

## Hilda Catherine Carey, RSCJ

July 9, 1928-September 16, 2019

Hilda Carey was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, daughter of Graham Carey and Elisabeth Foster Millet Carey, of Sunrise Farm in Benson, Vermont. Her father was an architect, a philosopher, a dairy farmer, a kind of Renaissance man who greatly influenced his youngest child. Her mother belonged to one of the oldest New England families.

Hilda attended the Shady Hill and Winsor schools in Boston, then was a student in the first class to graduate from Newton College of the Sacred Heart, where she received a B.A. in English in 1950. Hilda entered the Society at Kenwood on September 8, 1952, and received the habit on March 19, 1953, under the direction of Marie Louise Schroen. She made her first vows on March 19, 1955. She then began a long teaching career, first at Kenwood until 1959, then 91<sup>st</sup> Street in New York for one year as teacher of English and mistress of studies. She then spent a year teaching English and other subjects at the International School in Tokyo, followed by one year at Bloomfield Hills, and one year at Greenwich. Meanwhile, she went to Rome for probation in February 1960, culminating in final profession at Via Nomentana on July 21, 1960. The same year, she earned a M.A. in English and Education from Manhattanville College.

From 1962 to 1967, she was at Noroton as mistress of studies and teacher of English, Latin, and Geometry. One student's memories of her in those years: "When in motion, she always seemed to be in a hurry, her motions were swift and small, like a bird's. When she was sitting, she always looked so smart; however she achieved that, it was without hubris.... I was always effortlessly smarter in her presence. I reached to be able to answer her. She was never unkind in her responses. Under that transparent black veil was a brain whirring away at full clip. And I remember her playing softball at Noroton, her skirts tied up around her waist, swinging the bat at the ball." One of her nieces was a student there at the time and remembered the great degree of respect the students had for her; they were in fact, a bit in awe of her. In her freshman year, away from home for the first time, she was thankful that "Mother Carey" was there for her. Hilda was always genuinely interested in the lives of others.

From 1967 to 1969, she taught English and Religion at Grosse Pointe. In 1969, she helped to establish Glen Oak School in Gates Mills, Ohio, where she taught for one year. From 1970 to 1972, she was back in New York at 91<sup>st</sup> Street teaching a variety of high school classes, until she answered the call to return to the International School in Tokyo for the next year. She spent from 1973 to 1981 in Korea as professor of English at Songsim College for Women, Chun Cheon and Pucheon, and one year at the University of Maryland Yongsan Campus in Seoul. While there, she published three academic literary articles in the *Songsim Research Journal*: "The Lure of Circumference: The Meaning of the Term in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson" (1977); "The Restless Desert of The Great Gatsby" (1978); and "Mythopoesis in the Writings of Emily Dickinson" (1979).

In 1981, Hilda returned to New York to work at Green Hope Services for Women located in East Harlem, where she helped formerly incarcerated women prepare for the GED. In addition to this work, she also taught high school English and served as academic coordinator and guidance counselor at 91<sup>st</sup> Street. Over the next four years, she taught high school English and Theology at Stuart Country Day School in Princeton and later at Newton Country Day School.

Though not given the opportunity for a Ph.D., Hilda nevertheless had become a master teacher. In 1986, she began teaching freshman English at Boston College. She continued in the same position until well into her eighties and was remembered as a beloved friend and colleague by many. In 2003, she received the Outstanding Faculty Award at Boston College for tutoring services to student athletes. The award stated that she “typifies concern...and holds the students to the highest standards of accountability.” She continued contact with them beyond their college years and was always ready to listen and encourage. Hilda had a great love for baseball and admitted during her years in Boston that she was a “closet Mets fan” in a Red Sox town. In her last years in Boston, she was, among other things, Chaplain General of the Society of the Descendants of the Colonial Clergy.

Hilda had a particular love for the poetry of Emily Dickinson. In her teaching, she used novels from all over the world as a way of getting her students to explore the challenges of the human condition. For her, there was never any separation between literature and the deepest and most urgent concerns of our lives; and her students depended on her for guidance that went far beyond their studies. To everyone, she brought the same qualities of loving openness and total honesty.

Many years after her school days, a former student wrote in an autobiographical paragraph, “I learned from Mother Carey how important it was to know how to give someone your undivided attention. She taught me by giving me hers when I came in to grouse about whatever was bothering me. She closed every book on her desk, called down to tell reception to hold her calls, turned away from her desk and focused only on my problem.” That kind of undivided attention was her gift to anyone she met in her long life, wherever she was.

An enthusiastic, life-long learner, Hilda spent her summers earning graduate credits in Language and Linguistics, American History, English, and Theology. She also embarked on language studies, learning basic Korean with the Peace Corps and at Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea. When she applied to the Princeton University Center for Continuing Education, the writer of her letter of recommendation described her as a remarkably gifted educator, one who had “a knack for turning young people on to things intellectual, especially in the literary field.” She could share her knowledge in a variety of contexts, at the college and university levels in Korea and Japan and with ex-offenders in East Harlem. When asked, she said that her interests had pretty much remained the same throughout her life: love of literature, education, and people.

In 2015, when she was no longer able to teach, Hilda moved to the Abba Community in Albany, and the following year, to Teresian House. It was in those years that the fruit of her contemplative life became most apparent in the occasional profound observations she shared with those who visited her and in the open arms and welcoming smile she offered to everyone who approached her.

She kept in contact with her family, including nieces and nephews. Every year for many years, she knitted for them and other family members and friends wonderful socks, and gave them as Christmas gifts. Many are still the proud owners of “Hilda socks.”

Ten days after a wonderful visit by her brother John and his family from Ireland, Hilda died peacefully on the morning of September 16, 2019. One can conjecture that all the people she helped over the years and who predeceased her welcomed her with open arms.