



MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

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SILENCE and PRESENCE



Sister Mary Ellen Hanson, SSMO (on right) was on retreat at Marymount Hermitage from June 28-July 6, 2013 while Father Christopher Viscardi, S.J. was also here (center). We both appreciated the privilege and joy of daily Mass.

“Just Being”: One Week at Marymount Hermitage

By Sister Mary Ellen Hanson, SSMO

It wasn't like I had never been there before but in some ways it was! July 2013 was different in many respects from my previous extended stay 2004-2005's from fall to spring. So I was glad for that. No snow to travel through this time! However, Marymount Hermitage on the mesa in the summer is known for heat and thunderstorms. We experienced both. The “we” were Sister Beverly, HSM, and a Jesuit priest who was retreating all the way from Georgia. I appreciated the presence of both, along with another occasional attendee at Mass.

SILENCE? Oh, yes, multiples of that. I still continue to “wonder” at the sense of SILENCE in the

midst of heat and evening thunder in the distance. But, you know, SILENCE is the real gift of Marymount! Coming in to the space there from a noise-weary world is not a shock actually, but a real gift, once I settled in enough to recognize it. Even after these past two months of being back in Oregon, residing in the fastest growing county in the state, I can still “taste” the SILENCE which Marymount offered me.

Now some have observed that I may have some reduction in hearing acuteness. To that I also agree. As I continue to move toward the gifted years of living into the 80's, I also note that there are many “sounds” and “seeing” reflecting “newness” or is it “awareness” or is it “joy” or is it the inner SILENCE? This factor of SILENCE is truly something about which to wonder. It is a way of being empty AND full. It is really a Presence, you see.

So you suspect I brought along “things to do”? Yes, a rosary, of course, along with appropriate foods for the week. One of the four volume Office books and apparel for various weather conditions were basic. A camera was tucked in somewhere. And the ever handy-dandy field glasses for “silent” viewing of wild game, which also appreciated the silence and reclusive living. Then there was the journal with brief notings and prayer intentions.

Did I sing during the week? Well, I sang a lot while driving the 8 hours from Beaverton, Oregon moving from far west into the change of time zone in the Idaho mountains. Then singing later “in my heart” occasionally, and out loud at liturgies of Mass, Lauds and Vespers. Did I notice the buzzing of my companion insects? Of course! But the special SILENCE still

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predominated. It is indeed the grace of Marymount Hermitage. Wondrously, it remains when I “let go” of busyness as I have while writing this after-the-fact reflection!

*Sister Mary Ellen Hanson, SSMO
Beaverton, Oregon
September 10, 2013*



*Sister Mary Ellen helping me re-pot my aloe vera when she was here during her sabbatical.
(Photo from 2005 Archives)*



Sister M. Beverly's aloe vera “jungle”...only a very small portion. The plants normally occupy the chapel and hallway, but I bring them into the house if the winters are too cold since the hallway is unheated. (2005 Archives)

For Dolores...or The Aloe Vera Adventure

By Sister M. Beverly, H.S.M.

I came to your house for the first time in February, 1994, when Father Bill McCann was to be ordained a priest at the Cathedral in Las Cruces, NM. I had never been in Hatch, New Mexico before, but I knew it was “The Chili Capital of the World” as the large sign outside the town proclaims. My Mexican-American grandmother had told me stories about Hatch and the surrounding area, especially Salem, and had showed me photos of the cemetery there where my ancestors are buried.

It's strange to come to a place I have never been to before and yet feel at home. But I think that was mostly due to your gift of hospitality and your family taking me to their hearts, for which I thank you (and all the Stroiks). Do you remember that Shelby, your granddaughter, was celebrating her fourth birthday while I was there? Later she was quoted as saying, “Sister Beverly is like family...only far away.” Nice.

Do you remember that as I was leaving to fly home to Marymount Hermitage you insisted I take a small aloe vera plant with me? You had them growing all over the house in lovely pots and also outside in the hot, sunny climate they love. Obviously, you had a green thumb and so does your husband, Paul, with your beautiful lawn, outside flowers and shrubs. The reason I did not want to take the plant is that I never thought I had a green thumb. I told you I did not want to have a hassle at the airport. I thought maybe plants were quarantined and I would not be allowed to transport one. You assured me all would be fine, but I still was sure it would not survive the trip home with me. It did.

It grew and grew and I needed to re-pot it many times. I did not know what to do with all the shoots which kept coming up, so I threw them away. (I am ashamed to remember.) When the plant was too big for my hermitage window sill, I threw it outside into the winter snow (and it died, of course...alas), but I kept a sprout in the pot and the life cycle continued. You told me aloe vera are like weeds, hard to kill

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For Dolores...

them. I found that to be true.

I don't remember exactly when it occurred to me that other people might like to have an aloe vera plant, and that I could sell the new sprouts. I know it was at least 12 years ago or more. By then, Sister Rebecca Mary and I were in high production of a variety of hand-crafted items and we were selling our wares very successfully in parishes, especially in Boise. I first started getting mugs and pots from the dollar stores. When people found out what I was doing, they started giving me cups and pots or getting them for me from yard sales. Aloe vera plants have become an important staple of my parish sales. At the last parish in Cottonwood, Idaho, this year, I decided for reasons of space, I would not bring the plants. A lady (the mother of eight) asked for them and I realized it was a mistake not to bring them because people really do want them.

I have learned a lot about marketing. One principle is: "The more you have, the more you will sell." In hindsight, that seems obvious, but I had to learn it. As it applies to the aloe vera plants, I sell (on an average) half of what I bring. If I bring 10 plants, I will sell 5. If I bring 40 plants, I will sell 20. I make between \$100-200 a month with my aloe vera sales. It has gotten so that people know I have an aloe vera "jungle" in the chapel and in the hallway (from the house to the chapel), and they will call me up and ask if they can come buy one or two. Aloe vera is medicinal and that is the one aspect that people like, especially Mexicans.

I keep my large "mama plants" in the back of chapel (somewhat like decorations) and it was there that I have learned an amazing fact. If the largest plants are not moved, so that the plant continues to get taller and taller, it eventually puts out a flower. My type of aloe vera (actually yours!) put out (rarely) a pale yellow flower. However, a friend of mine who grew them in her yard in Florida, had a species which put out red flowers. I thought this was a fun discovery, but it took me years to find it out because I am always moving them to take the shoots and re-pot the larger plants.

Now that Father Bill has told me that you are dying of brain cancer, I wanted to tell you of this almost twenty-year adventure with the aloe vera (which has taken over my life) and to tell you I owe the success of this small business venture to your insistence in the beginning. I have asked my friends to pray for you, dearest Dolores. We pray for Paul and for all your family that the peace and consolation of God stand guard over their hearts and minds at your passing. We will miss you very much, especially your hearty laugh and bright, dark, brown eyes. My aloe vera plants are a small testimony to your huge heart which always gave so much love...a love which keeps on giving and giving...a heart like God's. When you are with God, we will depend on the charity of your prayers for us. God bless you always, Dolores.

EPILOGUE:

I wrote this letter in early October and sent it as a hard copy to Dolores and Paul. Much to my surprise, she herself wrote a small note on the inside of a card shaped like a white butterfly. Her note read:

Dear Sister Beverly,

Thank you for remembering me with the Aloe Vera plant that I gave you so many years ago. It was a lovely story. Your letter was very touching. Everyone has enjoyed it. And so may the Aloe plant continue! God's Blessings to you.

Love,

Dolores

She must have shared the letter with our mutual friends because Rosie Lack also of Hatch, NM wrote to say that her grandfather, who used to care for the Salem cemetery (which I wrote about) had died and she wonders who will care for it now.

Dolores' note was written on October 8, 2013 and she died on October 30. Father Bill McCann will offer her funeral Mass. Please keep in your prayers all our beloved dead during this month of November and pray for the consolation of families who have recently lost loved ones. Thank you and God bless you. Mass is offered every month for all the benefactors of Marymount Hermitage both living and deceased.