



Sister Sara Louise Reilly

February 11, 1916 – April 15, 2011

Each of us may experience another in differing ways. My self-imposed challenge in the next few minutes is to present a snapshot of the Sister Sara Louise whom I knew and loved and leave undisturbed your own memories of her.

Unbeknownst to either of us, the journey which Sister Sara Louise and I would later share began in the summer of 1933. On the 22nd of June that year, Elizabeth Reilly was graduated from Langley High School in Sheraden, where she and her family lived. Just three days prior, I was born at Magee Hospital and came to live with my family also in Sheraden.

Our journey would resume thirty-six years later in 1969, when Sister Sara Louise and I began eight years together at Ennis Hall, she on Mother Richard Ann's council, I as the community treasurer. According to the old adage, you never really know someone until you live with them. It was in those eight years that I came to know, love and respect Sister Sara Louise.

In 1998 Sara was interviewed for the oral history program. The interviewer, Sister Virginia Pascarella, asked her to identify the gifts which she brought to her life as a Sister of Charity. Sara hesitated just a moment and said: "It's always difficult to do a self-assessment." Then she continued: "My gifts were those that were traits of my family. Each one in our family (and Sara was the youngest of seven children), each one had organizational ability. They also exhibited fidelity to whatever they did."

Sara's organizational ability was evident in everything she was asked to do over the years. When she was appointed archivist in 1981, she undertook the monumental task of organizing and establishing a cataloging system of the congregational archives. We often hear a person referred to as a "mover and a shaker." Sara was a "mover" in the literal sense. She was responsible for moving the archives from ground floor St. Joseph to DePaul Center. When the new archive wing was added to DePaul Center, Sara moved again and she was involved in the final move of the archives to the new space here at Caritas Christi. Those who know Sister Sara Louise know that she did not stand by and supervise. She was a "hands-on" mover.

The second family trait which Sara identified was that of fidelity to whatever was to be done. In 1938 Sister Sara Louise wrote to Mother Rose Genevieve asking to pronounce the vows that would end the period of temporary profession. She wrote: "*Having lived community life for five years during which I have experienced the joy that can come only from fidelity to my God, I now understand that the service He asks of me is a faithful and generous observance of the Constitutions and of my holy Vows.*"

When she wrote these words she could have no knowledge of the contradictions this fidelity would introduce to her life: she loved little children, yet spent the majority of her teaching years at Seton Hill College; she loved languages, especially French, but taught the sciences; she loved to teach, but much of her life was given to administration and corporate responsibilities. Whatever she did, she did with fidelity.

Fortunately Sara liked to study and was an excellent student. She prepared carefully for every ministry to which she was assigned. Perhaps there was one exception. She was 19 years of age when she was missioned to Saint John the Baptist grade school in Lawrenceville, her very first assignment. There she was to relieve the second-grade teacher each afternoon so that the sister could rest. It was Lent and Sara recalled with a chuckle that her duty on that first day was to take the 75 second graders to the church for Stations of Cross. Her love for the little ones never abated. Throughout her years at

Seton Hill College, she continued to teach CCD at various nearby parishes, both Roman Catholic and Byzantine Catholic.

Little children, college students or those in-between, Sara loved teaching. She said she never taught the subject; she taught the person. Science was not her first choice. She acknowledged that she was not gifted in scientific research. Recently, however, one of our sisters commented that it was Sara's clear, organized presentations that made biology understandable.

In later years Sara spoke of her disappointment that she was no longer in a classroom. Her listener responded: "But Sister Sara Louise, you're always teaching." And she was. She guided and mentored numerous young sisters and others as they prepared for their own life course. Her standards and example called each of us to strive to be better. Sister Sara Louise was a wise woman who listened and guided without voicing judgment or criticism.

For Sister Sara Louise, words were tools to be used with precision. She served on every Chapter from 1963 to 1999. She sat on the Board of Seton Hill College, as well as our several hospitals. At Chapters and Board meetings, she listened quietly to all that was said and then sharpened the focus with a few, carefully chosen words. She recalled the Chapter debates as we struggled with change. It was her belief that each sister is being sincere in what she stands for. In her words: "We were called to approach everything in a spirit of Charity."

There are many, many other memories of her that you will carry in your hearts. Let me close with one other gift she shared with us. Early in her community life, others recognized that Sara could combine her gift with words with humor and her ability to observe life in detail. And so over the years whenever an occasion arose that required a little poetry, Sara was commissioned the "poet laureate." Now she didn't see it as poetry, rather as light verse. Retirements, anniversaries, comings or goings—whatever the occasion, Sara penned a verse or two. If you will bear with me for another minute or two, I'd like to conclude this evening's reflection reading one of her creations that we can all relate to. She wrote it in 1992; it is titled "Summer Festival Revisited."

Sister Patricia Mary Wilson then read Sister Sara Louise's verses, excerpted from the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill Newsletter, Summer 1992, Vol. 1 Nov. 4.

She then concluded. . .

And so, to paraphrase your concluding words, Sara: "In Heaven there's a festival that never, never ends. May our loving God reward you there, our dear Sara and dear Friend.



*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
~Sister Patricia Mary Wilson
April 19, 2011*