

## Sister Anne McDonald

Entered eternal life on December 17, 2016



Today we say goodbye to Sister Anne McDonald. To me, she was always Aunt Annie. Every holiday, every vacation, Aunt Annie was a part of our immediate family, usually with her beloved dog Lady by her side. I will always remember Aunt Annie's quiet dignity, how she let the loud and boisterous that surrounded her have their say as she awaited her time. Her father wrote in his family remembrance "My Gal Sal" that a colleague described her in the terms of journalism- as a font type- Bold Face Bodoni, the Non Nonsense Type. That holds up well.

But I will also remember her wit, and the way it could defuse the bombastic rhetoric of those around her.

I will never forget Annie's selflessness. She dedicated herself not only to the many students she educated but also to her family, playing an indispensable role as caretaker for many years when no one else could or would step up. I will never forget her brilliance- Annie's mind was always working on a higher level.

Most importantly, I will never forget Annie's love for, and protection of, those most vulnerable in society. My favorite story about Aunt Annie is one she told me about her experience as a principal in Hackensack. One young girl was picked on a lot by the other children in her class. In a particularly cruel twist, around this time of year, these children sent her home with a card and told her not to open it until Christmas. The card told this girl that no one liked her and that they wished she would leave the school.

This horror was reported to the school, and Aunt Annie sprang into action. The perpetrators and their parents were called into the school. Suspensions were immediate, expulsions were discussed. Most importantly, Sister Anne McDonald made sure that everyone, from that poor little girl filled with sadness to the mean bullies who terrorized her, knew that this was not acceptable. That cruelty, meanness, and disrespect would not be tolerated. The easiest thing to do would have been to ignore this or to blame the victim for not conforming to convention, somehow imputing that her quirks or characteristics made such cruelty inevitable. It wasn't and it isn't.

That story stayed with me all these years. In a world that seems to descend further into cruelty and disrespect with each passing day, Annie's defense of these norms of decency stand as a shining beacon in the darkness.

Aunt Annie's life teaches us that we must fight every day to protect the values we hold most dear. When some raise their voices to promote cruelty, intolerance, and hate, we must never shy away from raising our voices and acting swiftly to protect the vulnerable who are victims of that cruelty, to offer kindness to those abused by tormentors, and to teach decency in a time when it has gone out of fashion. Yes, we must be avengers for goodness. And in each act of kindness or decency we promote, we help to rebuild the world of decency, respect, and kindness that Aunt Annie spent her life defending.

Our journey as avengers for goodness grew harder and longer with her loss. But her example and her love lives on. Aunt Annie was never a Polyanna- she appreciated the complexity and darkness of the world. In closing, I wanted to read a piece that this state's most famous artist, Bruce Springsteen, wrote in his autobiography about growing up in the Church in small town New Jersey in the middle of the century. You might hear the echoes of our beloved Aunt Annie in these words:

*In Catholicism, there existed the poetry, danger, and darkness that reflected my imagination and my inner self. I found a land of great and harsh beauty, of fantastic stories, of unimaginable punishment and infinite reward. It was a glorious and pathetic place I was either shaped for or fit right into. It has walked alongside me as a waking dream my whole life ... The church bells ring.*

*My clan pours out of our houses and hustles up the street. Someone is getting married, getting dead, or being born. We line the church's front walkway, waiting, my sister and I picking up fallen flowers or thrown rice to be packed away in paper bags for another day to shower upon complete strangers... Organ music, and the wooden doors of our church swing open upon a bride and groom exiting their wedding ceremony... The bouquet is tossed. The future is told. The bride and her hero are whisked away in their long black limousine, the one that drops you off at the beginning of your life. The other one is just around the corner waiting for another day to bring the tears and take you on the short drive straight out to Throckmorton Street to the St. Rose graveyard on the edge of town. There, on spring Sundays, visiting bones, boxes, and piles of dirt, my sister and I run, playing happily amongst the headstones. Back at church, the wedding is over and I take my sister's hand. By nine or ten years old, we've seen it all plenty of times. Rice or flowers, coming or going, heaven or hell, here ... it's just all in a day's work.*

~ Peter Saharko, nephew of Sister Anne