



Video Story Transcript

In the Name of God Whom Do You Seek?

By: Storyteller MaryGay Ducey

Link to YouTube Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lldM5qveADQ>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hello, my name is MaryGay. I'm going to tell you a story. It's part of a longer story and it's true. Every word is true.

When I was in high school, I grew up in New Orleans, and when I was in high school, I was still in the Girl Scouts. Now, that is social death, usually, to still be a Girl Scout when you're in high school but we were there. And when you were a Girl Scout, you have to do lots of service projects. For good. And our service project, my best friend and I, whose name was Jerri, our service project was an unusual one and alarming. It was the last one drawn and we got it. We had to take the street cars, the old streetcar, down into downtown New Orleans. And that meant that we had to know where to go but anyone could have told us where. Everyone knew this place. We got off at Broad Street, turned left, and walked two blocks down. Anyone could have told us. We were going to the House of the Good Shepherd. It was so infamous that mothers would tell naughty children, naughty girls, "If you do that again, you will find yourself right, dropped off at the front of the House of the Good Shepherd. And you know you will never get out of there!" So little girls behaved lest they go up the marble stairs that we went up that day, two of us.

It was a small, small screen next to the door. And a great, big knocker and a big, big door. We knocked on the door. There was no response. But then the tiny screen shot back. And a face appeared. A nun. And she said, "In the name of God, whom do you seek?"

We said, "We're the Girl Scouts."

She said, "Mercy on you." And then she shot back the screen. We went inside. I'd never been inside a place where nuns lived. I was Protestant. There's not a lot of Protestants in New Orleans and I was so fascinated by Catholic people. They had bells in church, and incense, and nuns. And Sister greeted us. The floors inside there were polished so beautifully that we could see her nun's shoes, once you walk to that nice swaying back and forth. We hear clicking keys.

She said, "We'll take you upstairs to the girls. Be careful." We had come with all the things we needed. For we were to start a Brownie Troop and a Girl Scout Troop in the House of the Good Shepherd. She said, "Let's take the elevator." It was an old-fashioned elevator, the kind that has a sort of iron cage. We got in, went up one floor. She led us over to the door. The floor's linoleum there, not wood, cracked a bit. And then with a big key, she unlocked the door and then she left us. She left us. We went inside and there were 20 girls or so, from about seven years old to about 17, sitting together in a clump, with one very tall and beautiful girl sitting in front. They were all dressed in what looked like sackcloth, formless, shapeless garments. There was no a word, not a word.

We had prepared well. We brought marshmallows, and we brought chocolate, and we brought the hokey pokey, and we brought the words to "Kumbaya", and we brought lanyards. I, myself, have never made one in my life. And we thought this will be fun for the girls. They didn't leave the House of the Good Shepherd except to go to school. So, when we walked in and looked at the girls, they said, "Who are you?"

We said, "We are the Girl Scouts. We've come to start a troop." And that particular tall girl pulled out a switchblade knife, held it up in front of her and, looking straight at us but not anyone else, she threw it right up in the air. And it landed and quivered right in the floor.

She said, "I want you go home now."

We said, "We can't; we have to start a troop."

And thus, began our relationship with those girls on that day. We were to be there for a whole academic year. Every week we went. Every week, we went up the marble stairs. Every week, we knocked on the knocker. And every week, the screen shot back, "In the name of God, whom do you seek?"

"We're the Girl Scouts."

Girls had been there for many different reasons. They were orphaned, many orphans. Tiny girls - 7 years old, 6 years old. Two or three girls convicted of murder. A couple of girls abandoned on the streets. Girls with no homes, no prospects. No one to help who lived there. Every day the school bus would come and take them to school in their sackcloth and bring them back. The second meeting, we said, "What would you like to do today? We have brought knots, to tie knots."

The girls said, "We'd like to dance."

I said, "We dance the hokey pokey."

They said, "Oh no. No, no, no! Not the hokey pokey. We want to dance what girls dance outside."

We said, "Well, can you do that?"

"Well, we're not supposed to but door's closed." So...we danced. Some of us were boys, some of us were girls. (That's probably why I have trouble doing anything but leading, now.) We danced every dance we knew. But first, we started close dancing just for practice. And then at the end of that, we would do Girl Scout things, sang, talk, and then more singing and talking and then we'd leave.

By the time we'd been there about three times, the girls followed us to the door, especially the smallest one whose name was Stephanie. She was, just turned 7. On the third or fourth meeting, she said, "Will you write me a letter."

My friend Jerri said, "Well, you don't need a letter. We're going to be here every week. Every week."

She said, "No. Yeah, but would you write me a letter so I can have mail? Mail."

We said, "Yes, we will." Those days flew by. Those weeks flew by. We didn't have any uniforms to have our girls really perform the ceremony that you have to do to be a girl scout. We didn't have that. We didn't have anything except a lot of s'mores and incomplete lanyards. Winona, 17, was going to leave very quickly at the end of that academic year. She's going to be a dancer. She said, she said, "I, ah, I've already got an agent. I talk to him every day."

We said, "How?" And it was true. The girls would go to their windows in their small, small cubicles and lean out and look down at the street. And the evening boys would gather and call up to those girls, "Hey, baby. Hey, baby, I've got something for you. When you getting out baby? Soon, baby?"

And she said, "I don't know. I don't know. Pretty soon." She was a good dancer. She was the most beautiful, accomplished dancer I've ever seen. She would dance all by herself never with anyone else. And she was **so** beautiful to watch that, eventually, no matter what the dance fast or slow, all of us would stop and watch her.

It was almost time for us to have our kids fly up, which is what you say in Brownies and Girl Scouts, fly up. We went to our local church, the Presbyterian church, and said, "Would you give us money so our girls can have uniforms?" My pastor, Pastor Rell said, "No, I don't think so. No. Those girls have done something to get in." We ask the sisters. There really wasn't any money. So, I went back to the church and they gave us, all the choir robes, white choir robes.

And we thought, "Who will be there? The parents are supposed to be here." So, we went into the office and we gathered together every name attached to every girl. Some of them, years, 10 years old addresses. Who knew whether people lived there? And we just wrote everyone and begged them to come. We practiced walking up, receiving a tiny little Girl Scout or Brownie pin to be proudly placed. We walked in cadence. We did more lanyards to produce something for our guests. We got Kool-Aid, the social glue of any occasion. And then, we were almost ready. All the sisters decided to come as well.

It was a small chapel that had been set aside for us and on that day, we started early. Stephanie said, "Do you think someone would come who knows my last name?"

I said, "Could be. Could be." Our girls walked down, slowly and went inside, and the room was filled, filled with people. Just *filled*. We didn't know who they were, the girls didn't know. And everyone in their choir robes, they looked like vestal virgins. They received their pins and then we pushed back all the chairs and we all danced. The nuns danced too. Everybody danced. They danced the mashed potato. And then it was over. We left them.

I was just about to leave for college and it wasn't long after that, not long at all. I took the old streetcar down to the corner where I was doing some theater, late at night. And I walked home in those days. Just walked three, four blocks. And then waited for a ride from my folks. It had been a long summer. I had thought about Winona lots but there was no way to see her and or anybody. And then I heard the music of the French Quarter. "Night and Day." Slow weary bump and grind. And I saw a poster with Winona on it. And I went in. You could slip in. She was performing on the stage, the kind of dance that you hope you won't see, such a dancer as Winona. Such a young beauty, Winona. She saw me in a second and then we spoke. She said, "I'm

so glad you came to my show. I'm only here for six months. My first booking. My agent says you have to start somewhere. I mean, this is just the beginning.”

I said, “Oh, I'm sure it is.”

She said, “Well, where are you off to?”

I said, “Oh, I, I, I'm going to college.”

She said, "You're going to college?"

I said, “Yeah, yeah. Yeah.”

“College,” she said. “Well, you'll be, you'll be good at that. Yeah...you like to read.”

I said, “Yes. I do.”

She said, “Well, ah, probably our paths will cross sometime. Although I'm going to be very busy.”

I left. I never saw her again. We moved shortly after. Our lives became busier. And then, I was an adult. I wish I could go back now. I wish I could. I wish I could take the old street car, all the way down to Broad Street, get off, turn left, armed with lanyards and marshmallows...and dreams. I'd walk two blocks down and where the building used to stand, I would see those marbles do... and mount them. I would pull the great knocker and knock again and on the small screen shot back, "In the name of God whom you seek?"

I would say, “I seek, I seek an even chance. I seek a fair world. I seek a level playing field. I seek goodness. I seek Winona.”