

Isolated . . . but not alone



*The true story of a
miraculous recovery*

Her delicate facial features have eroded over the past half century, yet the beauty of the four-inch tall lady in blue who graces a nook in my home intensifies with each passing year.

I first laid eyes on the slender figurine that has survived dozens of changes of address in three countries when I awoke from what I initially believed had been a dream while in an isolation unit in an upstate New York hospital in 1962.

I'd watched from a corner of the ceiling as my parish priest, the Rev. James Vaughan, placed the form I recognized as a miniature of the Blessed Mother beside a larger form I recognized as my own body — or an emaciated version of it.

Heaven only knows how much time had elapsed since I'd been rushed to Albany Medical Center after our family doctor examined me on the sofa in our living room. Mom had summoned Dr. William Boland because I'd been projectile vomiting and burning with a fever that caused me to drift in and out of consciousness in the wee small hours.

But most troubling of all to Dr. Boland seemed to be that an agile Third Grader who had been romping with playmates the day before had suddenly lost the ability to touch her chin to her chest. This was no ordinary stiff neck.

In keeping with the doctor's orders that I be rushed to the hospital, my father wasted no time flattening the backseats of our green and cream station wagon into a platform upon which a pillow and blankets could be strewn.

Despite my raging fever, I recall Dad's strong arms carrying my listless body from the house to the car before turning on the ignition and backing out of the driveway.

An excruciating spinal tap had confirmed Dr. Boland's suspicion that I was suffering from a highly contagious and potentially fatal form of bacterial meningitis.

Alone in a sterile room where I was tethered to a bed to prevent me from trying to yank needles attached to IV drips out of my arms, I was too sick to know or care that my parents had been told I might not pull through. Nor was I aware they'd been cautioned that even if by some miracle I survived the infection that had invaded my brain, I might lose my hearing — or worse.

How close I came to dying didn't register until I later told anyone who would listen that I'd watched from a corner of the ceiling in my hospital room as Father Vaughan began praying over what looked like me sleeping on the bed.

As fascinating as it was to "see" my body below as the young priest from St. Ambrose in nearby Latham anointed it with oil, I was far more captivated by a glow that began to draw me into a radiant realm. I "felt" that I was on my way to meet Jesus and was overjoyed as I made my way into the light.

It is the closest thing to bliss I have ever experienced and I was sad when it was communicated to me (without any words) that it was not yet my time to enter the place I so yearned to be.

In what seemed like the blink of an eye, I was “whooshed” back inside of my pain-racked body with needles and tubes dripping nutrients and powerful medications into my veins. Memories of the next few days are fuzzy, but a sure sign I was on the road to recovery was observed when I asked if a special doll from my bedroom at home might be brought to me.

The news then had to be broken that it and a few of my other cherished belongings had been disposed of as part of precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the disease to my siblings. Remembering the tale of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, I could only hope that heaven had a place for childhood treasures that had to be sacrificed under such circumstances.

Perhaps that’s why I came to cherish even more the tiny statue of the Blessed Mother that Father Vaughan had left with me on the day he had administered the sacrament that in those days was called Extreme Unction – The Last Rites.

Only later did I learn that around the same hour my earthly shell was being anointed with oil and my innocent young spirit was ascending in the direction of a heavenly glow, something truly miraculous was unfolding outside the hospital’s walls. Neighbors of different denominations in a Latham subdivision had united in prayer at a Block Rosary while the Sisters of the Presentation at a Watervliet convent and Maryknoll nuns near New York City were also offering Hail Marys on my behalf.

The simple knotty pine shelf where I keep the miniature statue of Mary in my home is beside a cabinet where I store equally tiny candles to light when I pray for others. I usually know the individuals who are ailing, but I consider it a special honor when I’m asked to add the name of a child of a friend to my prayer list. For I firmly believe that children are never abandoned or alone – no matter how isolated they may sometimes appear to be while battling an illness or recovering from an injury.

The faded outline of a serene smile that remains on Mary’s face and the glow from the candles serve as gentle reminders of the tranquility I experienced on that long ago day when others cared enough to pray for a little girl some had never met.

A little girl who it turned out still had many lessons to learn — and a few to pass along — before it was time for her to complete her passage to The Other Side.



*The Lord continues
to work in mysterious
... and sometimes
picture-perfect ... ways!*

Skeptics will surely dismiss what I'm about to share as nothing more than a series of coincidences.

But there's no doubt in my mind that the events which have unfolded since I recently wrote about my miraculous recovery from spinal meningitis are further proof of the validity of the adage that the Lord sometimes chooses to work in mysterious ways.

The essay itself wouldn't have been written had Wendy Hobday Haugh, whose credits include a chapter in *Chicken Soup for the Soul's Angels Among Us* edition, not listened so intently when I confided the story of my long ago out-of-body experience.

While my experience didn't involve any angels, I had certainly felt a divine presence as my spirit was being drawn into a glorious light half a century earlier.

But if nobody believed what I'd tried so hard to describe as a child in 1962, why would anyone believe me now? "Just put the words down on paper – if only as a writing exercise," insisted Wendy. And so I did.

Not long thereafter, a relative sent me a copy of a newspaper clip announcing that the Rev. James Vaughan, who had once served at St. Ambrose in Latham and was now Pastor Emeritus of Sacred Heart Parish in Troy, was to be honored at a 60th anniversary of priesthood celebration.

The event was to take place on June 13, 2014. My heart leapt for joy as I imagined congratulating Father Vaughan on his vocational milestone and offering belated thanks for the prayers he had said and tiny statue of the Blessed Mother he had left at my bedside at Albany Medical Center 52 years earlier.

One small problem: *The Evangelist* story about Father Vaughan hadn't reached me until after the event in his honor had passed.

Taking a closer look at the news clip, I found an email address for Sister Rita Duggan at the Sacred Heart parish and fired off a message I hoped she'd forward to Father Vaughan – which she promptly did.

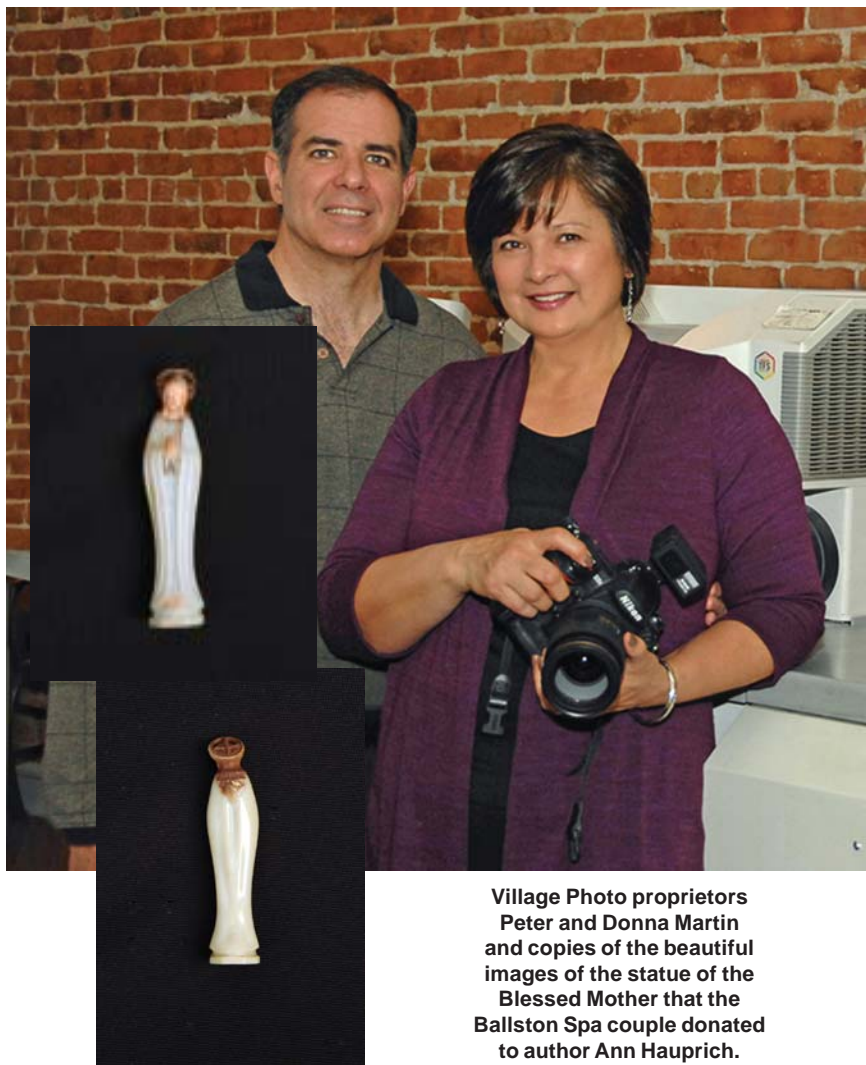
The padre and I soon began emailing back and forth about the possibility of a reunion, but due to a series of unfortunate events, autumn leaves covered the ground before we were able to carve a date and time in stone. Luckily, I'm a firm believer that "God's delays are NOT God's denials."

In this case, the delays led me to Village Photo in Ballston Spa where proprietors Donna and Peter Martin have earned a reputation for outstanding customer service. But this time, the Martins exceeded expectations in a truly heavenly way.

Still struggling to enter the digital camera age, I'd carefully snapped more than a dozen film images of my slender four-inch tall statue of The Blessed Mother, confident I'd secured at least one that would be good enough to publish with the essay I'd written about how the religious artifact had come into my possession.

Imagine my dismay upon discovering that every photo I'd taken was hopelessly out of focus! In hindsight I can't help but blame the cataracts I'm told are forming on my aging eyes. But the reason no longer matters.

What *does* matter is that Peter was so filled with compassion after hearing why the pictures meant so much to me that he extended an invitation that was too divine to decline.



Village Photo proprietors Peter and Donna Martin and copies of the beautiful images of the statue of the Blessed Mother that the Ballston Spa couple donated to author Ann Hauprich.

“Is there any way you could bring the statue into the store?” asked Peter. “I can’t make any guarantees, but I’m pretty sure I can get you a decent picture if you can bring the statue here and leave it with me for a few hours.”

Dashing home to retrieve Mary from her corner sanctuary, I reflected on how fitting it was that she was coming into the light after 52 years – as I was born in 1952 and it had been 52 years since Father Vaughan had left her at my hospital bedside.

Having never previously allowed anyone outside of my immediate family circle to hold the miniature statue, I said a silent prayer as I handed the cherished keepsake to Peter on the other side of the busy counter.

If ever there was a time to “Let go and let God,” this was it.

While I never doubted Peter would secure a publishable picture of the statue, the images that met my eyes were more beautiful than anything I had dreamt possible.

Not only had Peter meticulously captured the three-dimensional details of both the statue's front and back, he had precisely printed each image to reveal the statue's actual size. Not just one print of each side – but six prints of each side as well as a CD so that I could share copies with Father Vaughan and others who might be inspired by them.

Wishing to financially compensate Peter, I started to remove my checkbook from my purse only to have him stop me in my tracks.

“No way you're going to pay,” Peter beamed. “These are a gift from Donna and me. We just hope these pictures help tell the story of what happened to you the day the priest brought the statue.”

When a long dreamed of reunion with Father Vaughan was carved in stone for 2 p.m. on Wednesday, October 22, 2014, I was elated. I had, after all, been residing at 22 David Road in Latham at the time of my meningitis hospitalization. All ducks were in a row when news arrived that the loved one who was scheduled to drive me to the rectory in Troy would NOT be able to do so because of an emergency.

While I knew the odds of Wendy being available to chauffeur me all the way from her Burnt Hills home-office to Troy on short notice were in the slim to nil range, something nudged me to pick up the phone and call her anyway.

Not only did this busy writer friend who is also a devoted wife, mother, grandmother, church volunteer and piano teacher answer on the first ring, she also responded enthusiastically to my appeal for help. There was but one condition: Could I ask Father Vaughan if we could arrive an hour earlier than scheduled in order to avoid getting caught in rush hour traffic on the way home?

When Father cheerfully agreed to the earlier time, I was so excited I almost forgot to pack my statue of the Blessed Mother and the envelope in which I'd tucked copies of the photos taken by Peter as a gift for the padre. (I *did* forget to pack the 1962 hospital bill that mysteriously turned up in mint condition inside the home of my parents in 2014 — after I'd written the essay about my miraculous recovery — but that's another story.

The relaxing ride from Wendy's home in Burnt Hills to the Sacred Heart Rectory in Troy proved to be a bonus blessing. She had been away at her family's camp on Sacandaga Lake most of the summer.

It had grieved me to decline invitations to visit with her there, but I'd consoled myself that we could stay in touch via emails and phone calls.

Still heart-to-hearts without eye-to-eyes had caused me to miss Wendy terribly. At long last, on a day when I least expected it, I'd been granted the gift of her presence.

Because Wendy opted to stay on back roads as much as possible, I got to enjoy rural scenery as well as seeing parts of Troy rarely reported on during TV newscasts. The breathtaking views around Emma Willard's hilltop campus were still being digested when we pulled into the parking lot beside the rectory on Spring Avenue.



The group portrait at top commemorates the author's First Communion at St. Ambrose Church in Latham in 1961. Center photograph by Wendy Hobday Haugh captures the 2014 reunion between Father James Vaughan and Ann Hauprich (holding her cherished tiny statue of the Blessed Mother) while inset images depict the pair as they looked half a century ago.

A sense of peace filled my soul as the door to the historic pastoral residence swung open, leading to a cordial greeting by parish secretary Barbara Mastroianni.

Within minutes, a nimble Father Vaughan had descended the staircase and was warmly welcoming us. Although the decades had turned the venerable priest's jet black hair into wavy silver locks, Father Time had been incredibly kind to his face as there seemed not a trace of stress or distress. It didn't take long before his secret to joyful longevity was revealed. Father had devoted his adult life to what he loves the most: Being a priest.

Father shared as he had in *The Evangelist* story that he believes the call to the priesthood to be "a gift from God" and that it had been and remained "an honor and a privilege to praise and worship God in this priestly way" and "to serve God's people" by celebrating Mass and the sacraments and by "teaching, preaching, guiding and anointing them in good times and in bad."

A native of Troy, Father Vaughan had served as a US Navy chaplain near the end of World War Two before being called to serve as an Associate Pastor at St. Mary's and Sacred Heart in Troy and then at St. Ambrose in Latham, where our paths first crossed.

He'd gone on to serve as Pastor at St. Patrick's in Athens and St. Mary's in Hudson prior to returning to Sacred Heart in Troy, where he was pastor for nearly 30 years before retiring. In between, he'd also been a prison chaplain who stayed physically fit by playing basketball – often in the company of fellow priests. As I'd also moved frequently over the decades, it was little wonder Father and I had lost touch!

A highlight of the afternoon was responding to questions Father posed about my memories of the long ago day when he had brought the tiny statue of Mary to me. While Father said he had been as unfamiliar with the term "out-of-body experience" as I was in 1962, sharing my childhood recollections with him just two months before my 62nd birthday proved to be spiritually cleansing and renewing.

It no longer mattered that the adults in whom I had confided as a child had dismissed my story as hallucinations brought on by a raging fever. Years of fears that my imagination might have played tricks on my young mind were washed away as the same priest who had anointed me when I lay near death decades earlier listened intently before giving me – and my cherished statue of Mary — his blessing.

Blinking back tears of joy as I was nearing the entrance to the Village of Ballston Spa hours later, my eyes were drawn to a large neon sign upon which the temperature was displayed in degrees Fahrenheit. The gigantic number that greeted me was **52** – as if to affirm it was no mere coincidence that the reunion had taken place 52 years after the miraculous recovery of a child who had been born in '52! And then, the fourth child in a long line of siblings noted different numerals had popped into the sign's display area: **4:00**.

It was exactly four o'clock. *Talk about perfect timing!*

Below is a copy of the 1962 hospital bill from Albany Medical Center that mysteriously turned up in the home of Ann's parents for decades after she had written about her miraculous recovery. Upon her release from the hospital, Ann was sent to convalesce in the home of her maternal grandparents, Valentine J. Bopp and Catherine Tiernan Bopp. Part of their challenge was to "put meat on the bones" of the then skinny child seen at right. Although Ann didn't know it at the time, her Grandpa Bopp had experienced his very own miracle as a newborn while her Grandma Bopp was to bless her granddaughter with the gift of a "parting miracle" in December 1990.



ALBANY N. Y. ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER HOSPITAL Tel. W-3686 8 West St. 711

PATIENT: *Ann Marie Bopp* ROOM: *Room 1000* NURSING: *Room 1000*

ADDRESS: *1000 West St.* CITY: *Albany* STATE: *N.Y.*

NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION	CHARGES	CREDITS	BAL. DUE
1	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 27.00		\$ 27.00
2	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 28.00
3	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 29.00
4	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 30.00
5	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 31.00
6	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 32.00
7	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 33.00
8	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 34.00
9	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 35.00
10	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 36.00
11	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 37.00
12	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 38.00
13	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 39.00
14	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 40.00
15	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 41.00
16	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 42.00
17	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 43.00
18	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 44.00
19	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 45.00
20	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 46.00
21	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 47.00
22	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 48.00
23	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 49.00
24	MAR-9-62	INPATIENT	\$ 1.00		\$ 50.00

SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR EXPLANATION OF CHARGES

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EXPLANATION OF CHARGES

0001 - Activities Service
 0002 - Anesthesiologist
 0003 - Blood Bank
 0004 - Dietician
 0005 - Endocrinologist

0006 - Radiologist
 0007 - Social Worker
 0008 - Speech Therapist

OP ROOM — OPERATING ROOM: Use of room, equipment, supplies, services of nurses and resident doctors, and use of recovery room for two hours.

ANESTHESIA — ANESTHESIA: Use of equipment, supplies and services of full time nurse and physician anesthetist.

TRFUSK — TRANSFUSION: Whole Blood — \$35.00 per 500 cc; Plasma — \$35.00 per 250 cc.

REPLACEMENTS: Credit will be given on your bill for the transfusion charges if and when blood replacements are made in our Blood Bank. Two donors are needed for each replacement. Please make appointments directly with our Blood Bank, 141 S-5411, Ext. 4250.

TRFUSV — TRANSFUSION SERVICES: This charge is for services rendered in our Blood Bank in connection with the preparation of blood ordered for transfusion.

ROUT LAB — ROUTINE LABORATORY: This charge is made to each patient admitted to the hospital and covers all routine laboratory examinations which are performed in the Hospital Laboratory. It does not cover special laboratory services ordered by your doctor for your individual case.

Printing Date On Invoice Is Date Charge Was Paid, NOT DATE THAT SERVICE, MEDICINES, ETC., WERE RENDERED OR SUPPLIED.

Village Photo continues to make heavenly impressions



Ann Hauprich, who first met Natalia de Melo following the teen's arrival from Brazil in 2006, snapped the top right image after a 2015 portrait sitting at Village Photo during which Donna Martin took a series of first wedding anniversary pictures of Natalia and husband Gustavo Simoes -- including the one above left.

Since documenting the role Village Photo played in the previous chapter, proprietors Peter and Donna Martin have inspired prayers of thanksgiving on two additional occasions.

The first was in October 2015 when I arranged for Donna to photograph a South American couple who would be passing through Ballston Spa as part of their first wedding anniversary celebrations.

Donna, who prides herself on making high school students “feel like rock stars” when they pose for senior portraits, did the same when Brazilians Natalia de Melo and husband Gustavo Simoes entered her studio. The joyful images on this page lend added proof to the adages that “a smile is the shortest distance between two people” and that “laughter has no accent.”

Donna had instantly made Natalia feel at home by sharing memories of the lasting impression she had made when she was a teenaged Rotary International exchange student a decade earlier. Having Donna's warm recollections of a 2006 encounter translated by Natalia from English to Portuguese brought a million dollar smile to Gustavo's face.

By the time Natalia, now a dentist, and Gustavo, an attorney, departed from Village Photo, they could scarcely contain their enthusiasm over the rock star treatment they had just enjoyed. The photos they subsequently received double as prized souvenir post cards of their American vacation.



May 2016 portrait of author Ann Hauprich by Donna Martin.

My most recent prayers of thanksgiving involving Village Photo followed my “40th anniversary as a journalist” portrait session in May 2016.

Shortly after arriving home, I realized I’d somehow lost the delicate necklace with tiny red gemstones I’d been wearing when I arrived for my sitting with Donna. Because the necklace was a long ago gift from my three then young daughters, it holds great sentimental value and is priceless to me.

Little wonder my heart began to race when, after searching my driveway and then circling back to where I had parked my car to inspect the sidewalk and curb, nothing had turned up. The last thing I wanted to do was burden Donna and Peter – who had already done so much for me that day — with my dilemma.

But the thought of never seeing my cherished necklace again was more than I could bear. And so I reached for my phone. Struggling to suppress the rising panic in my voice when I heard Peter’s at the other end, I waited as he dropped what he was doing to take a quick look around.

“I’m so sorry,” Peter said when he got back on the line. “There’s no sign of it. But let me take down the number you’re calling from – just in case.”

With a heart too heavy to concentrate on writing or anything else, I decided to take a nap – but images of the lost necklace and memories of the day when I had received it – flooded my mind.

At first I recited The Serenity Prayer: “*Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*” I also prayed The Lord’s Prayer, with emphasis on “Thy will be done.”

Tears welling up on my eyes, I found myself petitioning “*Dear St. Anthony, please come around. Something’s lost and must be found.*” As I was completing my THIRD round of prayers to St. Anthony, the phone rang.

Lo and behold! Peter’s voice was on the other end. “You’re not going to believe this, but I just decided to take another look in the portrait studio and spotted your necklace. I don’t know why I didn’t notice it before, but I’ve got it here on the front counter now if you want to come and get it.”