

Memories and lessons from Mary Corey

Before I came to the Catholic Review and worked under the immensely insightful direction of the late writer and editor Christopher Gaul, I had another mentor.

Baltimore Sun editor Mary Corey spoke on a career panel at what is now Notre Dame of Maryland University. I was a senior, and it was her alma mater. Afterward, I scheduled a day to shadow Mary in her job as features editor for the Baltimore Sun. Impressed with her and my experience there, I took to writing letters and making phone calls to try and secure an internship at the newspaper. Much to my delight – after numerous phone calls – I was finally granted permission to work with Mary. I was 22 at the time, and she was 36.

I can still picture my work area on the fifth floor, where I was stationed near food editor Suzanne Loudermilk, the copyeditors and sports reporters.

For me, it was an internship dream come true. Under Mary's watchful eye, I had the opportunity to craft stories on topics ranging from a twist on traditional prom attire to Maryland wineries to landscape architecture.



Her voice may have been soft spoken, but Mary's message was strong. She expected the best out of me and pored over my copy line by line, asking questions and making suggestions.

Occasionally I would write articles for the food section, and Suzanne was the same way. I'll never forget that after interviewing Kevin Atticks, a journalism teacher at Loyola University who had recently written "Discovering Maryland Wineries," they both had the same question.

I had written that Atticks adjusted his glasses. "What type of glasses were they?" they wanted to know. I paused to think and recalled, "They were wire-rimmed glasses." Then one of them asked, "silver, gold, brown?" I remember feeling as though I had let them down when I didn't know the answer, but it was an invaluable teaching moment for me. Pay attention to detail.

About a year later, I did a freelance piece for the Sun on a local candy maker. In addition to the sights and smells of the shop, I of course noted the owner's blue eyes and gray wire-rimmed glasses.

One of the more interesting articles Mary had me do was to track down the origins of the popular Baz Luhrmann song, "Wear Sunscreen." (Did I mention this was 1999?)

Turns out, it was a mock graduation speech written by Chicago Tribune columnist Mary Schmich, that just happened to become one the most requested songs on alternative radio stations.

At Mary's suggestion, I compared the words to the lyrics of "Desiderata."

At the end of the article, I wrote "Desiderata advises: 'If you compare yourself to others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.'

Or, as Schmich counsels, 'Don't waste your time on jealousy. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind. The race is long, and in the end, it's only with yourself.' "

I was stunned when I read that Mary died Feb. 26, at the age of 49, following a battle with breast cancer.

Comments I read about her on Twitter and following a Baltimore Sun article included, "Mary was a class act all the way," and "What a loss of a shining star."

After my internship was complete, Mary forged ahead in her career, becoming the first woman to lead the Sun's newsroom.

For Mary, the race was great indeed.