
A New Life, Jean Conway

By Neal J. Conway, Jr.

I have often noticed that the weather is lousy when someone you love dies. When my grandmother died, the wind-chill must have been three below. We were watching for lightning the day we buried my uncle. On the March Saturday we had that blizzard, my mother, Jean Conway, died unexpectedly.

"I've never been to Paris," I wrote to a friend in Europe, "but I've been to a lot of funerals. One doesn't have to go to Paris but one does have to go to funerals. The more one goes to, the better one is able to handle them. Indeed, the less you shun and deny death, the less awful it becomes even when it strikes very close."

When you have known someone intimately and see her corpse, if you are informed by faith, you see that a significant dimension of that person is missing. You realize what Aquinas meant when he said that the soul gives form to the body.

My father and I prefer to think of my mother's passing quietly in her sleep as being softly awakened by God to eternal life. Though numbed with shock at this outcome of what we thought had been the flu, we realized that God had granted Jean Conway "a happy death" like that of Jesus' mother whom she had rendered in some of her oil paintings. It was happy not only in that it involved no pain, no tubes, no confinement but also in that it followed a life of faith and of

doing noble and constructive things.

Mom started volunteering in World War II. She had written "nursing home" on the calendar for Mondays she would never see. She was the face of Christ to many desolate patients at that nursing home where she assisted at Mass. Given charge of the singing because of her professional voice, she always insisted that Mass be concluded with the singing of *Holy God We Praise Thy Name*.

"I don't know if it's right," said Monsignor Madigan at Mom's Mass of The Resurrection, "but we're going to finish this Mass singing *Holy God, We Praise Thy Name*."

Because of the weather, my Dad and I had decided to have a private funeral. In spite of this, word spread and de Chantal church was filled to capacity, filled with friends of all ages, from every place Jean Conway had ever walked and from some she hadn't.

And everyone, a whole churchfull, followed us out singing *Holy God, We Praise Thy Name*.

God was good to the Neal Conways that snowy weekend and in the days that followed. He gave us the consolation of many friends and lots to keep us busy. The only thing He didn't do was send around a couple of kids to shovel snow. But, I guess He figured that we'd need more exercise for the new life that death always brings.

"A New Life, Jean Conway" by Neal J. Conway was first published in the April 18, 1993 issue of *Our Parish Times*. Neal Conway is the author of *Tales From Old Bethesda* and lives in Washington, DC. See nealjconway.com. Subject: Author's reflections on the death of his mother, Jean Bradshaw Conway.