

*Sister Harriet Holles, BVM (Agneda)*  
*Wake Stories/Reflections*  
*Marian Hall Chapel, June 21, 2017*

**Sue Stevenson Krocheski, Friend—Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM (Lucian)**

I deeply regret that I cannot be with all of you for Harriet's wake and funeral today. Harriet and I have been very good friends for close to 50 years. We met when I was a member of the BVM community and a student at Clarke in the late 1960s and our friendship was solidified when she stayed with my husband Paul and me in the summers of the early 1970s while she was taking classes at the University of Minnesota. Harriet visited us annually up until recent years.

It is a little glimpse into those earlier visits that I wish to share with all of you today. I believe we knew a side of Harriet that perhaps many of you did not. Once we had children, it was impossible to go to concerts or movies or out to eat when she came to visit but she didn't mind one bit. With three little kids to care for, there was very little down time to just sit and visit. I have such clear memories of Harriet pitching right in to help with meal preparations, wash dishes, feed babies, change babies, fold laundry; you name it, she was right there to do it. The two of us would sit and have our adult conversations during naptime for the kids. Harriet almost always insisted that she babysit for an evening while she was here to give Paul and me a chance to go out to dinner—a rare treat for a young couple for whom money for a babysitter just wasn't in the budget. Most of the time in those early years she rode the Greyhound bus when she visited. I would pack the kids in the car and take them to the bus station to pick her up and drop her off. Our oldest, Dan (now 42 with two kids of his own) always called her "Hurry-Ott" because he couldn't say "Harriet." For days after she left every time he saw any kind of a bus he would say, "Hurry-Ott rides the bus! Hurry-Ott rides the bus!"

Then there was the time all five of us stayed with Harriet and Sister Bertha Fox, BVM (Dolorose) on Rush Street in Dubuque. I think they thanked God for their vocations after we left! Dan, Julie and Laura grew up loving Harriet and looking forward to seeing her every summer. In later years, they were so proud to introduce their spouses to Harriet and to share pictures of their children with her each year in their Christmas cards. They, too, are grieving Harriet's death. Harriet, you were a gift from God in all of our lives, but most especially in mine. I am so very grateful for our 50 years of friendship and will cherish my memories of those years forever. May you rest in God's peace for all eternity!

**Sister Helen Gourlay, BVM (Frances Helen) and Sister Suzanne Effinger, BVM (Frances Carol), Milwaukee, Wis.—Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM**

We remember Harriet as a faithful friend to Sister Barbara Kutchera, BVM (George Mary) during her many years fighting cancer. Not being comfortable with busy highways, Harriet would take secondary highways to venture into Milwaukee and have a story to tell about her travels and always had a nice sense of humor. We shared the news of Harriet's death with Barbara's nephew, Joe Kutchera, and he said, "Please extend our condolences. Harriet was a beautiful person. Much love to all at the BVM community."

**Sister Marge Clark, BVM—Read by Sister Diane Forster, BVM**

When I lived in Dubuque, we discovered that Harriet and I "played well" together. There were many interests we had in common. One summer we did two road trips. She didn't like to drive, other than in town, while I love long distance driving. We did a day trip to the Amana Colonies, visiting all seven of them, and the lily pond, in one day and we enjoyed German food for lunch. Another time we went to Chicago for a few days. There was an exhibit of blown glass by Chihuly at the Garfield Park Conservatory amongst the plants and water. Harriet kept one of the pictures on her wall. The next day we saw the outdoor art exhibit *Earth from Above* at Millennial Park. In between, we ate out, stayed at Holy Name Convent, and had a great time.

**Mary Anne Miles Vydra, Class of 1965, Clarke University**

I took a number of math classes at Clarke taught by Sister Mary "Agenda" (*playing on Harriet's religious name Agneda*).

**Sister Carol Spiegel, BVM (Ann Carla)—Read by Sister Catherine Jean Hayen, BVM**

Harriet had many gifts. Because of her ability to think in both analytical and spiritual realms, Harriet combined ideas in creative ways. Her presentations for the Clarke Spirituality Weekends were *not* to be missed. I have many happy memories of Harriet, including two road trips—one to Minnesota and one to Missouri. I am very disappointed not to be present with you.

**Sister Catherine Jean Hayen, BVM**

I remember Harriet in so many ways. She was friend, neighbor, spiritual mentor, and an amazing cosmologist. A strong memory of her is her love of Bruce Sanguin's book, *If Darwin Prayed*, which we used in this service. In one of her last days of consciousness, I read her a quote from this book. She so loved hearing it. Harriet, may you now see the cosmos in a totally new way.

**Sister Cecilia Fandel, OSM, Cousin**

I am one of her cousins that came to visit her here in Dubuque. There other cousins and nieces and nephews here today also. I knew Harriet in numerous ways. She did spiritual direction and retreats for me. I used to come here to the Motherhouse, stay on campus, and meet with Harriet. I really appreciated her fine quality of listening and then honing in to where I was. She did not say "You ought to do this" or "You ought to do that." She presented a path to follow and then I had to do it myself, which was fine with me; I really enjoyed it. I also had her come to Ladysmith, Wis., where the Servants of Mary are located, to do retreats and spiritual direction for our older sisters. I really appreciated that. Most importantly, we enjoyed having our cousins' weekends here in Dubuque. I think I know everything there is to know about Dubuque! I really enjoyed the meals, especially the one meal, chili, that she made for us. It was a lot of fun.

**Margaret Fandel Ferry, Cousin**

I am one of the older cousins. When we would come to Dubuque for the cousins' weekend, we would stay here and see all the deer run around. Later, when Harriet was in her apartment, we stayed with her. When she would make the meal, she always make Aunt Mildred's baked beans. Aunt Mildred was the mother of Sister Cecelia and me. She shared the recipe with

everyone. To tell you the truth, I have never even made those baked beans myself, but Harriet made them every time we came.

#### **Sister Judy Callahan, BVM (Eugene Mary)**

Harriet was able to take something very ordinary and see the spiritual behind it. About seven or eight years ago while riding with me, she asked me all the things that a GPS could do. After I described all the features, she said, "That's a lot like how God guides us. The path is there but we have to know where we want to go. We know things happen along the way. If we make a detour, it says 'recalculating.'" She was delighted and surprised by all the features, and was able to see a deeply spiritual message. I can't turn on my GPS without thinking of Harriet and how God guides us in an even better way than the GPS.

#### **Sister Bertha Fox, BVM (Dolorose)**

I lived with Harriet at St. Columbkille's here in Dubuque for over a dozen years and learned some things about her that probably nobody else knows. She was able to correct math papers while watching TV. I could not correct any papers while watching TV. Also, I met Aunt Mildred, who came to visit us a couple of times, and I know how to make Aunt Mildred's baked beans. Harriet always brought them to BVM potlucks. It was a joy to live with Harriet and a challenge sometimes as I was a challenge for her. We got along and really loved each other. It was neat to meet family, being with Harriet's sister Alice at the time she died, and knowing all these young people (nieces and nephews) and the cousins.

#### **Sister Mary Ellen Caldwell, BVM (Eugenio)**

I had the joy of team teaching liturgy courses with Harriet at Clarke University. Quite a few times, we would do prayer weekends together. We also did programs for the Archdiocesan Lay Ministry Program. The particular joy that I had, as you can imagine from looking at the worship aid for this prayer service, is that she was the creative one.

#### **Sister Therese Mackin, BVM (Jeremy)**

We use to have fun when Harriet was Sister Mary Agneda and we would call her Sister Mary "Agenda" just for fun.

#### **Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM (Lester)**

I am a member of Harriet's set and have known her all these years as a friend. In following Bertha, I must admit that I got to know her much better after the Clarke fire (1984), which was a devastating experience for Harriet who lost everything. She ended up at St. Columbkille's, a remodeled school building that supplied housing at that time. BVMs Barbara Kutchera and Mary Crimmin (Agnes) and I lived across the hall from Bertha and Harriet. It really was a special time for me to get to know Harriet and all her dimensions. She shared her African stories, her spirituality, and all her gifts. The one piece about spiritual direction that I have used often in group settings is that "You can't get a plant to grow by pulling on its leaf." Harriet, I will continue to use your plant metaphor and always think of you lovingly.

#### **Sister Catherine Dunn, BVM (Catherine Michele)**

Clarke was enriched by Harriet's presence. The students were very respectful and appreciative of her. She was a tough teacher, but they did respect her and love her. It's evident today by people's responses regarding Harriet years later. She endeared herself to them; they knew she was doing the right thing with them. Clarke was blessed and enriched by her presence.

**Sister Marlene Pinzka, OSF, Rochester, Minn.**

I want to add that Loras College, too, was blessed by Harriet's presence. Harriet was part of my interview when our college closed and I came to Loras for a job interview. She has been a friend ever since. I learned so much from her.

**Sister Carol Marie Baum, BVM (Joseph Louis)**

Harriet was living in the BVM Circle apartments when I was lucky enough to move in next door in 1998. Harriet loved a good supper with great conversation and a great bottle of wine. She had a wonderful sense of humor, but she really enjoyed fine conversation around the table. We were blessed here at Mount Carmel when she would come periodically and share a weekend of spiritual reflection with us. Harriet was an avid reader, so it wasn't the "norm" of what was shared, but rather Harriet and her vast understanding of a most loving God.

**Jody Doyle, Manchester, Iowa**

Harriet was my spiritual director for years. Early on in our relationship, she mentioned that as a kid she wanted to be an interior decorator. How surprised she was that she became a BVM. As we were talking, it occurred to us that she had become an interior decorator—our interiors—and how she led each one of us to know ourselves so that we could also know our God. How blessed all of us are! I feel like I have heard all of these stories before, but through her perspective. We had great visits. The fire was so real to her, Mundelein College so important to her, and her math students were some of her greatest gifts. She talked about how important family was to her. She often said, "And they came to see me . . . They brought me this for Christmas . . . When I was here for my jubilee, this is what they gave me." How gratifying it was for her that you loved her so much and put that into action. She loved all of us and put that into action.

**Judy Haley Geeson**

I want to speak for the Cosmology class. As Harriet always said, "It's not cosmetology. It's cosmology." She increased my faith because she taught me about the universe and about energy. I was afraid of her class. I thought it was going to be math (not good!). I thought it was going to be physics (not good!). No, she had a way of using her theology and her brilliance and her simple-ness sometimes, to make us, not understand the universe, but appreciate it as God's work. I am thrilled that some of the class is here today. Some of us have been together with her for seven or eight years. I was there for two years and it was fabulous.

**Sister Irene Lukefahr, BVM, BVM Life Facilitator**

This morning I was speaking with Sister Mary Anne Hoopé (Bernarde Marie) who is back in the States from Ghana. She so regrets that she could not be here. The Centre for Spiritual Renewal in Kumasi, Ghana, benefited very much by Harriet's presence over a number of visits. She gave

retreat days and directed 30-day retreats. She shared her birthday with a little baby born on her birthday one year. Harriet always considered Miriam her baby. We thank you, Harriet, for all the ways you enriched the church of Kumasi. Thank you.

**Marguerite Ryan, Former Student**

I brought a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke and wanted to read it because it identifies her as the person who lives and has lived that poem. I recognize Harriet in it now.

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,  
then walks with us silently out of the night.  
These are the words we dimly hear:  
You, sent out beyond your recall,  
go to the limits of your longing.  
Embody me.  
Flare up like flame  
and make big shadows I can move in.  
Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.  
Just keep going. No feeling is final.  
Don't let yourself lose me.  
Nearby is the country they call life.  
You will know by its seriousness.  
Give me your hand.

**Bernie Curran, Friend**

On the way over here today, I was thinking how in the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan was a name that was quite common. His message was "The medium is the message." When I think about the medium, the message and the universe, I think that my dear friend was an icon for all of us to see the presence behind it all. In her class, there might be 30-35 persons. Suddenly we found ourselves to be as one. One of the mysteries of the universe is that it is all one. I have a stuttering problem, especially when I get nervous. Harriet was always present to all of us. Her presence made us feel free to talk.

**Sean Bradley, Colleague, Clarke University**

Harriet and I met about 20 years ago and have been good friends ever since. When she told me about someone relating to her that she was an interior decorator, she was so tickled. That thought lasted with her for quite a while. Harriet and I had a lot of good talk over the years, just a lot of good talk. She had so much to talk about, so much to teach, so much to relate in her beautiful way. She also always had a way of not letting me take myself too seriously. I remember two times in particular. One was when I bumped into her on the elevator as I was leaving at the end of the day. Of course, I mentioned all those very important things I had done all day long. She said to me, "What did you do today that really made this a better place?" That was not what was on my mind as I was leaving that particular day. Another time we were crossing the street, possibly on our way to check our mail. I must have been in a good mood because I was singing, which is unusual for me. She stops, and it might have been in the middle

of the street, looks up at me and says, “Now, what did you do with the money?” I said, “What?” “The money your mother gave you for voice lessons. You obviously . . .” God bless Harriet!

### **Donna Whitcomb, Niece**

I wanted to chime in about Harriet’s sense of humor. Thankfully, Harriet had a sense of humor because she had to deal with all of us for many years. I have a couple of stories. One involved my son Ryan when he was about 3 years old. I believe Harriet had come to visit us for Thanksgiving. We were all sitting around the table. Harriet was there with my mom, Alice, sitting next to her. My sister Debbie was also there. Her son had gone to the same preschool that Ryan had attended. Debbie said to Ryan, “So how do you like Sonshine Preschool?” Ryan proceeded to say, “I hate those Jesus songs.” I’m glad everyone is laughing; Harriet laughed too.

Sister Harriet’s sense of humor came in handy one time when my sister Karen and I came for a visit here. We were heading to Eagle Point Park when a bee flew into the car. Karen was driving. She jumped out of the car without putting it into park, leaving Harriet in the passenger seat. Harriet said, “I don’t want to ride with Karen anymore.” She mostly held to that and tried not to ride with Karen after that day! Harriet really had a great sense of humor. When she would come to visit us, she would take the bus or one of us would come and pick her up. Harriet didn’t like crowds very much. As our family grew, she tried to keep visits to more individuals or small groups. She taught us so very much. We had great conversations and enjoyed her great sense of humor.

### **Sister Patricia Ann Taylor, BVM (Wilbur)—Read by Sister Anne Marie McKenna, BVM**

Harriet was my spiritual director for decades and my spiritual journey was enriched beyond my hope. There are many aspects to a spiritual journey and her ability to direct and enable growth was priceless. This is a thank you, Harriet, for your generous sharing and direction given so freely, year after year, and giving me possible paths that enabled the Spirit’s gifts to mature in undreamed ways. As you experience the undreamed realities of an eternity beyond our limited imagination, know you made a difference freeing people to live, even in this life, more deeply in God.