

Sister Mary Faith Lautz, BVM
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Oct. 9, 2014

Carolyn Hamilton, Wife of Nephew Dennis Hamilton

I have to tell you how long it took Aunt Helen and I to get to know each other and be close. Dennis and I were married in 1982. We were going to fly Aunt Helen down to Madison, Wis., but then thought we would go up the following year and visit her and we would have more time with her. So that's what we did. Aunt Helen met us at the airport. It took about 30 seconds for us to get acquainted and feel like we've known each other for a very long time. She was in Anchorage at the time and she toured us around Alaska. It's a trip that my husband and I will cherish always.

Sister Margaret Mary Cosgrove, BVM

I think one of Faith's greatest gifts was her ability to be a good friend. She was kind. She listened well and offered wise counsel. She was patient and she helped many people work through difficult decisions in their life. She might be the only BVM who served as maid of honor for two different former BVMs when they were married.

Phoebe Van Hecke Segal

Sister Faith was an amazing woman. I believe that the first time we met was when I yelled "surprise" while jumping out of my locker at Holy Angels Academy in 1961. I thought my locker mate was coming by and, lo and behold, it was Faith. She probably *was* surprised, but not pleasantly so, and she sternly asked me my name. "Phoebe," I replied, and she didn't look like she believed me. How was I to know that that locker incident would be the beginning of our 53-year-old friendship—first as teacher to student, next as sponsor to an aspiring BVM, and finally as eye-to-eye friends? In high school, she seemed to be everywhere I wasn't supposed to be. Really. She scooted me out of many a lavatory when I took too long rattling my hair; she confiscated numerous cans of my aqua net hairspray; she told me that the chapel was for visiting our Lord and not my friends; and she took me aside to tell me that I was throwing myself too much into the role of one of Herod's wives in the annual Christmas cantata. "Stop slithering all over the floor, Phoebe!" She's also the one who announced to all of us flopping around on stage that President Kennedy had been shot. That's a moment few of us will forget.

As my sponsor, she first told me that I was too boy crazy to consider a vocation. Then, she started to believe my sincerity. It was she who took my parents' worried phone calls about my immaturity in entering the convent. I never knew that until a few years ago. Five years after I entered the BVMs, I was one of those who left the order. I left the lifestyle, but I never left Sister Faith. I followed her in letters to Alaska and to Arizona. She shared her adventures with me and I shared my marriage, the adoption of my son, and my teaching woes with her. We kept in touch but didn't see each other for about 25 years.

When she came back to live in Dubuque, I would come to see her quite often; we were now face-to-face adults. When I saw her, I thought she was just as beautiful as she had ever been, inside and out. I liked that she cared how she dressed and how her hair was combed. She had poise and

dignity and her outer beauty in no way diminished the depth of her inner beauty. She had great influence on me and on so many others. She awakened the artist in some and made many of us feel valued because she cared about us. About ten years ago, she confided to me that "Phoebe" was the first word she had ever said. She was about 2 years old and spotted a bird outside. Her grandma told her it was a "Phoebe" bird and so she said "Phoebe." Once again, by telling me that, she had made me feel special all over again. That was her talent and one that many of her "girls" at Holy Angels and elsewhere will always remember. So, thank you, Faith. I feel very blessed to have known you for 53 years. You were indeed an amazing woman.

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM

I was a student at Holy Angels Academy. I met Faith seven years before Phoebe; I met her 60 years ago. I was a junior at Holy Angels and Faith had just come to teach art. I want to assure all of you that I did not meet her in the art classroom. I always met Faith in the hallways. She did have that ability to make every single one of us feel so very special and important. She was part of the influence on my life in becoming a BVM along with other wonderful people that we had at Holy Angels at that time. As the years progressed, she always made the connection between Milwaukee and Holy Angels and my family. In the last few years she would always say to me, "Oh, Mary, you look just like your mother." And I liked that.

Katie Fischer

Oh, Phoebe, you slitherer! I have the background on that one! I didn't know Faith until more recently. Faith, my mom, Sister Liz Ann (Grace Coffey), and Madeline Kortendick were four best friends at Holy Angels HS in Milwaukee. So through that connection I got to know Faith.

But there is more. Faith was also the last woman my father dated before my mother. So the way Faith would tell it in later years was that they had graduated from Holy Angels and she was dating Dad one night. At the end of the night, she stuck out her hand and said, "Good night, Normy. And by the way, I'm going to the BVMs tomorrow." In later years, what she always whispered to me was, "You know he had a thing for your mother all along." When I last saw her, she once again repeated, "You know, Normy never kissed me. He was saving himself for Patsy."

You have to understand that I knew Faith long before I ever met her. We 11 kids were raised with, "You kids better behave yourself. Your mother could have been a BVM nun." I just thought that was just another "Dadism," but when she returned to Dubuque, Mom called and said, "You better invite Faith over." I said, "I know, my mother could have been a BVM nun." So she came over to the house some years ago. Terry and I had five kids jumping all over the living room. She looked around and said to one of them, "You sit there. And you sit there." She commanded immediate respect. I fortunately got to know Faith in her later years and came to really appreciate her. In addition to kind and loving, I would use the word indomitable. That's how I think of Faith.

Sister Susie Beckman, BVM

The words I have to say are not very erudite because I met Faith 74 years ago when I was in the third grade at Our Lady Help of Christians. Elaine Campbell, BVM and I were classmates. For some reason, Faith kept having us write "Silence is golden." We reached the point where we were ahead of the game and had a stockpile ready to hand in whenever it was called for. I teased her about

that over the years. Then one day in the mail I got this lovely picture taken in the forest and down on the bottom it said "Silence is golden." I had that laminated and I had it in my office.

Sister Bertha Fox, BVM

Faith had a green thumb. She talked to animals; she talked to plants. When I lived with her on Julien Dubuque Drive, each Advent or Lent we would get three or four bulbs, depending on the number of sisters living there, and plant them and then we would have a contest. Each of us would choose one of the bulbs, put a quarter under that vase and then we would have the race to see which one would bloom first. Faith always had the advantage. She always won because she talked to her bulb from the beginning and her bulb would bloom first. Faith also thought that bats were cute. She appreciated what they did for the environment. So she always defended bats.

Sister Judith Sheahan, BVM

I met Faith when I was going into second grade at Our Lady Help of Christians School. I had been a student at St. Luke and we had the Dominican sisters there. I loved them very dearly; they were my white sisters and the BVMs became my black sisters. One of the BVMs I met early on was Faith. Whenever I had any difficulties with the second grade curriculum, I would go to her. She taught both of my brothers when they were in second grade and they always ask about her. They will be very sorry to hear that she is no longer living. When I came to Marian Hall, I was able to get reacquainted with Faith. That was one of the blessings.

Sister Joan Stritesky, BVM

How do you talk about a woman who influences you, inspires you, laughs with you, and gives you insights into what sisters did? How do you talk about a gentle, smart and loving person? When I met her at the table in the Caritas dining room, she and Ann Regina told stories about how they stayed up until 5 a.m., doing painting on vestments that were to be given to the priests. Ann Regina read to Faith and Faith did all the painting. I said, "Sister, what happened to Solemn Silence?" She said, "What's that?" She would have an answer that would put you just where you didn't think you were going. She was such a gentle woman. I am hopeful that the memories of her will be an influence on the rest of the lives of those who sat at that table. I had to say something about Faith and all I could think about was wise, gentle, loving.

Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM

I really didn't know Faith, but I wanted to lift up her final years of ministry when she was the director of the Roberta Kuhn Center. I am there now and I get many questions about how is Faith and where is Faith. Faith also taught art at that time. I know that all those wonderful characteristics that you talked about when you were in second or third grade, high school and college, continue right through her years as director of the Roberta Kuhn Center. I know on the students' behalf that they are most grateful to have encountered Faith.

Fred Woodard, Husband of former BVM Virginia Spiegel Woodard

I met Faith through Ginny and it was one of the most remarkable experiences of my life. The broad smile and that very, very quick and loving hello are something that remains with me. I saw Faith maybe last week. I came up and spent time with her.

She was a great storyteller; she loved hearing stories. The Spiegels learned that Fred Woodard was a storyteller of sorts, always exaggerating a little bit on the edges to keep things clean and smooth. I remember having told Faith a story about a four-year-old Fred Woodard in Enid, Okla. I lived on Wabash Street across the street from the Booker T. Washington HS. Next door to us lived the dog catcher whom we called Uncle Babe. I had a birth mate cousin; we were born in the same bed but at different times. His mother was the midwife for my birth and my mother, six months later, was the midwife for his birth. The two of us in Enid, Okla., went up the street from my house to a little grocery on the corner. There the merchant had placed his wares in these little wooden chutes. We, of course, were quite partial to the fruit. So each of us took one plum or pear or something and immediately started to run across the street into an alley, not knowing that Uncle Babe was coming up the alley in the truck going to catch some dogs. Well, we were his dogs. My birth mate cousin hit the driver's side of the truck. I hit the truck in the middle and was dragged a half block. In those days in Oklahoma, things were segregated. The only place that would receive me at a hospital was run by the Catholic Church. When I awoke, I saw these fancy hats and they were like angels. I told Faith the story that I was not a Catholic, but I had been touched by the Spirit. I thought they were angels and to this day I believe still they were angels.

Like the nuns I first met when I was four-years-old, there was Faith, an angel always loving and full of surprises. The last time I saw her, she didn't quite remember me until I said my name completely. She said, "Oh, yes! And how are the little round heads?" That's what she called my three older grandsons. I told her they were well. Then she asked about Ginny and I said, "Ginny is well." "Oh, but she died, didn't she?" I said, "Yes, but she is well; she is well." And she said, "Oh, there's one thing I worry about and that is my cat." I had never seen a cat here, but I thought it well that I listen to her and I said, "Tell me about the cat." And she said, "Oh, this cat came to my grandmother's house and nobody likes it but me. I'm worried now that no one will take care of the cat." I said, "Oh, Faith, are you passing on to me a duty? Am I to feed the cat and take care of the cat?" She said, "I don't know that you will do." I said, "But Faith, I could take the cat out to the ranch and we could go into the woods. You know I can't put a leash on a cat." "Oh no, no, no, they got their own mind." I said, "Well, Faith, I will take it into the woods and let it lead me; I will follow it. I hope that it will at some point stop and show me the soil and weird, odd plants that grow in the woods." She said, "It might do that." I said, "Well, look, we will walk until we find a place to rest. While we rest, I will see if the cat will tell me marvelous stories about its life with you and your grandmother." "Oh, that would be wonderful," she said. And I said, "Look, I'm going to take care of this cat for you." She said, "OK, now I dismiss you." I thought that was really funny. She said, "One thing. My feet are hurting me very badly." So I rubbed her feet for about fifteen minutes and then said, "But I've been dismissed and I'm going away now."

Sister Mary Ellen Zimmermann, BVM

I lived with Faith for a short time on Julien Dubuque Drive before she moved here. When they did the Motherhouse renovations, she was able to stay at Julien Dubuque Drive when the sisters had to move out of the Motherhouse. She was teaching at Roberta Kuhn. I was looking at the brochures and thought, "Well, I'm no great artist, but I think it would be fun to try watercolor." But it didn't say that there was a class for beginners that year, so I asked Mary Faith if I could join when she had a beginner's class. She said, "Oh, I'm taking beginners in this class." So I went that year. She made everybody feel so special, as people have said. If you were talking with her, you

were the only person in the room. The first day we each found a little sprig of leaves with an acorn or two attached. We were to draw those in pencil and then color them with color pencil afterwards. So we were in the drawing stage and Faith was going around the room to all the students. She said, "Oh, that's nice Lolly, but let's try to get a little more flow into the leaves." So she drew a couple of leaves for me and then she went on to look at other people's work. When she got back to me, I had already finished the leaves and was working on the coloring. "Oh, that's really nice, Lolly, especially this section." It was the one that she had drawn.

Sister Monica Seelman, BVM

I have known Mary Faith Hamilton, Faith's niece, sitting in the front row since she was about six or seven years old because I used to go to Dodgeville. My family is kind of related to Faith on both sides because Faith's sister Dorothy married Frank Hamilton and my aunt Margaret married Bill Hamilton, Frank's brother. So we have that relationship.

Then on the other side of the family, when Faith left Dodgeville to go to Milwaukee, she started at Holy Angels. She didn't come as a freshman; she came as a sophomore. She said she didn't know anybody. She was not from Milwaukee; she didn't know a soul. So she was feeling very lonely. You know how high school girls are; they get in these little groups. She didn't have a group and was all alone. My aunt Eulalia, whom we called Noody, came over and introduced herself. From that moment on they were best friends all through high school.

My father was Noody's older brother. He went to Holy Cross. My brother Danny found a box that had some old letters in it. One of the letters was from December 1932. Noody was going to Holy Angels and she was sitting in study hall and she wrote a letter to my father who was at Holy Cross. It includes this little section that I think you will find very interesting. "I'm sending you a picture drawn by Helen Lautz. She crumpled it all up, but I resurrected it because I thought that it was so cute. The heads are all drawn from my penny. The rest of the picture she drew freehanded. Truly, I believe she is one of the future artists of the day. She has drawn gobs and gobs of pictures and thinks nothing of doing so. And she draws comical or sad ones, pretty girls or ugly ones, and whatever you could think of."

I don't know if Faith ever got this letter; I sent it to her recently, but she might have been too sick to read it. But that was from her good friend Noody who died when she was 40 years old. Whenever I came to see her, she would say, "Oh, Monica, your aunt, my best friend." She still had her picture from Holy Angels graduation in her trunk. I just want to share these thoughts with you to let you know I truly valued her as a friend. I also am in touch with some of the girls from Holy Angels that had Faith as a teacher in art class in the 1950s.

Mary Houghton, Former student (Read by Sister Monica Seelman, BVM)

She was 97 years old! When we were in school she was this cute, young devilish woman, rare in nun's clothing. We had so much fun in art since we liked her so well. Why didn't we stay in touch?

Mary Grannens, Former student (Read by Sister Monica Seelman, BVM)

Sister Faith taught art and so much more. During my time at Holy Angels, she was a role model for me and her art classes provided a nice balance amid the other academic courses. I am truly grateful our paths joined.

Pat McGrain, Former BVM Florence Mary Lindman (Read by Sister Monica Seelman, BVM)

Thank you for the note about Sister Faith. She surely meant a lot to me and definitely influenced my life for the better. I might not have had the magnificent life as a BVM if not for her. She was a lovely person in every way.

Kim Kelly, Grandniece

I'm up here to do my best. I am not a public speaker, but I am doing this because she made me a stronger person. A few people said to me, "You have to get up there and speak because you guys had such a unique relationship." I would have to say that's the perfect word.

We were pen pals since the early 1970s. Through her missions in Arizona, Alaska, Kansas City, Chicago, California, we would write letters back and forth. She would come to visit my grandmother in Milwaukee. I actually went through a photo album the other day and found a picture of her and me at the zoo. I had forgotten that she took me out on her own and we went to the zoo. I remember when I was in third grade at St. Casimir in Milwaukee. Back then we went to church two or three times a week. She came into town and said, "I'm going to come to your morning Mass." I was so proud and so excited to have her sitting over there. I could hear her singing "Morning Has Broken." As a third grader I thought, "My Aunt Helen's here."

My grandma passed away in 1988 or 1989. She came to the funeral. We had a service in Milwaukee, a small family gathering. That was when she actually moved here. We also spent a week together out in Portland, Ore., with my father. We gathered some of my photo albums so I spent a lot of time with her that week. It was an emotional week.

Since then I would travel here about twice a year. Let me tell you, when she was in her 70s and I was in my 20s, she would take me around everywhere in town. We would go to art shows. We'd go shopping. We would visit friends. I got to know a lot of sisters here in town. It was neat to see all these intelligent, warm friends of hers. She also took me dog racing, my first time ever and my last time. It was a special time. It was almost like a mini-retreat because everybody was just so warm and so loving. I think she took the place in my heart of my grandmother.

As the years went by, I met my husband and confided to Aunt Helen because she was a person who I thought would have some wise advice and she did. Both Chris and I were blessed to have her at our wedding in 2007. We were very excited about that. It was right before she felt that she couldn't travel anymore. We had our daughter and we named her Hailey Faith Kelly. We came here to visit Aunt Helen and she really loved Hailey a lot. It was just a special relationship. She was an amazing person and I know she is up there looking over all of us. That makes me feel good.

Mary Faith Hamilton, Niece

I have heard people say they have known Faith for 74 years. Well, I have known her for 75. That's how old I am. She was my mother's sister but was never around a lot when I was little. I think she

was in Chicago when I was really little. When she would come, she would bring people with her. Sister Ann Regina would come so I have known Ann Regina for many, many years. The people she would bring with her were very good at entertaining children. I would get all my friends from the neighborhood and we would play on the front porch with Sister Ann Regina who threw out all these wonderful games we could play while my aunt visited with my mother. When she was there, it was lovely. I loved having her as part of family.

But I really have gotten close to her during these last 20 or 25 years. When she was here in Dubuque, we saw each other a lot. For the last 10 years or so we would talk on the phone at least twice a week. We would compare our world views and politics and we found out that we were very much the same. That was lovely because she reinforced who I was. I was living out in the world and she had all of you women helping her be who she was. Having her in my life was a great support. I very much feel her here today. That surprises me. I feel her really here along with my mother, my grandmother and my Aunt Jane. I feel they are all with us today and giving us their love.