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Four decades as Catholic radio commentator

Thomas C. Fox | Dec. 6, 2013 NCR Today

NCR columnist, Mercy Sister Camille D?Arienzo achieved a remarkable milestone recently. Last month she celebrated her 40th anniversary as a Catholic commentator for 1010 WINS Radio, New York?s all news radio station. In fact, it was the first all news radio station in the nation.

She reflected back on those four decades of radio evangelism in a essay, which we reprint with her permission.

Congratulations, Sr. D?Arienzo!

> This Thanksgiving I joined the many who gave thanks for all that brings meaning and joy to our lives ? family, faith, food, friendship, health, challenges and opportunities. On that day, Nov. 28th, I celebrated an additional personal, professional gift, my 40th anniversary as the Catholic commentator for 1010 WINS Radio, New York?s all news radio station. This privilege has brought me into millions of homes and into contact with some of our industry?s finest people, including Stan Brooks, WINS? senior reporter.
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> My contributions to the station and its listeners go beyond my weekly and holiday broadcasts. They include my recommending an internship in 1978 for one of my Brooklyn College students, Scott Herman. He rose quickly through the ranks and is now the executive vice president of operations for WINS? parent company, CBS. Scott is a superb administrator, recognized as one of the nation?s top broadcasting executives. This comes as no surprise to those who have witnessed his meteoric rise to power. When he was a student at Brooklyn College he was the only one who successfully managed the campus radio station, WBCR. When Scott arrived as a student intern at WINS, a veteran newscaster, the late Paul Sherman, put his finger on the pulse of this young man?s inevitable success. ?Sister Camille?, he said, ?Scott will go far because he is very much a people person.?
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> Paul Sherman?s name recalls my own cherished association with him and his wife, Bess. In the early 1980s I invited the station?s news director, Bill Rohrer, to join the sisters in my convent for evening Mass and dinner. I suggested he bring a companion of his choice. He arrived with Paul, a Jew. It proved a wonderful evening and jump started our friendship. I was a guest at his son?s wedding and after Paul retired, and with his wife moved to Florida, I joined them for a memorable week there. Bess had called to let me know Paul was battling cancer and wouldn?t be with us much longer. She invited me to spend time with them. Paul and I walked the beach and sat looking at the ocean as we shared beliefs about life and death. I considered his friendship a wonderful gift.
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> In my early days at the station, when Westinghouse owned it, we had wonderful holiday parties and even some summer events. These helped us get to know one another better.
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> WINS moved from Park Avenue to West 57th Street and then to its current location on Hudson Street. General Managers and news directors have changed over the years. Mark Mason who now oversees digital content and Ben Mevorach, the station?s program director, both fine human beings. I interact

regularly with Ben because his office is in the newsroom, easily accessible to the studio where I record my weekly commentaries. We have an interesting relationship; sometimes we share significant concerns and with some regularity I fire him, just to keep him in line. It?s our private joke.

I admit great affection for many of the newsroom personnel, past and present and dare not offer a list lest I offend people by omission. Still, I can?t ignore the impact Juliet Papa and Bill Spadaro have had on me. Nor can I fail to mention Dave Plotkin who records my commentaries and Steve Ziegler who is a fine administrative assistant.

My long memory holds others unknown to most of the current staff. Bernie Saxon was the first in a line of engineers who recorded my commentaries. He bore emotional scars from his time in the army and was afflicted by phobias that limited his ability to travel. He was, at first, reluctant to talk to me, but, in time, shared stories about his life, including the fact that he had attended a Catholic School staffed by my community, the Sisters of Mercy. In 1976 I invited him to my Silver Jubilee celebration. He declined, citing fear of traveling. I tried to convince him to come and promised to send a car to transport him. He couldn?t do it.

One day when I went to record, someone else was in his studio. Bernie had been found dead that morning. When I learned that he was to be buried from his sister?s parish, I called the pastor to tell him all the good things I knew about Bernie. With great generosity, he said, ?Sister I don?t know him at all. You do. Would you please preach at his funeral Mass?? I replied that I would if his family would be comfortable with that. His sister called to let me know they were grateful for my offer and readily accepted it. She said when they went to Bernie?s apartment earlier that day the one thing on his desk was the invitation to my silver jubilee celebration from a few years earlier.

With the exception of Stan Brooks, WINS? beloved senior reporter, I?ve been on the air the longest. I?ve been privileged to attend a variety of WINS Family celebrations, including bar Mitzvahs, weddings and funerals. I?ve visited some staff members in hospitals and have listened to secret hurts and fears, joys and sorrows. I?ve offered and received encouragement over and over again. Among the privileges afforded me was an invitation from Stan Brooks to ?emcee the funeral? of his beloved wife, Lynn. Her sudden death this past May was a terrible shock to his family and to many New Yorkers who knew her as the creator of ?Big Apple Greeters.? My immediate reaction was to remind them that I wasn?t Jewish. Their reply was that the values we shared went beyond religious categories. It would be impossible to explain how privileged and humbled I felt to conduct that service in Riverside Chapel for this wonderful family. As a Sister of Mercy I recognize the value of comforting the afflicted.

I?m grateful to the listeners who tune in on Sundays and Holidays as I try to make sense of events that sometimes challenge -- or affirm our faith in God?s unquenchable love for each of us and for the creation that sustains us -- and which God calls us to protect. It?s a lot to pack into a single minute.

My reflections may not have always been right, but I?ve always been there...every single Sunday. And with God?s grace, I hope to continue, probably not for another 40 years, but for as long as listeners welcome me into their hearts and homes.

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