



Wake Stories of Gayle Brabec, BVM (Luellen)
Marian Hall Chapel, June 4, 2018

Robert Sammon, Hempstead, N.Y. (Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM)

My mother had the privilege of being the secretary of Our Lady of Loretto during the BVM's last years of ministry there. My mother always recounted the joy she had when she worked with Gayle and Helen and the times they shared a meal with my family. Gayle was a foresight in education. For instance, she began the resource room for children with learning issues long before many had recognized them. In Gayle's passion for the environment, she foreshadowed and heralded Pope Francis' concern for the environment and climate issues. BVM's were always ahead of the next important discussion and movement. Gayle told my mother, "I have to be about my works." She truly was a BVM who moved forward with Vatican II and her congregation's mission to be freed by love and act for justice. *(The yellow roses in front of the ambo are from Bob and his family.)*

Sister Marie Corr, BVM

My fun memory of Gayle is from when we lived and worked together in Butte, Mont. It was her first year as superior. She was very young; we both were. We had some exciting times. She was always so adventuresome. For example, we had a great benefactor Fanny Kelly who owned a big ranch up in the mountains. At Christmastime, Gayle wanted a live Christmas tree. Fanny said, "Come on. Go on up and pick whatever tree or trees you want." Off we went with our big station wagon. We were already a mile high and were 2000 feet higher by the time we got up there, so the air was a little thin. Of course, it was mid-winter and cold at that altitude. It was getting dark so we really had to rush. We got our tree, cut it down, turned around to leave and got stuck in a drift. We wonder how at that time of day we would get any help way out where we were. I can't recall how it worked out, but I was worried. Gayle wasn't. We made it out, got home and decorated our tree. It's a fond memory.

Susan Wolkerstorfer, Former BVM

I was a young, neurotic nun coming out of the Scholasticate. Gayle helped me become a very sane woman. We went hiking almost every weekend in the mountains. We came across a barbed wire fence that had a lovely sign that said, "Absolutely No Trespassing." She looked at the sign and said, "Absolutely Welcome." So we started hiking. Soon two cowboys came with two long rifles. They were so afraid of poachers. Do you know what happened? We ended up in the ranch house drinking tea.

Sister Mary McCauley, BVM

Little did I know last Wednesday following the 7:30 a.m. Mass, when I gave my usual warm greeting to Gayle and in turn received her usual warm smile, that we would be celebrating her funeral liturgy this morning. What can I say, what can we all say about Gayle? She was just so special and so loved. We loved her because of her extremely unique spirit. Our relationship dates back to the 1960s when I was teaching at Our Lady of Loretto in Hempstead. She had convinced the principals in the area that a school could not exist without an audiovisual coordinator. She became the coordinator for all the BVM schools in New York. She spent Tuesdays at Our Lady of Loretto. I could expect every Tuesday morning before classes began, Gayle would come into the room with that wonderful spirit of hers and have some great idea. Gayle could convince you to do things that you never wanted to do and you never thought you could do, but you did them. That was Gayle's spirit. She was an inveterate reader. She was excellent at crossword puzzles. She was always committed to a cause and she got you to commit

to that same cause. Of course, her major cause was the environment. I never was as committed as Gayle was because I could not do without a dryer in my home. Gayle was a woman of integrity. She was filled with kindness. She could be a tad impatient if things did not go her way or the way she felt the world should be going, but she was always cheerful. It was a privilege to know her and call her friend. Certainly, we are all going to miss her wonderful, precious spirit.

Sister Eileen Powell, BVM

There are many anecdotes we have about Gayle. The one thing I remember about her is that she was always focused. No matter what she was doing, she was mindful of it whether doing a crossword puzzle, digging in the garden, teaching, reading or convincing people about what they should be doing with her. She knew what she was doing; she knew for whom she was doing it. I will always remember that about you, Gayle. Thank you for your good example, your friendship and your love.

Sister Donard Collins, BVM

I had the privilege of visiting Gayle when she lived in Sac City, Iowa. It was during the 1980s when there were so many farm foreclosures. One of the priests in the Diocese of Sioux City, John Keane, held her such high esteem that he considered her another Mother Teresa. When I was visiting her in Sac City, Gayle really had to show me something of interest in the country, something she just knew I would love. We started out. For some reason, it got dark very early. All of a sudden, without any warning, on this blacktopped road was a sign that said "Road Ends." It was followed by gravel road. It left much to be desired for gravel because there was very little. As we started down this muddy road, we went into the ditch. I do not drive a stick. We worked and worked trying to get that car back up on the road again. We were afraid to go to a farm that was nearby because the dogs were barking and we didn't know how many dogs there were. Finally, by the grace of God, we were able to get the car back on up on the road. Then Gayle said, "Now that was a good experience, wasn't it?" It wasn't the experience I intended, but marvelous.

Sister Kathryn Lawlor, BVM

I would occasionally run into Gayle when she was building the addition to her home with straw bales in Frenchburg. She hired two carpenters from Tennessee. When I would ask, "Well, how's the building coming along?" She would say, "Well, one of the carpenter's grandmother died and he had to go back to Tennessee." In the meantime, it would rain and the straw bales would get wet. When the carpenters returned, they would begin again. I would run into her later and say, "How are things coming on that building?" She would say, "Well, another one of the grandmother's died in Tennessee. . ." They would repeat the process. When it finally was built, I said, "Oh, Gayle, what a success!" She said, "Yes, but those carpenters had too many grandmothers."

Sister Gail Fitzpatrick, OCSO, Mississippi Abbey (Read by Sister Jeroma Day, BVM)

Dear BVM Sisters, I was very sad to hear of Sister Gayle's death. I grieve with all of you. Although I didn't know Gayle well, we share a name and we have met several times since she and Helen Garvey, BVM, moved back to Dubuque. One of those visits was especially touching for me. I had taken a sister who was visiting from our community in Norway to see the Mississippi River from the most beautiful spot in town – Mt. Carmel, of course. It was last December and we just enjoyed walking along the road with the unobstructed view of the river. We met Sister Gayle and, although she did not recognize us, she came right over to us saying, "You must be cold. Please come in and have some coffee." She assured us many times that there was always coffee and she would be so happy to take us to it. She didn't know us, but reached out with such warm hospitality. I will always remember her openhearted greeting. All of us here at the Abbey keep Gayle and all of you in prayer. I can just imagine the warmth of Helen's greeting for dear Gayle. Peace.

Sister Jeroma Day, BVM

Three years ago when I moved here to Mt. Carmel and I was living up on the third floor of the Motherhouse. Helen Garvey lived up there also. A group of us would gather every night for supper in the kitchenette. Gayle would join us. For some reason or another, Gayle, who was sitting next to me, and I would always get into

friendly squabbles and Helen would have to separate us. Then Gayle would turn toward me and hit me on the shoulder and say, "Was that hard enough?" Then she would hit me some more. It truly has been a joy and a privilege for me to have shared these moments and years with Gayle. I will truly miss her, her ever-present smile and greeting and that little punch on the shoulder.

Katie Pfiffner, Pastoral Services

One of the aides asked if I would share on their behalf how much they loved Gayle and appreciated her daily greeting to them which was "Good morning!. Thank you for waking up and coming to work today to take care of us." They said they will miss her dearly.

Sister Mary Healey, BVM

Yesterday, one of the housekeepers told me what she thinks were Gayle's last words. She met Gayle when she was going out for her walk from which she never came back. They talked a little bit and then as Gayle went through the door, she said, "Thank you for all that you do."

Sister Bernadette McManigal, BVM

I have many, many Gayle stories. What I am going to recount picks up on something that Mary McCauley said that Gayle was a great reader. When I lived in Lexington and so did Helen and Gayle, we would travel together to senates or regional meetings. Gayle would always go to the library and get CDs of books so that we would listen to these books up and back. Her specialty was always something like *The History of the Last Three Czars of Russia*. Frankly, Helen and I never knew if we started with disk one or went to disk four. Gayle tried to keep us education. Thank you, Gayle, for all the laughter and all the fun you provided.

Sister Mary Angela Buser, BVM

I first met Gayle in the novitiate and then again in West Hempstead, N.Y. at St. Thomas the Apostle school. I think that was where she and Helen first began their deep relationship in the late 1960s. Gayle came to St. Thomas the Apostle to develop a learning center that we did not have. Her creativity and enthusiasm for that project, of course, developed a wonderful learning center from which all the children greatly profited. I remember her relationship with the faculty, particularly her relationship with a Jewish teacher who was a Title I teacher. When it came time for Passover, that teacher invited Gayle to her home to celebrate. I was the lucky one to go with her. I am most grateful to Gayle for arranging all of it. That was so typical of Gayle. She had a deep relationship with Helen. They moved into an apartment, Creativity II, something new at least in the East. She later taught at Our Lady of Loretto when Helen went there. Here at Mt. Carmel, we renewed our relationship. As we were both walkers, my joy was to meet her. Usually we were going in the opposite direction, so sometimes we simply waved or exchanged a verbal greeting while other times we might give a hug and move on. Finally, I want to remember these last months. Helen spent quite a bit of time in Marian Hall after her stay in the hospital, maybe four or five weeks. She happened to be in the room next to me so I would often see Gayle coming for a visit. Helen died on third floor, but she wasn't there very long. After Helen's death, Gayle often would arrive daily. I would meet her in the corridor and say to her, "What are you doing, Gayle?" She would say, "I'm looking for Helen." I would give her a big hug and say, "She has gone to heaven." After a while, with a hug she would say, "Yes, she's gone to heaven."

Sister Floria Shannon, BVM

Gayle and I were in Cut Ups together. She was my Regional for six years so we knew each other pretty well. In Cut Ups, we never knew with what she would come up. She start a nursery rhyme, giving us the first line and then expecting us to pick it up. We didn't know them; it's been a long time since we had gone through a nursery rhyme book. We re-learned a lot of them. She also would start with, "Oh, these tedious jobs! Who sits up all night to think of these tedious jobs that we have to do!" In Cut Ups, there is a lot of cutting and gluing. The other day she was going on and I said, "Gayle, this is volunteer. You don't have to come." She said, "Oh, but I like to come, because I like to complain."

Sister Laurene Brady, BVM

Gayle and I played cards every day after lunch. It was always interesting because after three games, if it was 2-1 in favor of Gayle, we'd quit. However, if it was 2-1 in favor of Laurene, we had to play a fourth.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

Shortly before Helen died, somewhere in her last illness, I had a conversation with her. She said, "People have said, 'Isn't it wonderful that you moved to Mt. Carmel so that Gayle could have care.' I think that to be in Kentucky would not have been a good thing for what has developed in my own life. I think I am going to pre-deceased Gayle. In fact, I think Gayle will live a long time." Of course, the day she had the accident, many of us who were aware of what was happening, had the deep, deep sense that Helen was there protecting her and calling her. It is wonderful what we do for each other.

Sister Mary Fran McLaughlin, BVM

Gayle was the second grade teacher when I was a student at St. Gertrude in Chicago in the early 1950s. We always loved her; she was full of fun. She was a very good friend of my fifth grade teacher, SM Coleman Shannon. We know how hard it was when SM Coleman died. Later, I was at Purdue in Campus Ministry when I received a short note from Helen in which she told me that Gayle was going to Bardstown and asked if I would take time to connect with her. Gayle and I had an adult friendship. We had wonderful times when she lived and worked in Kentucky. She certainly was a country girl and disdained city people, especially people from Chicago. She loved the country and the Kentucky rural life. She worked with many farmers trying to convince them to diversify their crops from tobacco. She was so welcoming to me when I visited her in Bardstown, Lexington and Frenchburg. She would take me on ride and would ask, "Do you want the religious tour or the civic tour?" She was a great historian and so welcoming and hospitable. I will miss Gayle, but I know that she has a new life and is having a ball.

Sister Mary Jean Ferry, BVM

How important it is for us to keep recent memories alive! We all remember table in the Caritas Dining Room and how Gayle, after a certain time passed, would stand up and say, "Can I get you anything? Coffee, dessert?" That was her ritual. Another was to ask, "Where were you born?" When she wasn't playing Cribbage, she would come to our prayer group. Every time she prayed a beautiful prayer of gratitude for all at Mt. Carmel – the staff, the sisters, the grounds. She was a woman of great gratitude and service.

Sister Margaret Mear, BVM

Not too long ago, I was walking down the corridor and ran into Gayle. This was when Helen was in the hospital. Gayle said to me, "Do you drive?" "Yes." She said, "Would you take me to the hospital to see Helen?" "Sure, but let me sign out a car. My truck smells like horse." She said, "Oh, let's go in your truck."

Cousin

I can't tell you how wonderful it is to hear all the wonderful stories about Gayle. My memories go back to when I was young. She was quite a bit older than I was. My mother, she and her sister Dee (Virginia) were very close when I was young. In fact, Dee lived with us for a number of years when she was finishing school and her mother was in nursing training. I haven't seen her as much as I would have liked to these past years. I'm from the Chicago area and life gets in the way. I remember the smile she always had. She was the most delightful person I ever knew. She was always up for anything. During the summers, my cousin Dee would take us up to the Will and Frank Frimml farm. We would spend a few weeks with her up there. She was always active, out on the tractor, doing all kind of things. I just envied her. She seemed to have such life in her. We've seen her off and on throughout the years. She never changed. She always had such a great spirit and a love of doing things and being outside. I love hearing these stories because it brings back many wonderful memories of Gayle.