

June 19, 2002

My Dear Jerry,

The transition from this life to the next by Gwen last Saturday is an event of immense magnitude for you, for your children, for the entire Apostolate for Family Consecration, and for friends like me.

I have known Gwen for almost twenty years as your dedicated consort, who is a good mother to her children, and who is on fire for the spread of the kingdom of Christ through the Apostolate for Family Consecration.

On the one hand I offer you my heartfelt condolences on your irreparable loss.

On the other hand I congratulate you for having had a wife who was so convinced of our Catholic Faith, who loved it and who lived it.

In spirit I shall be with you at Holy Mass at her burial next Saturday. I look forward to mid July when I shall be able to pray over her grave and celebrate Mass for her at Catholic Familyland.

Wishing you and all your children our Blessed Mother's comforting presence, I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Francis Cardinal Arinze
Prefect, Congregation for Divine Worship
and the Discipline of the Sacraments

June 24, 2002

Heartfelt condolences to you and your entire family for the loss of your beloved wife, mother, and grandmother, Gwen. Assurance of my prayers and those of the Pontifical Council for the Family for the eternal repose of her soul.

Alfonso Cardinal Lopez Trujillo
President, Pontifical Council for the Family

June 24, 2002

Dear Jerry,

Please accept my sincere sympathy and the promise of my prayers on the death of your dear wife, Gwen. I promise to offer Mass for the repose of her soul and for the spiritual comfort of your entire family.

Gwen was a wonderful woman, wife, and mother, and your lives brought faith, consolation, and inspiration to many.

You have the consolation that Gwen is interceding for you and your wonderful family before the Lord.

May God give you all the strength to bear the burden of grief you now feel.

Sincerely in Christ,

Archbishop John P. Foley
President, Pontifical Council for Social Communications

June 19, 2002

Dear Jerry:

I wish to extend to you and to the other members of your family, my deepest sympathies on the death of your beloved wife. I join you, your children and grandchildren, and all the members of your family in thanking God for the gift of Gwen's life and in praying for her eternal happiness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

I know that Gwen shared in the Lord's suffering especially in her final days here on earth. May you find consolation and strength in the Lord's promise that we who share in His suffering will share fully in His glory and that we who die with Him will live with Him forever.

As a faithful wife, devoted mother and grandmother, and loving family member and friend, Gwen was an instrument of God's love and goodness. She reflected a deep love of Our Lord and His Church. May the spirit and example of her life continue to live on in the lives of all those she loved.

With sentiments of sympathy, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua
Archbishop of Philadelphia

June 24, 2002

Dear Jerry,

I want to extend to you and to your family my deepest sympathy in the death of Gwen. I'd like to share with you and your family my favorite thought of death. I like to think of death as a rose God gives to a family, but one he doesn't divide evenly. Gwen receives just the bloom, thornless, fragrant and beautiful. You who are left behind receive just the thorn of loss that hurts like the dickens. But remember, God could not give Gwen her rose, without asking you to hold the thorn. He could not take her to Himself without taking her from us. May the thought of her rose be your consolation as you lovingly and courageously hold your thorn for Gwen.

Be assured of my prayers for her and for all of you.

Sincerely Yours in the Sacred Heart,

Most Reverend Roger L. Kaffer
Auxiliary Bishop of Joliet

June 17, 2002

Dear Jerry and Family,

I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of your dear wife and mother Gwen. Gwen was a beautiful example of commitment to the Lord and of surrendering to His will. While she continued to fight the good fight, she was ready to receive her everlasting reward in the presence of the Lord.

While Gwen will be missed greatly, we now have her to help us continue our earthly fight. I will remember her and your family in my prayers.

I am sincerely yours in the Lord,

Most Reverend Elden Francis Curtiss
Archbishop of Omaha

June 20, 2002

Dear Jerry,

I was sorry to hear about the death of your wife, Gwen. Her many years of service and dedication to you, your family, and the Church have been an inspiration for all of us. Please be assured of my prayers for you and your family during this time.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila
Bishop of Fargo

June 23, 2002

Dear Jerry and Family,

I am sorry about Gwen's death, but I am not sorry that her life has ended up as a triumph of grace. What Gwen did for her family and for all families all over the world will not be forgotten, either in Heaven, where the new is most important, or here on earth. God bless Gwen Coniker.

With profound condolences and in solidarity with her and your Family Apostolate, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ,
Monsignor John F. McCarthy

A Daughter's Personal Meditation on Her Mother's (Gwen) Passing

As I pondered my mother's passing, I felt God gave me this understanding.

In my mind, I saw her take her final breath, and her soul leave her body. I saw her surrounded by a silent darkness. In the distance, I saw a bright light moving towards her. As the light approached her, I could see it was her Guardian Angel. He took her by the hand and led her into the light. I imagined what it must've been like for her to cross the threshold into Heaven; there before her in all their splendor and glory, the Angels and Saints rejoicing! Mother Mary and St. Joseph were there to greet her and lead her to Jesus. Her daughter, Angelica, embraced her and introduced her to the grandchildren she had never met. All in Heaven were singing songs of joy!

Amidst all this rejoicing, I saw her turn around to look back at the place she had just come from. She saw her husband and children surrounding her bed, weeping and calling out to her. She saw their tears and heard their cries. And for a moment it seemed the heavens were silent, as she watched over her loving family, grieving and mourning their loss.

- Mary Krupp (twelfth child of Gwen)

Mother, with this card I send my deepest love and my sincere prayers for all that you do. What did I do to deserve that God above would give me a wonderful Mother like you.

Love you always and forever,

Maureen (first daughter to Gwen)

There is nothing like the feeling of a mother's love.

She gives warmth in her smile, her hugs, her cooking, her cleaning, her advice and her love.

Even when God takes her to the land up above, you will always feel your mother's love.

My last words to my mother were: "I love you, thank you for all you have taught me. I will learn from all you did. Until we meet again."

Love,

Kathy (second daughter of Gwen)

When I think of my mother my heart is filled with loving thoughts, this is what I believe describes my mother.

- Simple & deep love for God and others
- Hardworking
- Full of Love
- Loved Life
- Enjoyed Life
- Gave Life
- Loved her husband
- Loved her children
- Never judged anyone
- Always forgave and forgot
- Generous Heart
- Pure Soul
- Loved music, laughter, and joy!

Mom was simple but true, and the most beautiful person I ever knew.

Love,

Laurie (third daughter of Gwen)

Dear Dad and our beloved Mother gone before us,

Thank you so much for all of your sacrifices for our family and other families, your faithfulness to the Catholic Church as well as each other.

You and Mom have been a great example for many peoples as well as to your twelve children. You and Mom have fulfilled your commitment to the fullest. And because of that I truly believe that the Good Lord has blessed us all abundantly.

God bless you always,

Love your fourth daughter Peggy, Peter, Nicholas, Nicole, Kristen, Grace, and Kaitlyn

My Precious Mother,

Thank you for teaching me the meaning of love. I always loved being in your presence all my years growing up and still to your last day. My heart aches to be with you.

You always came in to take care of my family for each new baby and how you couldn't wait to hold the new baby grandchild. How the kids loved when Nana came to sleepover and for

my fifth child we came to you, how I thought I wouldn't see you again. I will never forget our last days together. You held on till I could see you and hold you in my arms one last time. I still hoped and prayed for your healing, you held on to see your newborn grandchild Kara Marie.

You were so concerned about leaving all of us, what we would feel. Mom your love is never ending, oh how we miss you. Dad thank you for being there for all of us and for your kind loving words.

Mom you have such great love for each one of your children, people say how can every child feel loved, oh if they only knew you Mom. Your great love and example has touched so many families. Your love will live on forever, I will pass every ounce of love and joy you showed, on to my family.

Thank you Mom and Dad for my faith and your loving faithfulness you had for each other. Dad your love and care you gave Mom was a sign of true love and such a great witness to us all, we love you Dad.

Mom I will never forget your loving smile, you even made us smile at your bedside, how we miss you beyond words can say. I keep saying I love you and I miss you and hope to be with you again. You had your wish to have Dad and all your children around you again like before the move to Ohio, all of us together on your last days forming a big hug around you.

Thank you Mom for a wonderful life and for all the love you have given to us all.

I will always love you.

Your daughter

Sheri (fifth daughter of Gwen)

Dear Mom,

I know you can hear me and that your loving spirit will always be with us. As I am starting to write you this message, it is about 5:15 PM on June 15, 2002, so it is only about twelve hours since your soul left your body. I remember Dad telling us kids many years ago that we have no idea what it is like to lose a close loved one. I think I am starting to understand what he meant. As Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, I find myself weeping at the thought of the physical loss of you in my life. You are so loving, caring, and special. It is truly in the total giving of yourself that you have received so much.

Mom, I am so heart broken to see you go. You are so wonderful. You have touched so many lives for the better. Thank you so much for your joyful, fun-loving spirit, selfless sacrificing, and countless acts of charity. Thank you for being a great listener, advisor and at appropriate times, a director.

Thank you for teaching me that life on earth is a gift from God and our pathway to eternity. God gives each of us life and calls us home at a unique time. I wish you could physically be with us longer, but we are at peace submitting to God's Will.

Mom, we know you had struggles in life, but you showed us how to press on in hard times, seeking and accepting God's Will, while remaining true to your values and commitments. I know your marriage was tested to its core, when Dad decided to move the AFC and the younger half of our family to Ohio, in 1990, leaving behind your closest friends — your five married daughters and their families. During the tough times your true qualities showed through, and we repeatedly witnessed your desire to be a good faithful servant of Our Lord.

As we all are imperfect people, living in an imperfect world, thank you for showing me how to turn to our Lord to receive His Unconditional Love and Forgiveness. Thank you for showing me how God asks us to share the same Unconditional Love and Forgiveness with all people.

I know you have done your best with the gifts God has given you. Through your weaknesses, God has made you strong, and through your sacrifices, He has made you eternally happy.

You shared the truths of our Faith by living them and by enjoying the present moment, while preparing for eternity. You made many moments special like festive Holiday celebrations. You made us feel special on our Birthdays by letting us pick our favorite meal and providing a couple nice gifts. I remember your classic St. Patrick's Day parties, with green clothes, food and drinks. You always made Christmas mornings a wonderful experience with special presents, for each of your 12 children, around the tree. You created a wonderful atmosphere with cheerful decorations and joyful Christmas music.

The last couple of months with you have been very special to me. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and love, all the way through your last words. You will always have a special place in my heart.

Love your son,

Michael

Dear Mom,

God granted you and us the gift of final preparation for you to meet Him in His Glory. We know your love will always be with us and that you will intercede in your own unique special ways. You showed us how to celebrate the gift of life, in the present moment, while balancing the sacrifices that prepare us for our final hour and doorway to eternity.

You answered the question I asked you [if dying would be difficult for you] in your own profound way, by showing me, rather than telling me: Even though someone gives his or her life completely to our Lord, dying is difficult because we were made to live.

By your example, you showed us how to live, how to value life, how to trust in God and how to leave this world in His Peace. We know that due to the effects of Original Sin, we must all experience death. We also know that at the end of the world, our bodies will be reunited with our souls. Please continue to pray and intercede so that we can all join you in our Heavenly Father's celebration. Thank you for the gift of your life to us.

Mom, you lived and ended your life on earth focusing on others, giving to the very end and graciously receiving the love offered to you. Love is Patient, Love is Kind, Love Never Ends. Your love will always be with us and you will always have a special place in our hearts.

Love,

Michael and your children

May 12, 2002

Dear Mom,

Happy Mothers Day! This is truly the most special Mother's Day ever. I need to express to you how much I love you and how much you mean to me. It is hard for me to come to grips with the fact that God may call you home soon. I have never experienced losing a loved one and I am afraid that I don't know how to act or feel.

I do have a tremendous feeling of love for you and of gratitude for my life and for everything that you have done for me. My life and everything that I am has been a blessing from you. You are a model of God's infinite love, because the love that you have so abundantly given to me you have also given to your twelve other children. Your love has never been partitioned but given in whole to each of us.

You also lend proof to the saying that "a mother is only as happy as her un-happiest child". You have always brought unity, peace and love into every situation. Your unconditional love and mercy for every child leaves an impression on our hearts and an example for us to follow.

Although, I feel sad at the thought of losing you I take comfort in our faith, which you have also blessed me with. By faith we believe in what we can not know with our senses. We believe that you will be with God in paradise. Go in peace knowing that it is God calling you home to be with him. I pray that we can all make the journey to our Lord as beautifully as you. I know that I will grow in grace and strength with you watching over me.

With Love Forever!

Robert (seventh child of Gwen)

Dearest mama you taught us to fly then flew away. We will love you forever.

Your son,

Joseph Vincent

My mother knew how to make everyone feel special. No matter what the situation, she made you feel like you were the most important person in the world! When there was a birthday, sacrament, or holiday, Mom found a way to make it extra, extra, special. She made each year better than the one before.

Mom always told me, "Love is patient, and Love is kind, Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." My mother truly lived this to the fullest. She also told me that if I lived this to the fullest, it would be followed by an equally important practice...SMILE...always remember to smile.

I am very blessed to have such a wonderful Mother whom I will always cherish in my heart.

Love you always, Maria (tenth child of Gwen)

Where do I begin? How can I put into so few words the feelings that engulf every inch of my heart? This woman, this precious child of God, this amazing servant of Christ, this humble beautiful mother of mine. My heart, my life, my inspiration, my rose! The truest example of Christ's love and mercy that I have ever known. How is it that I was blessed to have this beautiful mother touch my life in so many ways, too many to count. My heart aches for her every moment of every day, the sun doesn't shine as bright without the rays of her smile, music will never sound as beautiful without the beautiful sounds of her laughter.

I have meditated long and hard on what to write. I have so much to write about, if I had to choose one thing to write about in this book for my dear father it would be this memory that will penetrate my heart for as long as I live.

June 15, 2002, 5:30AM. I walked into the room where my precious mother had been laying in for 30 days. As I entered the room and saw her lying on her bed, it all looked the same as it had for the past 30 days. It looked the same but there was a feeling of deep sorrow that filled the room, this room that once emulated one feeling and that was love. I ran to her bedside to hold her, not believing the news that she had died. As I approached her bedside, I looked into her wide-open eyes and I saw that she was gone. My mother was gone, her body was there but her soul was gone.

I looked into her eyes that once were filled with so much grace, life, and love, and I saw there was nothing there anymore she was gone. I held her hand and kissed her cheek and pressed her hand to my face as I wept on her chest, knowing that was the last time I will

ever hold and kiss my mother. Everything was in slow motion. There are no words to describe the feelings in that room on that morning.

We had our last Mass with our mother in that room where we had been blessed with so many Masses with her. Then we prayed the Rosary around her bedside just as we had done so many times before. Then we all took our final moments with our mother.

The men from the funeral home arrived to take our mother. We all stood around her and formed the circle of life, embracing one another crying out, "Goodbye Mama, Goodbye Mama, Mama, Mama." We turned on the song "FLY" — we listened to the precious words of that song as the men lifted our mother from her bed and placed her on the gurney. They began to wrap her in a white sheet; we cried out as they were covering her precious face. They started to wheel her out of the room. We all followed holding each other and weeping. My father was weeping so sorrowfully. I went to him and we held each other. He began chanting over and over, "Thank you God for mother. Thank you God for mother. Thank you God for mother." We watched as they put her in the hearse and drove away. **"Fly, fly little wing Fly where only angels sing Fly away, the time is right Go now, find the light."**

Good-bye my mother, goodbye, thank you for blessing my life with your amazing Faith, Hope, Charity, & LOVE, always LOVE.

My heart will be forever filled with my love for you and the memory of your love for me!

With all that I am your baby Daughter,

Marybeth (thirteenth child of Gwen)

A note from a Granddaughter to a Grandmother gone before us.

September 27, 2003 (Gwen's birthday)

Dearest Nana,

Today is one of the most special days of the year because it is your birthday, the day that you were born, September 27, 1939.

I thank you and Papa for bringing my Mom into this world and I also thank you for bringing the whole Coniker family into the world. Family is the most precious thing that anybody could ever have. It is also something that you can cherish and treasure for the rest of time.

I also thank you for having a big family and keeping this family close together, because without family you'll have nothing, because family is the only thing that can help during good times and in bad.

Families are the people that support and love you. You cannot run or hide from your family. You have to learn to face things in life and to know that you can't turn your back from it. I was told this by my Mother, one that I love so much. Thank you for instilling this in your family, which will be passed on, as it has been to me, my family and all families.

So I am thanking you Nana, for bringing this family into the world. I love you so very much. Happy Birthday. I miss you.

Love your Granddaughter,

Christina Marie Skurski (16 years old)

June 2002

Dearest Nana,

"Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you!" The angel said those exact words to Mary. Nana was so much like Mother Mary, because she was so kind, soft, caring, gentle, loving, and understanding! She was a great Nana! All of Nana's creative ideas and activities will be passed on for many more years to come!

All of Nana's high spirited and Christ-like characteristics will always live on in many other people's hearts, and mine! You will never be forgotten and you will always live on in my heart! I look forward to meeting you again in Heaven. You are now in a beautiful place and will stay happy for all eternity!

God sent you here to earth for a reason. And we all know what that reason is... to be the best model, mother, and reach out to everyone and even anyone in the world and touch their hearts! You've changed so many peoples' lives because you gave up everything you had, and made a devotion to Christ. And now, it's our turn to reach out and change many more lives for generations to come.

You were the perfect person sent to us and you've had the choices like anyone else does! Your choice was to give it all to God, and suffer for the sins of the world. It's almost as if you were a reflection of Christ Himself or a martyr by dying for the sake of Jesus our Lord.

What can we say... we were very blessed to have such a special person like you as our Nana. Your generosity and your kindness proves to me (and I'm almost positive many more other people out there in this world) that you truly are (deep down in our hearts) a saint and my Guardian Angel to watch over me and help me to live a happy, holy life, just as you did. I love you very much... and your spirit will live within mine forever and ever until the end of time!

I love you!

Love,

Your Granddaughter,

Elizabeth Marie Clark (10 years old)

Letters from Church leaders.

“... I join in praying for Gwen so that the luminous example of her life, lived with total dedication to God and neighbor, may give light to many families in their journey towards God. I am sure that Gwen from heaven will intercede many graces for her dear ones and for the Work she founded.”

–Chiara Lubich (Foundress of Focolare)

“... Thinking of her, we can only thank God for her life, for what she has been for your wonderful family and for the Church...”

–Augustin Cardinal Mayer

“It is understandable that after 48 good years together, her departure to the Eternal Father has created a vacuum in your heart; however, be consoled that your “Sweet Pie” still lives and intercedes for you day and night from her place of rest. Her charism of unconditional selfless love and service to the Apostolate for Family Consecration, will forever be remembered and cherished and serve as a model for others to imitate her spirit of dedication and service to this noble Apostolate.”

–Archbishop Robert Sarah, Congregation for Evangelization

“As I read through all the lovely things concerning Gwen, the tears started coming to my eyes, which is really saying to me that my heart was being touched in a most beautiful and peaceful way. Thank you for sharing all of this love which knows no ending!...”

–Fr. Michael Maher, S.M.

“... While Gwen may physically no longer be at your side, I have no doubt that you often feel her presence and her help in going forward with your life and mission. Together you accomplished a great deal in founding and realizing the growth and success of the Apostolate for Family Consecration...”

–Archbishop Renato Martino

“...rest assured, Jerome, that from heaven Gwen will be helping you more than ever with all your needs. Pray to her for my intentions, for the apostolates of the Prelature throughout the world.”

–Javier Echevarria, Prelate of Opus Dei

“...It will be our joy to pray with you and others that Gwen’s holiness will be officially recognized by the Church – raising her to the honors of the altar in order that all families may be encouraged by her example and helped by her prayerful intercession – especially as the family has been and still is, under such strong attack in various ways...”

–Sr. Helen Therese, Monastery of the Holy Cross

Note from a woman that watched a video on Gwen.

“...Many emotions struck me as I watched the tape. One thing that carried throughout was Gwen’s incredibly contagious smile. How interesting it was to see from early pictures of her young life to late pictures as she was about to be born into eternal life, how gorgeous and stable was that smile... another miracle that was so obvious was the passing on of that incredible smile.”