

Remembering



Rita Mary Roemlein, CSJ

January 6, 1931 — June 19 2018

Helena Maria, was born in Lohr, West Germany, now called Bavaria. Her mother, Maria Harlacher, was also born in Lohr.

Her father, Wilhelm, was born in Wurzburg, Germany. Helena's older brother by two years was Walter. Helena was five years older than Gertrude and seven years older than Herbert. She loved her family and said they were musical. Every member of the family played an instrument, and they used to gather in the kitchen in the evenings and play classical music. Helena played the piano and flute. She was always very proud of her German heritage. Helena grew to love nature and beauty, learning to see God in all things.

She once said, "I have only the fondest memories of my early years in Germany. Our house in Bavaria was surrounded by meadows with the Black Forest in the background. Living in the low Alps during pre-World War II was joyful despite hearing about the

rumblings and turmoil in the cities. I even belonged to a Youth Group. I was proud of it and enjoyed the activities connected with it, which included camping and campfire fun, participating in sports and marching in our uniforms. It was a formation leading to youthful self-esteem and pride. A few years later, unfortunately, it fell under the spell of the regime."

She went on to say, "I lived through the bombing of Germany and Bavaria. Postwar years found us starving and poor. I remember my mother going from door to door, asking or bartering for a slice of bread or potatoes and one egg. After the war ended we had to wait and find out which army would be occupying our part of Germany. When the troops came marching down the road, it was the Americans! I had never seen a black man before and was fascinated. Thankfully, Germany's reconstruction found me with a scholarship to an American college. I attended Marymount for

a year and then needed to transfer to get advanced biology classes for nursing. So I was told the Mount was nearby and had the classes. When we drove up the circle at the Mount there was Sister Laurentia! I worked as a waitress/cashier in restaurants and at St. Joseph Hospital in Burbank to help meet expenses."

Helena attended Hasloch Grammar School, and then Wertheim-Hochschule and graduated in 1950. From 1951 - 1952 she attended Marymount College then transferred to Mount St. Mary's College and graduated from the Mount in 1959 with a degree in Biology, having decided not to go on with nursing. She received her Secondary Teaching Credential in 1964.

Helena entered religious life on September 15, 1954 at old St. Mary's on Slauson in Los Angeles, received the habit and religious name of Sister Rita Mary on March 19, 1955. She pronounced her final vows in 1962. Sister Mary Williams recalls Rita Mary was a happy person in the formation years, fun to be with, and very interesting to talk with about her years in Germany. In 2015 Sister gratefully celebrated her 60th Jubilee.

For a total of 40 years Sister served as teacher or principal, benefitting several schools in California and Arizona. In 1989 she moved to Germany to care for her elderly mother. When she returned she taught in Arizona and later was a driver for Holy Family Community at Carondelet Center. In 1995 Sister received a diocesan award for her dedication to Catholic education. The principal at Santa Cruz School in Tucson said, "Sister Rita Mary is an example and role model for all. She has the ability to make everyone feel special." Teachers who knew her as a

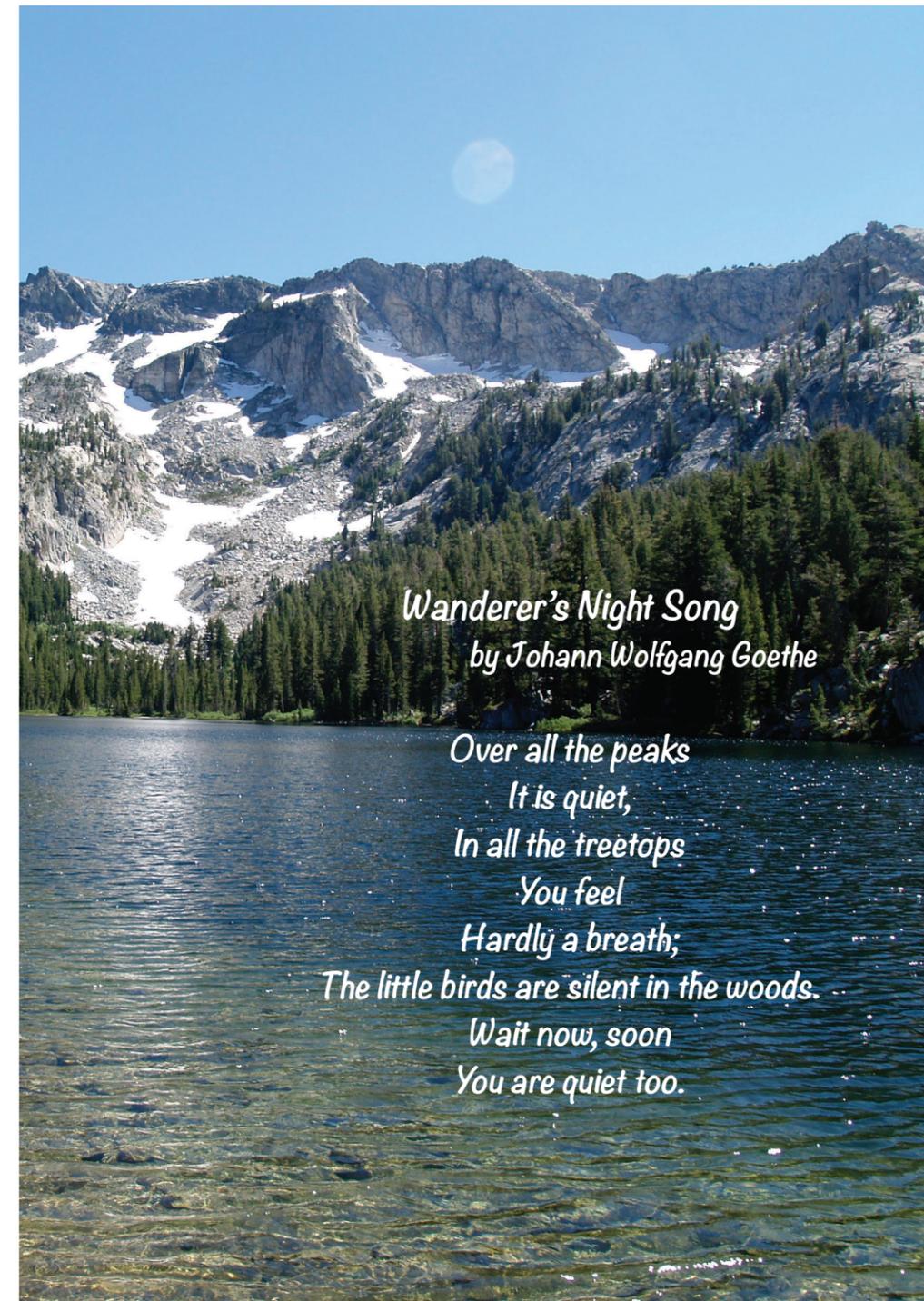
principal describe Sister as the best principal they ever had.

Rita was efficient, caring and highly professional. She was impressive and made a good appearance. She was knowledgeable and forthright, a woman of great character, and strong convictions. Once she said, "As a CSJ, I loved my mission in education as a teacher or principal and having so many special CSJ friends." Among her many friends was Sister Bernadette Floresh. Their friendship reached out to include others and to offer them joy and support. Rita respected authority and honored traditions. Hers was a practical wisdom. As a teacher or principal, she was kindly but could be stern. In summary it could be said she had a calm exterior, practical actions and serious intent. She was strong-willed with a social grace that gentled her actions. Rita had a lively sense of humor that was often evident.

She joined the Holy Family Community on August 16, 2005. Always very fond of dogs, she often said while living at Carondelet Center, "If only I could have a dog." Rita Mary was grateful for the loving care provided for 13 years by the Holy Family staff, and for the support and understanding given by the Vitas Hospice staff.

Rita, may you now be surrounded by your family and many friends, many creatures of God, and embraced by the Source of all beauty and goodness. ☺

~Written by Sister Frances Baker, CSJ



Wanderer's Night Song by Johann Wolfgang Goethe

Over all the peaks
It is quiet,
In all the treetops
You feel
Hardly a breath;
The little birds are silent in the woods.
Wait now, soon
You are quiet too.