

**July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016 – Sister Cleopha Werner speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana.**

Abbreviations

SCW: Sister Cleopha Werner

MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: This is July 27, 2016 in Oldenburg Indiana and I am pleased to continue my conversation with Sister Cleo. Thank you, Sister Cleo.

SCW: You're so welcome. It's my pleasure to tell you this story about my sister Lorene who died was a year ago in April, but she had breathing problems earlier back in September already she had breathing problems. Her children kept trying to take her this place and that place to find out what was wrong. Well, they couldn't find out anything. They gave her this and gave her that to take, but it was the day after Christmas she got really sick and she was taken to Saint Francis Hospital in Indianapolis.

So she was up there for five days and came home and it was on the 2nd of January when I went out there; they were going to have their Christmas celebration. They always celebrate that on the Saturday after New Year's because it's, all the hubbub is out of the way and they can just have a good day. Well anyhow, so I went out there then on the on the 2nd of January and I walked into the house and I said, "Lorene, you look terrible what's wrong?" She said, "I don't know Cleo," she said, "I think they sent me home with pneumonia." And she was coughing and coughing and coughing. Well anyhow as the day went on I thought, She's gotta go someplace. So I finally said, "Lorene either you call somebody or I'm gonna call somebody to take you to get help." So she called her daughter Flora so she and her husband Dennis came over and took her to Greensburg to Urgent Care. Well, they told her right away, she had pneumonia I think they gave her some antibiotics but and then, she had to go back the next morning to give blood and then at noon to go back and find out the results. Well here they've gonna have their celebration that afternoon.

Well Flora was gone with her mom and then so she went back at noon and they found out and whatever they found out, but they said you either have to go to Columbus Hospital or Batesville Hospital. And so she decided to go to Batesville. So Flora went with her. Well then another niece, her sister Linda said, "I'm going to be with them." So she went to Batesville. Well then they in and then they got a call back again that they're sending their mother up to Christ Hospital in Cincinnati well then the two husbands were in, Dennis left because they didn't want their wives to go up there except by themselves so anyhow then more people were left, grandma wasn't there, mom wasn't there, Aunt Florrie wasn't there and their husbands weren't there.

But anyhow the party went on, but it just was not a very good party and it ended early and everybody went home. Well my niece took me back home. She lives in Hamburg, so she said, "Bring me back home. Oh," she said, "Cleo that wasn't Christmas, grandma wasn't there and mom wasn't there. It was just not a very good party." I said, "Well you're right, but they'll be more." So anyhow, then she came, she was coming home from the hospital I forget how long she was up there. I don't remember what they found out or whatever, but she came back home. Well then I said, "I knew these girls and all of their family, all of them

worked and had kids in college and in high school and some in grade school yet and so I knew they wouldn't be able to take care of their mother without hiring someone. So I said, "I will come, I'll stay with her from Monday till Friday and then Friday evening. You take me home. I'll come back on Sunday for to be there for the next week."

Well that worked out so that was in January when I started. So every week I did that all up until the end of March and then, well, between all this she was in—they finally done (unintelligible) she wouldn't eat, she couldn't eat. She said I don't—she'd take a bite and she said I'm full I'm full well anyhow so they finally, they decided to put her in Saint Andrews for just rehab and some strength to get new again, that she would be stronger. Well it didn't help anything. She just got worse, it made her worse. Well finally then, one doctor said, I'm going to do one more test on her heart. So they took her back then to Christ Hospital and they tested the back side of her heart I don't know how that all is, but the back side of her heart and there's where they found the problem that her body was producing too much protein and it was affecting her heart. She only had 30% use of her heart and they gave her two months to live.

And well that was a sad day and so they had—all the kids were went my niece's bringing her home from the hospital, she was going back to Saint Andrews and they called all the rest of the kids and they were all there when mom came back. So she told them what was going on herself. And so that was just a sad time and he asked me if I wanted to come and I said, No I think you've got, you guys just be with mom by yourself. So it ends, I forget how long she was there not that long and then they eased, well they decided right away then when she left the hospital they said you can go back to Saint Andrews or you can go home and have hospice come. Well she chose to go home of course which was I was delighted to find out. So she went home and then I went to be with her.

She only lived three days after she got home. Got home on a Friday and then, maybe it was a little more time. But we got home on a Friday and her great-grandson was going to be baptized and so her daughter said, "Mom you think you could come?" and so she did. She went, she enjoyed the evening. That was on a Friday, I think. But then, Saturday, Sunday, I don't know maybe I got the dates mixed up. But anyway, so she came back home. She lived good that night. Then the next day, I don't she—but anyhow, she had different things happening between all this, but on—it was Holy Week and this was on Holy Thursday that she was sitting in her wheel chair in the kitchen. She loved the outdoors, she could go out there in the morning, stay all day and not even think about anything to eat she was just at home, digging in the earth. And so she was sitting in a wheelchair in the kitchen it was springtime and she said, "She was looking outside and all the beauties of trees were coming out the red bud was started to come. This grass was getting green the birds were singing, all these things she was mentioning that was going on out there.

And then I, you know, I said to her, I said Lorene, you know what, not too far down the road you're gonna see something more beautiful than this, you know, you're going to see God's face and she said, Cleo I'm anxious to go. I wanna see what God has in store for me. I know mom and dad will be there to meet me. So I just melted I just thought oh my Gosh, you know, to have that kind of thoughts. And where she, you know, she only knew she had a short time to live anyhow.

So then this was on Holy Thursday. Well earlier when she before we knew she wasn't going to get well one day she said to me said, "Cleo, I have got to get the kids back to the farm. Get those grandkids down by the creek into a cookout like we used to do when my kids were little." I said, "Lorene, don't let that thought leave." Well, anyhow I didn't hear it but if I heard later I heard but she told those kids, "I want you to have that get-together at the forum on Easter Sunday." So, well first of all after I, she was finished talking with me there, then the two girls were there doing things getting things together anything that they could help before mom died that they could have ready, you know, well anyhow then Lorene turned around and said to them, "Are we getting together for Easter?" and we said, "Mom whatever you want to do we'll do."

So then I heard later that day that this is what they told they have this get-together on Easter, down at the farm. Well they all got together they said that everything planned and they were gone. And then on Holy, on Good Friday, she told me, she said, "Now, I won't be there with you on Sunday but I want you to have it anyway." And she died Holy Saturday morning. So I thought it was a story I just thought, "Oh, my gosh." You know how she knew something was going to happen and she just she was just a gem.

But there were other things happen in her life for this. Well first of all her husband died it was 29 years the same month that she died, but after he died, she you know he had no idea of the finances, she and, because he took care of the bills, he took care of everything, you know, all she did was take care of the house and the kids and you know she took all kept all that together. So anyhow but after he died, she just went to pieces because she had no clue, she didn't know if they had money, to do, she didn't know what they had.

But anyhow, this one day she was going down the road and a white buck appeared in the middle of the road and she just stopped and stared at that thing because there was not any animals around here like that. And then she heard, "Don't you know I take care of you." So from then on she just, she just was a different person. She had faith in she had faith in God for sure but it was everything she was said everybody trust in God trust in God, he's gonna take care of it and she, you know, she got through all of this, she had a lot of health problems, she spent about a month in the hospital she couldn't and couldn't touch anything if I could touch her she couldn't be herself. This is name of this long, I don't know what she had but she finally got over that but anyhow it was she was she's an example and and I was so proud, so happy that I knew her as well as I did. We did things together, we took short trips together and we just had a lot of fun and so anyhow that's the story about my Sister Lorene. She was a gem.

She could always remember so many things her kids did you know over this is this and this and some of the kids they tell stories themselves things that they had—I said to her many times I said, "Lorene you got the best kids" and she would say, "Cleo don't give me any credit. It was all because of Leonard, he was the, he was a disciplinarian and she said, "I just stood back and waited and watched and sometimes I left the scene." Not that he ever he'd never hit them, never hit them, but he always was really firm with them. And I know two of the girls got in trouble one night. Anyhow he said go out and get a switch, but they brought this little dark, little stick in and he said, "That is not a switch, I want a switch, well they brought the second one in and it wasn't big enough either. They'll go back and get the third one, had to be long. And so anyhow you've had that along the table and he was talking

to them and as he said things to them, he smacked that switch on the table and he never touched them with it. But he hit that on the table.

So anyway it was just how he did it and he never, he never hit them, but he always had something really firm to give them. And one other time two of the girls were I think they're supposed to wash dishes then and they were fiddling around and all that and then they got mad at each other and they were a holler and said, "Oh get out, I don't like you, I hate you" and all that, but their dad sat them down on two chairs facing each other and made them made them hold hands and like he said, "I want you to say 'I love you, I love you.'" They started out he couldn't hear them, he couldn't hear them. Had to say it really loud and by that time, never happened. He said, "Go now do the dishes." So that was so good he disciplined up but they learned the lesson from that, you know, and they loved each other, they have more fun when they're together there's no fussing and fighting, it, they just have a good time.

And you know after they found out their mother wasn't gonna live very long but then they was bringing me back here one day and she said, "Cleo, what are we gonna do mom's the glue that holds us together?" I said, "Linda you have the same glue. You just helped get that, keep that family together." So they're been getting together Christmas and the holidays and when they like they used to and so their doing fine. So anyway, so those are some stories about Lorene and her family she just had a (unintelligible) family. They're just all in to her. Kids, girls just constantly doing things for me. Bringing me curtains to make this room dark so I can see and they just and they come, yet, Monday one of them came and said, "Cleo it's hot outside but not two o'clock to go down and get some ice cream." Well, anyway we were going down the street and I said, "Linda, they're not open on Monday." But Jim was upstairs and didn't have two apartments above that, he was upstairs laughing out the window he hollered he said, "I'll be right down." So he came down open the store and let us in, to get ice cream (laughs).

There's another story I need to tell you about mom's shoes. After dad died we had her at home and hired a lady to come and stay with her and then one of us went every night. I went weekends because I had a week—I could get there on weekday nights but I came every weekend on Friday night after work and came to stay sometimes till Sunday night—Saturday night or even Sunday.

Well anyway, but then mom had a bad spell we had put her in the nursing home because that lady said she couldn't take care of her anymore. None of us were trained to do that either. So anyway so she was in the hospital for a while and then that we have to put her at the nursing home because she needs some rehab. Well anyhow, so she was there and we had a notebook that wrote everything down, each one signed their name when they came and said how mom was or what was going on or sometimes about things about their family that everybody would know what's going on, well anyhow, so, so that was go on she was over there I guess two maybe three years I, I'm not real sure.

But this one day I came in her room she hadn't been up walking at all they lifted her in and out of bed with a left and I came in and there was a pair of brand new shoes sitting by her bed and I said, "Mom, where did these sh—she was blind, where did these shoes come from? She said, "Well there was a Doctor Zen came in and he told me he was gonna get

me a new pair of shoes. And I said, "Well mom, are you thinking you're gonna get strong that you can walk again? She said, "No, those shoes are for when I walk into heaven."

Well I just put the shoes down on the floor and we did the regular things that we usually do while we're there: pray the rosary and read, chat, and she takes a nap and sometimes she had the—always was thinking there were children bothering her. Every now and then you say, oh go, she would say, "Oh go away" when you're talking to her. "Mom you want me to go home." She said, "No these kids they keep bothering me." Always, always say, "Mom, you know what, I think you're just experiencing what we did when we were kids." She said, "No," she'd always say, "no you never were that bad." And so and so we let it go so anyhow the shoe just sat there for a day or so finally we put them in the cupboard we didn't know where they came from we didn't know anything about him we couldn't find anything except that Doctor Zen brought these shoes.

Well so anyhow the time went on and she and some of the things one morning I came and she was all excited and she say Esther I was out for a ride already today in the car. I said you were I said who took you in the car for a ride? She said, the Angels and I said, Mom, you are so lucky where does, that, where did you go? She said, Well it was an old car and the road was bumpy, but we went all the way down to the river and then we just sat there and looked at the river and after a while we came back. I said, Mom you are so lucky. Angels taking you for a ride? I'm jealous, I'm just jealous of you. I said, I never get anything like that. Anyhow, we laughed a little bit about it and went about our business.

And another time I was there with her, when I came she was picking her hair and she would say, Ester, I got these spiders in my hair, I can't get them out. I said, Okay mom, I'll take care of them. So I said, I'll get a bag and I'm gonna pick them out in this bag then I'll smash them. So I rattled the paper because she was blind she couldn't see. So, Okay mom, I got my bag here. So I picked in her hair and picked in and I said and I said, Mom I don't see any more I think they're all gone. And so I smashed the paper on the floor and stepped on it. There was no, the spiders were gone. They never come back again.

So I said, you always had to think of something, you know, to kind of cover it over it, I don't think that it really happened and then another time you see I was there and we were talking, but she said, Esther, there's a there's a table over there and Jesus and Mary are standing on it. I said, Mom, How in the world is this that you get to see all these holy people? I said, You are a good lady. And anyway so that was that then. And then she got this really bad spell and took her to the hospital and doctor said, you better call your family together because I don't think your mom's going to make it through the night. And so all of us were there, we walked in the room, well she had tubes in her throat and all this stuff. And then the doctor, nurses came in and said we should leave because she needed to take care of mom. So all went back to the waiting room, I said to my sister, my sister and brother they kind of took care of things. I said, Regina what is mom with all those wires in her? We're just gonna hydrate her and take her back to the nursing home, which we did before. She was 96 then already, so anyhow we didn't wanna just doing this back and forth too much.

Anyhow so that was that night then on—that was on the Wednesday night. On Thursday night—but we we wanted to stay with her at night, so I told them all, I said, "I'll stay at night because you folks all work and then you can come whenever you can. Well anyhow so the next day on Thursday I was coming back to stay with mom, well here that room was full with

all my brothers and sisters. I said, what's going on? And they said, we're gonna have a meeting. And Regina had heard from others other brothers and sisters that they were concerned about mom too having all this in her when you know she doesn't want that stuff.

Well anyhow, so we went back in there and we all talked, Regina said we're going around round-robin each one say how you feel about this. Some agreed, some disagreed you know so we got everybody's ideas. But we decided then though that we would not do anything till Monday because it was on Friday the doctor's gonna leave on Friday and wasn't gonna be back till Monday. We thought we'd have time to think about it over the weekend and decide what we can do. Well Friday morning, the doctor came in and mom said, I don't want all these wires in me. I want them taken out. I don't want to live I want to die. So we took all the wires out then but we didn't want to her back to the nursing home, so I wasn't there it was late at night so I was at home and so then they called different places in Batesville and anyhow then in the end my youngest sister said, We just got our basement finished as a walk-in. If, let me come, if you let me call my husband at work and see if he if it's okay with him we'll take mom there. Well, so that was all settled I was going to do that but then my brothers went to the nursing home the bed was hers and they got everything belonged to mom brought it to my sisters well and the shoes. Well she got there. It was in May she was freezing, she was so cold. Two of my sister's got a hair dryer and warmed up those shoes and put them on her feet she went to sleep and she never, never said another word except one time she said, "Is Sister Cleopha here?" And I was there which I was pleased to think you know I said, "Mom, I'm right here. Can I help you with anything?" She didn't say anything she just slept two weeks she's just laid there she was just as calm she never moved. She never did anything. We could you know we bathed her and did everything we needed to do for her she never moved and anyway but then the day was they called her they knew she was dying so he called hospice and she came and they had her all dressed up. Put her shoes on. And they found a gown in the drawer that nobody knew where it come from either, beautiful pink gown with appliquéed rose on it and that's what she died in.

So anyhow that was just such a holy time you know to be there with mom. Sit with her we all had to take turns and so we and you know it only one of us had to be there at time but ended up that everybody was coming all day they were there and they want to be there all day we start working jigsaw puzzles and all kinds of things and somebody said one day, wonder my mom thinks of us doing this? I said, She's happy because I knew she could hear yet you know and I told, I told my brothers and sister, I said don't ask mom anything just tell her if you want to tell her anything you want to tell her but don't ask her any questions because she can't answer. She will hear you.

So that was anyhow that so we had the funeral oh and another story I had to go back to the nursing home a little bit. She loved to sing, she was always singing or humming or whistling at home and then one day she said, "Oh I just can't sing right anymore my voice isn't good. Well so that was that, but she got to the nursing home I would say about six months before she died, she started to sing, and one day I came into the nursing home and I heard the singing as I was coming down the hall I thought whoever that is, she's got a really a beautiful voice. Here I walked in the room, and it's mom. She's singing, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." So I just stood there and listened and after she was finished I said, Mom, that was beautiful. Who did you sing that to? I guess dad, he always called me sweetheart. So anyhow after that my nephew found a songs on the internet, however or whatever and all

these Blessed Mother songs that she liked, so she had this tape of all these Blessed Mother songs on it.

Then this one day she was singing this one song and she kept singing after, I sang with her, and after she was finished with that song she kept singing and I said it was the same tune. I said, I never heard that verse before and she said, Did you recognize that? I said, No mom I sure didn't. She said, I just make that up. I thought, Oh my gosh mom, you are you are some wonderful person. I am so glad you're my mom.

So anyway, it's kind of the—then we were planning the funeral and we said we gotta sing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" that was the song she sang most. I said, Not in church. So we didn't know when we were going to sing it. But anyway so after the ceremony out here in our Holy Family Cemetery we were all there so we decided after the funeral was over, all the prayers finished, we would sing that, so we sang that out at the cemetery (laughs). Well then at the funeral home (laughs), we, um, Uncle Tommy he always played the guitar and sang and everything. Well these shoes mom got, "magic" shoes, they had gold thread through them and so we called them her golden shoes. Well anyhow he went to the library and got the words to this the song, "The Golden Slippers" and we sang that at the funeral home. I guess, I said, we just celebrated mom that way you know we got all the things that she did and remembered things that we remembered that she did. So it was, it was a celebration of mom when all this was and so, I think that's about my story I you I don't know if anything right now else that I want to say so.

MEL: Thank you, Sister, very much. Sister may I ask you one question. I was wondering if I may ask you about, when you were a Sister, when Vatican II came and it changed. Do you remember how you felt about it or changing, all the changes in the church?

SCW: Well I was in Cincinnati at Saint Joe in the city down bel—in the city and it was all a black parish and I was teaching first and second grade. Anyway, we had a priest come and gave us a little conference every—on First Friday, every month, well I was elected to after—it was before we could all mix together and sit at the table and have drinks together and all that. So I took him in the front parlor and always had him had a drink for him and sit and chat with him, well and this was during Vatican II. Well anyhow and I said to him I said, "Well there's gonna be a lot of changes made." He said, It's going to come very, very slow, the Catholic Church doesn't move that fast." And I thought, Well okay. Well then that was that was that night.

Well, then, I got the appointment to go to Indianapolis to cook for Doct—Bishop Schulte. Well he was went into the going to the council you know once a year how, once or twice a year however they met. Well he'd be going you know and then he'd come back and say more things was happening, but I said after whatever he saw happening I thought I thought of that priest that said, this goes very, very slow and this was happening like wow, wow you know it's just given to us all of us just to do and change and everything like that so, it really didn't affect me. I was really happy to have equally sure vernacular for Mass and prayers. Changing, turning the altar around was certainly a blessing and having the priest and looking at his back all the time. And having Latin that you couldn't understand.

And those days you know and the Latin Masses were said we didn't hear anything except the Gospel that we'd pray the Rosary during Mass and all kinds of things because the kids

aren't gonna be sitting still you know and they're not anything to do, we'd be praying the Rosary you know when we were kids. Well anyhow so all that changed you know and you know the Rosary wasn't as important it didn't seem as important anymore. All these, you used to have many processions like for Immaculate Conception and all this that was all like it was all out. No more, you didn't hear of Mary Crownings anymore in May, May processions and those kind of things still kind of affect me now. I just can talk about that to other people and that we used to do that you know the whole school I went to school little family across the street and the whole school, the girls all wear white dresses and the veils and the boys would all have dark pants and shirt that they would wear and Christmastime, we have a big procession at Midnight Mass. All the kids were there the whole school was there at Midnight Mass, except the first grade. Anyhow, we would carry blue candles around in church and one of the—somebody brought, carried the infant Jesus. And we'd walk around singing Christmas songs in church and at that time all the clerics of Oldenburg were here. And they would be at the procession and sing, the singing was—oh it was glorious and then we put those Vigil lights all, I guess we blew them out, I can't remember where we put them, but we were all carrying blue Vigil lights and the church was dark, it was beautiful.

And so and that and on Holy Saturday we used to have the services we had the main service like we have now on Holy Saturday night, but on Holy Saturday night then we would have Mass and then we had the Resurrection Mass you know and the brothers had made up a thing that they could raise up behind the altar. That was the Resurrected Christ and so they'd have a white cloth back there and then the Resurrected Christ would come up behind the altar and be up there all during what you call it, Easter season and it wasn't a Mass we had there because we didn't have, we had services that night, so and that procession for the Resurrection.

But those things now, they were hard for me not to think we'd have those anymore because I thought they were so prayerful and people would come everybody the church would be full for all of these things we did and now you know we have services so few people show up. I just think that something, something happened there that this wasn't quite right, I guess maybe it was right, but for me there's something still missing and the Rosary was always important to me and it still is, I pray it every day, sometimes a couple of days since I'm sitting here. So anyhow it is—those were the biggest things you know like that, but a lot of it like you know like the vernacular I loved that and the singing songs we could hear the words and all that so that was, that was good you know and there were other good things too, many good things I'm sure that I just don't think of right now, but um.

MEL: Is there anything else you want to talk about being a Sister of Saint Francis?

SCW: Well, I wouldn't want to change anything that happened um even though there were some tough times I'd rather not have, rather not have had but that's part of life. I got through it, I'm here, I'm happy and so I, I guess you know I just think it's how you face those things you're going to crab about and complain about it and worry about it and wish it wouldn't happen and this and that. It's gonna be—it's gonna just stick around forever—and I guess I never took it that way.

This one situation I handled I was in Evansville. This is before I left down there. It was at this parish and things were happening there that I just didn't want to be a part of, they

accused me of some things that I knew weren't true and there was no way I could tell them you know. So anyhow I knew I had get out of there and it uh, but anyhow, but these two people that were causing all the trouble, they said, Now we're talking about—they told me all these things that were doing—I was doing wrong, I did this wrong, that I tapped, hit this one kid and all things like that which I knew wasn't true. I couldn't I didn't argue with them, I just let them say it. Anyway, I knew I had to get out.

So, my sister was living in Columbus, Indiana. We used to call back and forth all the time. So I called her and I said, "Marty, I gotta find something else to do." Well she said, "Cleo, do what I'm doing. Take care of kids and clean houses. I said, "I'll do the kids, but I'm not going to clean houses." She said, "Well, move in with me. Find you a job." And so, but, one night—I said, "I needed to get closer to mom and dad." But anyhow, so the—after I was out of there and everything and I was thinking, This was God's way of getting me to be closer to mom and dad that He let this happen and all this accusing me that I was doing and doing.

Well a number of years later I got a letter from this one person apologizing because they knew I did not, would not do something like that. So anyhow that was—but I thought, you know and after I left down there I was, it just never came back to me much at all never, never thought about it much and a couple people asked me what happened and I couldn't even repeat the story too well because I just didn't remember it, didn't want to remember it. And so, anyhow, I got up here and I'd been with those kids, it was just a wonderful gift that God gave me. And so I just looked at it that way. That was really the one of the worst things that happened that you know that I had to, but I was thankful for the grace to be able to, and there again, the Holy Spirit helped me with that.

So otherwise I think you know even here in Oldenburg it's nice, you just live like you're a queen, everything is there for you, if you're here like I am right now in Saint Clare Hall your food brought to you, you your medications are brought to you, they take you there and you get a bath and they help with your bath or shower and it's just you know it's just a wonderful life and I just feel like I'm up here I'm, you know right now I'm just waiting for an appointment that I was supposed to have before I know what I'm really gonna be doing, but I just I'm so grateful and thankful to the nurses. I tell them all the time, how thank them for bringing my tray in, for changing my water and, and all the things they do and I say, you know, you folks make how many trips up and down the hall for me. I said, "Thank you so much I sure appreciate that" and I just tried to build them up and so I guess that's my mission up here to be happy, make others happy, hopefully (laughs).

MEL: Thank you.