

Sister Dorothy Kazel – A Remembrance

by Mary Beth Dulzer

I first met Sr. Dorothy at Beaumont School. I was a student from 1971 to '74. Sr. Dorothy was a guidance counselor, and she was also my shorthand teacher. I occasionally use shorthand to this day, and naturally I think of her every time I do.

I've heard it said more than once over the years that Sr. Dorothy was an ordinary woman who lived an extraordinary life. I've always disagreed with that assessment. To me, Sr. Dorothy **was** an extraordinary woman. She belonged to that rare breed, naturally gifted with an innate, selfless goodness and indomitably cheerful, kind and warm spirit. I refer to these individuals, the few I've met in my life, as "shining". Sr. Dorothy was a shining woman. Because of this, people were drawn to her like moths to a flame.

Like most teenagers in high school, I had my struggles and problems trying to grow up and find myself. I went to Sr. Dorothy, the counselor, just to chat and get to know her at first. A friendship easily developed and she became a trusted confidante. We saw each other often in school and a few times outside of school. Her friendship and listening ear meant a great deal to me. She was one of the few beacons of God's love and hope in my young life.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention Sr. Dorothy's wonderful sense of humor, vivaciousness and adventurous spirit. A favorite memory comes to mind. It was a blustery winter day and I was in class, glancing out the window just in time to see Sr. Dorothy in a black shawl and snow boots scurrying to get to another

building. The walk became slippery, and at one point she almost lost control. She quickly recovered, however, and started “ice skating” her way to the building, shawl flapping in the wind, an exuberant expression on her face.

During those years at Beaumont, I witnessed Sr. Dorothy reach out to many hurting young people. She genuinely cared and wanted to help, and she did help in very tangible ways. She often went above and beyond just a listening ear and sprang into action whenever a situation called for it. She meaningfully interacted, fearlessly got involved and made a positive difference in so many lives. Extraordinary!

Sr. Dorothy’s calling to become a missionary made perfect sense. She was made for the task. As much as we needed her, the poor in El Salvador needed her more, and she wholeheartedly responded to that need. I remember it well. The announcement was made at a year-end student assembly, and there was an audible gasp of shock and sadness from the audience, confirming just how loved Sr. Dorothy was among the student body. I was a senior and leaving Beaumont too, but I was also very sad to learn that she would no longer be in the area.

I remember her preparing to leave the states for her new life in Central America. A few students made her some skirts and blouses in sewing class. I watched her clean out her office desk which was filled with unique and colorful knick-knacks and keepsakes, along with a regular stash of some type of chocolate candy. She had such a sweet tooth. I watched her give away some of these items. She gave me a few. The one I remember was a bookmark with the words, “Bloom where you are planted.” Those words have had deep meaning for me throughout my own life journey.

There was a going away party for Sr. Dorothy at the end of that school year, one of many I'm sure. It was held at Beaumont School after classes, and outside adults whom I didn't know attended it as well. Several people spoke words of encouragement and good wishes. I remember one older man in particular who said (paraphrasing), "As difficult as missionary work is, you're leaving for a country named El Salvador – the Savior. So how bad could it be?" Ironic, and yet in that tiny, struggling country, Sr. Dorothy would experience the deepest and most meaningful encounters of her life with "The Savior".

We exchanged addresses, and off she went to Costa Rica to learn Spanish and then to El Salvador. We wrote each other a handful of letters. I remember her stationary. It had a colorful drawing of a little Hispanic boy wearing a sombrero and riding a donkey. Her letters were light, upbeat, and filled with the sights and sounds of a foreign culture. How I wish I'd kept those letters, but I was young and not particularly sentimental. I saw Sr. Dorothy that first summer when she came home. I wish I'd realized how privileged I was that she made the time to see me. Between family and friends, I can just imagine the number of demands placed upon her during her short time in the states. But that was Sr. Dorothy. She **made** time for the people she cared about. It was a light visit, catching up on each other's lives, and it would be the last time I would ever see her. I do remember having the sense that we were on very different paths in life, and that our commonality was diminishing.

We corresponded a few more times. Four years later when I heard the news of her violent death, time and distance made coping with her tragic loss a little bit easier. Yet like many others, it deeply affected me and has stayed with me to

this day. And like so many, I've had my times of wrestling, analyzing, and questioning.

Since her death, others who knew Dorothy and El Salvador far better than I have written excellent articles and books. I've read as many as I could, and they greatly helped me understand the Dorothy I never knew. This Dorothy experienced firsthand the horrors of war, saw things I hope to never see, continued serving the poor in spite of regularly facing the threat of physical harm, and endured the heartbreaking loss of many friends and colleagues. This Dorothy actually chose to remain in dangerous El Salvador to support the hurting people she so loved.

I've always been one to complicate Christianity. So for me, the message of Dorothy's life, like Dorothy herself, is profoundly simple and beautifully uncomplicated. Dorothy humbly exemplified the Lord's call to all Christians. It's the call to follow Jesus' example of loving God and loving His people. It requires dying to self, often putting others' needs first, and serving wherever the Lord leads. And for some, it means martyrdom. She chose to become a "voice for the voiceless" simply by her presence in El Salvador, and that voice was heard worldwide upon her death. Dorothy remains my most vivid example of one who willingly and joyfully gave their all in God's service. I was so fortunate to have known her, and I will always treasure the memories of our brief time together.