

REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF SISTER HAROLD ANN JONES April 7, 1922–April 10, 2017



“Sister Harold Ann believes in dreams.” This is the opening sentence of a headline article in a 1993 issue of Arizona Daily Star. After many years of amazing accomplishments during which she had more than fulfilled her dreams, the day came when she would dream no more.

Early in the morning of April 10, Sister Harold Ann heard the words she waited 95 years to hear, “Untie her – and let her go free.” She was no longer a dreamer or a believer in dreams. Her deepest dreams had all come true. They had burst into the fullness of life.

Maybe she believed in dreams because she believed in herself. This may have begun when she was born, Mary Gertrude, into the Jones family in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on April 7, 1922, the first of four children. Her parents were Dr. Harold Jones, dentist, and Anne White Jones. It was in their honor that she was given her religious name, Sister Harold Ann. Next born into the Jones family was her sister Pat, followed by her brother Jim, and then, the youngest, Nancy. Some think it was because of her position as the oldest child of the family that Honey (as they affectionately called her) developed her natural knack for taking charge; and how she began very early to believe in herself and to believe in others. She got a good start with her younger siblings, Pat and Jim and Nancy.

In her oral history recorded by Sister James Marie Malone in 1988, Sister Harold Ann recalled so fondly the Jones family years in Altoona when “all of us” took piano lessons at Cathedral Convent. And she recalls their music teachers: Sisters Mary Luke, Angeline, Mary Inez, and Frances Clare.

She began early to receive her share of recognition and awards, beginning with the coveted American Legion award in the Cathedral’s eighth grade class of 1936, an award given to a student who excels in scholarship and leadership. On September 8, 1940, Mary Gertrude entered the Sisters of Charity at Seton Hill, and she continued to be recognized for the leadership her classmates had spotted in eighth grade. In January 1994, Salpointe Catholic High School, Tucson,

awarded Sister Harold Ann the prestigious Seton Award. The criteria for the Seton Award reads among other things:

“Following the example of Elizabeth Seton, the Seton Award recipient must possess deep faith, courage, initiative and zeal, possess leadership qualities and have no sense of discrimination . . .”

No sense of discrimination—there was no problem on that piece of criteria for Harold Ann, considering first, her big heart, and then, her eye-opening years in the segregated neighborhoods of Abbeville, Louisiana, and the deprived Mexican neighborhoods of Ajo, Arizona. A third noteworthy honor: at the completion of the multitude of radical improvements at St. John School in Tucson, the St. John's community named the remodeled parish hall “Sister Harold Ann Jones Hall.” A plaque now hangs there with her name and picture as a sign of the parish’s gratitude and affection.

She held principalship after principalship—these principalships, with all they entailed, were great achievements.

It is who Harold Ann was, at the core of her being, that engineered her many achievements; it was the way she welcomed people into her life— teachers, parents, students, and certainly ourselves, her own Sisters of Charity. It is these qualities by which people repeatedly describe her. This week I heard a sister say, “I never got to know Sister Harold Ann very well, but she always made you feel good when you met her.”

In April of 2002, we had a celebration of her 80th birthday at Seton House, Pittsburgh. Some sisters told stories of how she had encouraged them as young sisters, especially in their professional lives. If we think of this woman whom the Arizona Daily Star described as a believer in dreams, it was clear that day that she encouraged the young to believe in their dreams. I have here a thank you note for that 80th birthday party from one of Sister Harold Ann’s own group, Sister Monica: *“I truly appreciated being there and hearing the wonderful and sincere tributes that were paid to Sister Harold Ann. She truly has affected the lives of many of our “younger” sisters in such a beneficial and lasting way. I truly wasn’t aware of how much influence for good she has been.”*

One would be hard pressed to name Sister Harold Ann’s favorite assignment or mission. Probably she herself would be hard-pressed on that one. She seemed to

love them all. In the ranking for a favorite, if there could be one, it might be her years as administrator and Sister Servant of our former Assumption Hall. How she loved being at Assumption. Again from her oral history, *“Many of the sisters there were my teachers, my companions in community living and missions. This was my chance to return to them what they had given me.”* She said 55 sisters died in her five years there. When it was time for her to move again to the missions, she said it took her three years to stop missing Assumption Hall, especially when she would learn that a sister there had died.

In her years of retirement, where did Sister Harold Ann turn to serve? To those who waited each day for her loving care. In the first five years of Caritas Christi, she administered the new venture of Elizabeth Ann Hall, a wing designed for the care of our sisters with memory loss. In her later retirement years, Sister Harold Ann responded to the Gospel mandate of *“giving a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name”* and took on the 6:00 a.m. shift of passing fresh water pitchers to the sister patients on the second floor. And when sisters would come to Caritas Christi for a temporary illness or recovery from an operation, Sister Harold Ann was knocking at their doors offering to do their laundry while they were incapacitated. This was when she was into her nineties.

St. Bruno’s, Abbeville, Resurrection, SS. Peter and Paul, Assumption, St. John’s, Caritas Christi . . . Sister Harold Ann left her memorable mark on each of these missions. She made a home and she made friends in each of them. People there will long remember the tall sister with the white hair that she's had since her twenties and the unique smile that each one could feel was meant just for him or her.

Indeed. Sister Harold Ann believed in dreams, and as the Arizona Daily Star also said in the 1993 dreamer article, she was a dynamo in bringing those dreams to life.

Sister Harold Ann is no longer dreaming. From the fullness of Easter life, she now continues to love us, reminding us, as she would if she were still here, to appreciate who we are. And she welcomes us to the home she’s making in heaven . . . for whenever the time comes that God is ready to *“untie our bonds . . . and let us go free.”*

*Funeral Liturgy Reflection
Sister Mary Clark
April 18, 2017*