

Meeting the Wants of the Age By Kim Cavallero

Most of us have caught ourselves doing it. We meet someone who doesn't speak our native language and talk louder—as if this will help them to better understand what we are saying. Or we meet an elderly person—with a lifetime of experience—and talk “down” to them in that “goo goo gaga” voice usually reserved for babies.

I found myself doing it when I met the mentally and physically challenged adults served by Sharon alums and cousins Suzanne McDonough-Betz '54 and Helen Joyce '41. As I watched Suzanne during a social development class she leads for the challenged, I quickly realized what I *was* doing and what she *wasn't* doing. Her voice never changed as she spoke with those in the class—she spoke to them in the same way she spoke to me. “That’s because they’re our friends. They’re not students or clients to us,” explains Helen.

Pioneer Gertrude A. Stewart

Helen and Suzanne’s aunt, Gertrude A. Stewart, was a pioneer in working with the developmentally delayed. In the 1900s, after watching her father’s life unravel due to a paralyzing stroke, Gertrude dedicated her life to what she termed, “helping suffering humanity.”

As Gertrude took classes and worked at a school for the mentally and physically challenged, her innate gifts were revealed. In 1927, she opened her own boarding school for challenged children. “When Gertrude was in the room, you *knew* she was in the room, but that personality was useful in teaching a developmentally delayed child. She commanded their



Suzanne McDonough-Betz (standing) and Helen Joyce

“THE PURITY THAT COMES FROM THEM IS AMAZING—THEY ARE ALWAYS KIND TO EACH OTHER.”



Suzanne works with John during the weekly social development class. Many were dressed in costume for Halloween!



Regina (standing) has been in the social development program since Suzanne and Helen began it more than 20 years ago

attention and could get them to do things others couldn't,” explains Suzanne.

In the 1930s, Gertrude bought a building on Baltimore Pike in Springfield, Pa. and moved her school there. As she grew older, her nieces took on more responsibility for the school and found working with the mentally and physically challenged to be a gift. “I feel blessed to have been given the opportunity to touch these lives. The purity that comes from them is amazing—they are always kind to each other. I watched how my own children would tease one another. You don't find that with the developmentally delayed,” says Suzanne.

Gertrude sold her property in 1973 to developers who later built the Springfield Mall. She left the money from the sale in a charitable trust for her nieces to carry on her work.

Changing Times

As the property sale was finalized, a law passed that required everyone—including the challenged—to be educated in mainstream schools. This soon made separate schools such as Gertrude’s obsolete. Much in the spirit of Cornelia’s charge to “meet the wants of the age,”

Suzanne and Helen responded to the changing times and turned their attention to serving those who needed it the most—developmentally delayed *adults*.

Today, Suzanne and Helen’s programs range from taking developmentally delayed adults to the shore in the summer

to a social development program they offer through the Haverford Township Adult Program in the winter. They also take the time to write Christmas cards to all of the individuals they have served over the years.

Fond Memories

Helen and Suzanne both innately embody that Holy Child spirit—perhaps they picked it up during their days at Sharon. “I loved Sharon. The nuns were wonderful teachers and I received a wonderful education. We had Gilbert and Sullivan operas every year and I loved being in them,” says Helen. “I had a marvelous education. There was an appreciation for learning that came from the nuns, and I have always continued learning as a result,” says Suzanne.

Many Holy Child alums have had unique life experiences (i.e. careers, families, overcoming difficult obstacles). If there is an alum that you would like to see profiled in Actions, please send an e-mail to actions@shcj.org for the editors' consideration. Please be sure to include the person's name, why you would like to see him/her profiled, and any contact information you have for the person.