

Sister M. Gabrielle Hagerty, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, July 19, 2016

Sister Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

Gabrielle entered the community in 1942. I had the opportunity to interview her for the history of our community from 1942 to 1972. I interviewed her along with other members of her set. I would like to share this interview with you.

The 27 young women who traveled to Mount Carmel on Sept. 8, 1942, carried with them ration books for sugar and meat which were required even for those entering the convent. They had learned to bring their ration stamps wherever they went because the austerities caused by World War II followed those of the Great Depression. The hardships they had endured during their youth had caused them to mature beyond their years. As children they knew what it was to lose their homes and move into small quarters, sometimes sharing these with relatives. They knew that corn could be burned instead of coal for heat to save money. Their relatives were experts at altering hand-me-down clothing for them to wear. One member of the "Set of 1942" had witnessed her father traveling miles by horse and wagon to sell oats for eleven cents a bushel. They never forgot the shock their parents suffered when banks closed and they learned their life savings were gone.

Even before ration books were issued, they had suffered scarcity as young girls. The pangs of lonesomeness they experienced, as their families traveled from place to place while their fathers searched for better jobs, gave way to the ache of watching brothers go off to war, some never to return. Yet they rejoiced with their female siblings who gained the jobs that previously had been for men only. They bought war bonds to support the war effort with the first money earned. Deeply etched in their minds, however, were the pictures of their mothers who struggled to keep families together despite the sorrows and griefs of the Depression and the war.

(Excerpt from *From There to Here* by Kathryn Lawlor, BVM)

Becky Hagerty, Niece-in-law

I am married to Mike, Sister Gabrielle's nephew. Mike and I have definitely benefited through the years. Mike was the executor of Grandma Hagerty's estate. One of the things she wanted was to make sure that Sister Gabrielle would have birthday parties throughout the years.

She left a small trust account. Some of you may not remember, but whenever you showed up at Grandma Hagerty's house, she had homemade sugar cookies and Pepsi in bottles. When Mike took over the trust account, he decided to invest the small amount of money in Pepsi stock. Sister Gabrielle was living in Iowa City, so on her birthday we would take her, Sister Mary

Agnes Giblin and Sister Jean Marie Brady out to eat. We went to brunches at the Collins Plaza, dinner at The Brown Bottle, Bob's Your Uncle, and various other places. Our young boys learned social skills, after all they were out with the nuns! They really got to know all three of them. We enjoyed it so much that sometimes we would just go out for other occasions. Whenever we were in Iowa City, we would stop and see them.

David thinks he was in first grade when Mike and I were going on a trip. We don't know who asked who, but Sister Gabrielle came to Muscatine and stayed with the boys while we took our trip. I've been wondering what they ate because we all know that Sister Gabrielle did not like the kitchen. If David was in first grade, that was 21 years ago and she would have been 76. What a woman!

John and Tom were in their first years in college when we helped Sister move from Iowa City to Mount Carmel. They let us take her belongings in a back storage entrance. The boys couldn't believe all of the empty bottle in the bins waiting to be recycled, but they sure thought it was a good place for Sister Gabrielle to be moving to.

We continued to visit Sister in Dubuque. On one Thanksgiving, Mike drove up, got her, brought her to our house for Thanksgiving and then took her back, all in the same day. It was a lot of driving, but it meant a lot to have her with us. Sister Gabrielle loved to travel, learn, and discuss politics.

One of my favorite visits with her was during the George W. Bush term. She did not think a lot of him. When we walked in that evening, he was on TV. We asked her what he had to say that evening and she said, "Well, he says he likes to read in the evenings, but I think Laura probably has to read to him."

She settled into Mount Carmel very well, was very active and made lots of friends. About 10 years ago, she asked Mike if he would get her the supplies to have an Irish coffee bar for one of her favorite holidays—St. Patrick's Day. We took her the Irish whiskey, the Baileys Irish Cream, the creamer, and the whip cream. She set up in one of the kitchenettes and served Irish coffee all afternoon. A few days later we called her to see how it went and she said, "Oh, good, but we wasted a lot of coffee that day."

She continued the tradition every year since then until this past year when she was not feeling well and did not get to have her party on St. Patrick's Day. When we went to see her on her 97th birthday, it was a very cold, windy April morning. When we got there, she insisted that we should get the supplies from the refrigerator and have Irish coffee with her at 11 o'clock in the morning. So we did.

As we sat with her, I decided to ask how she ever got started drinking alcoholic beverages since during the 35 years I've been married to Mike, I've never seen her brother Lawrence take a single drink. So she told us her story. When she was a brand new nun, she was sent to Manly to teach with two other nuns. It was a hot, hot August. Besides teaching they also had to do the

janitorial work. They were too tired to eat and they all started to lose weight. Mother Superior came to check on them and saw this. She went to a doctor and asked what they should do. He prescribed a cold beer before the evening meal to increase their appetite. She said, "I didn't like the taste of it at all, but then I kind of did and now I like it."

Her next assignment was Boone, Iowa, with the same scenario—she was losing weight again. This time when the Mother Superior went to the doctor, he thought she was anemic and said that she should drink red wine. Later she started losing weight again and her principal contacted Mother Superior and said that he thought she had an ulcer. Mother Superior told the principal that she is not the ulcer type. So rather than another drink this time, she had to beat up a raw egg, add a little water, salt and pepper and drink that every morning. Then halfway through the day, her teacher friend in the next classroom would show up with the same concoction. She would have to step into the hallway, drink it, and then go back in and teach. It did work, she felt better and gained weight. She did say though that she would have rather had another drink.

Later she went to Wichita, Kan. It was mostly a dry state, but she was in one of three wet counties. The liquor stores were like little glass outhouses. It happened that most of her students' parents were connected to the alcohol business. That Christmas, after asking the priest if it was OK to give the nuns liquor as Christmas gifts, she was introduced to other types of alcohol, a couple of her favorites being Black Velvet and Jameson.

The Pepsi stock lasted this whole time. We were able to have the birthday parties, the Irish coffee parties, and a little extra cash tucked away to play penny slots. The day after Sister died, Mike decided to liquidate the few shares of remaining Pepsi stock. It was at an all-time high. Do you think we have an angel watching over us? I do. So the plan is to have one more Irish coffee bar on Friday, March 17, 2017. You are all invited and then the rest of the funds will be turned over to Mount Carmel. She was quite a lady and we will miss her.

Sister Mary Healey, BVM

My first four years on the missions I lived with Gabrielle in Manly, Iowa. It was a privilege and a delight to live with her. For me it was a real blessing. I was sent there to teach two grades in our little school, the same two grades that she had taught when she first was sent there, but had since moved up to higher grades. She knew everything I needed to know and I knew nothing. I was a city girl who had just found out there were such things as double-grade classrooms. Gabrielle had gone to a one-room school and taught in a one-room school before entering the BVMs, so two grades in a room were a piece of cake for her. After a while, it was easy enough for me, but I don't know what I would have done without her those four years.

Sister Anne Kendall, BVM (email read by Anita Therese Hayes, BVM)

When I first became congregational representative in 2009, there were very few people who I had not previously met. One person was Paulina Sullivan, BVM. Going to lunch at Caritas, I asked someone to point her out to me. She happened to be very near so I went over and introduced myself and arranged to meet her after lunch. After lunch, I went up to her room and

she was not there. I had many people to see and I figured this was last minute that she had a lot to do and I would come back later. That I did in about an hour. I entered her room and she was sitting in her chair. I proceeded to talk with her for about 45 minutes. At the end when I got up to leave she said to me, "I am not the person that you think I am." I said, "Paulina Sullivan?" She said, "No, Gabrielle Hagerty." We both had a good laugh. I always teased her about being our dear Paulina Sullivan.

Sister Anita Therese Hayes, BVM

Gabrielle and I have been friends for a long, long time. She was in Washington, Iowa, and I was in Burlington. She had been in Burlington the year before. We would often get on the phone and talk about this and that. So I said, "Gabe, why don't you and I just get on the road and we'll find a little place and stay there for the weekend." Gabe said, "That would be great." Well, we kept saying that for years. The other day Gabe said, "We never did find that little place, did we?" I said, "No, we didn't." Gabe and I are going to have that little place when I get to heaven. We are going to take care of everything we didn't take care of in those days. Thank you so much, Gabe.

Sister Joanne Schneider, BVM

I lived with Gabrielle in Washington, Iowa. The big memory I have of that was going fishing with Loretta, her sister, Delbert, her brother-in-law, five BVMs and three other men. We went up into Canada into the netherworld. It was about a 10-hour ride and then we had to take an airplane to the fishing camp so we were out in the middle of nowhere.

The story told by the family is that Delbert had just gotten a new, beautiful and expensive fishing rod. He had never used it and was just going to break it in. So one morning he and Gabrielle went out fishing. He was fussing around with other things in the boat so she said, "Delbert, let me fish." Reluctantly, he gave it to her, set her up and showed her how to cast. She threw; the line went out and so did the pole. Right away it sank right down to the bottom. So like any good fisherman, you put an X on the bottom of the boat so you know where the fish are. They tried everything to get it but they couldn't so they went back to camp.

The next day they went back to that place and brought along a young fellow from the camp. He dove down to get that fishing pool. It was all ensnared in rocks, but it had a fish on it. The funny part was that when they came back, Gabrielle and Sister Vivina Bly, who was also on the trip, spent hours trying to untangle it. Delbert kept saying, "Oh, for goodness sakes, we'll just cut it." Knowing both Gabrielle and Vivina, they had to follow it through. After spending hours and hours, they finally untangled it. It was a story that both of them told many, many times. God bless you, Gabrielle. I hope you have a sweet time in heaven.

Sister Joan Stritesky, BVM

I'm Joan Stritesky. I should say Joan Marie Hagerty Stritesky. My mother was Irish. I knew Gabrielle from the missions. I visited with her here at Marian Hall. One day I asked, "What was your baptismal name?" She said, "Gertrude." I said to her, "My mother was Gertrude Hagerty."

Now my mother died in 1954 and this was some 50 years later. So I said to her, "Mom." She looked up at me. I said, "I'm going to call you mom because you're the Gertrude Hagerty alive."

So once in a while when we were in groups I would go up to her and say, "Hi, Mom!" The groups would always stare at her and then at me and wonder how that happened. It was a great joke, but sometimes she was embarrassed because not everybody understood the joke. She said, "You do that right when there's a crowd around." I said, "That's the best time." Thank you very much, Mom.

Mike Hagerty, Nephew

My message is one of thanks. This is a very holy place. My family would like to say thank you for everything you did for Sister. The staff, the sisters—we can't say enough. So thank you very much.

Sister Mary Agnes Giblin, BVM

I inherited four Irish coffee glasses from Gabrielle. The last time I came she said, "There's a box up there on the shelf that has your name on it." When I opened it, there were four Irish coffee glasses. For those of you who knew Gabrielle, she always found something good about everyone she met or about every situation. So imagine my surprise when I came home one day and she told me that one of the pastors she worked with had died. She said to me, "I think I better go to that funeral. I want to make sure he's in the ground."

In all seriousness, it was certainly a privilege and a blessing for me to be able to live with Gabrielle. Gabrielle taught me many things. The reading that I read certainly described her very well as I knew her. I will remember her as always calm, cool and collected. She taught me which hill I should climb to die on and which ones I should just avoid.

Sister Catherine Jean Hayen, BVM

My special memory of Gabrielle is her love of centering prayer and of the practice of T'ai Chi Chih. Even when she could only travel by wheelchair, she would come to T'ai Chi and practice it seated with such a beautiful smile and peace on her face. That is how I will remember her.

Sister Donna Schauf, BVM

Whenever I would go to visit Gabrielle, she was so peaceful. She made you feel like you were the only person in the whole world. I appreciated that. I also appreciated her sense of humor. This is a story from Wichita, Kan., when she was principal at St. Thomas Aquinas. The sisters lived in a little bungalow across from the school. A Jesuit would come every day to celebrate the Eucharist. This one morning he came on a brand new bicycle. He said, "Can I bring this into your parlor? I don't want anybody to steal it." So he did. After Mass at breakfast a sister was telling Gabrielle about bringing in the bicycle and Gabrielle said, "I'm sure glad he didn't ride a horse."

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM

This morning I have on my hat for Opening Doors, which is a corporate board for Maria House and Teresa Shelter, shelters for homeless women here in Dubuque. Gabrielle had a great commitment to that particular ministry. I can't tell you how many times I would pass her room and she would say, "Come here, Mary, come here." She would slip me a little bit of money for Opening Doors. The day that she died, I informed the director of Opening Doors of her death. They checked back on her record. Oh, my heavens, she was one of our most faithful contributors! So all the homeless women and children that Gabrielle supported in these last years of her life are saying thank you to Gabrielle for her loving care.

Sister Paulina Sullivan, BVM, Cousin

I'm the Paulina who was mentioned earlier. I am also Gabrielle's cousin. We entered the community together in 1942. I didn't want to stay and wanted to go home immediately. Gabrielle helped me a great deal in the beginning to get settled in. Now here I am 74 years later loving every bit of it and they can't get rid of me. Thank you, Gabrielle.