



## **Sr. Theresa Mary Morrow, DW Sr. Mary of the Heart of Jesus July 21, 1927 – March 22, 2017**



We are saddened to report the passing of Sr. Theresa “Mary” Morrow (Sr. Mary of the Heart of Jesus), who died peacefully at Maria Regina Residence in Brentwood, NY on Wednesday, March 22, 2017. Sr. Mary was 89 years old and 67 years professed.

Born in Brooklyn, NY, Sr. Mary was a member of St. Patrick Parish. Diagnosed with polio at 4 years of age, she spent her elementary school years at St. Charles Hospital, Port Jefferson, NY until she was 10, and later went on to graduate from New Utrecht High School, Brooklyn, NY. She entered the novitiate in 1949 and immediately began employment with St. Charles Clinic in Brooklyn, NY where she worked in medical records. In 1955 she went to Portsmouth VA and worked at Maryview Hospital in medical records and admitting until 1964. For the next 14 years she worked in hospital administration at St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, NY, St. Charles Clinic in Brooklyn, NY, and concluded her years as an administrator in 1978 at Unity Hospital in Brooklyn, NY. After training for chaplaincy at Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn, NY she worked at Mercy Medical Center in Rockville Center, NY in Pastoral Care and as a Hospital Chaplain for nearly 20 years. In 1996 she was recognized with Mercy Medical Center’s Gold Star Service Award for her work in pastoral care in the physical medicine and rehabilitation unit. Said of her experience in Hospital Chaplaincy, “I found that God saved the best for last. This is my most spiritual...meaningful work, being with people in the things they suffer and what happens in their lives. It’s a very life-giving ministry.” She also noted how much she relied on God for her ministry saying, “Prayer is essential, without that, what would I be doing? What would be the benefit of my listening and counseling if it were not based on my prayer? By myself, I can’t do it...and I say to myself, ‘Thank God’.”

Survived by her sister-in-law Joan Carlock and nieces and nephews, Sr. Mary will be remembered for her very compassionate and cheery personality and will be missed by her Sisters, the Daughters of Wisdom.

Donations may be made in memory of Sr. Theresa Mary Morrow, DW to Daughters Of Wisdom, 385 Ocean Avenue, Islip, N.Y. 11751



## **Eulogy for Sr. Mary Morrow, DW**

**July 21, 1927 – March 22, 2017**

**By Sr. Ann Casagrande, DW**

Today we gather to celebrate Mary Morrow's new life! We all knew Mary, some of us knew her as Theresa – most of us knew different aspects of her.

Today, let us gently go through some of the passages of Mary's life:

She was born July 21, 1927 to Boyce and Helen Morrow. At the age of 4, Mary contracted Polio and went to St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, New York. She stayed at the hospital for many years, getting rehabilitation and her elementary schooling. Perhaps seeing the Daughters of Wisdom attending to all the children with such love and care, was the beginning of Mary's vocational call to religious life.

She entered the Daughters of Wisdom in 1949 in Ottawa, Canada and at age 22, she made her first vows. For the next 15 years, she worked in Medical Records and Admitting in both St. Charles Clinic in Brooklyn, NY and Maryview Hospital in Portsmouth Virginia.

For the next 14 years, (1964 and on) she worked in Hospital Administration. During these years, she worked in St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, St. Charles Clinic in Brooklyn and Unity Hospital in Brooklyn, NY.

Most of her life, Mary was wheel chair bound. A former patient from St. Charles Hospital taught Mary how to drive with hand controls. The car was very beneficial for Mary – and she named all her cars, "Nellie" and in the end, we think she had had 5 Nellies!

In 1979, she moved into, what I think was the love of her life, Pastoral Care! Here, at Mercy Hospital in Rockville Center, she worked for the next 30 plus years until she retired around 2008. It was then that Mary herself, knew that the time had come for her to retire and go to Sound Beach. All of this is a general overview but let's fill in some of these pages:

Mary had a simple focus in life – she loved nature, the sun, the water, the beach and in short, she loved life and all people! People seemed to know that. When the ray of sunshine that she brought to her patients, came wheeling in to their room, people responded with a smile and deep gratitude for her visit, her listening empathy, encouragement and her promise of prayer for their journey.

In 1996, she received the Gold Star Employee Award from Mercy Hospital, an award given to those who not only contributed to patient care but also served as a role model for other employees. The staff at Mercy nicknamed her, Sister Mary Sunshine! Very appropriate!

She enjoyed reading the NY Times! Her great pleasure was to get the Sunday paper and she spent the week reading different sections. When Mary first went to Sound Beach, one of our sisters was there who was having difficulty focusing and remembering. Every morning, I would see the two of them sitting together and Mary was reading the N Y Times to her and they both seemed to be enjoying this time together. Of course, they were sitting where they could also see the beautiful LI Sound.

During her younger days in Maryview, I heard that she read “dirty books” and hid them under her mattress. I asked –“What dirty books?” The answer – “National Geographic! – sometimes the pictures of natives were naked!” I say – thank God Mary had the common sense to continue her reading – and perhaps, in those days, to continue hiding them!

Another of Mary’s favorite times was to visit Lee’s Riding Stables in Litchfield, CT. Mary would visit whenever she came to Litchfield. She enjoyed watching the horses and became good friends with Lee. Sr. Rosemarie called to tell Lee of Mary’s death. Lee did a lot of work with handicapped children and shared that one time, during Mary’s visit, they were able to get Mary on a horse! What a joy that must have been!

A traumatic event occurred when Mary lost her brother, Bobby, in 1977. He and his wife, Joan, had 4 children, the youngest of whom was just making her First Communion. Mary stayed by Joan and often gathered the children and brought them out to Star of the Sea in Port Jefferson. The bond has always remained especially strong with Joan, Harry, the children and cousins that Mary also packed in the car and brought to the beach!

The gospels tell us not to light a lamp and put it under a basket – but rather set it on a lampstand to give light to all. I think Mary’s life is an example of this parable.

And now that you are in heaven, Mary – we know that you will leave the light on for us!

# God bless Sr. Mary Morrow

## ABOUT LONG ISLAND | Been There, Done That, but Ever an Optimist

By DIANE KETCHAM

**S**ISTER MARY MORROW not only works in a hospital. She once also lived in one. The nun, whom patients and staff at the Mercy Medical Center refer to as Sister Mary Sunshine because of her bright disposition, spent much of her childhood in the dark confines of a polio ward.

At 4 she was given a diagnosis of polio. "It was the 1930's," she recalled. "They didn't know what to do with us back then."

So the little girl from Brooklyn was shipped off to a hospital, St. Charles in Port Jefferson.

For six years she lived in the hospital. "There were 100 or so other children with me," she said. "It was a polio epidemic, and I remember the ambulance making trip after trip bringing other children in. They put us in plaster casts and braces. They didn't know what to do for us." Except keep them in the hospital. "We were healthy children," Sister Mary said. "We just had a handicap."

While children in suburbia were learning to ride bicycles, the children in St. Charles were learning to maneuver wheelchairs. "They were wooden back then," Sister Mary said, "big wooden wheelchairs with high backs." The children raced one another in the chairs. "Until the nuns caught us," she said. "We got demerits for that and talking during class."

Sister Mary lived in the hospital until she was 10. "My parents would come out from Brooklyn every Sunday and visit," she said. "They would bring my two brothers and the family dog, and they would drive all the way out on Northern Boulevard. The visit took their entire day."

She remembers how much those visits meant to her. Like few others, she knows how lonely and fearful it can be staying in a hospital. As a chaplain at Mercy in Rockville Centre, it is her job to allay some of those fears. That she does so from a wheelchair doesn't detract from her mission. "My friends call me the Holy Roller," she said.

For 64 years she has viewed life from a wheelchair. Her illness left her with paralysis of the legs. The nun, who is 4-11 when she pulls herself up on her braces, travels the halls of Mercy rolling along, stopping to chat with almost everybody she sees. As she heads toward you, it's like waiting for the President. You see her coming, but people seem to pop out of the woodwork to say hello

or grab her hand. Anything to be enveloped by that smile.

"She's a ray of sunshine," said Mindy Garfinkel, an occupational therapist who stopped to greet her. "You bring out the best in people," Ms. Garfinkel told her.

"It's God's work," the nun said. Although she will be 69 next month, there has been no slowdown in the caring or compassion from the person whom some consider the angel of Mercy. Sister Mary was recently chosen to receive the hospital's Gold Star Service Award in recognition of her work. It was an extremely popular decision. With her love of humanity, it's hard not to love her.

"There are times when you think she is too good to be true," Michael Quane, a spokesman for the medical center, said. "Is she Mother Theresa or is she kidding us?" He leans toward Mother Theresa, he added.

Sister Mary's primary duty is of offering pastoral care to patients in the physical medicine and rehabilitation unit, where everybody in the 25-bed wing uses wheelchairs. Seeing Sister Mary in hers, "means so much to the patients," Dr. Thomas Coyle, the medical director of the unit, said. "Limitation is new to most of these patients, and they see this person in a wheelchair and they say, 'Well, she understands.' It's so important, the example of what can be done. Mary gives them hope. That's crucial. You can go without food for a month, water for eight days. But without hope you can't live."

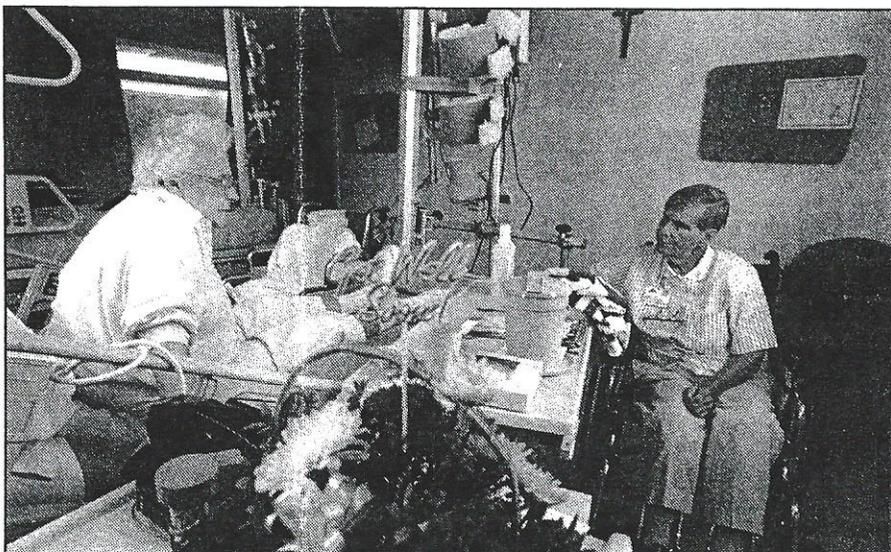
Hope seems to be Sister Mary's fuel. She is optimistic about everything. Even finding a parking space at the hospital. As a member of the Daughters of Wisdom Order, she lives in a convent in New Hyde Park. That means a daily commuting trip in a Chevrolet with hand controls.

Arriving at the hospital she looks for an empty handicapped space. Elsewhere that would be easy. But at a hospital many visitors are handicapped. After finally securing a space, Sister Mary waits for someone to come along to take out her wheelchair. Someone always does. "God provides," she said.

Even a reason for a disability, she says. "My wheelchair opens doors," she said. Patients find it easier to talk to a person who has also suffered. The importance of a chaplain, she said, "is listening."

Her listening tour began one day at the nurses' station. "She clicks with our patients," said Maureen Sodokov of the rehabilitation department.

Dressed like a candy striper in a



Steve Berman for The New York Times

Sister Mary Morrow with Shirley Cooperman, also a Mercy volunteer, after knee operation.

pink-and-white-striped short-sleeve shirt and bright pink pants, Sister Mary pushed her wheels and headed down the hall. She resembled a jockey hunched over on a steed, especially with her hair cropped short like a young boy about to take his First Communion. "I like my hair short," she said. "So I go to a unisex shop."

In a narrow room with two beds lay Shirley Cooperman of Rockville Centre. Mrs. Cooperman was recovering from her second knee replacement. "I've been a volunteer at the hospital for 29 years," she said.

Mrs. Cooperman, who is Jewish, started volunteering at the Catholic-run hospital, she said, "so the staff could take their holidays off." Through the years she has often encountered Sister Mary. "I see her going and coming with that cheerful face," Mrs. Cooperman said, "and that sweet smile. You have to stop and talk to her."

"Do you realize you're my inspiration," Sister Mary told Mrs. Cooperman. "As a volunteer. You do this of your own free will. I always draw inspiration from you volunteers."

After a few more compliments that left Mrs. Cooperman beaming, Sister Mary backed out of the room.

It was time to visit the patients in physical therapy. On the way she happened upon Sister Katherine Gee, who was recovering from surgery and learning how to handle a wheelchair. "Let's meet like the police cars," Sister Mary said as she maneuvered her chair next to Sister Katherine's.

In the physical-therapy room she compared tans with a new patient, George Weisenburger of Garden City Park, who had a hip replacement. "I go to Jones Beach all the time," she told him. "For me the beach is a holy place." The only problem, she added, is the sand that gets into her orthopedic shoes and the braces.

"How's the food here?" Mr. Weisenburger asked. He assumed that the sister was a patient.

For 17 years the nun has comforted patients and staff at Mercy. "She's always there when you need her," said Sally Casanova, a nurse.

"It's a partnership," Sister Mary was quick to add. "We care for the whole person here. The doctors and nurses take care of the body. We chaplains take care of the person within."

But who takes care of Sister Mary? She sidestepped the question

and talked about her youth. Born Theresa Morrow in 1927 in Brooklyn, she started life with a lot of love from her Irish parents. But polio soon made that life a challenge. She had 10 operations before she was 16.

When she was very young "I was part of a crowd of handicapped children," she said. "So I wasn't any different. But when I became a teenager I couldn't keep up with everyone. I had the will, but not the where-withal. It was hard."

After spending many years living with nuns in the hospital, becoming one just seemed natural, she said, even though she couldn't attend a Catholic school. "They weren't accessible to the handicapped back then," she said.

There was even a question about whether a disabled woman could become a nun. "You don't enter religious life to be taken care of," she said. "You enter to be of service. But they knew me."

That was 47 years ago. She has worked in Catholic hospitals ever since. Nuns didn't choose their careers, she said. "You were given either school work or hospital work." What she wanted to do, she confided, was to be a missionary. "But they

said to me, 'Mary, the distance is too great, the terrain too rugged.'"

Her terrain became the roadways of Long Island. She was sent from one hospital to another. At one point she was assigned to St. Charles, which had expanded into a general hospital. "I felt like I was home," she said. After a stint at a hospital in Crown Heights in Brooklyn, she was given a year of training in pastoral care and then sent to Mercy. "We have to be ready to listen to people," she said about being a chaplain. "They need to pour out their stories. Their lives have been turned upside down so. Men hate to cry. But I tell them, 'Cry.' It's just as human as sneezing or smiling."

Or praying.

"How easily people will say, 'Oh God, help me,'" she said. "There are no atheists in a hospital."

Although she sees much sorrow, the sister never seems to lose her smile. Does she ever become depressed? "I belong to the human race," she said. "I have my ups and downs." There are times that life creates problems, she said.

Dr. Coyle offered an example. "I went with Mary to a lecture on post-polio syndrome," he recalled. "We wanted to discuss Mary's accomplishments. A disability can be a catapulting force that people superachieve because of."

Mary, he added, can do just about anything. Except fix a flat. "We got outside and Mary's car has a flat tire," he recalled.

"I said, 'Call Triple A,'" the nun recalled.

"But we fixed it together," he said. He got out the jack. She got out the prayer book.

Sister Mary is never at a loss for words, said Sister Norma Jean Lokcinski, another chaplain at Mercy. "But when she won the Gold Star award," Sister Norma Jean said, "they asked her to speak, and there was silence — golden silence. It was so out of character." Sister Mary said she was overwhelmed. The award means a great deal. It could be her crowning achievement. Sister Mary is, after all, at retirement age. "Retire?" she said. "What do nuns retire to? I don't have a house in the country or a spouse to go off and vacation with. As long as I'm healthy, I'll keep doing this. This is my life, and God's work."

The sister who lives to comfort others will continue to travel Mercy in her wheelchair. "These wheels are my wings," she said. In more ways than one.