



Lorain native living the life she always wanted serving as author, educator, public speaker

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LORAIN — As a child, Hilare Tavenner had three dreams of what she wanted to be when she grew up.

"I had three very strong compulsions," said Tavenner, 60, now an author, educator and public speaker.

"I wanted to be a nun; I wanted to be a teacher and I wanted to be a writer. I did the nun thing. And I've been doing teaching for 40 years. Now, I want people to benefit from the terrific life I've had. I want to spend the rest of my life putting in books, something that I think will be of use to others; to posterity," said Tavenner.

To date, the prolific writer has penned seven books, the latest being "My Friendship with St. Elizabeth Ann Seton."

A 1966 graduate of Lorain High School, Tavenner, who still lives in Lorain, said, "I'm very proud of it. At public schools, in those days, we got a good education, but you had to work for it."

When she turned 17, Tavenner embarked on her first "dream" quest, which was to become a nun. She went to a convent in Syracuse, N.Y., to become a Franciscan sister, believing she had a calling to convent life. Almost 20 years later, Tavenner said she'd found herself re-assessing her life.

"I kicked the habit," she said tersely.

She received her bachelor of arts in education from Catholic University, Washington, D.C., in 1974; her master of arts in religious studies from St. Charles Seminary, Philadelphia, in 1982, and her doctorate in reading and language arts from the University of South Florida, Tampa, in 1993. After leaving the convent, Tavenner said it took her about five years to become financially stable. "After teaching in Catholic Schools for 15 years, it was a real eye-opener to find myself teaching in an inner-city school in Tampa. The elementary school was so violent we had a full-time police officer with a gun. This was in 1985. I was told it was the only elementary school in Florida

requiring this kind of protection."

During this time, Tavenner went to school at the University of South Florida and taught future teachers as an associate for the university.

In 1993, Tavenner returned to Lorain to care for her mother, Mary Catherine Montgomery Tavenner, who had been diagnosed with emphysema 15 years prior but was now chronically ill. Her lung specialist told Tavenner he believed her mother "had six months to live".

Tavenner said moving home was an answer to both of their prayers. Her mother needed help to remain in the family home and Tavenner had always dreamed of writing. This would give her the time to do so.

Her mother lived for six more years, and Tavenner produced four books: "Nun of This and Nun of That," a fictional but realistic look at convent life in the 1960s, and its sequel, "Nun of This and Nun of That, Book Two."

She continued her writing with "France, 1996: Memoirs of a Writer in France" and "A Portrait of Helen Steiner Rice: A Lorain Version," a brief but informative biography of legendary Lorain poet Helen Steiner Rice.

"I was stunned that there was nothing in Lorain to show respect for what she (Rice) had accomplished," said Tavenner.

She and a friend "went looking for Helen's grave" at Ridge Hill Memorial Park, then Calvary Cemetery and finally found her grave site at Elmwood Cemetery.

"The grounds keeper escorted us to where she was buried," Tavenner said.

She presented a petition bearing a thousand names of Lorainites who wanted to see a local school named after Rice.

"I created the petition, got signatures, took it to the school board and they agreed," said Tavenner.

After the death of her mother in 1999, Tavenner went on to write two more books, "Peru 2002: Memoirs of a Writer in Peru" and "Memories of Mom: They called her Dutch."

"My mother was extremely bashful, yet she could be the life of the party," said Tavenner.

"For a long time, I debated whether to write the book about her. Then, I finally decided, 'I'm the writer,'" said Tavenner.

She created a writer's group last year, to give voice to struggling local writers.

"There was inconsistent attendance. There's now a core of five die-hard members. We meet four times a year," said Tavenner.

She is also working on a book about Italy, a country she has visited twice. She remains her own business agent as well, posting her books and public speaking engagements on her Web site at www.dutchink.com.

"For most of us, life is challenging and difficult," said Tavenner.

"I've put in 60 years now, and I thank God I'm able to endure and do something good. I finally have arrived at a new time in my life and I seem to be more at peace with circumstances beyond my control," said Tavenner.

"There are so many things I can't change. I have to allow for life to be what it is," she said.

When times get tough, Tavenner said she tells herself, 'In God's own way, in God's own time.'

The other thing I say is 'Let go and let God.'"

These days, Tavenner teaches a variety of classes at the Lorain County Community College Center located at St. Joseph Community Center in Lorain, from college entrance courses to English as a Second Language.

Despite her world travels, Tavenner said Lorain is, and always will be, her home.

"I never want to be anywhere else in the world," said Tavenner.

To order her books, Tavenner said to call her publisher, Ex Libris, toll-free, at (888) 795-4274.