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Dedication [to Sister Mary Jean Flaherty]

Rosemary Donley

George P. Smith II

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DEDICATION

Mary Jean Flaherty was the second daughter born to Agnes Bradley and Vincent Flaherty. She grew up in Clairton, Pennsylvania, a mill town south of Pittsburgh, popularized in the 1980's movie *The Deer Hunter*. After graduating from St. Peter's High School, she enrolled in the School of Nursing at Pittsburgh Hospital as a cadet nurse. At the end of the first year of training, she entered the Seton Hill Sisters of Charity. Several years later, she returned to Pittsburgh Hospital to complete her nursing program. Sister Mary Jean's years in nursing and religious life coincide with dramatic social and political transitions in the steel valley of southwestern Pennsylvania, in the field of nursing, and in the religious sisterhood of the Roman Catholic Church.

As a young nurse, Sister Mary Jean was assigned by her religious superiors to supervise maternity nursing services and teach students and staff nurses in a community hospital run by her religious community. At Providence Hospital in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, Sr. Mary Jean embraced what would become the pattern of her professional life: Dedication to improving the well-being of mothers and infants, and investment in developing and testing systems of nursing education. At Providence Hospital, she came under the tutelage of Mildred Disbrow. Ms. Disbrow was to become a leader in maternity nursing. Then, she was a young head nurse struggling to provide women with modern maternity services. Mildred Disbrow found in Sr. Mary Jean Flaherty an apt pupil and creative co-worker. Sr. Mary Jean found in her an inspiration for her life's work.

It was the custom in the preconciliar church for religious superiors to transfer their members frequently from one work or institution to another. Sr. Mary Jean's next mission was Rosalia Foundling Hospital and Home for Unwed Mothers, located in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. The Hill, a home for many immigrant peoples, was a black community in the fifties. The Foundling served as a haven for unmarried pregnant women; a maternity center for women who wanted more homelike environments during their period of lying-in; and a nursery for newborns, infants, and toddlers. In the fifties, most infants born to unmarried women were adopted. These babies were cared for at the Foundling until arrangements were made for their futures. Some ill or handicapped children continued to live at the Foundling while they received medical treatments. Rosalia Foundling, as its name indicates, was also the place where the police, the courts, and various social

agencies brought babies who had been abandoned or neglected. The nurseries, especially the nurseries for toddlers, were busy, noisy places in the fifties.

Sr. Mary Jean's assignment to the Foundling was stimulated by her superiors' decision to send her to school at nearby Duquesne University to earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing. Sr. Mary Jean was assigned to be the registered nurse on duty from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., seven days a week. Her superiors, trained as school teachers, reasoned that she could attend classes during the day and find time during her twelve hour shifts to study and prepare papers. This plan did not appear to take into account the responsibility for the care of newborns, infants, and toddlers or that some patients would be in active labor and deliver their babies in the evening and early morning. Sr. Mary Jean supervised the aides and student nurses in the nurseries and accompanied mothers during their labor, monitoring progress, alerting attending physicians, who would arrive, on most occasions, in time for delivery. It was common, then, for the unmarried mother not to see her child. Because the pregnancy was also being concealed, the woman, Sr. Mary Jean, and the physician were the only witnesses to labor and childbirth. Perhaps it was this factor, so much in contrast to her earlier experiences of maternity nursing in a small town, that gave Sr. Mary Jean strong convictions about the importance of early mother-child relationships and the significant role of families.

When Sister Mary Jean returned to school to earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing, she was an experienced clinician, supervisor, and teacher. While her arrangement "for working her way through college" seems dramatic, she was able to attend school almost full-time and graduate with honors. Most religious women of her *genre* completed their baccalaureate degrees in a series of Saturday and summer schools. Most sister nurses, like their lay counterparts of the fifties, did not attend college and were educated in hospital schools. As graduation neared, Dean Regina Fusan encouraged Sr. Mary Jean to accept a newly created fellowship at Yale University in maternity nursing. However, Sr. Mary Jean's superiors had something else in mind. They assigned her to head the maternity nursing service at Providence Hospital and teach maternity nursing in its hospital school of nursing. Later she developed a maternity service in a new community hospital in Jeannette, Pennsylvania, worked at the infirmary of the Sisters of Charity, and taught maternity nursing at The Pittsburgh Hospital School of Nursing.

In 1971 she enrolled in the graduate school of nursing at the University of Pittsburgh and completed her doctorate in 1979 supported by a federal traineeship and a nurse scientist training grant. During her study with Reva

Rubin she also worked as a teaching and research assistant and served as a member of the faculty at the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing.

In 1976 she was appointed associate director of a newly created department of education at Magee Women's Hospital of the University of Pittsburgh, the leader in maternity care in southwestern Pennsylvania. When Sr. Mary Jean became the director of education, she was able to enhance the "Three Rivers" service delivery model by creating a series of education programs: diverse modes of preparation for childbirth, breast-feeding, parenting and grandparenting programs, education to help community, hospital-based nurses and physicians in their work with high risk families and infants, and women's self-help programs.

Sr. Mary Jean accepted a faculty position and the chairmanship of maternal child health nursing at The Catholic University of America in 1980. Shortly after her arrival in Washington, she was asked by the National League for Nursing (NLN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) for assistance. For more than a decade, she has worked at policy levels as a member of the NLN's Board of Review and Board of Appeals. As a senior consultant for NLN, she has assisted faculty and administrators in baccalaureate and higher degree nursing programs throughout the United States. Her work with WHO took her to Indonesia where she conducted a national manpower study, prepared hospitals and community agencies to be the training centers for nursing education, and collaborated with the Ministries of Health and Education in the development of the first baccalaureate program in nursing in Indonesia.

Sr. Mary Jean's research in early mother-child interaction and the role of grandmothers in black families has been published in professional literature. She has also written extensively on the professional education of nurses. A talented and respected teacher and dissertation director, Sr. Mary Jean serves on the editorial boards of *Maternal-Child Nursing Journal*, *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, and is a faculty editor of *The Journal of Contemporary Health Law and Policy*. She has presented papers in the United States, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, England, the Philippines, the Soviet Union, Spain, Argentina, Brazil, and Canada. Sr. Mary Jean is a member of the Board of Management of the Bon Secours Health System. She is a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing and is a recipient of the Kappa Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International Excellence in Nursing Award.

Of Sister we may aptly apply the words of the Prayer of St. Ignatius Loyola: For she has striven and not counted the cost, has fought and not

heeded the wounds, has toiled and not sought for rest, and has labored and not asked for any reward.

Sister Mary Jean's kind and gentle manner has provided tone and perspective for *The Journal of Contemporary Health Law and Policy*. Her steadfast loyalty has been a great source of strength and satisfaction. We are very pleased to honor her lifetime work of service not only as a Sister of Charity, but also as a distinguished scholar and teacher by dedicating this volume of the *Journal* to her.

*Sister Rosemary Donley, S.C., Executive Vice President, The Catholic
University of America
George P. Smith, II*

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