

When somebody listened

By Sister Vera Gallagher, RGS
NC News Service

Marvel believed she was stupid. The teen-ager didn't like school and never studied.

Out of necessity, her mother worked the midnight shift and her father worked days. Marvel began staying home to make sure her younger brother got off to school. Day by day the excuse became a habit; then Marvel quit school.

Her sister had missed only one day when the truant officer showed up. But the little brother had missed lots of school, and Marvel, 15, never went. "You must attend school," she was told. But she didn't want to listen.

Because the parents, who needed to work, were home so irregularly, the juvenile court took over the children's supervision.

Marvel and her sister spent two weeks at the juvenile center while the court looked into the situation. Except for skipping school, the two sisters had done nothing wrong. But Marvel was shocked as she listened to the stories other children told.

The judge sent Marvel to live at a home for teen-agers run by the Good Shepherd Sisters in Detroit. "The Sisters have taken care of teen-agers like you for more than a hundred years," he said. "You need education and loving care."

A Sister who was a psychologist gave Marvel intelligence and aptitude tests. She'd been tested at the center, and hated taking tests twice. But she tried.

Then the Sister said, "I'm going to test you again."

"Why?" cried Marvel. "Am I that dumb?"

The Sister smiled. "You tested higher than any girl we've seen," she explained. "I want to make sure."

Marvel stood there amazed. She? Everybody always said she was stupid. Marvel couldn't believe her ears.

Marvel lived in a calm atmosphere in the Good Shepherd home. She could study at night. After attending school regularly for a few months, learning became easy.

Then the day came for Marvel to leave. The principal explained that with one more year Marvel could graduate from high school prepared to be a cosmetologist.

Marvel decided to stay until she was 18.

With the Sisters, Marvel listened to scripture readings at Mass, met God and learned to love him.

After she got married, Marvel kept thinking about all the help she had received. She remembered the boys and girls she had met in the juvenile detention center.

"Somebody helped me," she said to herself. "When I thought I was stupid, somebody listened. I've got to pass it on."

Only 19, Marvel Davis petitioned the Monroe County Juvenile Court in Michigan to license her home for foster children in need of court supervision. She is licensed for six.

Now 35, she has helped 128 foster children and has adopted two.

"One came at age 2," she says, "but he'd bounced around to so many foster homes that he was frightened. He didn't laugh, didn't talk. I couldn't let him move again, ever. He's grown into a happy child now. I'm his mother and my husband is his dad. Somebody listened to my needs. I listened to his."

Being a foster parent is not always easy, Mrs. Davis says. The children, especially teen-agers, come with problems. Sometimes Marvel and her husband worry about them and pray for them.

Many of Marvel's foster children have graduated; some are working; others have gone to college. Most went back home. And by following the example she set in listening, they found it easier to get along with their families.

Advent is a time for listening. Advent is celebrated because Mary listened to God's message to her.

Today, if we listen, will we too hear God's voice?

(Sister Gallagher is a free-lance writer in Seattle, Wash.)

FOOD...

...for thought

The care of an infant does not begin on the day of its birth. It begins months before, as any expectant mother making her way back and forth to prenatal visits in a crowded doctor's office knows.

An expectant mother looks ahead to her due date with great hope:

- She longs, with occasional moments of trepidation, for the child to arrive.
- She realizes how much new life already is present as she feels the child moving and kicking inside her.
- She makes arrangements for the birth and the days after.
- She ponders the change the baby will bring to her life.
- She spends time thinking through the impact a new child will have on the other family members.

In short, an expectant mother does much more than wait passively. She is actively involved now in the life of the new child.

Advent is a season of expectation for God's people. And the example of the expectant mother helps to illustrate the meaning of this "expectation."

A person with great expectations is not a passive bystander in life. The expectant person gets actively involved now with events that are to unfold more fully in the future.

Similarly, people of Advent are not passive bystanders who merely wait for Christmas some weeks off. As expectant people, they begin taking action now in light of events which are about to unfold more fully on Christmas.

- Advent people think about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and sheltering the homeless.
- Advent people concentrate on ways to express compassion and to heal wounds.
- Advent people ask whether there is a need for peacemaking in their own homes, their neighborhoods, their world, and what they can do about it.

It is more than difficult to be a genuinely expectant person if one has lost hope in life. How can a person who lacks hope look ahead longingly to the future? How can a person without hope get actively involved in preparing the way for future events?

"Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path," John the Baptizer shouts out in the desert as the Gospel of Mark begins. His words serve virtually as a theme for Advent.

Advent is a season when people face crucial questions:
Who lacks hope?
How can hope be given now to those who have little or none of it?

...for discussion

1. Think about people who lack hope in life. Do you believe it is possible for hopeful people to communicate hope to others?
2. How will you observe Advent at home? What does "preparing for Christmas" mean to you?
3. Father John Gurrieri talks about developing "an Advent mentality." What does he mean? Does he suggest any ways for doing this?
4. Why does Father John Castelot say, "Hope is what Advent people are all about?"
5. In Katharine Bird's article, Neil Parent suggests that Advent is not just a time for preparation but is also a time for action. What kinds of social action could you engage in this Advent?

SECOND HELPINGS

"Advent, Christmas '84: Family Prayers and Activities," by Patrick Dooling and Corinne Hart. This booklet is for families and small groups who want to observe Advent at home. Some suggestions might be tried at the dinner table. Points to discuss, brief readings, prayers and activities are included. Readers are reminded that "there is no right way" to carry out these ideas. "Phones will interrupt, absences occur." But "perfection is not the point." Families, the authors suggest, might ask how God's coming changes people: "Whenever God comes close to us, we must move. We can no longer stay the same." Included are activities for Christmas and Epiphany. (Franciscan Communications, 1229 S. Santee St., Los Angeles, Calif. 90015. 1-99 copies, 40 cents each, plus postage.)

omises

ta-
after
ing
ged
land.
fused
con-
not go
idn't.
their
c
ke
e who
t
st,
dying
ands 1
23:46).
g sec-
1

beginning of the chapters: "We know that affliction makes for endurance, and endurance for tested virtue, and tested virtue for hope. And this hope will not leave us disappointed" (Romans 5:3-5).

In fact, the whole created universe is sustained by hope in the vision offered by these chapters in Romans. And together with creation, "we ourselves, although we have the Spirit as first fruits, groan inwardly as we await the redemption of our bodies. In hope we were saved."

"But hope is not hope if its object is seen; how is it possible for one to hope for what he sees? And hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patient endurance" (Romans 8:23-25).

(Father Castelot teaches at St. John's Seminary, Plymouth, Mich.)