

Sister Helen Sherrard, BVM (Agneselle)
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, October 25, 2013

Sister Stella Marie Swakoski, BVM

There is a very interesting and humorous story about Helen Sherrard that I am confident she would like me to share with you this morning. It all began in December of 1998 when Leslie Hayes invited Helen Sherrard and me and eight other people to come to a timeshare in Las Vegas, Nev. Before I left Anaheim to fly to Las Vegas, I learned that Radio Shack had produced the first talking watch for people who were visually impaired. When I arrived at the airport in Las Vegas, my wonderful niece, Sharon Smith, met me and I said, "You know, Sharon, that I just learned that Radio Shack has a talking watch." "Oh!" she said, "Would you like one?" "Well, let's look into it." She said, "There's a Radio Shack not too far from here." So we toddled on over to the Radio Shack where we met a very interesting and caring clerk who showed us a talking watch, gave us a brief instruction on how to use it and a brochure to take home.

We left Radio Shack and went over to the timeshare where I had a very heartwarming welcome from all the ones who were there. There was a total of 10 of us. We had a very lovely dinner and after dinner we did what all BVMs do—we got into our relaxing clothes and got ready to play cards. We played cards for quite a while. Leslie would tell each of us when it was time to go for our ablutions because it was necessary to do that with 10 people. When it was my turn, as I was walking into the bathroom, I remembered I had my talking watch on and the clerk said not to get the watch near any water. So I stepped back and put the talking watch on the top shelf on the mantle of the lovely fireplace which was outside the bathroom. I went in and took care of my needs. When I came out, what an amazing sight! There was Helen Sherrard on her knees with a large broomstick in her hand, reaching under the bed, bouncing back and forth, hitting the floor, bouncing back and forth, hitting the floor. The rest were moving the chairs and looking around. All of the sudden it dawned on me that I was hearing the sound "cock-a-doodle-doo, cock-a-doodle-doo, cock-a-doodle-doo." They were all looking for a rambunctious rooster. I went over to the mantle, pressed a couple of buttons and the "cock-a-doodle-doo" stopped. They all looked in amazement, but Helen didn't hear that the sound had stopped and she continued pounding the floor, hitting the springs, going back and forth with the broom. Finally, she burst out, "What IS that?" I said, "It's my talking watch." "Let me have it," she said. "This talking watch makes a better 'cock-a-doodle-doo' sound than my friend who has a farm." We had a good laugh about the talking watch.

Now fast forward to 2006 when I arrived at Mount Carmel. When I came up the walk with my nephew and my nieces and the BVMs were there to greet me, there was Helen. So I said, "Cock-a-doodle-doo," and she burst into a beautiful laugh. As you see her lie so beautifully in the casket, she has that little amused smile. I was on second floor Caritas and so was she. I developed pneumonia and moved down to first floor Marian Hall. She had the room right above me. When we walked out of the dining room, we would come as far as Nan's Garden and then I would go up the ramp to my room and she would take the elevator to hers. I couldn't resist saying, "Cock-a-doodle-doo, cock-a-doodle-doo" or "Don't let that rooster peck at you." She'd burst into laughter. We did that all the time.

All the time we walked together, she never once mentioned that she felt ill, so it was a great shock to me when she went to the hospital. It was a greater shock when we learned she was coming home under hospice care. When she was settled in her new room and it was feasible for me to go visit her, I went. Her lovely niece Roxanne, a nurse for 35 years, was there giving her loving care. I reached over the bed and very gently said, "Helen, it's Stella. Cock-a-doodle-doo, cock-a-doodle-doo." She turned her head. I said, "Helen, if you know it's Stella, squeeze my hand." She squeezed my hand. Not too long after that our heavenly Father called her home.

I don't know if there are roosters in heaven or not, but the Lord said, "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has entered the heart of man, what joys God has prepared for those who love Him." Love Him she did. Helen had a deep, abiding love for God and she did all her work in His name. She was so generous, such a good teacher, such a good worker in whatever field she worked in. She did wonderful, wonderful service. I'd always chuckle when my nephew would come in and say, "Bring that pretty sister to the table." She was very attractive looking. So now, Helen, we are here to say our final good-bye to you. It breaks our hearts that we have to leave you, but we know you are safe with God in heaven. Maybe, when you are thinking about us, you might just say, "cock-a-doodle-doo," and the ones in heaven may wonder why the smile comes to your face and the cock-a-doodle-doo story will still go on. I love you. I miss you very, very much. I know you are safe in heaven. Keep praying for us. Thank you. Amen.

Sister Kathyryn Lawlor, BVM

I first met Helen Sherrard when I was professed and went to St. Mary Grade School in Clinton, Iowa, to teach. Thank God there was a group of young sisters there who were a great godsend to me, Helen Sherrard and Pat Galhouse among them. Every evening after school we would get together and talk about what went on in the classroom. This was a godsend because there are two important things I learned from that: one was to keep things in perspective and the second was to enjoy the children you are teaching. I have here an email from one of the students that we taught at St. Mary. She wrote:

I plan to send you a card honoring your loss of the wonderful young sister with whom you shared your first mission. In case you are writing a tribute, you might like to know I still have the autobiographies we wrote and illustrated in sixth grade. We were the lucky class that had such a wonderful teacher move up with us to seventh grade. We remember her verse choirs. Peace and love, Louise Welsh Schrank (St. Mary Grade School '57).

I have one other little thing to say about Helen. She went home with me on a home visit one time. My dad was serving drinks and he came to Helen and asked her what she wanted. She said, "I don't care for anything, thank you." My dad turned to me and said, "What did you do? Bring home a Protestant nun?"

Sister Diane Forster, BVM

I lived with Helen in Chattanooga for a good number of years. What I treasure most about Helen is the humor and the wisdom that she brought to friendship. She was a friend to many and seemed to be able to make friends very easily, talk to everybody, never met a stranger, and generally enjoyed people, and, as Kitty just mentioned, enjoyed the children. I believe Helen enjoyed every person she ever met.

Sister Eileen Healy, BVM

Helen was our pray-er and Helen didn't want stuff. Sometimes we who live outside of Mount Carmel give gifts at Christmas or on birthdays, but what Helen truly enjoyed were the couple of times when she was well enough to come to our house for dinner close to her birthday or around Christmas time. It was a gift for us as well as for Helen.

Roxanne (Rocky) Sherrard , Niece

Helen was very close to her family and very interested in genealogy. She was a well-traveled lady with fascinating stories to tell and always brought us little trinkets that we enjoyed. Whenever she came home during the summer, she was constantly playing games with us kids. She was very child-oriented and made everybody feel extremely special. She had a wonderful sense of humor and a beautiful smile. She enjoyed having visitors here at Mount Carmel when she was not able to travel any longer. She always bragged about how beautiful this place was and how kind everybody was. All summer long she would go and visit cousins and other relatives. For the last year-and-a-half, she was asking me when my dad would come home again. My dad used to come home every summer, but he skipped a year. She asked and asked, so a month before she took ill, Dad, who is from Texas, and I were out here for a day. I think it was very pre-planned. She looked like she had lost some weight. She knew what was coming; the end was getting nearer. She was such a special lady and we were blessed to have her in our lives. When I was born, Aunt Helen was talking to the other nuns at the convent. "Roxanne. What kind of name is that for a little girl?" I think she expected a generic family name. Roxanne was unusual back then. One of her favorite sayings was, "Little boys are like puppies because they are always on the ground and doing their thing." When she said that to me, I thought, "I have grandsons. How true."

Sister Frances Ann Schaeffer, BVM

I also lived with Helen in Chattanooga for 20 years, and they were 20 years that were really special. Talk about never meeting a stranger—anyone, especially a BVM, but anybody who came through Chattanooga and stopped to see us, received the royal tour. She should have been hired by the Chamber of Commerce because everybody got to know all about the battles and everything else. She showed them *everything*. She was so warm and welcoming to everyone. They were 20 wonderful years.

Sister Eleanor Craggs, BVM

I never lived with Helen, but she and I are in the same set so I have an affinity for her. She cornered me one day and asked me if I would play dominos with her. Reluctantly I said, "OK, Helen, I'll play." When I got there, I never knew whether I was on three, up three or frozen on three. Helen always knew and she set me straight on that. She was a really nice person and I loved her dearly.

Sean McAfee

My grandmother, Ionia Gilberts, could not be here today. She was a first cousin to Helen. Sister Helen came to my grandparent's house almost every summer and spent a week or two visiting with us. In fact, I have the farm that she probably was referring to regarding the roosters. She would come and often we would have Fourth of July and celebrate with fireworks. We always

looked forward to Sister Helen's visits and her talks about her travels around the world often, with Sister Peggy Devereux, and all the things she would share with us.

I am a Protestant minister now. I did grow up in the Catholic Church, so don't hit me with your missals when I leave. I was here with my grandmother in December of 2011. Helen gave us the complete tour of the building and talked about everything. I had a couple of questions for her, mainly, "Why two candles on the altar table instead of three or one?" I know what we say in our denomination, but Helen said, "I don't know, never thought about it." She touched people's lives when they met her—her genuine love and caring, so effective in her love for people and life. She once said, "The BVMs are getting older. There are fewer of us every year." Probably because of where I am now, I asked her a question and shared the answer with my congregation. "Does it make you sad to realize that the BVMs are shrinking and may someday not exist?" She said, "No, not at all. We had a purpose, a purpose given to us by God in education, in teaching children. And now, there are public schools and everybody stepping up to the plate. We've served that purpose and now God is going to create a new purpose and from that something else will be born." I really believe that speaks to the heart of my dear cousin, Sister Helen Sherrard.

Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM

I lived in Dalton, Ga., for five years. Dalton is about 30 miles south of Chattanooga. So whenever I felt lonely for a community, I would always call Our Lady of Perpetual Help and say, "Can I come?" and everybody would say, "Of course you can come." I think it was the end of my first year in Dalton when it was time to do financial reports. I had never done one before. So knowing that Helen was very good with numbers, I called her and said, "Helen, would you help me with my financial report?" She said, "Sure. Bring everything down." So I gathered all my papers and we sat down at the table and spread everything out. Helen's first question to me was, "What was your beginning balance?" I said, "What is a beginning balance?" She said, "Don't worry! We'll just make up a number."

Sister C Jean Hayen, BVM

I just have to mention that Helen was one of the charter members of our Tai Chi Chih classes. She radiated the peace and the movement and the joy of that for all these years. Helen, we miss you dearly in our class.

Sister Mary Crimmin, BVM

I have only known Helen in the past three years since I have worked here at Mount Carmel. My reflections of her are of coming to my office and saying, "My room is too hot." So I would say, "Not to worry. We'll take care of it." And I would call maintenance. Not too many months later she would come again and say, "My room is too cold." So we'd say, "Not to worry." We'd call maintenance and try to take care of that. So as I'm thinking of Helen moving to a new place in her life where God has many mansions, I certainly hope that she has found one where the temperature is just right.

Sister Anita Therese Hayes, BVM

When Frances was talking about Helen's little tours, it reminded me of the tours that she gave me when I was visiting in Chattanooga. On one of those tours, we received a pass to the national

parks. Helen, I can't tell you how many times that's how I got into the national parks. You presented the pass and then you could go in, no fee. So, thanks a million, Helen, for that tour.