an independent Zen community, the Silver Spring Zendo/One Heart Sangha. We continued to grow and began holding the Wednesday evening and monthly all-day sittings at Christ Congregational Church, just a few blocks away on Colesville Road. Over the years the sangha expanded its opportunities for practice and study. Rose Mary also became more involved with the White Plum Asanga and was asked to serve on its board of directors, which she did for several years.

In 2015, Rose Mary installed her first two dharma heirs (successors), Bob Ertman and myself. About that time she also began stepping back as teacher as her Parkinson's symptoms progressed and made attendance more difficult for her. Since my move to Delaware in 2016, Bob has continued to lead the Sangha, along with Martine Palmiter, a faithful longtime sangha member, who Rose Mary recently made a Dharma Holder, an important step towards becoming a sensei. Together, we, her dharma heirs, and all the members of the sangha hope to carry on the legacy of our beloved teacher, who, to paraphrase a Zen chant, "Showed us the Way fearlessly and compassionately, and to whom we bow in gratitude."

In One Heart Sangha, on the occasion of someone's death or serious illness, Rose Mary would ask us to chant the Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra, commonly known as the Heart Sutra. This teaching tells of the wisdom beyond wisdom of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who hears the cries of the world and sees deeply into the boundless nature of reality. At the end of this sutra is the famous Sanskrit mantra that goes as follows:

Gate gate paragata parasamgate bodhi svaha!" (Gone beyond, gone utterly beyond, gone to the other shore in compassionate embrace with all beings. So be it, amen and hallelujah!)

While Rose Mary is no longer with us in body, in spirit we know we are in her compassionate embrace from beyond. May we carry her wisdom with us always to save all beings!

COMPANIONING THE DYING

Another important part of Rose Mary's ministry for well over 30 years was supporting those at end of life. A longtime hospice volunteer, she often shared that she learned more about the ministry of spiritual guidance from companioning the dying than in any other setting.

After retiring from Shalem, in 2006 Rose Mary completed the End of Life Practitioner's Program at the Metta Institute in California. She was accompanied by her dear friend Priscilla Norris, the longtime clinical coordinator at Joseph's House, the hospice in Washington, D.C. for formerly homeless victims of AIDS and other life-limiting conditions, where Rose Mary had volunteered.

Her Metta experience greatly influenced the shape of this part of her ministry, which culminated in the program *Companioning the Dying: Opening Fully to Living*, a program of formation and support for persons both in companioning the dying and in living fuller, more compassionate and courageous lives. The full story of how the Companioning program came to be is told on the website of the program, www.companioningthedying.org, and I won't repeat it here.

But the heart of that story is a formative experience Rose Mary often told, about companioning a longtime friend and colleague, Father Sean McCarty, in his final months in a nursing facility for priests. Often when she would visit Sean, she encountered another priest, Father Eugene, a member of Sean's religious community, who was partially paralyzed. Every morning Eugene would wheel himself over to be with Sean. He and Rose Mary would often sit for hours together with their dying friend. She began to observe how Eugene companioned Sean: sometimes praying aloud, sometimes holding his hand, but *mostly simply being present*, seeming to take his cues from the Spirit animating both Sean and himself.

Staff of the nursing home would sometimes ask if he would sit with other patients who were dying. They didn't need him there in his priestly role; rather they simply wanted him as one human being who knew how to be present with another. One day he said to Rose Mary, "I don't have the right words any more, I don't know what a priest should do, but I can be here and maybe this is my final vocation."

Rose Mary was so inspired by Eugene that she began to envision a program for those who sensed in themselves a similar calling to companion the dying. In 2008, with Sister Amy Hoey as co-director, they created a pilot program called *Companioning the Dying: Opening Fully to Living*. The response was so positive, they immediately began planning how they might build an organization to continue this effort.

In 2009 I joined the Companioning program in a support capacity and installed the legal and administrative infrastructure to create a not-for-profit, charitable corporation. Classes were held each year in Kensington and attracted people from throughout the Mid-Atlantic. When Amy

decided to retire to New Hampshire in 2012, Rose Mary invited Priscilla and me to be her co-directors. In 2013 the program expanded to include a parallel program at Stella Maris Hospice in Timonium, Maryland.

Rose Mary continued to co-direct the Program until 2016, when her Parkinson's symptoms made it impossible. Today the Program continues to be inspired by Rose Mary's vision under the leadership of Priscilla and three gifted new co-directors, and supported by over 150 alumni from all over the mid-Atlantic region who have experienced the transformative impact of the program.

HER JOURNEY WITH DIMINISHMENT WITH PARKINSON'S

While she was busy shepherding the Zen community and the Companionship program, Rose Mary began to have her own health challenges. Beginning in about 2010, those of us who worked closely with her began to notice hand tremors. She assured us that her doctor said they were nothing more than "essential tremors"—a neurological disorder which by itself is not dangerous. But only a year later, in 2011, she told us that tests had revealed she did, in fact, have Parkinson's Disease. This was not easy for her to hear, particularly since at that time her brother John was rapidly diminishing from the effects of Parkinson's. Rose Mary and Mary Ellen would often travel to Cumberland to visit John and his family, and they continued to do so until his passing in August 2012.

Rose Mary often told the story of her experience during this difficult period. In a recent conversation with Lois Lindbloom, who for many years collaborated with Rose Mary in group spiritual direction, she reminded me that Rose Mary included the story in a talk titled "*Tending the Holy in the Now of Diminishment*," which she gave at the 2013 annual conference of Spiritual Directors International. In the talk Rose Mary described her ministry at Joseph's House and in creating the "Companionship the Dying" program, and connecting that to spiritual direction. And then she turned to her own story. She reported lamenting to her neurologist about some of the realities of carrying the diagnosis and effects of Parkinson's:

When I said to the neurologist, "If I didn't have a brother for a benchmark with this, this wouldn't be so hard." He said: "I will permit you to feel sorry for your brother. *I will not permit you to feel sorry for yourself.* You are not your brother. We don't know how this will progress in you. Your job is to live with what is, as it is now, and not project into the future."

And with this, Rose Mary began to reflect on her brother's experience. She said: "I noticed I think for my brother John there was a calling in his diminishment. He became much more loving than I could ever imagine. [It was] just beautiful."

And so, as with John, Rose Mary found a calling in her diminishment, namely to assure as she could that others would benefit from her experience with Parkinson's. She enrolled in clinical studies at Johns Hopkins. And when her beloved sister, Sister Mary Ellen, was diagnosed with a disease also in the Parkinson's spectrum, she resolved to support and companion her as long as she was able, ultimately spending her last years and months living next door to her here in Maria Health Center.

As Lois Lindbloom remembers the talk that Rose Mary gave at SDI, she recalls that Rose Mary added this to what the doctor said to her: “Rose Mary, nobody cares about your damn talks! You facilitate transformation—that’s what you do!”

Yes, that’s what our Rose Mary did. She promoted transformation in so many ways:

- through her teaching and writings at Shalem;
- through the Zen Community;
- through Companioning the Dying and her ministry at Joseph’s House;
- through offering and nurturing the ministry of both one-to-one and group spiritual direction;
- through offering spiritual support for hospice staff, such as at Holy Cross Hospice, and for hospice chaplains throughout the Baltimore/Washington region;
- through her ministry in supporting listening groups, essentially group spiritual direction groups, for medical school students through the George Washington University Institute for Spirituality and Health (GWISH);
- through her ministry to her own religious community, the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

In closing, Rose Mary loved and often used the poetry of Mary Oliver who, in her poem “When Death Comes,” describes what Rose Mary aspired to for her life:

*...When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
When it is over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.*

Thank you, dear Rose Mary. So be it and amen.