

Dosia Carlson
**A Christian, an Alleluia/
Una Cristiana, un Aleluya**

1. Getting to Know Dosia/Aprendiendo a conocer a Dosia

Name/Nombre: Mable Dosia Carlson

Career/Carrera: Hymn Writer; Ministry
With Older People/
Escritora de Himno;
Ministerio con personas
de edad avanzada

A.B. Recipient/A.B. honor: 1983

Color of Hair/Color de pelo: Auburn/Rojizo

Color of Eyes/Color de ojos: Green/Verde

Brothers or Sisters/Hermanos o hermanas:
Kathy and Bob



Birth Order/Orden de nacimiento en la familia:
Middle Child/Segunda en
nacer

Favorite School Subject/Clase favorita:
English and Music/Inglés
y música

Hobbies/Pasa tiempo: I was an active kid. I loved
bike riding. When by
myself, composing
hymns./Fuie una niña
activa. Me gustaba montar
bicicleta, Cuando estaba
a solas me gustaba
componer himnos.

My friends and I liked/A mis amigas yo nos gustaba
Hanging out and eating ice
cream/Andar con amigas y
comer helado

I looked up to/Yo admiro a

Church youth
leaders/Líderes de la
iglesia; Marian Anderson;
Franklin D. Roosevelt

2. We Can Be Hope¹

*We can be hope in a world often hopeless,
We can be hope for those who fear.
By showing dread cannot box us in,
That dark depression must never win,
We can be hope in the name of God.*

*We can be joy in a world often joyless,
We can be joy for those who mourn.
Embracing life with a healthy zest,
Remaining faithful through ev'ry test,
We can be joy in the name of God.*

*We can be love in a world often loveless,
We can be love for those who hate.
Accepting each as a child of worth,
And being thankful for ev'ry birth,
We can be love in the name of God.*

3. What Have a Drugstore Booth, a Bike Ride and a Brown Leatherette Pocket Bible to do with Dosia Carlson's first day of high school?

- Drugstore Booth? Dosia loved to chum with Girl Scout friends. They giggled, were serious, made plans to sell war stamps. It was September, 1943, and seemed to Dosia that World War II had always been going on.
- A Bike Ride? Good thing she and her peace-loving family could go biking. She joined her ornithologist mom for bird searches. She loved the freedom of the breeze drawing back her hair. Her heart found poems and tunes.

¹ #42, God's Glory II, 1972. The writer is indebted to Dosia Carlson for permission to use "Oral History, 1985" tapes plus God's Glory and God's Glory II, hymnals published by The Beatitudes Center for Developing Older Adult Resources, 555 West Glendale Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85021-8799.

- A Brown Leatherette Pocket Bible? "I was appalled at the thought of not taking that with me to the hospital. I did get another one. It still had my secret chapter, Romans 12.

Instead of senior high, she carried the Testament, along with Poliomyelitis, to Lucas County Hospital. When she left the "fresh polios" isolation unit, everything had to be thrown out, including her Bible.

"Polio brought a new chapter into my life for sure. There were months and months of rehabilitation. I was one year in the Toledo Society for Crippled [sic] Children."

4. Wait and See

Dosia's breathing muscles just sat there deserted by the nerves that told them to inhale and exhale. She was going nowhere soon. Bulbar paralytic polio damaged nerves at the base of her brain. Spinal paralytic polio hurt nerves that tell leg, trunk, and arm muscles to contract. Even when she commanded her floppy limbs, nothing moved.

She waited:

- Until the active disease stage passed to learn how much damage had been done;
- For surviving nerve cells to send out new connections;
- For three visiting hours each week.

As with all acquired disabilities, Dosia's changed everything yet nothing. "I felt awful. I was responsible for quarantined friends missing the first weeks of high school."

That first year, when she could barely swallow or speak, her first questions were

"Will I be able to ride my bike?"

"Will I be able to go to the drugstore with friends?"

Well, yes, maybe. Franklin D. Roosevelt became President. Polio would not stop her either. Just then, the thirteen-year-old could not feed herself and for some months could not move anything from her neck down.

With prised glasses, she could read without someone holding the book above her face. "I did algebra in my head. I received freshman

credit but had little sense of being a high school student. We were pretty much on our own with tutored school."

5. All Sorts of Changes

"I don't ponder what my life would have been like without it. It is a natural part of me. People accept me as a person who has some physical limitations, but it hasn't really stopped me from going ahead in life."²

- "My mother was afraid I'd do too much. My father said, 'Don't let anything stop you.' [That] was as hard as accepting limitations."
- Back home, Dosia was not using a wheelchair much during her sophomore year so a friend carried her books. She had regained partial use of her arms and legs but school stairways were impossible. She went half days with classes on first floor. French was upstairs, so she studied Latin and Spanish as they were on the main floor.
- Most of her third year was at the rehabilitation center in Warm Springs, Georgia. "One neat spot, like a college campus. I began to serve others there as assistant choir director. We talked about getting plastered. I was in a body cast from my toes up to my chest. They were trying to straighten out my back, which had gotten crooked."

"I had to realize that I probably was not going to fulfill missionary to China plans." She also realized that she could find a way to serve God wherever she lived.

6. "Me?" I Wondered.

"In my early stages of rehab, John Huston would say, 'Dosia, you want to think about going to seminary some day.'"

She grew up sensing that the church was her home. Role models represented the life of the church beyond the local parish. Some were camp and youth leaders.

Few women then held significant leadership roles. For a career exploration paper, Dosia interviewed Marion Van Horne, her

² "Oral History," 1985, Tape 2

church's director of Christian Education and literacy expert. "I thought, women can do a lot of things in the name of the church."

Others, including John Huston, also drew her interest toward Christian education and youth work. He was head of the Ohio Congregational Conference youth department and a Hartford Theological Seminary graduate.

In 1945, the war ended. Youths wanted to share in the rebuilding of the world. At John's encouragement, Dosia wrote "Pilgrim Youth Come Rise to Action" (#2, *GG*). Singing it, the youths raised hundreds of dollars. "Compared to the concurrent slaughter of the war the personal battle I waged against polio in the early 1940s was minute."

A disability weaves its way into and through everything that happens in a person's life. It added a particular texture to Dosia's whole be-ing. While only one thread of her unique fabric, her personal battle was to permeate all that she would do and become. She worked out her life experiences by composing meaningful hymns. "Pilgrim Youth," verse two, sings,

*Though the task seems far beyond us,
And our sacrifice too high,
Will we fail the pilgrim spirit . . . ?"*

Dosia Carlson has not failed the pilgrim spirit. Sooner or later, her concern about something found its shape in a hymn. Introducing "Grant Us Courage to Cope" (#28, *God's Glory II*), she wrote, "As violence crushes our society, I pray – through hymns – for courage to combat evil." The second verse prays

*Show us ways to combat ugly threats to the soul,
Ev'ry substance that keeps us from life that is whole.
Redeem us for using the gifts you bestow.
Come, empower our choosing; O God, help us grow.*

7. College

*A Christian Should Be An Alleluia
from head to foot. . . .
Ev'ry cell of ev'ry muscle
in this body I call 'me'
Sings aloud in
jubilation praising God unendingly"
(1974, #20, *GGII*).*

From its beginning, Dosia Carlson's life has been an alleluia. That alleluia spirit met its test in college. "I was determined to start professional life as a classroom teacher."³

She was impatient to finish her education and become a classroom teacher. One academic dean, supposing that wheelchair mobility might diminish career options, tried to discourage her. After her vulnerable lungs interrupted study at DePauw University, she took most of her undergraduate work in Ohio at Oberlin.

"Participating in the lives of responsive youngsters helped me know that even during periods of recuperation I could serve anytime, anywhere."

Dosia knew from her first composition in fourth grade that music is a good way to express feelings, faith, and love of God. Encouraged in sixth grade to "play the little tunes running around in my head," she earned a music education minor. She composed hymns, pageants, and anthems. *Sing a Song of Sunday*,⁴ was her earliest published work (1954). She wrote "We Want to Learn to Live in Love" (1965, #11, *GG*) because no songwriters for children had acknowledged that all feel sad or mean "and fail to love or to be fair." She helped to develop the children's hymnal, *Sing of Life and Faith*.⁵

After an injury at Oberlin, she completed undergraduate studies at University of Toledo. Finally, she earned her education degree with a minor in music education.

8. I can teach!

First, she wrote a hymn:

*Let Us Join in Great Rejoicing;
we have reached a treasured goal.*
(1954, #5, *GG*).

³ "Free-Wheeling Retiree" in "That All May Worship and Serve," United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries. www.uccdm.org. Link Newsletter, Archives, V4, N2, 2002.

⁴ Standard Publishing.

⁵United Church Press, 1969.

The Assignment: Develop/direct the first one-room, accessible high school program for persons with orthopedic disabilities.

From 1954 through 1957, Dosia guided a dozen students at the Charles Feilbach School for Orthopedically Handicapped in Toledo. "I jokingly described myself as the principal, dean of girls, dean of boys, librarian, teacher of all courses, and custodian."

9. Seminary

"Stairs everywhere meant I needed students with strong arms to carry me from one floor to another."

Dosia loved teaching but felt drawn to full-time Christian ministry. In 1957, she began study that would marry education with religion. Her Hartford Seminary years were challenging in terms of mind and soul-stretching classes and physical barriers.

At Hartford, she met Greta Wiseman and Calista Olds. The three became lifetime companions. Within a few years, Dosia and Calista would become team teachers. In the next years Dosia also would serve the church nationally and internationally.

10. Associate Professor Carlson

Dosia was ready:

- ✓ Required degrees
- ✓ Professional confidence
- ✓ Mobility tools
- ✓ Contagious love of living

The new decade brought a new season. The autumn that John F. Kennedy was elected President, Dosia was invited to teach at the college that had nurtured her spiritual voice at church camp.

She became Associate Professor of Religion at the UCC-related Defiance College. She arrived with a bachelor of education degree and a master of arts in religious education.

The college needed someone to guide students through this national season of "rapid-fire development. My fourteen years there began in 1960 and spanned a period crammed with social change: civil rights sit-ins, assassinations, ecumenical growth, Vietnam, Kent State

shootings. College campuses exploded with revolution." Racial gang riots were wildfire in Cleveland. Dosa was busy.

*Lord, We Would Be Instruments of Loving Service
Gracious God, true source of wisdom,
teach us as we seek the right.
When we dwell in doubt or darkness,
grant us your great hope and light.
All the gifts which you have given
we would use for human good.
As we reaffirm your greatness,
bless us in our servanthood*
(1978, #26, GG)

While managing campus programs, she journeyed through the struggles of many college students. Her pioneering programs would help young people explore career opportunities in the church. "Fortunately," said this woman who thrives on the role of creating innovating programs, "I never had to juggle it all at the same time."

11. Ph.D. and More

She published articles and composed. Music offered respite from a demanding work position.

"We learn from each other, we teach each other," she soon wrote about the interplay among medical students, teaching physicians, and patients in the Intensive Care Unit."⁶

In 1966, in the middle of doctoral study at the University of Pittsburgh, Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS)⁷ caused lung failure. She did not have time for this. She had things to do and places to go, Ph.D. dissertation meetings, and a plane ticket for a national conference. Again, she was going nowhere soon.

During her third ICU stay within six weeks, she began to fill a notebook with reflections that would become *Unbroken Vigil*. Among the fortunate few survivors of bulbar polio, she returned to study. Then, with a Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology, Religious Education and Higher Education, she returned to Defiance College.

⁶ The Unbroken Vigil: Reflections on Intensive Care (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 56.

⁷UCLA Post-Polio Clinic. RanchoPPSG@hotmail.com. Visit <http://www.pps.com/>.

In 1972, she designed a sabbatical program to learn how churches meet needs of the aging. A young Phoenix UCC had opened a 25-acre, multi-leveled care facility. Dr. Culver (Bill) Nelson, senior pastor of the Church of the Beatitudes, and Dr. Everett Luther, administrator of The Beatitudes Campus of Care, administrator, encouraged her to spend her sabbatical year with them. She did.

12. Yes

"God has more work for me to do and lots more music to write," she said about the perfect assignment for the midstream of her life. "I loved college teaching, so I came to another type of campus."

Most of the approximately 750 Center residents still had a great capacity for giving and receiving. They wrestled with world and local issues. They focused on living and the search for a purpose in life. Dosia also found their loneliness. With daily losses, "it becomes important to talk over other thoughts."

She wanted to devote her time to understanding and supporting the elderly. She was offered a permanent position on church and campus ministry staff.

At age 43, she resigned from Defiance and said temporary goodbye to Calista Olds. Nurse friend Greta Wiseman agreed to join her in Arizona. In August, 1974, with Dosia Carlson vigor, she greeted a new season of campus ministry. Ten years later, she would also become Adjunct Professor Arizona State University Adult Development and Aging Program.

As Beatitudes Social Services Coordinator, she supervised and resourced

- social workers
- continuing education activities
- general campus programming
- workshops and conferences.

Summers, she worked on certifications as specialist in aging from University of Michigan and as consultant for long-term care of aging granted through National Association of Social Workers.

13. The Center for Developing Older Adult Resources

Dosia mobilized the religious community when she saw that homebound elders and adults with disabilities had serious needs.

No one knew because they did not come around any more.

"The interfaith ministry puts faith into action." Formed in 1981, the Center for Developing Older Adult Resources helps persons stay in their homes longer through free in-home services developed by public/private partnerships. Dosa's leadership as executive director from 1981-1995 inspired people of all faiths and ages to work together. With over 1,000 volunteers from more than 150 area churches, partnerships flourished within the broad, creative programs she designed: Volunteers Interfaith Caregivers Program [(VICaP)], Project GrandCare, Generations, Flinn Learning Center, and Nurse and Health Ministries Network.

With news about Center DOAR programs as imaginative as those that met the needs of Feilbach School students, Dosa traveled widely to help establish similar programs. At age 70, she spoke at an international conference in Japan.

14. "Why not become ordained?"

Dr. Nelson asked, as Dosa became more involved with older adults within her congregation. "I had never considered myself as other than a minister. Ordained, I could offer the sacraments.

"People asked, 'Why do you want to be ordained? You are just asking for trouble.'"

Those words appeared strange in 1978. In 1853, a century earlier, "Nettie" Brown, another pioneer-spirited woman from Oberlin College became the first woman ordained to the Christian ministry in a major denomination in America, the Congregational Church.

Although World War II provided more opportunities for women, 1950 statistics show fewer than 207 women out of about 6,000 clergy, as reported by UCC historian Barbara Zikmund Brown.

Since Antoinette Louisa Brown's (later Blackwell) ordination, Zikmund Brown said, women regularly responded to the call to ministry "by marrying a pastor or a missionary, training, and going out on the mission field themselves or serving in special ministries of education and social service."⁸ The modern feminist movement of the early 1970s changed that.

⁸ "Women's Ministries Within the United Church of Christ" in Catherine Wessinger, Religious Institutions and Women's

"Ordination became my absolute desire and intent. I was aware, too, that as a woman and as I had some physical disabilities, perhaps these attributes would strengthen my witness within the pastoral role of the church."

In January, 1979, nineteen years after seminary graduation, the Rev. Dr. Mable Dosia Carlson went forth to serve as an ordained minister.

15. Older Adult Ministries

Now, as throughout her life, Dosia's spirit, prayers and deepest being found expression in hymns. Her passion for ministry to older adults continued to find creative ways for remaining as fully alive and independent as possible. Asking ourselves "Who are you?" is the basic standard of measuring human worth, she said. "We are of value just because we are, we have our be-ing, and we can respond to God's love and hope."⁹

16. Retirement

"There have been times when I stubbornly refused all help. But it also would have been terrible if I had just sat there and said 'I can't do anything.' There has to be a balance between the things that we accept and those we fight."¹⁰

Since youth, Dosia has wrestled with mixed messages that came from many directions: You can do anything; you can do nothing. With a "fine bluesy tone," this lively, rolling wheelchair symbol of self-reliance and interdependence introduced her address to the 1995 American Society on Aging by singing:

I Can Do It By Myself, Maybe.
I can manage without help, maybe.
.....
Self-reliant, truly tough I am made of sturdy stuff.
I can do it by myself, maybe.
I'm completely on my own, sort of.
I'm self-made, this flesh and bone, sort of.

⁹ "Quality of Life" in The Way, undated, 8.

¹⁰ As quoted in Stephen Sapp, "Beyond Autonomy: Interdependence in Later Life." Aging Today, September/October, 1995, 13.

Independent to the end, I don't even need a friend.
I'm completely on my own, sort of.
Do I ever want to pray? Never.
Would I follow Jesus' way? Never.

All that God stuff is so cheap,
Makes me laugh or want to weep.
Do I ever want to pray? Never. Hardly ever.
Well, maybe!

(*"I Can Do It By Myself, Maybe," #27, GGII*)

At age 77, Dosia Carlson is still free-wheeling in her motorized wheelchair. She sums up retirement as "a graduation from one phase of our lives to another. It is the expanding of options, not necessarily a change of pace."¹¹

17. What About You?

- After reading Romans 12:2, look up "conform" and transform."

How are you a conformer? A transformer?

What scripture has hooked you?

- "I don't ponder what my life would have been like without a disability because it is a natural part of me. We are of value just because we are, we have our be-ing, and we can respond to God's love and hope."

What does Dosia's life attitude tell you about how God views all with disabilities?

- Living with a disability stirs us to choose an attitude toward all that enters our life without asking permission.

What connections do you find between that thought, Psalm 92:1 and 2, 4, 15b, and how Dosia lives? And how you live?

¹¹ As quoted by Rosalie Robles Crowe in 50 Plus - The Phoenix Gazette, The Arizona Republic, Sunday, February 26, 1995

Why do you think Dosia made a good role model for Feilbach School students? For her college students and advisees? For others with disabilities and older folks?

What do you think is the difference between being a disabled person and a person with a disability?

- Sometimes we take into ourselves the "You can't" messages that others impose upon us. Think about times you wrestle to follow your voice of independence.

What tools of your faith offset the negative inner voice that says, "I can't compete"?

17. Church Family Project

1. Invite career persons with disabilities to visit with a church group about their work, disability, and faith. (Keep in mind that most disabilities are invisible.)
2. Partner with your pastor for an afternoon of visiting people in a care center.

18. Still Curious?

American Society on Aging <http://www.asaging.org> .

Antoinette Brown (Blackwell) <http://www.distinguishedwomen.com/biographies/black-al.html>;
<http://www.winningthevote.org/ABBlackwell.html>

The Beatitudes Center D.O.A.R. <http://www.centerdoar.org>.

Carlson, M. Dosia. Engaging In Ministry With Older Adults. Alban Institute, 1997. <http://www.alban.org>. _____ . Rituals for the Celebration of Later Life (Older Adult Issues Series) Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

Patterson, Deborah. The Essential Parish Nurse: ABCs for Congregational Health Ministry. See UCC Desk Calendar, Ministry.

Weaver, Andrew J. and Carolyn L. Stapleton, eds. Wells of Wisdom: Grandparents and Spiritual Journeys. See UCC Desk Calendar, Spirituality.

Dallas (Dee) Brauning. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, May 2007