

"I BUILT BRIDGES WITH MY PHOTOS"

Brother Heinz Helf



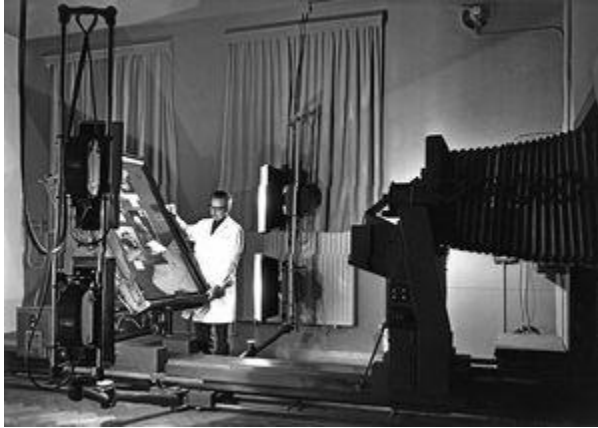
Brother Heinz Helf was born in Kaiserslautern in 1934, joined the Order of Steyler Missionaries in 1952, and took his perpetual vows in 1960. In addition to his work in the print shop, he played horn and was involved in the fire department. He still meets with his brothers at the table tennis table today.

Visitors who I guide through our mother house in Steyl keep asking me this one question: 'In which country were you active?' Then I smile because I can understand the question, of course. We are a worldwide missionary order and everyone expects all confreres to be on the mission. Not me. Not that I didn't try. I have wished for the Philippines several times, but in the end it was always Steyl. Because here I was needed.

After I entered the order, I first trained as a carpenter. At that time we had many good craftsmen and also artisans in our missionary order. Many of them worked in our own print shop, where the Stadtgottes has been printed every month since 1878.

As technology progressed through industrialization, new tasks arose. And so I was allowed to do a second apprenticeship: as a reproduction photographer. I learned to analyze photos and to prepare them for four-color gravure printing. A very complex process. As a master, I later trained apprentices in this profession. During the heyday we offered 35 different apprenticeships in Steyl. So the print shop became my home. In addition to our magazines, we have printed various calendars, books and brochures. Many external orders came in. We were busy. The print shop was

the Order's largest source of income, and the money flowed to over 80 mission countries. For a long time this was a purely theoretical sentence for me.



Until my brother, Michael Heinz asked me whether I would like to accompany him as a reportage photographer. I was immediately enthusiastic about this idea. We traveled to Angola and Mozambique, where we visited our brothers and sisters who lived and worked in the most difficult conditions. The victims of the civil war were given medical care in Luanda (capital city of Angola, editor's note). In the night we visited the scared and orphaned children in the canals at night and give them a roof over their heads.

Now I understood how important our service was at home. How important it was for us to raise money so that our confreres could help the poorest. With the reports from the mission, we in turn were able to show the readers and donors in the Stadtgottes that they are doing good by buying our products or that their money is well spent. So I was able to build the bridges with my photos. I liked that.

This was followed by trips to Nairobi, Taiwan, Russia and Colombia. I was impressed by the time at the Masai in Kenya. Since I started working with photography, my favorite motifs have always been faces. For me, every face has its own beauty. The Maasai are proud people. Their faces express that too. Capturing this expression with the camera was a challenge. Even today, at the age of 84, I still enjoy taking pictures. But only here in Steyl and the surrounding area. My life has calmed down. Because of course I'm old, everyone can see and know that. I often go to Steyler Unterkirche and pray. This place exudes a special atmosphere. This special spirit that emanates from the sarcophagus of St. Arnold Janssen is good for me and our guests.

I find it a great gift that I can still get involved in the community. Through guided tours, for example. I show the boiler house to the visitors and explain to them that we have trained the men and women here for mission missions. So they built the bridges. And even if I wasn't working abroad, I can proudly say: Of course I'm also a real missionary.

Recorded by Steffi Mager, and published by *Stadt Gottes* on February 2019

Posted at Facebook account: SVD Brothers International, May 12, 2020