



## **Sharing of Memories of Helen Marie Macatee, BVM**

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, April 27, 2021

### **Irene Lukefahr, BVM**

I first met Helen when we were both living in St. Louis in the 1990s. Later I learned that Helen was a wonderful volleyball coach for the girls at St. Francis Xavier Grade School. She even took care of washing all their uniforms. As we heard in the eulogy, the girl's team won the city championship!

Years later, Helen and I got reacquainted when we both lived in San Jose, Calif. We would often meet at Mass and also catch up on community news. I experienced her kindness when I moved into my first apartment. She and Ann Galvin came bearing cookies and then stayed to help unpack kitchenware.

By the time we met again in Dubuque, Helen had returned from several years in Zimbabwe and I had returned from seven years in Ghana. We had lots of stories to share of our experiences in Africa. I could well imagine the challenges Helen had as a teacher, since she had little or no teaching materials. But she seemed to have loved the students and the students loved her. Helen also expressed deep gratitude to Lynn Winsor who had sent volleyball equipment, which Helen immediately put to good use with her students. I think Helen thought this was the best gift she could have received and shared.

Although Helen had limited eyesight and hearing loss, she was always gracious and grateful whenever I visited her in Marian Hall. As many of us know, Helen had the habit of taking a person's hand and kissing it, like you were the pope. Then she would say thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I thank you, Helen, for your friendship and your inner beauty that now shines forth as you have come to know the abundance of God's love.

### **Mary Anne Hoopes, BVM**

I went to Zimbabwe with Pat Nolan on a third world grant. We stayed in the convent in Chivu where Helen Marie had lived. Helen Marie had left before we arrived. We met some of Helen Marie's students, who were filled with admiration for her as a teacher. They spoke of her interest in each student and her desire to help them. I am sure they never forgot her.

### **Brigid Mary Hart, BVM**

My memories of Helen Marie are from the late 1990s at Wright Hall. Private as Helen was, I sometimes was privileged to see her sketchbook. She had an unusual ability to capture life in the face of another. I remember the sketches of African women in beautiful dresses. Helen's ability to capture dignity and compassion remains with me. Thank you, Helen.

### **Mary Ann Fremgen**

I had never met Helen Marie until I was visiting the sisters with my dog Bronx. I first met her in the hallway of Marian Hall where she became very excited over seeing Bronx, who was in my arms. When she moved to the memory care unit, she was out of her room more. When I brought Bronx closer to her she would say in a very high pitched voice, "Oh, oh, oh, how sweet. Sweet little dog," and then she hugged him. Whenever I arrived on the fourth floor, the staff would find her to watch how excited she'd get with Bronx. They told me they never saw her so happy except when Bronx was there. Helen Marie, I hope you are forever happy resting in peace!

### **Agnes Marie Keena, BVM**

Although my relationship with Helen was limited, she came into my life when I was beginning a new ministry as principal. I often expressed to Helen and Margaret Mullin that I felt unsure of my ability to be a principal. Helen and Margaret kept reassuring me that I had the gift and to 'just do it'. I am so thankful I took their advice.

Helen and Margaret were always writing grants to get funds for special projects for the students at Xavier Grade School in St. Louis. One Saturday when I went over to see them, they were leaving with a van of students. I asked Helen where they were going and where did they get the van? I found out that day how good they were in obtaining what they needed for their students. Helen and Margaret knew the right people to ask. They were headed to a math competition with some of the students. Helen was known in the Archdiocese as an excellent math teacher. She also was a great coach for the girls' basketball team.

When Helen decided to go to Zimbabwe, Africa, many BVMs and schools in the area began collecting school items for her to take. We packaged and sent many items throughout the years. Helen was always grateful. I regret that after Helen returned from her time in Africa I never had the opportunity to connect with her, except for brief meetings in the halls at Mount Carmel. The line from Mary Frances' letter 85 reads, "If our divine Lord and His sweet mother and St. Joseph knows us. And is pleased. No matter for the world."

I believe that Helen truly lived the psalmist prayer Psalm 95: "Unbar your heart and simply wait for God. There is so much grace in waiting." Now, I pray that Helen will walk with us as "we move together—in beloved community, steadfast love, enduring mission from past to present and thrust into the unknown future." (Excerpt from "*O Sacred Spirit*," BVM Assembly prayer, 2021).

### **Mary Healey, BVM**

Helen Macatee had the most beautiful smile; it was like a sunrise. When we lived together 60 some years ago, I didn't notice it, but when she came briefly to Wright Hall where I was working, she was happy to see someone she knew. At Marian Hall she didn't leave her room without an aide escorting. The first time I met her in the hall there, I didn't realize she couldn't see me. She was just passing by but I stopped and spoke to her. She broke into that wonderful smile and kissed me. Any time after that she always recognized my voice, smiled, and spoke. One day last week I was in the Gables and stopped in her room. She was lying with her eyes closed and Katie Pfiffner was holding her hand. I wondered if I could see that smile once more and spoke to her. She didn't smile, but she let go of Katie's hand and grabbed mine.

### **Mary Jo Keane, BVM**

Helen and I used to attend the Sunday Madonna de la Strata liturgy at Loyola University in Chicago. Helen was an introvert with many talents, including art that was present on some of the walls of the dining room. She quietly talked about her life before the services began. My very favorite story was the time she taught Shakespeare in high school in Africa. She totally enjoyed it. I did too.

### **Alice Caulfield, BVM**

Helen was a very private person and yet enjoyed a good party. She was the driver at Marian Hall when we only had a car or station wagon. Sisters in wheelchairs had to use the Project Concern bus that used a lift to raise them into the bus. They were always afraid as they were raised up and down. We got our first customized van and Helen was the driver. At the beginning the ramp had to be put up and down manually. She did it all and enjoyed it. Sisters in wheelchairs didn't have an option to go for a ride or out for ice cream until Helen offered to take them out. Sometimes it was in the evening. She was willing to do whatever. A real asset as an employee. She thoroughly enjoyed working with the sisters. We are grateful for you, Helen.

### **Gwen Farry, BVM**

In the summer of 1992, Helen Macatee was the driver of the first Marian Hall van. The van was certainly a step up from the old station wagon, but did not have an electronic lift for wheelchair access. Helen had to lift the ramp by hand, push the sisters up the ramp, firmly attach the wheelchairs, assist with seat belts, and then fold the ramp before taking off for a destination.

That summer *Sister Act* came to Dubuque and the Mount Carmel and Marian Hall sisters were invited to attend. There was much excitement at Marian Hall because the movie had been filmed at and around St. Paul Parish in San Francisco, home for several BVMs and mission for several others. Word was that pictures of Father Donaghoe and Mother Mary Frances Clarke could be seen in the convent community room in the movie, and those familiar with St. Paul's were on the lookout for glimpses of the Star Bakery and possibly the barbershop across the street from the church. Helen made multiple trips to and from the theater, probably viewed the movie at least three times. Indeed, it was Marian Hall's *Sister Act* directed by Helen Macatee.

### **Rosalie Bradish Benson, cousin of Mary Anne Bradish, BVM**

Helen and I were in the same Holy Family class of 1946. She was extremely athletic and always ready for some fun. When we were freshmen, she set out to "torment" Sister Mary Melanie, our Latin teacher, by locking her out of the classroom. Helen's daily insurrection resulted in fewer minutes of class time for all of us. Three from our class became BVMs: Jean Leonard, Henrietta Blomer, and Helen. Now all are gone.

### **Kathleen Mullin, BVM**

Helen Marie and my BVM cousin Margaret Mullin were in the same set. They became colleagues and friends when missioned together for years at St. Francis Xavier grade school in St. Louis. I got to know Helen Marie from attending meetings in St. Louis and visits there. I observed Helen Marie enthusiastically teaching math and computer science to the 7th and 8th graders; they excelled with her. She, like her family members, was artistic; students and housemates benefitted from her ability to do artistic projects.

Helen Marie was treasured by three generations of Margaret's family in Davenport, where the two of them enjoyed holiday and summer visits. She was athletic, a good card player, a listener, and displayed a sense of humor. With them, she felt she belonged.

Once when I had to attend a night meeting out of town and travel back for a next day funeral, I asked Helen Marie to accompany me to keep me awake. On that drive she shared about her many siblings and all their accomplishments. I realized they kept in touch with her from California and Hawaii, and she spoke lovingly of them.

Several years ago at Marian Hall, Helen Marie and I reconnected. We had some good talks. Knowing her delight in chocolate candy I brought some to her on each visit. Helen Marie had lost hearing and visual skills, but when we met she hugged me, a gesture she was hesitant about giving before, and her smile was a blessing.