



## Mary Simon

June 7, 1933 - April 30, 2023

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Mary Alice Cassaretto Simon, 89, died peacefully at home on April 30, 2023. While an undergraduate at Loyola University, Mary Cassaretto met Raymond Simon, a fellow student. They fell in love and married in October 1956, and are survived by eight children, Matthew (Jacqueline Covert), Mark (Dr. Catherine Counard), John (Tanya Solov), Gregory (Barbara Coghlan), David (Agnieszka Kubiak), Kevin (Micaela Daly), Maria (John Taylor) and Daniel, and 23 grandchildren. Mary and Raymond recently celebrated their 66th wedding anniversary, and Raymond died earlier this year.

Mary was born on June 7, 1933, the oldest of three daughters of Frank Cassaretto and Agnes Neary, and lived for five years near Maple Square (now Magnolia) east of Ashland Avenue in Chicago. Her father worked as a college professor at Loyola University. She enjoyed visits with her grandparents “on the Neary side” who had immigrated from Ireland to Chicago in the early 1900s. She and her younger sister, Toni, born in 1935, were very close. When their youngest sister, Gemma, was born ten years later, their family was complete.

When Mary was five, the family moved to Blue Island where they lived in the upstairs apartment of a two-flat owned by Mary’s aunt and uncle, Alice and Darl. As the family story went, after Darl landed a job working for the railroad (steady employment was rare during the Depression), he and Alice purchased

a nearby two-flat with the plan that the rent paid by the upstairs tenant would help with the mortgage. When the tenant moved out unexpectedly, Mary's family moved in.

Both Mary's father Frank and her uncle Darl served in the Army during the Second World War. Mary recalled those years fondly, despite rationing and other economic challenges. Alice got a job downtown and everyone pulled together, including the two girls. On Saturdays, they would do the ironing while listening to radio broadcasts of Notre Dame football games, then go out together for ice cream or to the movies. Mary was a gifted student, beginning her education at St. Benedict in Blue Island with the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Mary and Toni were frequent book borrowers at the Blue Island Library where the librarian became their lifelong friend.

After the war, Mary attended Blue Island High School, where she excelled and graduated in three years. She was an active member of the Debate Team which was racially integrated. For a Senior trip, the Debate Team planned to visit Washington, D.C. At the last minute, they learned that hotels in the Capitol would not accommodate their Black classmates. At a Team meeting, some classmates proposed canceling the trip, but their Black classmates urged Mary and the others to go to Washington, D.C., and see and learn all they could, but also to remember this injustice. She did.

Mary enrolled at Loyola University in 1949 soon after it had begun admitting women. She was given a half-scholarship because her father was a professor. Mary thrived academically, socially and spiritually amid the optimism of post-war Chicago. Through the Sodality, a young, single, Catholics club on campus, she met Raymond Simon, a handsome boy from Bridgeport, and they went on frequent dates. The Jesuit and lay faculty had a profound influence on Mary's intellectual development, fostering her innate curiosity about people and ideas, plugging her into a long academic tradition and convincing her that each person should develop her talents and spend her life serving the needs of her family, her church and the larger community.

After graduating, despite limited Spanish language skills, Mary got a job as a

social worker for the Chicago office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico which supported a large influx of workers resettling on the mainland after leaving the island in search of better economic opportunities. She connected easily with her clients and was a natural advocate as she sought affordable apartments, furniture, clothing and jobs for the workers and their families. About two years later, she was awarded a U.S. government scholarship for graduate studies in Mexico (now called a Fulbright Scholarship) and set off for the National University in Mexico City. She was welcomed by faculty and students there, and fully engaged in the academic and social life. At the end of her two-year course of studies, she presented a dissertation about the growth of Protestantism, particularly Evangelical Protestantism, in 20th Century Mexico. She was pleased that her original research gained the respect of her professors, albeit grudging, since they viewed Mexico as a Catholic country. Mary received visits during summer breaks from Raymond Simon and his friend Dick Rochester, who made the long drive from Chicago to Mexico City to spend time with her, including side trips to Acapulco and other historic sites. Soon after she returned to Chicago with her graduate degree from the National University, she and Raymond were engaged. They were married in 1956, a tumultuous year when Raymond completed law school, sat for the bar exam, and also became seriously ill with a kidney blockage. Fortunately, Raymond recovered from surgery quickly, passed the bar exam and got a job with the City Law Department. They rented an apartment at 6030 N. Sheridan Road and quickly started a family. While Mary was a loving wife to Raymond and devoted mother to her eight children, she viewed her role as analogous to the conductor of a symphony orchestra. Mary and Raymond were a team (joined eventually by their children, their children's spouses and their grandchildren) and the team's goal was to live rich lives full of love, achievement and service. The beauty of her vision, her own joyful, selfless commitment to the progress of the group and each member of the group and her organizational talent carried everyone along, most of the time.

While Mary had been surrounded by women growing up, each of her first six children was a boy, until her seventh child—Maria--was born more than a decade later, and then the eighth was another boy. Undaunted, she became an expert in raising boys, reading out loud stories of adventures and fun and appealing to their imaginations. Like the hero of *Where The Wild Things Are*, she tamed them all. Mary admired Maria Montessori, the Italian educator, and surrounded her children with interesting materials, tasks and routines. The older ones were praised for teaching the younger ones and she celebrated every success, developing a way of making stories out of each achievement which built their confidence and guided them toward the next challenge. Mary still had professional aspirations and taught classes in the Sociology Department at Loyola University for a semester in 1962, but delayed her career plans as the family grew.

The dinner table became the center of family life where Raymond would talk about his day and each of the children would have a turn to speak. A good joke or a funny story was repeated and embellished. Mary would present the activities and schedules for the next days and weeks. These ideas then became expectations, because they “had been discussed.” Raymond and Mary would invite friends and relatives to dinner, and every family member would be tasked with extending hospitality. One would answer the door and hang up coats, another would carry plates and drinks to and from the kitchen, others would be assigned to sit with the guest and make conversation.

In 1969, when the children’s energy had become uncontainable, Raymond and Mary purchased a property on Buffalo Lake in Central Wisconsin, so that the boys could run and play and swim. During the Summer, Mary would stay at the property and Raymond would commute from Chicago for long weekends. Eventually, they bought ponies and horses so the children could learn to ride and care for animals. Mary believed in the positive impact of time spent in nature and promoted the ideas of Aldo Leopold and other Wisconsin naturalists. During this time, the family upgraded from a station wagon to a van with 10 seats, and Mary undertook a number of extensive long-range

trips, first to Mexico, then to Florida, Washington, D.C., and the Western national parks. She scheduled museum visits, outdoor hikes, beach visits and other landmarks at every stop along the way. These experiences stretched the children's imaginations and provided lots of material for family stories. Mary encouraged each child to travel abroad after junior year in high school, and would read their letters home to the younger ones, and they would begin planning their own adventures abroad.

Mary was devoted to Raymond and fully supported him at every stage of his remarkable career. She accompanied him to countless political and social events and helped him write speeches, sort through policy issues and maintain many relationships. They entertained frequently and participated together in fundraising and other support for many educational, religious and charitable organizations. Perhaps Mary's most important influence on Raymond, her children and eventually her grandchildren was through her commitment to social justice. While she was a keen observer of policy issues and debates, she was practical and down-to-earth about helping people and made financial contributions and volunteered her time with many grass-roots organizations, providing much-appreciated support to the full-time leaders and other volunteers. This commitment started early and continued her whole life. In the mid-1970s, Mary was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, a chronic, often debilitating auto-immune disease which damages joints throughout the body. While Mary's relative success at managing the disease for almost 50 years was a blessing, her life involved chronic pain, deterioration of bones and joints, susceptibility to infections and other challenges. The Chicago winters were particularly difficult, and Mary discovered that the climate and thermal waters in the Mexican town of Ixtapan de la Sal provided relief and she became an annual visitor to the Hotel Ixtapan. She reconnected with old friends from her student days in Mexico City and made wonderful new friends. Eventually, Mary built a small house in Ixtapan and Raymond and Mary spent the winter there in later years.

As the older children left home to attend college and the younger children

became more independent, Mary found ways to re-direct some of her energy. She began attending classes on a part-time basis and discovered an Art History class taught by Suzanne Epstein, often in her own home. Suzanne and the group of more than a dozen loyal students or “art ladies” became good friends and met regularly for lectures that eventually encompassed the History of Civilization and went on road trips to visit museums, galleries and special exhibits all over the country. Mary also obtained a second graduate degree in Latin American Studies from the University of Chicago attracted by its all-star faculty. Once again, she conducted original research, this time in Cuba, even before the US blockade and travel restrictions had been lifted completely.

Throughout her life, Mary was a voracious reader with interests that ranged from Urban Studies to European and Latin American History, from children’s education to social justice and environmental protection, from theology to policies pertaining to immigration and refugees. She was very social and loved nothing more than having “a good visit” with friends and family members or a “good discussion” about an intellectual issue or a personal problem. In the end, Mary tried to convey values to her children and grandchildren through her example. She extended hospitality to friends and relatives, and made the family a source of fun, nurture and support. She loved to travel and explored Europe, Mexico, South America, Japan, China and the Holy Land. In later years, Mary grew close to each of her children’s spouses and celebrated her many grandchildren’s baptisms, birthdays and graduations. Mary and Raymond hosted holiday celebrations at their country house for as many children and grandchildren as could make it. Whenever possible, Mary would gather her family at the table and encourage each grandchild to describe the events of their lives and took the opportunity to instill her values of faith, work, kindness and service in a new generation.

Memorial visitation and a Funeral Mass will be held at St. Gertrude’s Church (1420 West Granville Ave., Chicago, IL) on Saturday, May 20, 2023, with

visitation 9:30 am-11:00 am and the Funeral Mass at 11:00 am, to be followed by a reception at Palm Court in Mundelein Center on the Loyola University Lake Shore Campus (1020 W. Sheridan Rd., Chicago IL) 12:30 pm-3:00 pm. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, donations to National Immigrant Justice Center (<https://immigrantjustice.org>) are appreciated.

# Previous Events

## Memorial Visitation in Church

MAY 20. 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

St Gertrude Catholic Church  
1420 W Granville Ave  
Chicago, IL 60660  
(773) 764-3621

## Memorial Mass

MAY 20. 11:00 AM (CT)

St Gertrude Catholic Church  
1420 W Granville Ave  
Chicago, IL 60660  
(773) 764-3621

# Tribute Wall



“ *Mary Simon*

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October 08, 2023 at 11:31 AM



“ *To all of Mary's Family, Friends and Community,s , Mary was and is still now from another place Universe-Heaven a Ray of Light - Multiple Rays of Light . Meeting and knowing Mary through out the years ( Lol in my case probably Divine Intervention ) Mary's conversation s on Theology, political and social issues, personal issues and problems, and just plain common sense remarks, humor, and Justice ( all of these discussed and presented in a Loving and Christian manner, always ! ) will always be remembered by me and Greatly Greatly Valued, Robert Parrish*

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**Robert Parrish** - May 20, 2023 at 10:23 AM