

# **Sister M. Carolita, CSC**

(Vivian Berneice Hart)

September 23, 1930–May 22, 2021

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**These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Suzanne Patterson, CSC, who read them at Sister Carolita's funeral on May 27, 2021.**

Vivian Berneice Hart, better known as Bea, was born September 23, 1930, in Winamac, Indiana, the third of eight children of Cecil Mae Dickinson and Ernest Wesley Hart. She was born on the first day of fall. Her father always said that fall came in with a bang that year since she was their first girl. Five of her siblings preceded her in death (Jerry Lee, Tom, Don, Janet and Glenn). Her sister Jo, and her brother Dale and his wife Linda live in Florida.

Bea's father worked for the government in wiring defense plants during the war, so the family moved several times. Her education began in Winamac, then continued in Pulaski County and Kewanna, Indiana. She spent the first semester of seventh grade in Claude, Texas. The family returned to Kewanna, where Bea graduated valedictorian of her class in 1948. She worked as a bookkeeper for two years before she began training at the Holy Cross Central School of Nursing, South Bend, Indiana. Two classmates were Holy Cross Sisters M. Gertrude Dolores (Schwenk) and M. Louisita (Welsh).

While still a student, Bea began working at St. Joseph Hospital in South Bend, where Sister M. Michaeleen (Frieders), CSC, was the administrator. Sister Michaeleen remembers Bea as being full of life and a good nurse. Bea was assigned to take care of Sister M. Carolita (Davy), CSC, the sister of Sister M. Carmen (Davy), CSC. As Bea was caring for her, Sister Carolita told Bea, "You are going to take my place in Holy Cross." Bea said that was impossible since she wasn't even Catholic. Of course, that began to change when she started going to

Mass with the other student-nurses. Sister M. Carolita not only had a big influence on Bea becoming a Catholic, but on her becoming a Sister of the Holy Cross.

After graduating from nursing school in 1953, Bea worked as a nurse at St. Mary's Hospital in Cairo, Illinois. She often said that this experience laid the foundation for a terrific nursing ministry in Holy Cross.

Bea entered the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1955 and received the habit August 15, 1955. The Davy family requested that Bea be given the name Sister M. Carolita in honor of their daughter and sister, whom Bea had cared for so lovingly.

Sister Carolita graduated from Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, with a Bachelor of Science in nursing, pronounced her first vows on August 15, 1957, and left for her first mission at Our Savior's Hospital in Jacksonville, Illinois. After her final profession in 1960, she was assigned to teach fundamentals of nursing at the Holy Cross School of Nursing in South Bend for a year before beginning graduate studies in Washington, D.C., where she received a Master of Science in nursing in 1963.

She then returned to St. Joseph Hospital, working in several positions, ultimately as director of nurses. In 1967, she went to Cornell Hospital in New York City to study coronary care nursing and returned to Indiana to work with Dr. Ray Firestein in setting up the first coronary care unit at St. Joseph Hospital, also the first in the area.

For the next 10 years she ministered in Salt Lake City, Utah, at Holy Cross Hospital in critical care and as director of nurses. One of her more challenging events while there was that she was charged with taking two unconscious boys with severe head injuries back to England. The two had been injured in a severe accident in Wyoming that killed their father and left their mother with a head injury. Sister Carolita and the boys were fogbound their first night at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois, and on the second night were snowbound. They got out on the third night. Unfortunately, 8-year-old Simon never

regained consciousness and died later from pneumonia. Jonathon, the 6-year-old, recovered and is now a professor at the same university where his father taught.

In 1972, Sister Carolita went to the University of Utah and became the first Sister of the Holy Cross to become a nurse practitioner. She loved being a nurse practitioner because she could do things without having to contact the doctor. She ran the Northwest Clinic until 1979 and helped set up four other clinics in the Salt Lake area.

From 1979 to 1984, Sister Carolita ministered as the administrator of Mount Carmel East Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, where a new wing was added to the hospital during her administration. Ordinarily the hospital ran quietly—until Sister Carolita had a run-in with the Ku Klux Klan. One of the security officers was elected second in command of the KKK, and his picture appeared on the front page of the Sunday newspaper. After many hours of discussion, the officer was given his pink slip. Although the situation was filled with tension, Sister Carolita handled the challenge in her usual calm fashion and, thankfully, trouble was averted.

Sister Carolita gave her whole heart to everything she did and to anyone she met. After a 1977 earthquake in Guatemala, Sister Carolita went to help the victims. She took everything in stride, telling Sister M. John Margaret (Dietzen), CSC, how they could only wash their hair in beer since they had to be careful of the water. One of her friends dubbed her “Nurse Without Borders.”

In 1985, Sister became the administrator of Holy Cross Hospital in Mission Hills, California. This was shortly after an earthquake had destroyed the hospital, so there were many problems to be addressed. Sister Carolita left this position much sooner than she would have liked because she was elected regional superior for the west from 1987 to 1990. As superior, she enjoyed getting to know the sisters in the west. After this ministry, Sister Carolita shared the position of superior of Saint Mary’s Convent with Sister M. Catherine Dolores (Dietzen), CSC. During this time, she developed a real love for the sisters at Saint Mary’s.

From 1995 until 2007, Sister Carolita served as director of health affairs for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. She was the liaison between Archbishop Roger Mahony and all the Catholic health institutions in the archdiocese, working with administrators of hospitals, health systems and nursing homes, and advocating for legislation to make health care more accessible, especially for the poor. She also visited the 109 retired priests in the diocese to evaluate their health status and determine any other needs they had. The priests truly appreciated her assistance and most especially her listening ear.

Sister Carolita and the Sisters of the Holy Cross received the 2005 Serra Project's Compassion Award for being instrumental in providing supportive housing for men, women and children living with HIV or AIDS in Los Angeles.

In 2007, Sister Carolita returned to Saint Mary's for her golden Jubilee and stayed to minister. She was an invaluable team player as a councilor and a great support to the sisters.

Early in her career, Sister Carolita had been given the opportunity to attend medical school free of charge. Although thankful for the opportunity, she was not interested in being a doctor because she wanted to stay working with patients. Over the years, this commitment to others has extended to her Sisters of the Holy Cross and to her family. Sister John Margaret mentioned that Sister Carolita was the medical encyclopedia for the family, answering questions about tests and procedures.

Helen Olson, Sister Carolita's lifelong friend, shared this story of Carolita's nursing skills. Helen's father John Griffin was in St. Joseph Hospital in the 1960s, all prepped for surgery when Sister Carolita came to wish him well. When she touched his leg and his response was a quick "ouch," she knew immediately something was wrong. She pulled back the sheet and found that Mr. Griffin had a blood clot. So, Helen says, Carolita saved him for the family to enjoy life with him for many years afterward.

The Hart family always enjoyed Carolita's visits home, where there was always a gathering with food and fun. Our sisters who fluted our big caps will appreciate the following story. At one get-together, a little girl asked Sister Carolita, who was dressed in the full habit, "Where did you get all those straws in your hat?" Another time a child asked, "Why do you have your daddy's shoes on?" Those were the days!

Sister Carolita and her Pius X bandmates maintain a strong bond to this very day. The remaining sisters are close-knit, sharing life in person and via email, and love one another dearly. In addition, Sister Carolita was active in the alumnae group from the Holy Cross School of Nursing. The group came to Mass at the Church of Our Lady of Loretto monthly for years. She loved to go places and loved parties. She loved her sugar-free chocolate and the banana bread Sister Michaelleen baked for her. She also loved anything purple; even her rosary was purple!

Sister Carolita was accepting of anything. Though she had had heart trouble for 22 years, nothing stopped her. During the past year, she was regularly seen taking her exercise on the first floor of Saint Mary's Convent with Sister John Margaret. Sister Carolita remained independent until close to the end, always accepting that her heart was slowing down.

Sister Carolita appreciated the song "I Hope You Dance" written by Mark D. Sanders and Tia Sillers and recorded by singer Lee Ann Womack with Sons of the Desert.

Carolita, we know for sure you gave faith all you had, and now you are dancing your heart out with the Lord of the Dance himself!