

Full Helen Thompson, BVM (St. George)
Wake Stories/Reflections
Marian Hall Chapel, Sept. 10, 2018

Kathleen Stanton Kwilas, St. Gertrude Class of 1957

I had the pleasure of having Sister St. George as my 6th grade teacher at St. Gertrude's School on the north side of Chicago. The whole class thought she was so cool as she wore "penny loafers," not the normal shoes for a nun in our era. She was also a good role model for young girls. Thank you, Sister, for being a nun who made me look forward to going to school. Rest peacefully in God's loving arms.

Pat Clark Sabatini

As you probably know, Helen fought going back to Mount Carmel. However, the past few years she has said over and over what a good move it was, how happy she was to be there and the incredible care and attention she received. Please thank all those who made her time with you so pleasant. I have many happy fun times of our growing up together. Helen was a beautiful skier in addition to everything else and such a good artist.

Sister Elizabeth Avalos, BVM

I met Helen when I was a Scholastic at Mundelein College. Helen coordinated the Upward Bound Program that assisted high school students to improve academically. I decided to do service and joined this program. This was my first introduction to working with African Americans and being taken out of my comfort zone, which is something Helen encouraged us all to do. Our paths intersected years later when we both were living in the east bay of San Francisco. During those years, a group of BVMs would go to Guadalupe College on December 31 to pray together and on January 1 to celebrate the New Year by setting up several TVs in the Pink House to watch football games. It was then I discovered that Helen's favorite team was the San Francisco 49ers. She made a good choice.

Helen had a way of gathering people together. Every four to six weeks she would drive an hour and half to Santa Rosa to meet with a group of folks who wanted to discuss current theological issues and break bread together. That group still meets and they call themselves Sister Helen's Group. Through justice activities, presentations, prayer, or fun times, Helen challenged us to look beyond ourselves. She believed there was a universe of ideas that we needed to discover. Sometime check out the BVM Galaxy, a visual impression refined by a verbal description of BVM demographics created by Sister Rita Basta, BVM and Helen as part of the Government Adaptation Study. Helen's memory will live on with a variety of people throughout the world.

Joe Tembrock, Santa Rosa, CA

Sister Helen was an inspiration for several dozen people in Santa Rosa, Calif., for over a decade. She provided an opportunity for us to be challenged and to learn. She would suggest a book – for example: "Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion" by Greg Boyle SJ. Then if we agreed, Sister would develop an outline to be used for discussion. We became a loving community. We never got a formal name; we were "Sister Helen's Group." I quote from a past email from Sister Helen for Gaudete Sunday: "As I conclude I realize that what I have rejoiced

for over two years now is having you, individually and as a group, as persons with whom I walk, with whom I enrich and deepen my spirituality. You are the real treasure for whom I rejoice!

Sister Marilyn Wilson, BVM

My first encounter with Helen was as at Mundelein College as a student in her Education Psychology class during the Scholasticate in the early 1960s and later in the Seminar for High School Student Teachers. I attribute much of my philosophy of teaching to her wisdom that said, "The Learning is a process based on the mutuality and fluidity of role of student and teacher." Occasionally I reminded her of my gratitude to her for insight.

With my move to the Bay Area Northern California in 1980, we shared many connections: cluster gatherings, region meetings, enneagram workshops, volunteering at soup kitchen, Senate preparations, rituals, prayer gatherings and much more. Helen always brought unique hors d'oeuvres to our BVM potlucks with great artistry in their presentation – too beautiful to eat but we did anyway. She was always brilliant, knowledgeable, gracious, and dedicated to community. I wasn't always able to follow her systems thinking but very appreciative to be mentally challenged and stretched. One special connection we shared was a love of the Russian River cabin and for a time I assisted her in the scheduling of guests and was able to retreat there on occasion. She shared the magnificent redwoods, her art and love of nature. So dear Helen, thank you for being mentor, friend and BVM sister.

Sister Sheila O'Brien, BVM

I am one of those wonderful one who got to ski with Helen out in Colorado. She taught at St. Gertrude's, which was my home parish. Eileen Crowley, a former student, wrote on Facebook what a wonderful teacher she was to have in grade school. Eileen also had her at Mundelein where Helen was preparing student teachers to go out into the inner city. What a wonderful gift that she could do that. Maybe you saw in her room that she had pictures of two women. One was Margaret Thornton who was a great professor at Mundelein. She recognized early on Helen's potential and guided her to go to the University of Chicago. In those days, the professors at the University of Chicago didn't think much of a Catholic educator. After all, Notre Dame was a football school. They were blown away by Helen's brilliance and intelligence. The other picture was of Roberdette Burns. When Helen was invited to Clarke, Roberdette was very wise in guiding her in financial matters. They formed a great friendship and, in fact, lived together in California.

Sister Peggy Geraghty, BVM

The first time I met Helen was in 1963. I was in her first Educational Psychology class that she taught at Mundelein after she finished her degree at the University of Chicago. We knew she was brilliant; she finished her degree in two years. Nobody finishes a doctorate in two years at the University of Chicago! However, Helen was able to do that. Yet, when she taught us Ed Psych, she could translate it for us poor humans who were in her class. I was out of school and had a phone call from her in the summer of 1966 asking if I would come and be part of Upward Bound with her that summer and any summers ahead. We had a wonderful in Upward Bound. It was a chance to see a whole other side of Helen. Administrator, yes; she was the director. Also a very dedicated Helen who went out into the projects to talk with the families about have their daughters come and be part of the program. She really was committed to developing the gifts of

the students who were underprivileged and hadn't had the best education. She did everything she could to boost them up so that they could go to college. When she wrote her classic book about the levels of consciousness, it was brilliant. Looking at it today, I can still hardly understand it. It was so advanced in terms of explaining human consciousness. It started at the primary level up to the level of a Mother Teresa. I was thinking today about levels of consciousness and how Helen's new level of consciousness must be so far beyond even the wonderful thoughts and ideas she was able to explain to us in her book. Now her level of consciousness is total. I rejoice with her

Kathy Schneider Rumstrom, Mundelein College Class of 1968, Niece of Sister Catherine (Katie) McHugh, BVM

I met Helen in the Upward Bound project. I worked for her for three years in the mid-1960s. The goal of the Upward Bound project was to help the disadvantage, low-income kids get the skills, motivation and coaching that they needed to succeed in school. Helen's program had another objective. She created a transforming experience for the college students that she hired. It was our job to live in the dorm and be roommates with the high school students, coach them, tutor them, help them with their homework (sometimes the professors didn't know it) and to give them advice, to be friends with them. All of us were very pro-equality, but on a very superficial level; we didn't know what it was all about. Helen created the situation of living in the dorm with them where you can't help but sit on the floor with your roommate and her friends just shooting the breeze. Then they start telling you that their mother or grandmother has to walk two miles to find a grocery store and can't take a bus because every penny is needed for the food. We started to learn what food deserts are all about. We probably had heard the term, but we didn't know the impact. Then you take your roommate home to the Westside of Chicago and see the legs of the baby cribs in coffee cans filled with some toxic chemical, I think it was kerosene, to keep the cockroaches away from the baby. You start thinking about the abhorrent, subpar living conditions even in Chicago. As an older person, I think, "How can I say 'even in Chicago?'" You can't cry with your roommate who is sobbing because her older brother who she adored was just killed in Vietnam because you start thinking about the fact that your brother is safely stationed in Germany. All these things and many, many more that Peggy and I could go on all day talking about experiences, they transformed us in a way that Helen expected them to happen. She planned it. We owe her such a huge debt of gratitude. She provide us with so much love and direction. With Peggy, Kathleen O'Brien Hoffencamp, Carolyn Smith, so many wonderful leaders, and love from Helen, we changed our lives. I am eternally grateful to her.

Sister Catherine (Kitty) Ornellas, BVM

Helen and Roberdette came to Hawaii when I was a caregiver for my family – my mom, my brother and my sister Mary. This is the other side of Helen. I took them around to one side of the island until we couldn't go any farther. There was a beautiful beach there, but it was not a swimmable beach. Helen and Roberdette got out of the car and Helen says, "Let's go swimming." I said, "You are not going swimming on that beach. It's too dangerous – the undertow and the currents are too dangerous." Helen said, "No, we'll go in. We'll have a swim. It's too beautiful." Well, Roberdette went in with her. I thought, "I'm not going to sit out here watching them drown. I'm going to go drown with them." I went into the ocean and we swam. Roberdette and Helen kept going farther out. I yelled, "Get back here or I will throw you out of this ocean." As you can see, we survived. Helen was something else. She was just a wonderful

person. When I first came here a year ago, she called and said, “Come and visit, Kitty.” So I went up to see her. Now Helen and Roberdette are in heaven are probably laughing about this situation.

Sister Marie Corr, BVM

I got acquainted with Helen when Regions 1 and 2 combined and became the West Region. The Regionals wanted a west leadership team, so from the various geographies from the West, we had delegates. That’s how Helen and I connected. It meant that I had to fly into Berkley for meetings. Helen was my hospitality person. She would meet me at the airport in Oakland and drive to her home in Berkley and drive all around Northern California to wherever we needed to be. I saw most of Northern California that way. We had deep conversations on the new cosmology and the evolution of consciousness. It was a marvelous time of conversation and sharing. I am really, very grateful.

Sister Catherine Dunn, BVM

I sent out an e-mail about Helen’s death mostly so that the Clarke alums would know that she died. I have received 84 responses, many who wrote at length, and all expressed that fact that she was a mentor to them when they were students. In 1973, I was teaching eighth grade in Carroll Catholic School in Lincoln, Ill. I also was in doctoral study at Arizona State. I got a phone call inviting me to teach a summer course at Clarke College. Helen brought me to Clarke in 1973. I taught a course and loved it. She came into the class several times. After the class was over, she invited me to her office. We sat down and talked about the course. She talked about much she liked the way I taught. She invited me then become a member of the Clarke faculty. “Now,” she said. I said, “I can’t do that, Helen. I’m under contract in Lincoln. I’ve signed a contract.” She said, “We’ll work on that.” What she did with the president was to buy up my contract. When Sister Leone Cordell, who was the principal, found a lay teacher, they paid for her for that year. Those of us who lived in the residence halls at Clarke used to meet every Wednesday and Saturday evenings with Helen and Therese Mackin. In fact, Helen started it. We’d have cocktails and then we’d go out to eat someplace. Helen loved to go to the Safari in East Dubuque because the Safari served cannibal hamburgers. She loved that raw hamburger. We sat there and watched her eat it. We did *not* order the same thing. A wonderful woman, a woman of many talents, a great intellect with a heart of love that she shared with so many people. We were blessed. Helen, may you rejoice with all people you know in heaven. We can hardly wait to see you again.

Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM

Helen also invited me to Clarke in the early 1970s. It was a new program in a sense – summer school and special programs, a wonderful umbrella concept, which led into continuing education in time. That was my experience with Helen and I am really, very grateful. That experience put me on another whole path in education and in my own personal development and relationships that continued right up to today. Some of you may remember Helen’s great love for the Myers-Briggs test. She used to give workshops and explanations. I don’t know if anyone in this room was present, but we had a wonderful workshop at an over 40 or over 50 gathering that happened briefly in our community history in the 1980s and 1990s. Helen did an evening on the Myers-Briggs and it was fun. Everybody had to fill out a form even if you had done it before. Helen put them in groups. I remember how stunning it was to see who we are in a group of about 100.

From one table of thinkers to all kinds of people who were extroverts and outnumbered by the introverts. It was a wonderful experience. That was Helen. She did all kinds of work to pull that off. The BVM and Associates had a grand time. Helen always had a way, and I know her from community work, to give her all. Sometimes she was way out ahead of us; at least I speak for myself. She was very supportive and willing to bring you along. Thanks, Helen.

Sister Eileen Healy, BVM

The first thing I have to say has to do with Helen's patience. As a novice, I had a tendency to run and get snagged on doorknobs. My rosaries were all in shattered pieces. I don't know if it was Leo or St. Christine who we went to and show them our messed up rosaries, but always it was, "At recreation, find SM St. George and she will fix it for you." I think she was a sacristan. We would meet up and she would redo my rosaries and give suggestions on where to wear so I didn't get snagged on every doorknob. I will never forget one Senate we had at Clarke. It was the first time that this came into my consciousness. She was very upset because we just accepted the budget. A group who knew math and finances would look at the budget first and then tell us if it was fine and we would all say "Aye." She was very upset. It was the first time I heard that our budget was a "moral instrument." It was our responsibility to look at and see. That didn't greatly encourage me to study budgets, but it was always in my consciousness that at least we should. When I was at St. Paul's, we would go early to basketball games if St. Bridget was planning ahead of us just to watch Helen.

Sister Kathleen McGrath, BVM

I knew Helen in the later years at the shelter for homeless families that Catholic Charities ran in Santa Rosa. She came in one day and said, "Kathleen, I need something more to do when I'm up here in the Santa Rosa area." She got very involved with our families. If someone just needed someone to listen, if we needed a receptionist at the reception desk, or if someone needed a food bag – she took care of many things and she touched the hearts of many families who really needed a touching.

Sister Karen Conover, BVM

I met Helen when I completed the novitiate in California and I, along with three of my Set of 1965, came to Clarke College. That was in the winter of 1968. Whether it was that summer of the next summer, I cannot remember, Therese Mackin, BVM and Helen, whose offices were in close proximity, put up with me as a gopher, a doer of whatever they wanted to have done. As I look back, I thought, that's pretty amazing. Here's this person who I thought was way up here and I was just this lowly scholastic. I wanted to mention Helen's fidelity to Roberdette Burns, BVM in the later years. We watched Roberdette diminish in size and ability and then came to Mount Carmel. We saw how often Helen traveled to visit her, to be present to her. It really touched my heart. Those bonds of friendship continued. She just made those things happen.

Sister Therese Mackin, BVM

Of all the things Helen could teach me, she taught me how to ski. We went up and down the hill. I fell down and she picked me up. She did that in a variety of ways during her life and mine.