



Sister Marie Sheila Beatty, OP 1920-2017

Sister Marie Sheila, baptized Mary Arlene Beatty, was born on August 21, 1920, in Lansing, Michigan. She was the third of seven children born to Howard and Agnes (Torpey) Beatty. Two of her brothers, Billy and Robert, died in infancy: Billy in 1919 and Robert in 1922. Sister Sheila thought both deaths could have been related to the flu epidemic that swept the country after World War I.

In her autobiography, Sister Sheila gave a detailed account of her parents. The following are a few highlights.

My mother was born in Duro, Ontario, Canada, and received most of her education at Loretto Abbey School in Toronto. By the time she was eighteen she was living alone in Lansing. She studied nursing for a year but ended up working as a private secretary. My father was from a Methodist family in Petoskey, Michigan. He worked on a farm to pay for his education in electrical engineering at Michigan State University. After he was baptized Catholic, my parents married and lived in Lansing, where my father found a job doing research on car motors and styling at REO Motor Car Company. [REO were the initials of the founder, Ransom Eli Olds.] When the company was sold to General Motors my father lost his job and we moved to Petoskey and lived with my grandparents until 1921 when my father found a job in Saginaw. It was here that my father began his high school teaching and coaching career that lasted for the next forty years.

Thirteen of Sheila's school years were with the Grand Rapids Dominicans. When asked where she met the Adrian Dominicans, she said,

I had a cousin who went to Dominican High School and she loved it. When it was time to go to college she went to Siena Heights. While she was there I went to visit her. In the meantime I had taken one year of nurses training, but I didn't persevere. So I withdrew from the program and got various jobs. One was at a plant sorting ball bearings for new airplanes; that was a good paying job. In 1944 I was able to register at Siena using my cashed-in war bonds and some of my savings.

At the end of her second year at Siena Heights, Sister Sheila entered the postulate on June 29, 1945. Her parents and her sister Janet were present for her reception ceremony in January 1946. Years later she was asked what she remembered about her novitiate year. Sister Sheila said, "I do not recall any major boo-boos, but many floor dishes. Going to Innisfail for a week is a happy memory and I was glad to be assigned to bring trays to the sick sisters living in St. Clement Infirmary."

At the end of her novitiate year, Sister Sheila made first profession on January 5, 1947. This is what she wrote about that day.

First profession in Holy Rosary Chapel was an early morning ceremony. The rest of the day was spent packing because someone told me I would be leaving Adrian that day. Sister Edmund had made an announcement to that effect, but I was sure I wouldn't be going out to teach. By 7:30 that evening, I was in Detroit at St. Theresa Convent. I taught third, fourth or fifth grades and remained there until June 1954.

Her summers while assigned to St. Theresa were spent at Siena Heights College. She finished her undergraduate studies and received her bachelor's degree in English in 1949.

With the exception of the two months at Mundelein, Illinois, Sister Sheila's twenty-six years of classroom teaching were in Michigan elementary schools. From 1955 to 1971, she was assigned to teach at Our Lady Gate of Heaven in Detroit for eight years, St. Luke in Flint for two years and Our Lady of Sorrows in Farmington for six years.

By 1970, the Congregation began using open placement, giving each Sister the option of choosing her own ministry. This new procedure, along with changes following Vatican II, affected Sisters in various ways. In 1971, Sister Sheila accepted a position at St. Paul Grade School in Owosso. She taught for the first two years and then served as school librarian for the next seven years.¹

In the summer of 1973, Sister Sheila had begun taking library science courses that Michigan State University offered in Perry, Michigan. She continued her studies for the next eight summers.

From August 1980 to June 1981, Sister Sheila was librarian at St. Mary Cathedral School in Saginaw. She welcomed the opportunity to live in the area because she it allowed her to visit her elderly parents, both of whom died during the year.

In addition to her parents' deaths, Sheila also was affected by major changes planned for St. Mary. The school was to become a Junior /Senior High School with grades 7 to 12. The 4th, 5th, and 6th grades were being moved to Our Lady Help of Christians School and the preschool primary grades were being moved to St. Casimir School. These changes explain why after one year at St. Mary, Sheila moved to Our Lady of Help of Christians to serve as librarian. She enjoyed working with the younger children in the library, but at the end of that year at Our Lady Help of Christians, she was not rehired and had to find another job. She wrote:

For three months I was with an elderly woman in Detroit who lived alone. She wasn't eating properly and was in the hospital. The doctor said that if she had a companion she could live at home while she recovered. She and I got along quite well. But in November 1982 she told me she was well enough to stay by herself and that I could find another job.

¹ In 1982 the Congregation withdrew its commitment to provide teachers for the grade school.

By December 1982 Sheila found a position at St. Agatha School in Redford and she continued to serve as librarian until June 1990 when she retired. She said, "I was lucky because I found [housing] at Our Lady of Sorrows Convent in Farmington because they had one empty bedroom."

Sister Sheila and the four Sisters with whom she lived in Our Lady of Sorrows Convent represented four congregations. This living arrangement only lasted until June 1992 when the pastor told the Sisters that the next year the parish council would be taking over the use of the convent for parish offices.

Sister Sheila found housing at St. Alphonsus Convent in Dearborn and enjoyed living there until the parish took over the use of the convent in the summer of 2010. This time she chose to return to Adrian. Sister Marie Sheila died on January 21, 2017, at the age of ninety-six.

During the remembrance, Sister Pat Dulka, OP, Co-Chapter Prioress of Holy Rosary Mission Chapter said:

When asked how she would like to be remembered, Marie Sheila replied, "I would like to be remembered as a joyful person." Marie Sheila, your presence, your quiet prayerfulness, and your attentiveness did bring much joy to us. Thank you! May you now enjoy eternal peace!

In her homily, Sister Joan Delaplane, OP, framed her reflection on Sister Marie Sheila's life with the readings² selected for her funeral liturgy.

Those who knew Marie Sheila would describe her as not very talkative; in fact, very quiet. Some say that silence is the language of God. A gentle woman with a great heart might best describe her. The foundation for this joy, I believe, can be found in the deep faith in God's love for her, and her deep appreciation for the Eucharist. Isaiah speaks of a loving Creator who has called her by name: "You are mine!" It speaks of trusting this God to be with her, no matter floods or fires, because she is precious to God, loved and assured that God will always be with her, even for ninety-six years.

Our initial identity is fashioned and formed by our parents and siblings. There is no question about the profound relationship Sheila had with her family and how much she loved and respected them. As we mature, however, we search even deeper for the truth of who we are.

When this truth is believed and one lives out of that core, then one can exude the kind of quiet, gentle, peaceful presence so experienced by those who knew and loved Marie Sheila.

The desire to abide in God's love is witnessed in Sheila's choice of Gospel reading from John and her daily love for Eucharist. At one convent when there was no Mass on Saturday, she and another sister would travel to a nearby parish to celebrate Eucharist. "They who eat this bread will live forever." That was a promise in which you trusted, Sheila, and which we today trust you are experiencing in its fullness. Thank you for your quiet, joyful, faithful presence in our midst for so many years. Enter and dance now into the joy of your Lord.

² Isaiah 43:1-6; John 6:51-58



CENTER: Sister Marie Sheila with Bishop Moses Anderson, Detroit, during the dedication of Hope Center for Children, September 23, 1987. RIGHT: From left, Sisters Francis Marie Foley, Marie Sheila Beatty, and Barbara Ann Beerkle



LEFT: During a mission group meeting, September 1985, at Camp Ozanam, Carsonville, Michigan. CENTER: Sister Marie Sheila during her ministry at St. Paul, Owosso, Michigan, 1971-72. RIGHT: Sister Marie Sheila, center, celebrates her Diamond Jubilee in 2006 with Sisters Ellen Schmitz (left) and Betty Jenkins.



LEFT: 1923, Saginaw, Michigan. RIGHT: The 2006 Diamond Jubilee crowd: back row, from left, Sisters Marcelline Fouchey, Marie Siena Chmara, Jeanne Marie O'Laughlin, Anne Lindquist, Therese Tighe, Jane Quirk, and Clare O'Connor; and front row, from left, Sisters Sean Therese Halpin, Marie Sheila Beatty, Therese Margaret Roberts, Therese Craig, Donna Wencel, Betty Foster, and Mary Margaret Donnelly.



Members of the Beata Mission Group, meeting at St. Alphonsus Convent in Dearborn, Michigan are, from left: Sisters Mary Helen Smolbrook, Marie Sheila Beatty, Mary Laverne Feeney, Mary Adelaide Eiden, Mary Lisa Rieman, Barbara Ann Beerke, Joan Sullivan, Joan Baustian, Loretta Ruedisueli, and Marie Gabrielle Courter. Not shown is Sister Helene Burns.