

A Tribute to John McAleer by William J Murphy

John McAleer (James Austin '42) died peacefully at home on Tuesday evening, March 13th, at 10 p.m. shortly after the family had read the Prayers for the Dying. His memorial Mass was celebrated on Saturday, March 17th, at Holy Cross Church in Overland Park, Kansas. John's wife Ruth tells us, "It was a long, grace-filled journey for John and for all our family. We ask for the prayers of the brethren. Marists All meant a lot to John." At the time of the death of Larry Hanshumaker, John wrote to us saying: "Without being too melodramatic, I think it's clear that I'll see Larry pretty soon! Getting real tired. Love. John." Ruth's address: 8700 Metcalf (102-E), Overland Park KS 66212; 913-381-6548 --- This notice appeared in issue #61, Easter 2001

I came to know John Joseph McAleer mostly from the golf courses where he shone and I was a dim lit bulb. In earlier days John had been part of a rollicking community with such great monks as Alex and Terry Jones leading the way, but John could rollick with the best of them. He co-authored "This is the monkery, Brother dear." He could play the role of a slightly neurotic provincial seeing Brothers everywhere. He tried to get Big Gil Barry to supervise cheerleaders for the cross-country team!

There was a time when John and I sat around in a very Hemingway and Parisian manner discussing life, the second novitiate, and where we saw ourselves going. John was into new thinking in the Church and for the Church. It was significant for him and became so for those with whom he came in contact. He was extraordinary in that he functioned on several different levels compressing different missions. His life impacted on mine in many ways, and I believe, mine on his.

And there was another significant aspect of John's life that came to the fore. John was a loving person because he knew how to love. There were his strong family ties, and later in life there was his marriage to Ruth. Would that I had the word power to express the depth and meaning of their love. To my knowledge John never asked for a cure for his illness; he found joy as he was facing God. His death was peaceful. He still has the love advantage. He was not late for the forever Laetare Sunday, the big bash for triumphant Christians.

Ruth McAleer writes in issue # 62, June 2001

I want you to know how much the reconnecting with "the brothers" meant to John. When he left the order after fifteen years it was a little like the last scene in THE NUN'S STORY. So many of you have sent notes and cards to me and my family relating memories you have of John. They help us to keep smiles on our faces as we walk through this journey of grief. We are grateful for that.

I was asked to write something for Marists All from my point of view. First, I want to quote from his obituary which my daughter wrote: "John's lifelong dedication to both teaching and learning continues with his anatomical donation to University of Kansas Medical Center. His life was filled with his devotion to family and faith; his love of art, music, politics, sports and nature; his commitment to justice and peace; and his enjoyment of 38 years of service and fellowship in a 12-step program." John made a difference in the lives of many people, including my own. We are thankful that so many made that known to him in the last year of his life.

John was the most supportive husband any woman could wish for. I went back to school in the seventies to finish a degree I had been working on for a long time. It was a time when the "non-traditional aged student" was being welcomed back to college. I went to school with several "older" women whose spouses felt very threatened by their action. Not John! He not only helped me along the way but insisted that I continue on to graduate school as soon as I had the BA in hand! When my spiritual journey took a path in a different direction, he was so encouraging without giving up his own convictions. And when, much to my surprise, I found myself on the road to ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church, John was the most staunch and understanding supporter I had. He used to tell people, "I married this nice Irish Catholic girl from Boston and she turns out to be a WASP priest!" In his retirement he designated himself to be my "spear carrier." He called himself the "Vatican Observer" at all Episcopal functions he attended and enjoyed a wonderful relationship with the now Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. I miss him terribly but thank God every day for his presence in my life. And, I thank God for all his Marist brothers who keep me and our family in prayer.

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