

Blue hyacinths played an important role for Janet Stuart on May 6, 1882 when she was deciding about becoming a religious. Standing next to a side of blue hyacinths “the word of the Lord came to [Janet]” and she “saw it all.” As her biographer, Maud Monahan said, “She always kept this anniversary, and if possible liked to look at blue hyacinths on that day.”¹

In New England, where I live, blue hyacinths arrive as a gorgeous blue bouquet just in time for the annual transition from winter to spring. They are quite striking when in bloom, and it is easy to imagine their impact on Janet. But sometimes what may play an equivalent role to blue hyacinths in our own lives isn’t as immediately recognizable.

I joined the Society at Kenwood on August 2, 1966. Within a day or two I was participating in almost all the standard activities, including a 30 minute mid-afternoon “adoration” in the chapel. All the other novices and postulants there seemed composed and prayerful, as if they not only belonged, but knew how to “adore”. I, on the other hand, was wondering what in the world I had gotten myself into, and what I was supposed to do now.

In a mild state of panic I thought of a song that was then popular, and decided that it was God’s and my song. The song is “Bus Stop” by the Hollies, a British rock group of the time. It is accessible through YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=It75wQ0JypA>. Its lyrics include:

“Bus stop, wet day, she's there, I say ‘Please share my umbrella’.
Bus stop, bus goes, she stays, love grows under my umbrella.
All that summer we enjoyed it, wind and rain and shine.
That umbrella, we employed it. By August, she was mine.”

These lyrics did not seem particularly religious. But they reflected that I had entered the Society in August, and were something I could hang onto when I needed them.

Several decades later I realized that God had played a role in that song coming to me, and that it was far more significant than I had recognized at the time. Further, it signaled something about my future praying. I have found through the years that music often does a better job of praying in and for me than I can myself.

Particular pieces of music sometimes choose me now. For example, music on my iPad serves as my alarm clock, and recently Leontyne Price’s version of “Lead Kindly Light” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxdQh2MTF3c> has been a compelling wakeup call.

Many of us experience occasions when a decision or step forward is required, and we are not sure what to do. We may encounter images or symbols that do not seem profound at the moment but that we come to realize in retrospect have provided a safe haven and direction for us. Perhaps Janet Stuart’s appreciation for blue hyacinths can help us recognize – in hindsight, at least -- how sacred these images and symbols may truly be.

¹Quotations are from Maud Monahan, *The Life and Letters of Janet Erskine Stuart*, available online at <https://archive.org/details/cu31924029442476>