Dear Aunt Ginny and family,

Ginny Kotynski is my god-mother, and she and I have always had a special spiritual and affectionate bond. To me, Ginny has modeled the essence of a Christian god-mother.  Sometimes, living at a distance from other people can allow one to experience the other's essence, without having to wade through day to day concerns, tribulations and human failings.

And this is the essence I experienced, especially during those growing up years, when our McCartney Family of nine visited the Kotynski Family of eleven:

I saw deep joy and at times even merriment in Ginny’s eyes, underneath the physical pain and exhaustion she must have experienced.  When I looked around the house, I saw dozens of sterilized baby bottles, row upon row of cloth diapers drying; outside during the summer, in the basement during the winter.  But the sparkle of joy in her eyes made a greater impact on me.  When I ran to get a hug, I closed my eyes so that I could more fully experience the fragrance of flowers, centered around Aunt Ginny.  When I opened my eyes, I saw bottles of formula, babies burping up on someone’s shoulder and little blondes racing around, so I’d quick, close my eyes again so I could smell the floral bouquet emanating from my god-mother.

I remembered the glowing stained glass window of the Virgin Mary above the altar at St. Casimir’s Church in Hammond.  And I also remember another glow surrounding my Aunt Ginny.  Sometimes, if I could squirrel up close to her, I sought out her hand.  My eyes saw hands, rough, red and calloused from years of washing, but my little fingers experienced tenderness, kindness, and gentleness.

Maybe my Aunt Ginny’s presence is part of why I have absolutely no problem spiritually or cognitively reconciling Christian beliefs and seeming dichotomies, the union of opposites - Virgin birth, Resurrection, Dying in Order to be Born, Ascension, Assumption, Tongues of Fire Transmitting Virtue?  Why not?   Because long ago, as a quiet little ginger top, I learned to suspend my senses in order to experience the Truest Truth.

Aunt Ginny understood and practiced certain Christian truisms in her daily life.  While living in modest temporal circumstances, she clearly understood the extravagance of divine “currency,” in which God promised that He would never be outdone in generosity.  The more Ginny gave of herself, time, energy and talents, the more she grew in wisdom and virtue.  Lucky me, to be a recipient of that wisdom.  As part of this giving, Ginny also knew the value of redemptive suffering.  She was brought up with the lovely Catholic encouragement to look upon trials as opportunities to “offer it up.”  When suffering is inevitable in this earthly existence, one can voluntarily embrace the lessons to be learned and the virtue to be polished, by giving the pain as a gift to the One who can transform and redeem it.  I remember her encouraging us all to take our daily bumps and bruises and to “offer it up."

When I drive through the Chicago area on my way from Minnesota, I stop and visit Ginny.   I was always drawn to a certain painting on the living room wall, and one year Ginny told me the story behind it.  When I visited in late September 2014, I noticed that the painting had been replaced with one of bright flowers, and Ginny said that she gave it to a granddaughter who had long admired it.  I wonder if that grandchild knows the story, and what a treasure she possesses.

This is the story of Ginny’s painting:

The painting is of an older man and a small girl in a tiny rowboat.  The painting is in muted, somber tones, so one’s focus stays on the figures.  The man is rowing towards a distant shore, and the young girl sits close to him, quietly trusting.  Ginny said that the painting reminded her of her beloved grandfather, Joseph Pfeifer, and of herself as a child.

After her birth in 1926, Ginny was placed in foster care and later in an orphanage.  Her grandfather, Joseph, visited her. At one point, he left $100.00 for her care, specifically to buy her clothes and milk.  At the beginning of the Great Depression, this was an enormous sum.  At one visit, when Ginny was three years old, Joseph saw that Ginny had lice in her hair and rickets from a vitamin D deficiency.  Other children were sharing her clothes.  Joseph took her by the hand and stated, “I am taking you home.”  Ginny told me that Joseph’s care for her, and the resulting psychological and spiritual haven he created for a tiny, frightened, abandoned soul, was so profound that to her, Joseph embodied God.   She said that she remembers first hearing the story of Abraham, who was commanded by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac.  Ginny said she was at peace as the story unfolded, confident that God would never allow Abraham to harm Isaac.  Joseph became Ginny's kinsman-redeemer, and she grieved deeply when Joseph died when she was nine years old.  Ginny chose the Confirmation name “Josephine” to honor her adoptive father.

Recently, I completed a study of the lovely story of Ruth, and my mind constantly went to the similarities between Ruth & Ginny, Boaz and Joseph.  Ruth was a Moabite, a Hebrew by adoption, not blood.  She voluntarily chose to humbly care for her Hebrew mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth’s virtue attracted the attention of Boaz, who became her kinsman-redeemer.  For their care of each other, and fulfillment of the Levirite law, Ruth and Boaz were blessed by becoming the great-grandparents of King David, and they are one of the few couples named in the genealogy of Jesus. The ripple effect of kindness extends into eternity, and I pondered the ripples of Joseph taking the hand of a tiny girl, who developed into a faithful, virtuous woman, who has, in turn, passed on the Christian faith.

I remember Ginny simply stating facts, but not complaining, knowing how to give thanks in all things.  She expressed her abiding optimism and expansive vision in living a life of gratitude. During a blessed visit in November 2014, I expressed dismay over her early years. In her characteristic style, Ginny replied that she was grateful to lice and rickets, because that prompted Joseph Peifer to take Ginny home, and raise her as his own.   "All things are working together for good, for those who know the Lord and are called according to His purposes."  Roman 8:28

I deeply love and admire my god-mother, and have always felt abundantly blessed to belong to her,

*Mary Irene McCartney*

*December 7, 2014*