

It Turns Your Life Around

By Ann Orhelein

Helen Outlaw of Melbourne Beach, Florida, is a shining example of what a person can do in the apostolate of the laity. Every other week she has a TV program called "Catholic Dimensions" which features the lives of the saints, apparitions of Our Lady (especially Garabandal), holy relics and more. On the third Monday of each month she schedules two religious programs in her home, one in the morning and one in the evening, to which all are invited to come and pray, see a religious film and share some light refreshment. There is a lending library of religious books and tapes at the rear of the house, and relics for people to borrow to bless the sick. At least once a year she goes to the shrines of Europe with tape recorder and camera in hand, always looking for new material for her home and TV programs.

Helen Outlaw is indeed a busy woman, always on the go, and totally committed to bringing the treasures of the Catholic Faith to others. But it wasn't always like that.

Born a Baptist

Although raised as a Baptist, Helen showed interest in Catholicism as a young adult. She had been to Mass several times with a friend and "although I didn't know about the Eucharist, I felt some 'presence' that kept me coming back.

"I was doing post-graduate work in Tallahassee and one day saw some nuns in the library. I asked them if they would tell me something about the Catholic Church. They were only too happy to oblige and sent me to a real nice priest.

"When I went to see him, he was complaining that someone had just given him some fish that he didn't know how to cook. So, there I was in the kitchen of this priest whom I had just met, cooking his fish. Then we sat down and had dinner together.

"That took care of any awkwardness that I might have felt and I soon started taking instruction. At the end of the summer I became a

Catholic. I was about 26 at the time."

Helen met and married Beville Outlaw, a Baptist, who, nevertheless always accompanied her to Mass. Their children were raised in the Catholic Faith. Many years later, Beville would also convert making them the only Catholics on either side of the family. Were they accepted?

"Oh, yes, they accepted us," said Helen, "But it was hard—the strain—and still is. There's quite a difference between Baptists and Catholics; they're poles apart. You wouldn't believe some of the things Baptists believe about Catholics. I have to laugh at it now."

A Painful Affliction

Life went along on a fairly even keel for Helen and Beville Outlaw and although Helen felt she had become an "indifferent" Catholic, they weren't doing badly, at least in the eyes of the world. They were blessed with children, Beville was a successful businessman and Helen was a principal in the Florida school system.

Then in May, 1974, fate struck a telling blow. Helen was suddenly afflicted with a painful eye disease. Every time she blinked, her eyelids

would grate against her eyes causing cell deterioration. She went to four specialists. She was told that there was a good possibility that the eyes had been permanently damaged. An examination at the Watson Clinic in Lakeland, Florida verified this. All they could do was prescribe some drops that she had to put in her eyes every hour and a salve in the evening to keep the eyes from drying out overnight. Helen retired from the Florida school system burdened with her affliction and without much hope for things getting any better.

"We were going to Europe that summer and I asked Beville if we could make a side trip to Garabandal. I had read *The Apparitions of Garabandal* by F. Sanchez Ventura Y Pascual and I believed. Now I wanted to see the village. I didn't tell Beville that there was only a donkey trail, but it worked out. We rented a car and drove up. The only people in the village at the time were some young girls. I had the book with me and pointed out pictures of the places I wanted to see: the *calleja*, the *cuadro*, and the pines. The children would look at the pictures and take us there.

A Down-to-earth Manner

"Coming back from Garabandal, I thought of Joey Lomangino whose story was mentioned in the book, and since he lived in the States, I had the strongest urge to look him up. It took me three days to get up enough courage to call him, but when I did, he was so friendly that I felt I had known him all my life. Bev was very impressed with Joey's down-to-earth manner. He invited us to his home so we went to Lindenhurst (New York) where he



During the 1976 pilgrimage to the shrines of Europe conducted by The Workers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Helen and Beville Outlaw posed for a picture with Joey Lomangino at the pines in Garabandal.

greeted us graciously and we all went out to dinner. This was before Joey was married. Later we went back to his house because he was giving a conference that night in his basement.

"At the conclusion of these conferences, Joey would invite people up to venerate his medal from Garabandal. When I approached him I told him of my problem and he placed the medal on my eyes. I prayed to myself . . .

"By the time we returned to the hotel, my eyes no longer bothered me. However, that night I still applied the salve.

"While driving back to Florida the next day, we were playing the tape of Joey's conference, when I suddenly realized that I had gone for two hours without using my drops. It was the first time in two and a half years that I had been able to go more than hour before my eyes would start to draw and become very painful. I would never use the drops again.

"When I arrived home, I went back to the doctor. After his examination, he said, 'Helen, what have you been doing with your

eyes?' I felt strange about telling him what had happened. I guess many people feel that way instead of praising God. Then the doctor told me that my eyes were like new—not one trace of scar tissue. I was elated and told him about the miracle and have been speaking about it ever since. Wherever I go, I speak about God. It has changed my entire family's lives. We have gone to Garabandal every year since—one year we went twice. We bought property in the village and have built a trailer home. My husband, of course, believes in Garabandal and became a Catholic in 1978."

A New Direction

Helen's cure reinforced her belief in Garabandal and she purchased a documentary film. She traveled to Miami, Jacksonville, Tampa, Sarasota and Ocala giving conferences in churches, schools, parish halls and homes. In 1982 she took a course on how to operate a TV camera and produced a trial program as part of the course requirement. The TV station was so delighted with the result that they

told her, "We'll take anything you produce."

Helen decided that one program every two weeks was about as much as she could handle and produced her first one on the rosary. When she found out the date it was to go on, she lit up inside—October 7, Feast of the Holy Rosary!

But, as is true in all of God's authentic works, Helen has found the cross in her apostolic activity. "When I started on the TV program it was exciting to learn, but the mistakes, and the forces that I felt went against me . . . For this past year, I have lived in a constant state of agitation and of problems. I have come to realize that when you do something for the Blessed Mother, you're going to have to take what comes. It's been a year and a half now that they have been going on regularly."

Through it all, Helen has matured spiritually and now is able to say, "I haven't told this to anyone, but at the time [of my affliction] I didn't understand the value of pain. I was not that much into the Catholic Faith even though I was a Catholic. I didn't understand the Faith as I have been learning it recently. Now I think I know the value of pain and if the Lord wants me to have the pain again, this time I would accept it—at least I hope I would be able to."

Helen remembers that when Joey put the medal on her eyes she prayed, "Lord, if you want to help me, I will never allow myself to look at anything impure and I promise to use my eyes to read, to find out more about You and to do something for You." She has kept her promise. "It turns your life around when you realize the Lord has been so good to you." □

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