

Sister Jane Cavanaugh, SC

Entered eternal life on May 18, 2022



My name is Brendan Quinn and I'm one of Sister Jane's nephews. This is the second funeral I've attended in the past few days, and I think Sister Jane would be proud of that. In her role as Head of College Relations, I'm guessing that she attended more funerals than anyone else here today and I recall one day when she arrived at my house and said that she had been to three funerals that day and I thought – slow day for her.

She touched a lot of lives in her professional career whether in her role at the college, or early in her career as a teacher and then a principal. Toward the end of her career and in her 80's, she came full circle and started volunteering as a tutor again.

There are a bunch of postings about Sister Jane on the St. Elizabeth University Facebook page, mostly with messages of prayers and thanks, but my favorite one, which I can only guess is from a former student since she referred to her as Sister Eugene, ends with, “PS, I am still wearing eye makeup,” smile emoji – I'm sure there's a good story there.

I remember calling her Sister Eugene back in the day. Between Betty Jane, Sister Eugene, Sister Eugene Marie, Sister Jane, I wondered what she had on her passport, and that reminded me of when she and my mother came to visit us in Ireland and my wife nicknamed them Lucy and Ethel. We went on a quest to Skibbereen to find the birthplace of Catherine Mehegan, AKA Mother Mary Xavier, foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth. My mother and Betty Jane had been in Ireland together 40 years earlier and every time we drove through a village somewhere in West Cork, Betty Jane would say, I know I've been here before, I'm pretty sure that we need to go left.

On that earlier trip, they were accompanied by their maternal grandmother, Grandma Carol and it started as a visit to Margaret who was living in Germany at the time while her husband was stationed there, but it grew into a larger trip that included visiting relatives in Ireland, Paris where Betty Jane had studied as a Rhodes Scholar, as well as Lourdes and the Vatican. The two stories I heard about that trip were 1 – that they only had one camera and three rolls of film between them, so they were judiciously rationing picture taking, until they got to the Vatican, and Betty Jane took a whole role of pictures of the Pope. The other story involved the mischievous girls sneaking out – and I don't mean Betty Jane. One night, they ended up with two rooms and Betty Jane stayed in one and my mother and Grandma in the other so as usual, Betty Jane led them in saying the rosary before bed, but after Grandma and my mother went back to their room, Grandma grabbed her hat and said c'mon, we're goin' out, and don't tell your sister.

When Sister Judy started planning the funeral, she asked me what I thought was most important to Betty Jane and there were two things that came to mind. First was education, and Betty Jane lived that as both a teacher and a student. I mentioned that she was a Rhodes Scholar, but she also wrote a doctoral dissertation titled Co-ed or Dead, about the need for women's colleges to admit men to survive. That seems pretty prescient, considering that what is now St. Elizabeth University, did just that about six years ago.

In addition to her official teaching roles, she also tutored many of her nieces and nephews through the years, which brings me to the other thing that I think was most important to Betty Jane, and that was her family. In terms of her role in the family, I would say without a doubt that she was the Boss. My grandmother was the matriarch, but it was clear who was in charge.

Betty Jane had four sisters (Mary Rita, Jean Ann, Margaret, & Bernadette), 22 nieces and nephews, and I don't even know how many great and even great, great nieces and nephews, but I think we're well over a hundred family members at this point, and with that many people, there are always different opinions, but when it came time to make decisions, we always looked to Betty Jane.

She was deferential to her sisters and how they raised their children, but she was also not shy about giving her opinions. I recall when it was time for me to look at colleges, she vetoed the first one that I asked about and then gave me a list of good catholic schools within a reasonable drive of home to consider.

She dedicated herself to taking care of my grandmother, which I'm sure played no small part in her living to be 101, and she was always there for the rest of us, with a good piece of advice, a multi-hour ride to somewhere we needed to go, or just a smile.

She was truly dedicated to a life of service, to her family and to others, and if it's time for a final grade for that, she has most definitely earned an A.

Brendan Quinn
Nephew of Sister Jane Cavanaugh, SC