

Elizabeth Hoye, RSCJ

December 7, 1920-September 3, 2007

Each of our life stories begins in a particular home. For Elizabeth Hoye, that home was the family of Dr. Frederick Joseph Hoye, a dentist, and his wife Laura Powers Hoye, a gifted musician. The Hoyes lived in New Bedford, Massachusetts, well known as a fishing and whaling port. Kathryn Hoye, Libby's younger sister, married Lucien Pichette; they became the parents of a son and four daughters, one of whom has preceded Libby to eternal life, and all of whom were dear to their aunt.

For Libby the path from New Bedford led to Wheaton College, where she graduated with a degree in chemistry *magna cum laude*. Eight years of work in chemistry labs followed, where she was primarily involved in research. In 1950, Libby entered the Society of the Sacred Heart at Kenwood. During the next ten years, in addition to teaching chemistry, biology and religion in high schools from New York and Connecticut to Detroit, Libby earned master's degrees in both education and chemistry. She made her final commitment to God in the Society of the Sacred Heart in Rome on July 30, 1958.

Thus, the foundations of her spiritual home were complete. It was on these foundations that she would build her life. Intellectually gifted, firmly grounded in sacred scripture and prayer, a person of common sense and humor, Libby was a wonderful teacher. She and her students at 91<sup>st</sup> Street in New York were able, by the early 1960's, to attend lectures given by theologians of many denominations, as well as bishops on their way to and from Vatican Council II. It was at this time that Libby's lifelong interest in ecumenism took shape. In addition, she broadened her horizons and those of her students, by taking them to visit temples, synagogues and mosques. The edifice of Libby's life was progressing along interesting lines.

It was in 1971 that the definitive work of Sister Hoye's life began. As she started Abba House, Libby named John 14:1-3 as significant. Jesus says: "Let not your hearts be troubled, nor be afraid. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house there are many mansions. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and take you to Myself." One commentator says that here Jesus speaks of his most basic promise to all who follow him: that faith opens up the door to God's dwelling with us and in us, and that in that dwelling, there are many mansions to explore.

Libby was a great explorer! She truly believed in the spaciousness of the Father's house and in the all-embracing quality of God's love. Recently she was vigorously nodding her head in assent when one of our chaplains said that what matters most is God's merciful and complete acceptance of us, just as we are. Libby was both a student of the wonders of God's love, and inevitably a teacher who communicated that love – through teaching chemistry, biology, and religion – and later by sharing with thousands of people her love of prayer, of scripture, and of the magnificent works of God. For thirty fruitful years, Libby built a House of Prayer, first at Kenwood and later on Western Avenue.

In the truest sense, however, Libby was helping to build the house of God in the context of the Catholic, Christian, and Inter-faith communities of Albany. Listen to her words: "I am a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart and of the Parish of Saint Vincent de Paul. In the fall of 1971, I came to Albany to open and co-direct, along with Sister Mary Gen Smyth, the Abba House of Prayer, a center for prayer and spirituality open to all lay persons, clergy, and religious personnel as a source of renewal and spiritual growth. In 1972, Abba House fortuitously entered into a friendship with Barry House, the Episcopal retreat house in the Adirondacks, a friendship that continued throughout the history of Abba House. The two houses had many mutual friends in both dioceses. The things that God plans have a way of expanding! Christians of several other churches began to make use of Abba House and contacts developed."

That is a magnificent understatement! Libby and Mary Gen's ecumenical and interfaith ministries were richly blessed. The 1970's and '80's were years marked by a rhythm of daily prayer in solitude and with others. Serious study of prayer, theology and ecumenism were also part of the pattern. Times of prolonged prayer and retreat at Mount Saviour, the Benedictine monastery in Elmira, New York, which became for Libby a true spiritual home, deepened and strengthened her prayer and led to a vigorous apostolate, not only of hospitality to hundreds at Abba House every year, but in at least fourteen specific commitments in the area of ecumenism, many of which she sustained for more than ten years. She lists these among "special events," for example, "Participated in conference on Science and Faith of the Northeast Synod of the Presbyterian Church at Stony Point, New York. The committee in charge met monthly for a year at Abba House of Prayer." Another excerpt: "Sponsored, with Barry House, a public ecumenical dialogue, 'Experience of the Cross and Resurrection in the Work for Christian Unity.'" If ecumenism needs a patron saint, Libby qualifies!

Libby also participated in many committees, commissions, lectures, retreats and boards. She knew how to give her energies where the rubber meets the road, in unglamorous but necessary common work. In addition to this, she helped to support the ministries of Abba House in typically scriptural fashion, by the work of her hands, heart, and mind. She became a registered nurse in 1975, at the age of fifty-five, and for years thereafter was a familiar figure as a private duty nurse in many area hospitals. She especially loved night duty. We like to describe ourselves as religious of the Sacred Heart as "wholly apostolic, and wholly contemplative." It seems that Libby lived her vocation to the full.

And then came the difficult moment of letting go of all that she loved as co-director of Abba House of Prayer and of saying perhaps her deepest "yes" to the God of Life. The nurse who had cared for so many others now needed to receive care. These last years were a time when Libby struggled to believe, to love and above all to trust in God's faithfulness and in the love of her sisters, family and friends. It seemed that her whole self was being prepared for the great encounter with the One who always keeps his promises. Elizabeth Hoye died on September 3, 2007. Attending her wake or funeral were our bishop, Howard Hubbard, and many priests, as well as about a hundred ecumenical colleagues and friends. Libby's niece Anne represented her family. May she intercede for all of us from the mansion prepared for her by the God she loved with a lively faith.