

Celebrating the Life of Elizabeth Thoman, CHM

Media Literacy Pioneer, Education Advocate

Memorial Gathering: Complete Audio Transcript

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2-4 PM

St. Augustine Parish Hall, 3850 Jasmine Avenue, Culver City, CA 90230

Co-Hosts:

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Michael Danielson, Seattle Preparatory School

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

Michael Danielson (MD): Sisters, would you like to come back up and be our first speaker. You can see we got a lineup of speakers. Sr. Johanna Rickl, CHM, and Sr. Lynn Mousel, CHM, with the Sisters of Humility of Mary, will be our first speakers, and thank you so much for traveling all the way from Iowa, right?

Joanna Rickl, CHM: I came from Iowa and Lyn from Montana. Well, it's certainly a joy to be among so many friends of Sister Elizabeth Thoman. Like some of you perhaps, the Sisters of the Humility of Mary are still trying to grasp the reality of Liz's physical absence among us, but we are aware of her spirit and what scripture calls the Cloud of Witnesses and many Catholics refer to as the Communion of Saints. We believe that after our earthly existence, we continue the relationships with our love ones in a new way. Sometimes we are reminded of the person and in other times, we experience the person's presence and support in a different way. I feel very confident that Liz is very present here today, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to join this circle of friends in remembrance and celebration of her life and work.

Now, all of us who knew Liz probably have our own examples of proof that she was a woman of vision and determination to bring about that vision into fruition. At the vigil service that our community had at the time of Liz's funeral, her sister, Patty, shared with us that Liz was very much a Thoman, but there was something different about her. Patty said that Liz had a vision that the family

could not help her realize and she said that's what Liz found in our community, her second family, basically the space and support to continue following that vision, increasing the passion for it, and finding the ways to live out that vision.

Well, Patty's observation was news to me and perhaps many of our community; but after a time of reflection, it really resonated to me as being quite true, I can see the validity of it, and that's where I think all of you enter into the picture as well because you too offered support and space, challenge and creativity, commitment and correctives to help Liz become who she was meant to be and to help her do what she was called to do, not only by the needs of society, but also by the God who loved her and called her to a particular vocation and mission. I'm so grateful that Renee Hobbs was with Liz during the week that she was in the hospital shortly before her death and many of you provided support, prayers, cards, and offered some encouragement.

Two of her brothers drove from Tennessee and spent some days with her until the morning of her death. That evening, several of our sisters were with Liz and prayed the rosary together. About five minutes later, Liz danced over the edge of the world and crossed over into her forever home, so thanks to all of you for walking with Liz and sharing that wonderful journey.

Lynne Mousel, CHM:

I just wanted to share a bit about how grateful I am to have the opportunity to work with Liz on the membership development team, which had to do with developing new programs and documents related to potentially welcoming new members into our community. I was able to experience her passion and creativity around that, and was so grateful for that. Before she had moved back to Iowa, I was able to come out here to Los Angeles and we made a video where in the video, I explained a little bit about the process of becoming a sister and she was just so encouraging throughout that process.

We rehearsed and went over that. I have a wonderful memory of that and how she mentored me through that. Then when we were together on the team and we're creating documents, and programs, and things, she would call me up sometimes and just want to go over things. Sometimes I would be tired, it had been a long day, I would have a message to give her a call and to go over something. She just had such passionate energy. When I did give her a call, there was something about it where it was still just a real pleasure to do that with her and somehow the energy was just infectious. I

was just blessed and enriched to know her as we all were. Thank you.

MD:

Thank you. Speaking of phone calls, I remember some of the messages she would leave on my answering machine, Liz would just leave a whole ton of information on the answering machine. It's like she got so passionate. It's like she couldn't reach me, but she'd leave that message and I'd go to listen to every bit of it, every part of it and take notes, the passion came through even over the telephone. Next, we have Professor of Communication Studies University of Rhode Island, founder and director of the Media Education Lab, truly an inspiration for me and I know a lot of you, Renee Hobbs.

Renee Hobbs:

Thank you Tessa, thank you Sister Rose, and thank you all of you for coming to this opportunity to engage in collaborative remembering because we each knew Liz in our own different ways and as we share stories, we'll see some of the overlap of her tenacity and her courage. I think what brings us all here today is her vision that every kid, and every parent, and everybody around the world needed to be a media literate. She had that vision. It was a really crisp, clear vision. It was really easy for us to embrace it because it made so much sense.

I can feel like I could talk for three, four, five, seven, ten hours and so I'm going to try to keep it to five minutes. I want to share with you three moments that were especially tender to me in my remembering of my long relationship with Liz Thoman. But of course, you know there was a time... it seemed so long ago, I can barely remember it; but there was a time I didn't know Liz, but I knew of her because even in the Borders Bookstore in Ann Arbor, Michigan, there were Media&Values Magazines. I remember once walking into that bookstore with one of my professors, and pointing it out, and saying, "Look at this, it's a magazine that's targeting a lay leadership with ideas about how to think critically about media, isn't that cool," and my professor said, "Um-um, not scholarly. Doesn't count for anything. Ignore it." That helped me understand the world of academe that I was entering and so it was several years later after I had not been able to write a dissertation about media literacy because there was no scholarly work on the topic. Right.

After some years that I got a chance to meet Liz for the first real time and that was at the Aspen Institute, the National Leadership Conference sponsored by Charlie Firestone at the Aspen Institute, and truthfully, I didn't know what to expect. Liz was so tall, so slim, so beautiful, so regal, and she wore that beautiful bright blue. The

blue that you are wearing (points to audience member) is Liz's blue, so thank you for wearing that blue; that's the blue Liz wore. At the Aspen Institute was when I first got a chance to see Liz thinking on her feet, and she was so brilliant, and she was so effective at getting complicated ideas into a concise, journalistically, friendly, understandable, crisp way that I was just in awe because what would take us academics, several paragraphs to find the idea, she could deliver in a soundbite. I remember just being amazed at that talent, her talent as a professional communicator.

Only a year or two later, I had another very dear and very fond experience with Liz that will always be so close in my heart... Because she had taken a vow of poverty, it was our practice to share a hotel room. When we went to the many media literacy conferences back in the early 90s, there were five, or six, or seven a year as it was growing in momentum, and so I have the fondest memories of one experience in Boone, North Carolina, racing up and down on a bus through the mountains of Appalachia, really feeling quite fearful that we're going to lose our life as this bus driver just was driving in ways we couldn't even imagine. He was going way too fast down those mountains. During that bus ride, Liz opened herself to me. She shared about going to high school. She talked about her decision to make her vow. She shared her vulnerability and her anxieties and through that whole conversation it was made obvious to me how strong she was in the face of all those doubts and insecurities that are just part of being alive, and that's when I fell in love with her.

I admired her first, but then I fell in love with her because she was so lovable. Her decision to let me in was a great gift and I treasure it. The third story that I want to share with you is the Los Angeles story because Liz's generosity was incredibly influential in my life. In 1998, I was teaching undergraduates at Babson College and Liz had started the Felton Media Literacy Scholars Program. Is there anybody here in the room who is a Felton scholar? We are so proud of you. I was so envious of Liz. I was green all the time because she had this amazing; talented... you guys were at the time mid-career professionals, right? Bright heads, and just incredibly ambitious and smart, and so in visiting with you and seeing how cool your club was, and how smart you were together, and how insightful that the energy was in the room, I said to Liz, "Wow, Liz, I sure wish I had a Felton Scholars Program," and low and behold, Liz said, "Oh, yeah. We need a Boston version," and she made it so.

She introduced me to Norman Felton. She said, "We need an East coast version," and that was really my first experience working with

graduate students. You are graduate students per se, but adults and that program became a huge and important part of my life. Finally in just my last moment, I do want to share a little bit about the grace and the beauty of Liz's final days when she were just as beautiful as all the rest of her life. What I specially observed about Liz in those last days was her grace and her ability to be present to the moment. She was a community builder all through her life and even in those last days, in the ICU and in the hospital, she behaved in such a way that the nurses, and the tech, and the neurologist, and everybody who came in to the room fell under the spell of the community she created because she knew how to bring people together around a shared vision.

I'm so grateful to Liz's teaching me about the power of community, and the power of vulnerability, and the power of having a vision. Those are insights that are so meaningful and I will always remember her for that. Thank you.

MD:

Thank you so much, Renee. I know how much your friendship meant to her, she spoke of you often and dearly, and I know in those final days even though a lot of us couldn't be there, that your friendship was there in our place, so thanks for that.

Next, from the journalism faculty, California State University-Northridge, and Syracuse University Newhouse School, we've got Bobbie Eisenstock to tell her stories.

Bobbie Eisenstock:

Passionate and compassionate. Committed and dedicated. A lifelong learner and educator. That's Liz. I met Liz when we were graduate students at the Annenberg School for Communications at USC in the mid-1970s.

Liz and I were perhaps the unlikeliest of friends. Different in so many ways, we quickly became friends and close colleagues brought together by two commonalities: Catholic education and media literacy.

I am not Catholic but I was taught by Mercy nuns. I graduated from a Catholic girls' high school in West Hartford, Ct where I was the editor of the newspaper and became actively involved in civic projects. Liz found that intriguing and that bonded us in a certain way.

When Liz and I met at Annenberg, we immediately realized our common interest in studying media's role in young people's lives and that, independent of each other, we were on the same media literacy path. We both had an instinct about the need for children

and adolescents to be media literate as well as print literate. At that time, the field of media literacy was beginning to emerge in the United States. The Singers, Dorothy at Fairfield University and her husband Jerome at Yale, were at the forefront, along with Aimee Dorr at Harvard who was in the process of joining the faculty at Annenberg just in time to chair my PhD thesis committee.

Our graduate education was a unique experience. Liz and I were part of the first Master's and PhD classes. Since Annenberg was in the process of becoming accredited, the Dean invited distinguished scholars to be visiting faculty for a semester or year-long appointment. We were taught media theory by the theorists themselves:

- Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler taught us their uses and a communications approach to understanding media's effects;
- George Gerbner demonstrated how TV violence can cultivate real world violence and his new – at that time - Cultural Indicators' Project;
- Ev Rogers taught us the history of diffusion of innovations and applications to the emerging field of communication technology;
- Ed Palmer from the Children's Television Workshop explained the principles for developing educational programming;
- Wilson Bryan Key discussed his subliminal seduction thesis and had us holding print ads up to the light to find the word S-E-X spelled out and other subliminal messages.

And there were many more, as well as Rand Corporation researchers predicting how future technology and the emerging communications revolution would change society. It was an exhilarating time!

The faculty also provided opportunities for whatever we wanted to pursue. Liz developed the magazine *Media & Values* as a class project. And the Center for Media Literacy grew out of her vision for the role media literacy could play in education.

Liz lived in an apartment on South Shenandoah Street in West Los Angeles. It was a "garden-style" apartment building with a gated entrance into a tree-lined open atrium. Her apartment was on the far side. That's where she wrote, published, and distributed the early years of *Media & Values*. Depending on your expertise, she would invite you into her living room to brainstorm ideas for upcoming issues.

Ultimately, what started as a class project turned into a significant media literacy venture that outgrew her small apartment. She rented another apartment in the same complex. When she

outgrew that space, she moved to an office building in mid-Wilshire with an actual conference room and then to a location in Santa Monica on Ocean Park.

Liz was a community bridge-builder. She organized local media literacy conferences and had the foresight to organize the first national Media Literacy Conference at UCLA, which was a success beyond her expectations. Everyone involved in media literacy - or who wanted to be involved - was there. It was inspiring and empowering. Then there was AMLA, establishing a national media literacy association.

Our shared passion for media literacy drove our relationship. One of my students became her intern. She and I developed a course for University Extension. We both were facilitating media literacy workshops for teachers and students, so we often referred one another or stepped in if one of us had a conflict.

Any time Liz called for something, it was hard to say no. When she asked me to be a founding member of AMLA, I couldn't because of family obligations. She understood. Then one day I got a different kind of call from Liz. She said we needed to meet for lunch. She and I did not meet *to lunch*. We always met *to work*. That's when she told me she was too ill and Tessa was stepping in.

Liz' life was filled with Aha! Moments. She knew the right questions to ask. And the answers were based on evidence.

We are living in a time when asking the right questions is more critical than ever to shed light on misinformation and fake news and move us beyond post truths. Liz' relentless drive and dedication to spreading media literacy inspired us then and her legacy inspires us now. She will truly be missed.

MD: Thank you. Howard Rosenberg was not able to join us today; but Frank Dawson is here, associate dean career and technical education at Santa Monica College. Thanks for joining us today. Give him a hand.

Frank Dawson: There's so much to say as far as Elizabeth's concerned. I first met Elizabeth Thoman in 1995; I was on a panel with Stanford University. I've been working in the television industry for a number of years at CBS and Universal as a development executive and production executive. I found myself getting in trouble a lot of times because I questioned the images that we were putting on the air. I was told in the industry that I was too serious. However, I have recognized for a long time how serious television, and the power of television, and the images on television were concerning.

When I was in college, I became a student activist and one of the activities I became involved in was the takeover of the Student Union Building. When we occupied the building, the building that housed the student radio station, the first thing we did was we got on the radio just like you do in a coup d'etat, and you kind of like

explain this is who we are and this is what our demands are, and that went on for a good half-an-hour until they switched the transmitter, and went to a remote transmitter, and we no longer had voice of our own, we could only speak through third parties. Second thing that happened is, this incident became a national story.

Once it became a national story, it was on the news media, and I had to call my mother to let her know that I was okay because there's a lot of information that went out that was kind of erroneous. I said to my mother, "Mom, everything's all right." My mother was crying, and she was saying, "Oh, what're you doing, what're you doing? We sacrificed getting you into college and you're throwing it all away," and yet that's not what's happening. I said, "No, mom," and my mother did not believe me. I said, "How could you not believe me?" My mother always believed me and she said, "Because I heard it on the television." I said, "Wow, my mother believes someone she does not know just because it's on the television set instead of her own son." I was a government major at that time.

When the incident was all over, I changed my major. I became a communications major and that became my passion. I said, "If this is an industry that's so powerful, the idea of controlling information and images, that's what I need to be, that's what I need to do. And that was a decision as far as the rest of my life is concerned." I ended up moving to California, worked in television. Again, because I understood how the powerful the images are, I got into a lot of trouble in television with the people that I worked with. I was on this panel at Stanford and it was a panel on the impact of televising advertising on children.

After my presentation, I was approached by this tall, slender woman. I was very afrocentric at that time. She introduced herself. She said, "My name is Elizabeth Thoman. I'm the director of the Center for Media and Literacy. We're based in Los Angeles, and I'd love you to stop by and visit with us because a lot of the things that you had to say were based in media literacy. Do you know that term?" I said, "I've never heard of it before." Liz invited me to the Center. I came and met with her, and I became an advocate of media literacy. In terms of where I was in my life, it was such an important time in my life because I was very frustrated. I had all this passion for this industry which didn't accept my views. They thought I was too serious about it. The time that I connected with Liz, it just brought it all together.

Here was an avenue for me to continue with my own beliefs and things that I wanted to push forward, and it was rooted in something that was very, very important, and Liz taught me all of that. In a short period of time, I became a member of the board of the Center for Media Literacy. I got a chance to meet Renee Hobbs. As I transitioned into education at Crenshaw High School, I was able to bring a number of, I think six teachers, to a workshop at Santa Monica College which changed their lives as well. I am still in contact with those teachers and they talk about that. As I said, it was just a very, very important moment in my life. I had so much admiration for Liz in what she taught me and how I've been able to apply it throughout my life.

Also, I remember when we had to shut the Center; we would it close it down as a board, and for all that Liz had invested and all she had put into it, I was just so amazed at the strength she exhibited in terms of that moment in which so many things that she had worked on her life, what she built and she had put together, and the fact that it had to be shut. But the way she dealt with that was really empowering to me in terms of understanding. She made sure that someone good was in place, Tessa, and that there was an organization to pass along the materials and a lot of the teachings and a lot of things that she had created, so it would not go to waste.

I'm just forever grateful for having gotten to know Liz, to spend time with her at that apartment on Shenandoah, and all that I've learned in media literacy and how much that is continuing to impact myself, and my students, and all the faculty at Santa Monica College where we developed a course and a program in media literacy called "Reading Media: Developing basic media literacy skills." Thank you very much for your time.

MD:

Next, we've got Michael Robb Grieco, Director of Curriculum and Technology Integration at the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union, and a media literacy historian. Welcome, Michael.

Michael Robb Grieco:

I am, I would say, third generation from Liz in media and literacy, and your grandchildren will write your history. I wanted to give a little bit of my arch and how I connect to a few of the things that have already been said. I came to media literacy because I had a very wonderful advisor mentor... from my teaching internship, I was studying to be an English teacher and my mentor saw that in everything I was doing, I was making music and video, stuff that I've done up to that point independently and just incorporating it naturally into everything that I was doing and she said, "Hey, there's this new English program at Concord High School," public high

school in New Hampshire, where we were, “That has junior English as media literacy theme,” and I’m like, “What is that?” It happened to be the first required full-year English course that was media literacy themed.

I got there and they handed me material. I’m like, “Okay. I do media stuff,” that’s how I got my foot in the door with them and how they got excited about having me there. I said, “What’s the curriculum,” and pretty much most of the stuff that I got I was from the Center for Media Literacy. Liz’s name wasn’t on it, but I later found out that’s who it was. Her influence shaped my practice at the very beginning. Then I later found out more because this woman showed up in the back of the classroom to observe me in my first year of teaching. I’m like, “Why does a researcher want to observe me in the first year of my teaching,” but it was because she had consulted on creating that program, as she had done with hundreds of schools around Massachusetts and New England, and Renee Hobbs was sitting in the back of my classroom, and I didn’t know her at the time and I was just doing my thing.

Years later, when other schools that I’ve moved into were asking me to teach their veteran teachers how to do this media literacy that I’d only done from my version, and Liz’s materials, and Renee’s framework, and my colleagues, and I was like, “I think I need to know more about this.” I called Renee and that’s where our relationship blossomed. Then I became a graduate student at Temple and got my PhD with Renee as my advisor. I ended up doing my dissertation on the history of media literacy, because of some other work that we had done with the Holocaust Museum.

At this point in 2008 or something like that or nine, it was really difficult because there were so many different strands doing great work, but there was very little common understanding and overlap between the way things were done, and the absence of history really made me feel that that was a place where we needed to do some work so that we would at least have those stories to read across.

I found that the place that I could tell a story of our history was through Media & Values Magazine which ran from ’77 to ’93, specifically, because of what was already said. Liz was an amazing curator and translator of ideas, and there was research in that magazine itself which wasn’t scholarly enough yet. There were translations of her work. There were translations of Michael **[0:35:20 inaudible]** work that they did and sometimes the editors and there was... that appeared alongside conversations with media

industry professionals, alongside educators, activist, media reformers. All [0:35:35 inaudible] are all in the same magazine because she believed all those voices needed to be part of what media literacy became, not just this is what we need to do to democratize media for media experience or the people, for children, for parents, but also that media industry people need to understand what those needs are and they need to understand what the media industry's choices are being, the context of that's being made in.

All of those things were part of what she tried to design into that magazine. It became a really rich place that she changed way over time to tell those stories and to find what those ideas were that became what later became a field, right. That was really an exciting thing to be a part of, but my personal relationship with Liz really only came much later. Sister Mousel, you mentioned about getting the call, and the tenacity, and the voice being a little bit too tired to take that on-and-off -- that happened to me a lot over this process with the research where and when when we were getting Liz's archives.

When I said a great curator, Liz sent 72 boxes of things that were perfectly organized in terms of theme in giant boxes and stuff that came from LA. They are now, going to Temple University to be in the archives there. But I would get these very directed calls and it flashed me back to the first time I met her at AMLA in 2007, when she had that... flashed me back to... well, I kept this close to the vest with her; but I had a Catholic school upbringing as well and it flashed me to the nuns who were my teachers who had that amazing capacity to be so kind and listening too exact... so, "Oh, you're a student of Renee? What's your work? How did you get into this," and this like amazing first time, and then turn, and have that voice of, "You're going to do this, and this, and this, and..." because she had sussed out what I cared about, it was an obligation that suddenly I felt in my bones and I was like, "Wow, all of the good Catholic educators that I had coming up had that same thing," so I never told her that I had that upbringing until later on.

But when I really got a chance to turn that corner from being shaped as third generation to falling in love with who Liz was, was when I got to do some on the extended interviews, and sit down and talk to her for that research, and I want to end with sharing one piece of that. For me, that all happens with somebody I admire. It usually happens when they make me laugh or we laugh together and turn it into a conversation, and that happened when I asked the question to her which I was obligated to ask, I said, you probably heard this one before and have the answer, "What were the values of Media

&Values?” and she said, “Yeah. We had to answer that pretty much everytime I spoke anywhere.” I said, “Okay. Here’s your chance to do it for the historical research piece,” and she said, “Okay.”

Well, the values were really human values and she went on to list a bunch of our pillar American democratic values and she actually made reference to the Constitution, and I’m sitting there going, “Hmm.” She said freedom of expression, equal opportunities, freedom from oppression and prejudice based on pre-gender, race, sexuality, all of the things that we would think of as sort of underlying our democratic society and I said, “Yeah.” So I asked her, the first five, eight, ten years, maybe in Media&Values, you’re speaking primarily to religious audience like Catholic religion in the beginning, and then ecumenical across different Christian and non-Christian religions, so why this broad American... why weren’t you saying stuff about the golden rule or making some religious references during this, and she said, “Well, yeah, that was our audience and sometimes those references would be there; but I just felt like it was much broader.” I was like, “Even when that wasn’t the target audience, who your target audience was?” “Yeah, that, and everybody else in the world,” and she started cracking up like that that, from the very beginning, it was the work, right, that she wanted to bring media literacy to.

She was listening, employing ideas from all over the world, and that ambition is something that... and belief was something that stuck with me, and then I think is really beautiful and important.

MD:

All right. Thank you so much. Three things; number one, we’re going to take a quick break. Number two; I want you to try to find a pen or a pencil that you can write down a few comments. Number three, I want you to introduce yourself to somebody and find out where they came from. Stand up, stretch, break. Three minutes. All right. Our next speaker is on the education department faculty at University of California Los Angeles, UCLA, Jeff Share. Thanks for coming, and give him a hand please.

Jeff Share:

(Hands out paper) This is a piece of feminist money. This is something Liz gave me when we were rebuilding the Crash Course and we talked about money, the media, and the message that it communicated. She told me about this piece of money that she and some sisters put together. One side of it, it says, “To encourage the church to celebrate the gifts and calls of women equally with those of men in all ministries, I am withholding...” (and there’s a little blank spot to write how much money) “from this collection. I contributed it to Women’s Ordination Conference.” She told me

what she used to do. When she'd go to a sermon on Sunday and the priest would give a sermon that she felt very sexist, she would pull out one of these, write down \$5-\$10, and when the collection came around, she would drop that in the plate and at the end, she said she'd go right up to the priest, shake his hand, look right in the eye, and say, "I left you something in the tray." I love it.

To me, this is media literacy with the Freire approach of action, the idea of looking at social justice and doing something using media, looking critically at media, and creating alternative media. I want to mention another story here. One day, we were doing the crash course somewhere at a conference and before the conference started and we both have wireless mics on us. During the break, she forgot that she had to go to the bathroom and the whole time, everybody in there was listening to the conversations Liz was having in the restroom, just one of those funny moments.

I first met Liz Thoman at her home in Shenandoah Street when I took her Crash Course in media literacy about 30 years ago that was the beginning of a journey that has taken me into a deep exploration in the field of media education and the power of critical thinking. I've come here to remember and honor Liz, and the work she did that has influenced my life and the lives of many others. Her beliefs in social justice and critical thinking were the cornerstones of who she was, what she did.

As we were together, Liz and I had many powerful discussions about the importance this work has for representing groups of people, for women, for the planet, and for everyone who lacks the power to have their voices heard and their stories told. I had not seen Liz since she moved to Iowa, and I don't know what she was thinking in those final days, especially when she saw her country shift; but I do know that she would not be happy with what's happening now. Today, we're living in the era where a former reality TV show host has become a president who blatantly lies and claims alternative facts, viciously attacks media and anyone who opposes him, and uses the highest office in the land to advertise his own business interest. If this isn't a desperate call for critical media literacy, I don't know what is. Now, more than ever, we are desperate for a media that is populist, that thinks critically, and is prepared to question everyone and everything especially those with the most power.

This is what Liz stood for: Human rights ... This is what Liz stood for: she supported liberation theology in the '80s when she saw the human rights abuses in Latin America. For decades, she worked non-stop to build a movement in the United States of media literacy that

could enter churches, schools and the public spirit. She understood very well that education is always political and that media literacy must address the issues of social justice. Liz might not be with us for this struggle to retake our democracy and build a caring and just society, but she is one of the giants whose shoulders we all stand on while we continue this work that she began decades ago.

MD:

Next up, Erin Reilly, President of the National Association of Media Literacy Education. Please give her a hand.

Erin Reilly:

Thank you for inviting me to participate. I actually remember the first time I heard Liz Thoman's name, was when I was getting a Leaders of Learning award for Cable in the Classroom. I didn't feel I came from media literacy, even though I would say I'm a third generation media literacy scholar, because I was doing work around media and girls. It was about gender equality. I've come from that angle. Everyone said, "Yeah, but you have animated characters and you're using social media. This is media literacy," and I was like, "Okay." And Frank Gallagher said, "You need to know about..." I think it was at AMLA at that time. I finally did (learn more) by actually working with Henry Jenkins and being the research director at New Media Literacies at MIT.

I always felt as I learned about the work that we were helping to build upon the rich history of media literacy that Liz was a part of, and many of you here in this room. But the moment I met Liz in person, after hearing about her and actually reading some of her work, was seven years ago when I moved here to Los Angeles and started my California journey, and it was actually the same time that I've been on the board of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. A way to start my American road trip was in a board meeting on the East coast and then driving here. Within a few weeks of my arriving, Liz invited me over for dinner and we came over. She really grilled me -- that was the first part of the dinner. She wanted to know what I was going to do as a board member NAMLE, if I knew financing, if I knew business modeling, and somehow, that lasted only 30 minutes. She turned around and said, "Okay, here's all these boxes, you need to take them with you." I was like, "Okay, I'll do that".

But the rest of the evening was amazing because we talked about media literacy through our art and it was right when she was starting to do photography with Healing Petals and she pulled out all of her photography. My background is in filmmaking, photography. We started talking about the importance of visual literacy and the meaning of an image. I was just so moved by how she was giving

these photographs to hospitals and to people, and putting them in places where people needed to be mindfully thinking through and having a sense of peace. It actually came back to me this week, personally thinking about these healing petals and the movement of imagery, because my dad just had a heart attack. We were in this hospital and there was a beautiful picture. I was like, "I wonder if that's Liz." I don't know if that's Liz's photo, since that's where I was going. I'm really honored to be here. Now, on behalf of NAMLE, we actually wanted to express our overall appreciation for all that Liz has done over the years to build NAMLE and media literacy in general.

Now, from the stories members have shared with me -- when we reached out to a lot of members and asked them to come together and share with us -- and from the times that I met Liz, she was an unbelievable detail-oriented person. I heard that over and over again. But it was also about her passion, her relentless attention to detail, her expectation of high standards (which I think I passed the test when she gave me all those boxes when we first met her), and commitment to media literacy which made NAMLE a much better organization. Now in 2003, NAMLE, which I think was AMLA board at that time, created the Meritorious Service Award which was to be given to individuals or projects that have significantly contributed to the growth and quality of the field of media literacy. This award is intended to honor those who have given many years of service, helping to build infrastructure or otherwise remaining mostly behind the scenes and often unacknowledged.

This year, we decided to rename the Meritorious Service Award in honor of Elizabeth Thoman, and it's now Elizabeth Thoman Service Award, and it will be awarded... I hope to see all of you in Chicago in June at the NAMLE Conference because we will award that service award in Elizabeth's name. Then, lastly, I just want to say our field is forever indebted to Liz for her commitment and dedication of the time when there weren't many people focused on media literacy education. I didn't even know about it and now, I actually say I'm a media literacy educator. We want more young people saying that, right, especially today? We'll always honor and remember Elizabeth Thoman. Thank you so much.

MD:

Can you imagine trying to fill the shoes of Sister Elizabeth Thoman? What a challenge. You know who has done an awesome job? She's smart in her working too, but she carries on the passion in such an amazing way. Please welcome Tessa Jolls, who's done fantastic job.

Tessa Jolls:

That is a great introduction. Thank you. But there is no filling Liz's shoes. There's just no way. She was just an incredible, powerful person and a real leader. I wanted to talk about leadership here because Liz is still exerting leadership. We're all here because of Liz and we're still feeling that power of her commitment and her mission. She was a totally mission-driven person. When I think about Liz as a leader, she had confidence. She had faith and I think that her faith certainly carried her through because so often, her work wasn't recognized. Just as Renee was saying, it wasn't even recognized as a serious field of study. Liz had total faith that media literacy was a field. It is also a movement globally. There are global efforts to institute media literacy throughout the world. There are also efforts to introduce media literacy as pedagogy.

Liz saw the potential in all of these arenas. She took them on her shoulders and then really tried to pass them on to us. I think that's really where her leadership came in because she recognized early on that this field needed people who can carry on the work, people who are dedicated to that mission, and she... we've heard about it here today. She recruited people. She tapped on your shoulder and she grilled you if you said you were interested, because she wanted to make sure -- are you committed, will you follow this in a quality way that is really about media literacy, will you follow through, will you put in the work, and nobody was a harder worker than Liz. When people here talked about getting those phone calls, I mean in my family, we still laugh about it because Liz was calling night and day. She knew that on Sunday nights, we had a family night where we watch movies - I have two kids - and Liz knew we would be there. Yes, she would call.

Again, here's Liz; just ever present, unrelenting, but also a quality that she had as a leader that I think is so important to know is her optimism. When she would call me a lot of times, there were discouraging moments as Frank alluded to. She would say, "What's the good news," or, "I have some good news." We really focused on the positive and what could be done, rather than wallowing in what couldn't be done, or how things weren't going well. She also had a phrase that I really love and she would always say, "We're hopeaholics." I think that captured a lot because we kept going no matter what and we really hanged on to that sense of optimism, and hope, and confidence, in the rightness of our cause and in the fact that in today's world, I don't think there's any denying that media literacy makes total sense in terms of what we need as a society, and how we can move forward, and have dialogue, and have some methodology how we discuss, and relate, and build bridges to each other.

I'm like of many you, I could go on and on to talk about Liz; but she certainly changed my life and I know the lives of many people here, and I know her influence will live on. I'm very grateful for all of you being here. I know that Liz would be totally grateful because this was her mission to make sure that we really have stayed in media literacy going forward. Thank you.

MD:

Raise your hand if you have a Facebook account, raise your hand. Raise your hand if you're friends with Sister Rose on Facebook. Oh my gosh! She posts so much interesting stuff. My friendship with Liz goes back almost as far as my friendship with Sister Rose. She has been such an amazing resource in media, and media studies, and her books and workshops, but also just her passion and her commitment. Sister Rose, thank you so much for being here. It's her turn to share. Give her a hand.

Sister Rose Pacatte, FSP:

Thank you, Michael. I can still remember when I first met you. It was at the Religious Ed Conference and I was giving a workshop on media literacy, and I guess I was being a little... I just come back after getting a master's **in media literacy at the Institute of Education** at the London School of Economics, and I guess I was being a little provocative. I can still remember Michael and his eyes, he came up and he'd asked all these questions. I don't remember what they were; but anyway, we have been friends ever since then, so that's great. Sister Johanna mentioned that this is a circle of friends. These are random thoughts by the way... You can have my complete reflection. It's already been at the National Catholic Reporter and the Global Sisters Report.

But Sister mentioned this is a circle of friends, and the reason that there is a circle here today is because of the pedagogy of media literacy education. We're all the same in front of our media experiences and there's no right or wrong about how we interpret what we watch or consume. When I was in England for the master's program, we always sat on the same level. The teachers sat at the table with us and we were all around a table, all 25 of us, and he emphasized that that in the whole year, he only stood up at a podium once and it was the class on ideology and the media because he said it was so important, we weren't even allowed to ask questions; but otherwise, we were all together.

All our opinions mattered, that was very important to him. In this circle, it's almost closed, we put this chair here for Liz, and we have a candle burning, and of course a sample of her artwork, she gave me this and it's been hanging in my bedroom ever since she gave it to me. I'm so glad that I had it for this occasion. Of course, we have

the beautiful flowers and her beautiful picture. What a beautiful woman and she kept that dignity of her womanhood. I think she loved being a woman and I love that about Liz. She was also very practical and because she was practical, we have something else here in honor of Liz. Michael, if you could migrate over here a little bit? We have a basket for your donations to help cover our expenses because Tessa from the Center and us, we dug into our resources to bring this together and so there's a basket and we know Liz would be very proud of that basket because she always was good at... putting out a hand there.

The thing is with Liz, you never got the idea that it was for any other motive, other than for the promotion of a mission of media literacy education in the world and she was so focused. Okay. Elizabeth Warren last week, she was shut down in Congress from reading the letter of Coretta Scott King and yet, Elizabeth Warren persisted. I think if you go through Liz's life, coming out here to California to seek a master's degree in a field she didn't even know existed, she persisted. She created the Center. She started the magazine Media & Values. She persisted. She got involved with the Aspen Institute, and then the National Media Education Conference, and AMLA, and then NAMLE, and she persisted. Then her health went and first, it was the cancer and then Parkinson's, and yet, nevertheless, she persisted. She persisted with grace and determination. I have to tell you that she changed the trajectory of my life within my religious community.

We're dedicated to spreading the word of God through the media, but we're also... we have a special article in our constitution that says we're supposed to be critical thinkers about media ourselves and then to teach it to others. Around 1990, it started eating at me. How do we do that? Then, I met Liz at a catholic communicators conference. She just sat... it was in Portland, Oregon and you still see her there, and she spoke about Media&Values, and I just was like, "Oh, my god. Superb. Oh, my god, this is exactly what I've been looking for." A year later, I heard her speak again in St. Louis and I said, "Where can I go to get a master's degree," and she said... she was in hurry and she brushed me off. She goes, "Contact John Pungente in Toronto. You know, I did and a day later, I had a fax of schools either in England or Australia, but that also tipped me off and has been confirmed over and over again, the generosity of the media literacy education community, of our willingness to help one another, to be there for each other, to Skype in classes.

I Skype to Loyola University in Baltimore, their curriculum class, ever quarter or every semester when they have the class and we Skype

them in when we have our media literacy training course here in Los Angeles. There's mutuality, and I think we're actually trying to live what media literacy means in our lives and that's the gift that Liz gave us. Just as a closing comment, I think, sisters, you need to know that Liz's legacy, and her presence, and her charisma is going to live on here and wherever we go, and whomever we touch. Never think that maybe your small presence here or there, you have a huge presence. Even if maybe some people don't know Liz's name, that doesn't matter. That will live on.

We thank your community. We thank you for letting Liz do this work all these years. I know maybe we were talking before about the community grasping exactly the extent of what Liz has been doing, and she said, "Well, maybe some did and maybe some didn't," but we're here to tell you that what she did was great, and wonderful, and filled with grace. Thank you. Thank you everybody.

MD: So nice. She persisted.

Michael: Do you see it's a hashtag? #shepersisted, wow. Thank you so much. I literally got chills just hearing that and thinking about her persistence through the years, through all of what she did, and now, it's on us; it is really on us. Nothing would bring her more joy than to see her passion continued in the work that we're doing, even if its conversations just about what did you think about how the news got covered, or how this event was covered, or my kids are 19 and 22 years old, and just to sit down with them and talk about politics, and news, and what's going on really bringing that first to a conversation, that's what she was so good at. Then, for educators, just taking advantage of the opportunity that we have to invite kids into a critical thinking conversation about the media, it's never been more important than today and we must persist in honor of her. Amen to that.

Audience: Amen.

MD: All right. We have some opportunity for a few people. Ira if you want come up ...

Ira Gorelick: I want to make this very brief. My name is Ira Gorelick, the guy who went to school with Elizabeth at USC. I was in that first class. The class she talks about with Richard Burn, I was in those classes with her and had discussions; but that's not what I want to say...Everyone's talking about the apartment that she lived in. My mother lived literally around the corner and after about ten years in LA, after I graduated, I left the State and one day I get a call from my mother that Elizabeth stopped by. Maybe after a couple months, I

get a call, "Elizabeth stopped by," and I'm just wondering... mind you all, I know that she's done all these great things, media literacy and all that; but for me, my wife, my daughter, she was our friend. The smile -- that was what was important to her. She brought that to my mother. She would come and spend some time with her, and my mother wasn't... she was sharp, and she would share the conversations we had with Elizabeth, and Elizabeth would share with me. I just want to say that, "Yes, she was this great woman; but she was my friend." She was a soul and I'll never forget that.

Fr. Anthony Scannell:

Because I had similar relationship with Liz. My name is Tony Scannell. I did not have a relationship with Liz on a scholarly level, media literacy level, like apparently many of you do. It was more on the friendship level. I've known Liz for about 45 years. When I first came to Los Angeles to Franciscan Communications, she was there. She was a photographer and a producer. I have to say that Liz changed my life in a couple of years. First of all, she changed it by calling me Tony for the first time. First we shared the values as religious as Franciscans. But I was teaching at a seminary in the wooded area of Northern Wisconsin for about 14 years, working in media, making films before I came up to California. I was known as Anthony and when Liz called me Tony, I didn't like it at first. I was a little stiff about it; but she kept calling me that and before long, everybody called me Tony, so hardly anybody knows my name is Anthony.

The other way she changed me was by making me aware of the sexist language in our church, especially in the liturgy. She made me so aware of that that I have stopped and always try not to use sexist language, especially when in celebrating the Eucharist, et cetera so she changed me in that way. We're working on a number of projects at Franciscan Communications, and after she left and established her own media literacy office, I would go there for Eucharist, for dinners, for meetings, and for parties. Elizabeth was a great party person, but especially as a friend. This is a story that's kind of typical of Liz. When she was working with us at Franciscan Communications, she and I attended a meeting of some advertising council in a hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Before we went into the presentation to this big hall, she and I were talking. I looked down. I said, "Liz there's a dollar bill at your foot." She picked it up and I said, "Liz, this is your lucky day. They're having a lottery in this advertising council; the winner is getting a free trip to Las Vegas, airfare and hotel included." She entered and she won. I think she traded in the airfare, and then three other sisters and myself went to Las Vegas for the week. I hope I'm not telling any secrets. Sorry.

I don't think anybody who ever met Liz for the first time could believe she was a nun and she was a member of a religious order; but if you got to know her, there was no doubt... I am just glad that over all these years, I can say that I had Liz Thoman for a friend. Thank you.

Elaine V. Scott:

Thank you. I was a Felton scholar. Unlike many circumstances you may find yourself in with Liz, I was not particularly popular with her. I knew that and there's only one person in this room who can verify that. He's sitting over there and he managed to get me here, my friend Clifford. I'm not telling you that because it's a negative thing. I'm telling you because she persisted until the very last moment to figure out why in the world I was included in that group and why in the world I was a part of that class.

It was on the night of our graduation that she came up to me and she goes, "Elaine, come inside," and I said, "Yes." She said, "I need to tell you that I'm really a bit apologetic that we really never hit it off very well during class," and I said, "Well, that's okay. I got a lot out of it anyway." She said, "Well, I know; but I don't leave things like that unfinished," she said. "I went into deep meditation and I went into prayer, and I said, 'Lord, what is she doing here?' I came out with a very profound realization that your job is like one of our great prophets before Christ and his name was John the Baptist, and his job was to go before as the messenger, and let everyone know who's coming and that things are going to be different, and that's just not much fun." Liz said, "I really now understand who you are and I hope that you continue to stay with me and continue to hold on that road," and I said, "Well, thank you. I think I will," and I did and we did stay on that road. Thank you.

Clifford Cohen:

Thanks Tessa. Thanks Sister Rose. My name's Clifford Cohen. When I came to Los Angeles in 1991, I came specifically to start a little program, a children's program that was rooted in animation, I'm working away in my little world. I'm bringing animation into the classroom and I'm integrating into the curriculum, and I got a call from the Center for Media Literacy and Liz is telling me, "You know you're doing media literacy?" I'm going, "I don't even know what media literacy is." I actually fought it because that's my personality, and I'll take my time to assess where I am in this world and whoever's telling me; but I'm sold, and I'm here, and how many years later.

It really is a strong community that this woman built. It's quite amazing. She paired me with Elaine. I am completely the opposite to Elaine in certain ways and Liz put me with Elaine. Actually, we found

our communication and we actually did some great work. Anyway, it's really good to be part of this community as big or little part as I am. Thanks very much. Thanks, Liz.

Pam Dawson:

Thank you. I'm Pam Dawson, and I had a completely different relationship with Liz because I worked for her at the Center for Media Literacy. I went in there knowing zero about media literacy, didn't know this at all. Frank Dawson is the one who suggested that I go for an interview because I had just become unemployed, and I said, "Sure. I'm an office manager. I do all this stuff. I can do this." I went in and she did interview me and hired me. It's interesting because, again, I knew nothing about media literacy; but because of her passion, because of her desire to spread that word, I found myself talking to people about media literacy. I had come from a school situation as an office manager, and I was still friends with several others teachers, and I went back to them and I said, "Have you heard about..." and introduce them to media literacy.

What I was saying just now is the fact that when she brought that into the world, it was just at the beginning of this internet and how important it is to this day that our kids that get the idea that everything has a message beyond the message. It's up to us as their parents, as their friends, as their mentors, as their whatever to make sure that they get it that just because they see it on TV, it is not true. Just because someone says it to you, it doesn't mean you have to take for what it is. Do that critical thinking. Learn from what your experiences are and take them out to the world. That's what I got from Liz.

Dain Olsen:

I'm a teacher at Los Angeles Unified School District. I've been teaching there for 25 years, teaching media, filmmaking, animation, and so forth. I became a leader of media arts education and helped to start the movement towards standards for media arts education. Early in my career, about 25 years ago, early '90s, I was teaching film in South LA and we had this inspiration about somehow involving some kind of critical thinking in teaching film to my students. I looked up, I guess it was on a telephone book at that time....It's hard to imagine looking in the telephone to find a connection and found the Center for Media Literacy. I thought I should go there and so I went. It was middle of the summer and there was Liz, and I just introduced myself and said I was interested in learning.

I spent a week there at the Center, hanging out, looking through books, reading the magazines, talking to Liz, listening in on who she was talking to and what she was saying, and just learned a lot right in that time, and I got a workshop from her as well, very brief in

media literacy and analyzing media. One of the things she did was, she would play a commercial. I'm sure you've seen this .where she played a commercial and she would turn of the sound, and then you would watch it again with just the sound, and then you'd watch them together, totally blew me away and totally revealed media in a totally new way that I could bring to my students.

I incorporated a lot of those methods in my classroom. Ever since then, at home, whenever the commercials are playing, we turn off the sound and instantly, those commercials are totally depowered. I learned a lot from that. Then in leading media arts education and establishing standards, literacy was a primary component of what we built into that as we established it. Since then, media arts education has become national. I led the writing team for national media arts standards with the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards. In 2014, those were established, and media literacies is explicit in the arts and strands within media arts education standards that are K12. Those standards have now been adopted by nine states and it looks like they're moving forward in about 10 more states.

In California, we're pushing these media arts standards. It looks like they're going to be included in California. I'm in touch with New York and they are developing their media arts standards as well. This is a national movement. This is K12. This is an arts subject area that tends to have a core status and is built in to the educational system, and it's gratifying to see great things for this developing and growing. This was Liz's inspiration I think, the inclusion of literacy, as well as Tessa and all of your efforts that we very much appreciate as educators in K12 schools. Thank you all and thank you to Liz.

MD:

I was thinking of sowing the seed, the seeds that she planted in all this fertile soil are growing, that's phenomenal

Roselyn Silver:

I'm Roselyn Silver and I was editor for Media&Values to Liz's executive editorship for 11 years. Working for Liz, who was very fair, considering she had to generate all the money herself, and even a generous employer, but we did have to watch boundaries. But I have wonderful opportunities working for her to go to conferences, to travel to Canada, New York on projects. But in addition to her skills as an editor, I feel that beyond everything, she was a wonderful bridge builder. Considering the divisions we have in our society now, maybe it needs to build bridges almost as much as it does anything else.

An example of this is when I was going on a family trip to Israel, my mother and I were stopping in Rome, and Liz said, "Oh, in Rome, you

have to see Father so and so.” I remember that he was doing something with theology in Rome and he had a media literacy background, but I can’t for the life of me remember his name. My Jewish secular mother had possibly never had met or at least had one conversation with a Catholic priest in her life; but we went to see him, and it turned out he was from Kansas where we were from, and a really a great guy and my mother had a wonderful time.

This is not to say that Liz didn’t have an ego. One little snippet is that I was privileged to go to a couple media communication conferences that were based in the liberal Protestant communications world in Florida. The first one particularly, we played Trivial Pursuits into the night; all of us attending the conference which was good for me because it was probably the only game I’ve ever been any good at. But if Liz didn’t know anything, she would tend to say, not just once but several times, “Oh, it must have happened when I was ...” Obviously, that was the only way that she would close that.

Beverly Feldman:

Hi. My name is Beverly Felman, and I work on the media construction site called Hollywood Set, so I’m usually on that side of the camera. In the mid-’90s, I was working on being a mother and getting my master’s degree. In the course of my master’s degree, I looked up media literacy, and I found Liz, and I went and talked to her, and she wanted me to do the Crash Course. I did that. Then she wanted me to do the Felton Scholars, but I was on the fence about it and I hadn’t made up my mind.

At that time, the head of the CW Network who was going to give a big speech the following day to all of the affiliates of all the CW-related stations around the country, station managers and their crews or whatever, and so I’m rehearsing him and he says... in his speech, he says, “You know...” because they were at war with WB. I think it was CW and WB. I can’t keep track of it. I don’t care. But he says, “You know, the WB is so lame that kids actually go back to doing their homework,” and I stopped and I said, “Mr. So and so, as a parent, I take offense to that,” and he said, “Really,” and I said, “Yeah, really. He said, “Should I think about saying that?” I said, “Yeah, I think you should.” He goes, “Okay, I’ll think about it. Okay.”

Cut to next morning, we’re doing the speech, we’re live, and he says... we get to that place, and he says, “The purpose of the CW Network is to stop children from doing their homework,” and the whole room stood up and gave him a three-minute standing ovation, and me in my seat, I was apoplectic. When it was over, in the car, I get on my phone and I called Liz, and I say, “Yes, I will take the Felton thing.” With meeting Liz, I would also end up serving

seven years on the board of the Center for Media Literacy. Thank you.

MD:

Another round of applause for all the speakers today and for everyone here. Media literacy now is a website that is listing all the different legislative processes that are going on in the country, so please go and check out what's going on with that. Of course, please the visit the Center for Media Literacy and the Pauline Media Center. Such amazing resources that we have!

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