

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER MARIE ESTELLE COPELAND

November 27, 1918–November 11, 2014



*“Jesus, Lord of my life,
I can ask for nothing more
Than to see and believe that my life lies
In you, in the kingdom of my Lord.”
I found a treasure in a field,
That neither time nor death can steal.
I will sell what I have, give all that I am
To hold this treasure as my own.”*

From “I Found the Treasure” by Dan Schutte

These words are excerpts from the tape which Sister Marie Estelle chose to be played as a Communion Meditation on the celebration of her Golden Jubilee. It seems very fitting that we should be reminded of them to today as we join to celebrate her new life with Jesus, the Lord of her life.

Mary Roberta Copeland was born in Mt. Pleasant on November 27, 1918, the third daughter of George and Stella Harhager Copeland. Sadly her father did not live to see his daughter. She was baptized in Saint Joseph Church in Mt. Pleasant. Because her mother needed help, Roberta was sent to live with her grandmother in Mt. Pleasant. After five years, her mother met and married Lewis Bandemer, a widower with two sons. He had given his home to his sister to raise his boys, so Stella and Lewis began to build a home and family in Iron Bridge. Roberta joined them in Iron Bridge, her sister Frances says that as she got older she felt it was a hard and confusing transition for a six year old to leave her grandmother and to come to new and strange surroundings. Eventually, the family numbered eight. Josephine, Sarah, and Roberta Copeland, and sisters Frances, Bertha, and Joan, and brothers Lewis and John Bandemer.

Roberta entered the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill on September 8, 1936. She received the habit and the name Sister Marie Estelle on January 1, 1937. Sister Marie Estelle spent her active ministerial years at DePaul Institute, now DePaul School for Hearing and Speech. During her early years at DePaul, she taught in the primary division. Later she became a licensed audiologist and spent several years in that capacity. Last evening we heard testimonials of her ability to test even very young infants and of her kindness and patience as she performed those tasks. Always interested in history, her final work at DePaul was service as archivist, working to preserve the rich history of the school.

Sister Marie Estelle was a life-long learner and her file is filled with the lists of degrees and workshops that display evidence of her constant concern to bring to her students the latest and the best possibilities that were available to ensure success in life. She said she was grateful for having spent those years working for the deaf and she was grateful for the many former students who visited and contacted her. Once she wrote to her superior, “One of my former students wrote to tell me that over the years he had many ear molds made as he needed new hearing aids, but he never had one that fit as comfortably as the one I had prepared.” After she wrote this she apologized for bragging

about her work. However, last evening we also heard that no student was ever without a hearing aid because Sister responded immediately to any need.

Those are the facts, but who was the person? Sister Marie Estelle (Roberta to her family) was a woman with a zest for life and opportunity. She was a devoted member of her family who maintained contact with her brothers and sisters, their children, and their children's children. She shared her talents with them in many ways. Some testify to her ability to teach them to sew. Others, who were under her tutelage, admit that in this endeavor she failed due to the student's lack of interest. She was noted for her unique afghans, even winning first prize in the Modern Abstract division at the School House Art Center for her "Indian Flowers".

Her interest in things was contagious. She was an avid sports fan and shared her love of sports with her sisters and her family. She enjoyed travel and made several trips with friends. Her treasured pictures include those of the travel group enjoying sites in Arizona and in Hawaii. When Marie Estelle came to Doran Hall in 1997, she became involved in crafts and continued to share her many talents with her sisters. When computers were introduced at Caritas Christi, she was there to learn and be a part of "Sisters on the Web." Marie Estelle was also one of the "Red Hats." She made a stunning appearance in one of her outfits of red and purple with a lovely red hat.

Most especially, Sister Marie Estelle was a true and lasting friend. Two women who entered the community on September 8, 1936, with Sister established a friendship that strengthened and endured to the death of both of her friends. Sister Marie Estelle, Sister Jane McNulty, and Sister Rose Bernadette began a friendship in the novitiate and shared their joys, sorrows, journeys, and celebrations with one another throughout the years.

However, Sister Marie Estelle did not limit herself to her close friends. She found time to greet and share with those with whom she lived. A woman of inquiring mind and many talents, she shared these freely with others. She enjoyed life as it opened out to her and found God in the day-to-day world.

The last few years were years of slow and quiet decline. The one who for many years had helped the deaf to hear came to experience diminished hearing. The one who animated friends and found joy in helping others did not have the energy or ability to respond easily. These years of slow diminishment modeled for us the way that Sister Marie Estelle lived her life. "I have learned to take one day at a time . . . not to look forward or backward but, in the words of Elizabeth Seton, to 'Look up to the blue sky and love Him.'"

On November 27, Sister Marie Estelle would have celebrated her 96th birthday. We know now that she will be celebrating with a myriad of people whose lives she touched and who have also touched hers. She joins her parents, step-father, sisters and brothers, and her many dear and close friends.

Today, dear Sister Marie Estelle, we celebrate and thank you for your long life of generosity, kindness, and witness for us as a Sister of Charity. Please keep those of us who are still on the journey in your sight as you meet Jesus, Lord of your life, in the Kingdom of your Lord.

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Louise Grundish
November 13, 2014*