

STORYTELLING: *FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION*

Throughout history, all generations have enjoyed both telling and hearing stories. It is how we share experience, understand each other, and create community. In this our 150th year of remembering and now moving forward, perhaps to new traditions, it seemed apt to call on some of those gifted with telling tales of hope and humor, to relate their favorite tales of Sisters of Charity.

THE ART OF STORYTELLING

The art of storytelling calls on the accumulated wisdom, beliefs, values, and experiences which the teller sees as enjoyable to be told and as important to those to whom tradition is to be passed. Most often storytelling is an oral tradition, though tradition also is passed along in print as women and men of wisdom seek to record important events -- sometimes only as factual as the teller can imagine. These may be stories of joy or of sadness, but always they weave words which call us to remember who we are.



Sister Mary Agnes Sharkey

Marie, a historian, provided us with a biography of Mother Xavier and the history of the College of Saint Elizabeth. Both scholarly and anecdotal, Sr. Blanche's works tell of the strong women who bridged all kinds of difficulties to bring together our Congregation and the College, now in its 111th year.

Sister Mary Agnes Sharkey and Sister Blanche Marie McEniry were two women who chose to write the stories so they would not be lost. Sr. Mary Agnes, from her memory of the early, exciting days of founding up to the late 1930's, brought together a mingling of facts and interrelationships, generation to generation, within three volumes telling the saga of foundings and expansions.

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OUR STORIES

With that as an introduction, several sisters from varied generations were asked to tell a favorite story of their interrelationships within the Sisters of Charity. Sprinkled with humor and remembrance, these are retold to joggle the memory of the reader, to invite you to add the images of time and place, to imagine the storyteller herself as well as those who walk in the event. And, as you read, keep in mind your stories that are remembered, for we are all a community of stories and storytellers, and our "journey makes us one."



When we were young and dangerous, Sr. Agnes Nyhan (R.I.P.) would stand on the steps of the swing in Nazareth Park and just take off in joy! Now there is no swing, the park is changed, but there are the memories! Can you visualize this: the tall, stately Sr. Agnes swinging with joy -- truly a memory for the young at heart!

Sister Helen Jean Everett



In 1960, two young Junior Professed Sisters at Assumption, Morristown, were lucky enough to be the covert recipients of a gallon of chocolate ice cream from a gracious parishioner. They hid the ice cream outside an upstairs windowsill and conspired to meet to enjoy it after the Superior went to bed. Alas, when they opened the window to get the ice cream, it fell to the ground. They sneaked out the front door and behind the hedges to retrieve it and were just digging in to their first bits of ice cream when they heard sirens and the police were at the door. One of the elder sisters had seen the two prowlers out front and had promptly called to have it investigated. The two sisters, Peggy Killough and Joyce Vincent, played dumb and today remain at large!

Sister Cheryl France

Storytelling is an interactive art, creating a relationship between teller and audience. The listener provides the imagination to recreate the story as it is told, while the teller often spontaneously adjusts tones, wording, and pace of a story to meet the needs of the audience. Storytelling is by its nature personal, interpretive and uniquely human. More than any other form of communication, the telling of stories is an integral and essential part of human experience. *www.storynet.org, National Storytelling Association, 1997*



Several years ago Sr. Mary Canavan and I were on our way home and heading to the Massachusetts Turnpike when we spotted a car at the side of the road. The two stragglers looked familiar and we debated whether or not to see if we knew them. You bet we did! Srs. Maeve McDermott and Maryanne Tracey were on their way to New Jersey when their car broke down. As they got into our car, both talking at once, we heard the story of their “tired” car. Maeve said to Maryanne, “Do you want to steer or hold the key?” The only way the car would move was if the key was held in the on position, so two people were needed to drive this relic!

Several miles down the Pike, Mary and I were told we had to stop in Waterbury to pick up Sr. Irene Mongrandi. True to Sister of Charity hospitality, the Waterbury sisters shared their supper with four unexpected guests, and five of us, packed into a subcompact car then proceeded, uneventfully, to New Jersey!

Sister Carol Hoban



The first night I spent at Saint Thomas Convent, Bloomfield, as a candidate (aka Postulant) was memorable. I went down to the basement to do a load of wash and discovered a flood! The sister who was “in charge” of me, Sr. Joseph Marian Hudson, came to my rescue and we spent the night in boots, mopping up. I never will forget my first experience of “real” community. I thank all the sisters at Saint Thomas Convent for providing me with many more “real” experiences after that which eventually helped me to discern my future with the Sisters of Charity.

Sister Patricia Mennor



‘Twas a very special day! September 14, 1975.” We were at the canonization Mass for Elizabeth Ann Seton, anticipating Sr. Hildegard Marie’s appearance as lector. When it came time to leave St. Peter’s Square after the Mass, we were hot and tired. Sr. Ellen Patricia and Sr. Mary Agnes moved quickly, and suddenly Sr. Miriam Thomas and I saw them at a sidewalk café motioning us to hurry. As we struggled to move in and around the small table for 2, Sr. Miriam’s cane hit the table vase, and water and flowers came pouring out! A waiter appeared, picked up the flowers and with a small bow presented them to Sr. Miriam. “For you, Madame!” Italian chivalry was alive and well in Rome in 1975!

Sister Agnes Gregory Craig

Our sisters enjoyed an evening of storytelling during the 150th anniversary kick-off weekend in September of 2009. (Pictured l to r) Sister Johanna Quinto, Sister Maureen Sullivan and (seated) Sister Roberta Rooney.



On a miserably hot, hazy and humid day in August 1976, Council members gathered in the Council Room at the request of Sr. Hildegard Marie, who was seeking approval of the transfer of a Sister from her congregation to the Sisters of Charity. Before we could get to the issue at hand, Sister Hildegard thought it advisable to review all pertinent sections of Canon Law for Religious on this topic for our learning and edification.

The lesson was long and I noticed Council members somewhat distracted, sleepy, edgy, and just plain hot! Sr. Hildegard continued at a pace remarkable, if not memorable, for former professors. An hour passed, and finally Sister Hildegard closed her remarks by asking if there were any questions or need for clarification. I promptly asked about an obscure section mentioned to me, at which time every Council member came alive with disbelief and dismay. I advised Sr. Hildegard that I was joking ... to no avail. We went over the point for another 20 minutes! Yes, the sister was accepted in our Congregation!

Sister Barbara Aires



One story I discovered about Mother Xavier’s wisdom while I was doing research is a treasure. It has to do with Mother Xavier’s relationship with the Morris and Essex Railroad Company. We all knew that the railroad asked for an easement through the front of our property so that the railroad could go straight to Dover from New York. I can’t remember details, but the outcome was an agreement between Mother Xavier and the Morris and Essex Railroad. As I read the account, I looked for the amount of money the railroad was willing to pay. But this did not matter to Mother Xavier. She had other ideas, more lasting than money. She agreed to the easement

A FINAL STORY



Lackawanna Station, Convent Station, NJ

through our property if the railroad would agree to put a station stop at the front of the property, and the railroad company created the stop in 1867 and later built a “new” station in 1876. Mother Xavier had a vision of the needs of the Academy and of building a College, and knew that the railroad stop would be a benefit to both. The railroad agreed. On hindsight, both parties made a good decision. Some things are more important than money!

Sister Ann Stango



Each Province had a final celebration, and Sr. Mary Jo Ward and I co-chaired the event for the Southern Province. Since we were all sad about the ending, it was not easy to motivate “creative participation” of a committee. I vividly remember Mary Jo ringing a large bell to bring some order to the group, only to have a Sister on the committee respond in Pavlov fashion with “Live, Jesus, forever in our hearts.”

In spite of the reluctance among the sisters on the committee to accept the reality that our beloved Southern Province would soon cease to exist, we finally chose a theme: The Journey Makes Us One, a phrase from the hymn “Jerusalem, My Destiny.” From then on the celebration came together. At the liturgy on the celebration day, as we came to the last phrase of the hymn, we all sang our hearts out, aware that “the journey [has made] us one!” All our planning was not for an ending, but for a beginning filled with hope. To this day, I continue to cherish the memory of working with, of being with wonderful women.

Sister Thomas Mary Salerno



The young man (pictured holding the microphone) survived the Copapayo Massacre and gave his testimonial to the tribunal.

When I started to write this article, I was in El Salvador visiting Sr. Peggy O’Neill. Across the Centro Arte para La Paz courtyard, a young man, speaking to a large gathering in a tribunal format, was telling the story of the 1983 massacre and its aftermath in his zone during the war in the ‘80’s. He was nine when the massacre occurred, and Sr. Peggy O’Neill, having shared many of his experiences in

the Copapayo region, was present to offer him support and encouragement. In the midst of his testimony, a member of the tribunal asked if anyone came to their assistance during these times. “Si,” he replied, “las Hermanas de Caridad y Hermana Peggy de Caridad.”

This was a difficult story in the form of testimony. It enabled a retelling as a sacred experience of an event, written in sorrow but lived in the hope of the *comunidad* of continuing relationships of those who now people that region – and Hermana Peggy. Through his testimony we once again recall that wherever a Sister of Charity is, so are we all. The gift of storytelling carries that forward from *generation to generation*.

SISTER BARBARA GARLAND