



Photo added by Nancy Nelson

Rev Fr Victor Joseph Heinen

BIRTH	26 May 1909 Milo, Warren County, Iowa, USA
DEATH	24 Jun 1953 (aged 44) Maryville, Nodaway County, Missouri, USA
BURIAL	Saint Columba Cemetery Conception, Nodaway County, Missouri, USA
PLOT	Section 31
MEMORIAL ID	82333489

FR VICTOR HEINEN

In the little town of Milo, Iowa, on 26 May 1909, a baby boy was born to Andrew J. and Emma (Frueh) Heinen. Four days later, at the boy's baptism in St. Mary's Church, they named him Joseph. The family was a large one. He had eleven brothers and sisters.

The early years of Joseph's life were spent on his parents' farm in Iowa. In 1924, at the age of 15, he entered the high school at Conception Abbey. He was simple and direct in manner, unpolished and unsophisticated, a real "country boy." His classmates quickly gave him the nickname of 'Hoosier' or 'Hoosie,' which, besides indicating his rustic profile, blended quite well with his last name 'Heinen.' Hoosie Heinen found himself the butt of many pranks and practical jokes during his first year, but by his sophomore year he had established himself on a more equal footing.

The story is told, for example, that on a certain "Student Fun Night," there was need for a volunteer who could perform the trick of balancing a nickel on his chin and then pitching it off into a funnel tucked behind his belt. No one spoke up; but finally, Heinen said he would give it a try. He put the narrow part of the funnel in his belt and leaned back to balance the coin on his chin. While he was poised in that

position, the fun part of the trick (unknown to him) was done, namely, a pint of water was poured into the funnel. It would seem that Heinen should readily have learned and remembered his lesson, yet the identical trick was pulled on him the following year, much to his genuine (or pretended) embarrassment.

During his high school and junior college-days, the future Fr Victor acquired a great interest in zoology, botany, neurology, and other related subjects. He excelled in these fields, and whenever a student encountered a difficult problem in biology or zoology, he could be sure of getting a good, reliable answer from Hoosie Heinen. The active store of knowledge he carried around was no doubt a source of great admiration to his equally brilliant professor in the biological sciences, Fr Alphonse Eberhardt, whose assistant he was with the teaching and lab work. Heinen had his own key to the biology room, and it is reported that on one occasion he took a notion to dissect a dog and examine its inner structure. A few other students became interested, too, but until they could capture a poor stray, they didn't have a dog. Lest the stray they did eventually capture might in fact be somebody's pet, Heinen swore his co-conspirators to deepest secrecy. In the last two years of his life, in the early 1950s, Fr Victor's biology class featured the careful vivisection of one unwanted dog per year.

Already from his high school days, Joseph Heinen had intended to join Conception Abbey and this he did in 1930 when he entered the novitiate. He professed vows before Abbot Philip on 3 September 1931, and received the name Victor. While a novice and then a cleric, he gained the unfortunate reputation of being a good sleeper in choir. Despite his best efforts, he would invariably doze off after a few psalms and would still be sitting through the Gloria Patri as the rest stood up and bowed. At times like this, a confrere would close his books and put them away. Even the remedy of standing up during part of the psalmody while the others sat was ineffective. At a conference once the cleric master aptly applied the Latin hymn verse for Easter Lauds: *Victor surgit de funere* (the Victor rises from the tomb). Another characteristic was his ability to tell a story. He could always "top" everyone else. No matter what others had seen or heard or could say, he always knew one better. For this reason, along with his superior knowledge in science, he was thought by some to be a little too cocky and earned from them an occasional kindly rebuff.

Most of his college and seminary studies were done at Conception; but he went to St. Benedict's College in Atchison for one year and earned a Bachelor Of Science degree in biology. It was generally taken for

granted that he would eventually go on to obtain a doctor's degree, but in the vagaries of human judgment and God's mysterious providence, this never came to pass.

On 6 June 1936, Fr Victor was ordained a priest, and his first major assignment was that of professor in the science department of Conception College. However, shortly after the election of Abbot Stephen in 1937, he was made the monastery's treasurer (1937-40) and then procurator (1939-40). These were important positions for one so young and just ordained, but he undertook these new responsibilities with zest and self-confidence. It is said that the monks ate very well while he was procurator, and one monk recalls that when he was sent to California in 1939, Fr Victor treated him with the best of good will and with all the needed new clothing and luggage. Perhaps Fr Victor, in carrying on the business of the monastery, was not reliant enough on the abbot. It is said that, as a punishment for proceeding without permission to purchase the 80 acres later known as Bro George's farm, he was sent out on assignment to the Indian Missions. There he would remain, suitably engaged in the work of the Church, for the following ten years.

Father served as pastor at Kenel, South Dakota, from 1940 to 1943 and then at Selfridge, North Dakota, from 1943 to 1951. The people and the bishop respected him as a hard and zealous worker and, although many of his plans did not materialize, they showed that he was an imaginative thinker. For example, at Kenel he had big plans to re-institute a Catholic Indian Boarding School, but due to lack of funds and other circumstances, such as being a great distance from a railroad or paved highway, these plans were never carried out. They demonstrate, however, his generous heart and his great desire to serve his people in the best way possible. While at Kenel, he also put eighty acres of prairie land under cultivation, with a little help from Bro Herman Kuhn, who was his housekeeper.

At Selfridge, North Dakota, Fr Victor continued to put forth his best efforts, despite a growing sense of isolation, of being (as he said) "out of sight, out of mind." North Dakota is well known, of course, for its driving winter storms. The pastor described an especially bad one. He said he awoke one morning to find about a bushel of snow piled up inside the door. After searching for the cause, he concluded with no little amusement that "all that snow had come in through the keyhole!

Out of concern for the children in his parish, he first arranged to have Catholic Sisters teach in the public school and then, after a few years, started his own parochial school in the church basement. He got the

priest's house remodeled, but shortly afterwards it was destroyed by fire. He therefore purchased a rundown family dwelling to live in and, just at the time of his departure from Selfridge in 1951, was on the verge of building a new rectory. The footings were in place and building materials were on hand. Care of the Selfridge parish, as well as the parish at Solen, was transferred at this time to the monks of Assumption Abbey at Richardton.

Upon returning home to Missouri, Fr Victor was named resident chaplain of St. Francis hospital in Maryville and instructor of biology and German in Conception Seminary. Despite a period of fifteen years away from the classroom, he quickly revealed again his talent for science and for making it appealing to students by his calm and kindly demeanor. He believed it was the mark of a bad teacher to make the subject appear more difficult than it really was. The summer of 1952 presented him the welcome prospect of going at last to Iowa City for graduate studies and of being succeeded at the hospital by Fr Leo Gales. This new arrangement was ideal because a full-time professor of biology and zoology - one with the proper credentials - was badly needed in the high school and college. Fr Victor was by far the most capable monk to get ready for this position. However, other events - surprising and unwelcome - intervened. Early in the spring of 1953, he suffered a ruptured appendix. Long after the emergency appendectomy and perhaps his release too soon from the hospital, he was bothered frequently by sickness and pain, yet he rejected all advice to go back into the hospital for a check-up. He felt he could wait until after the current school year was over and he had preached, as promised, the sermon at a new young priest's first solemn Mass.

In June, after making the community retreat, he became very ill once more and was readmitted at St. Francis Hospital for treatment. The doctors discovered, too late, that serious complications after the earlier operation had set in and had already taken their toll. They tried as best they could to save him, but the infection and gangrene had advanced too far. In the midst of untold pain and suffering, Fr Victor, then only forty-four years old, passed to his eternal reward at 9:30 am on 24 June 1953, the Feast of St. John the Baptist. His funeral was held the following Friday, 26 June. Grief over his untimely death, observed both in the Conception community and in the Heinen family, was especially profound and perduring.

Fr Victor had been a monk of St. Benedict for twenty-two years, a priest for seventeen. All who knew him would remember him in a favorable light: whether as a picturesque speaker, an excellent professor of

biology, or a zealous missionary pastor. Left in the keeping of his fellow monks were also the memories of happy times in the monastery and his love of the brethren. These, too, were part of his devotion to the kingdom of God.

May he rest in peace!

Family Members

Parents



Andrew Jacob Heinen
1883–1963



Emma Magdalena *Frueh* Heinen
1889–1933

Siblings



Mary Margaret *Heinen* Stahl
1911–1938



Threasa Ann *Heinen* Wallace
1912–1991



Edward Lawrence Heinen
1913–1914



Albert John Heinen
1914–1988



Dorothy Agnes *Heinen* Foertsch
1918–2006



Rita Gertrude Heinen
1924–1924



Bernadine *Heinen* Wingerter-Tosseth
1925–2020



Norbert Andrew Heinen
1928–1960

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