



Helen H McKown

July 29, 1923 - December 15, 2017

Helen Howes McKown Obituary

Charter member of the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church

Helen Howes McKown of Oak Ridge, Tennessee died peacefully in her sleep at age 94 on December 15, 2017. She was born July 29, 1923 in St. Paul, Minnesota to Frank Twombly and Minnie D. Howes.

After receiving her B.S. in education at the University of Minnesota, Helen was interviewed by Superintendent Blankenship of Oak Ridge Schools saying that he liked teachers he had previously hired from Minnesota. She was hired in the summer of 1945 to teach at Elm Grove Elementary School. She did not arrive in Oak Ridge until late August.

When her friends and family heard that the atomic bomb was made in Oak Ridge, Helen said she still wanted to teach there. She took the train down to the L&N station in Knoxville and transferred to a bus that dropped her off at the bottom of the hill at Kentucky Avenue and was told to hike up the hill to the high school carrying her suitcases for her assignment of where to live. She looked at those muddy sidewalks and almost turned around to catch the next bus back to Knoxville.

But if she had not stayed, she would have not met her future husband, Henry (Hank) McKown square dancing in Glenwood Elementary School's gym in 1946. They were wed on July 16, 1947 at Unity Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. It was a loving, wonderful marriage that lasted 68 years, ending when Hank died in 2015, also at 94 years old.

Together they raised four daughters who went to Glenwood Elementary School because they lived on East Drive in the third privately built house in Oak Ridge. When the girls were young, Helen enjoyed leading their Girl Scout and Campfire Girls troops. She was also active in the PTA in those childhood years.

Helen and Hank were charter members of the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church

formed in 1950. She served on their board and was also secretary of the church in the 1970s. She served on many committees, taught Sunday school, and was pleased to have been able to sing in the church for 60 years. She also initiated the writing of the church's 65 year history.

Helen's love of music led to her singing with the Oak Ridge Chorus and actively participated in the Oak Ridge Civic Music Association and in their Guild.

She made many of her own and her daughters' clothes and enjoyed meeting monthly with a group of friends in their sewing circle. Later her love of embroidery led her to joining the Embroiderers Guild where she greatly expanded her knowledge of stitchery making beautiful pillows, wall hangings and well over 100 name tags for the members of her church. She also loved to knit sweaters. She only stopped when her eyesight dimmed from macular degeneration, but she kept up the relationships with her friends in those groups until she died.

Helen and Hank loved to travel and saw most of the US and a good many countries in Europe and the Middle East when Hank was transferred to work in Vienna with the International Atomic Energy Agency for three years in the late 1970s. They continued their travels later in life to Central America, Peru, Australia, New Zealand and China.

When the World's Fair came to Knoxville, Helen started volunteering by greeting people at the American Museum of Science and Energy. After the fair ended, she continued volunteering at the information desk every Friday morning for over 25 years. She enjoyed telling visitors about Oak Ridge's history and meeting people from all over the world.

Surviving her are four daughters: Louise McKown of Oak Ridge; Betsy Perkins and husband Dexter of Grand Forks, North Dakota; Anne Child and husband Garry of Dripping Springs, Texas; and Jean Norton and her husband Ron of Solebury, Pennsylvania. Grandchildren are George Perkins of Los Alamos, New Mexico; Doug Perkins of Toyko, Japan; and Eric and Lindsey Norton who are still in college in Philadelphia and California. She had one great-granddaughter, Cora Perkins. Two sisters-in-law, Carrie Howes and Mary Cunningham are both 90. Helen has three surviving nieces and two nephews and their children. Helen is preceded in death by her parents; her twin brother, George and her husband, Henry McKown.

A memorial service to celebrate her long life will be held at the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church, 809 Oak Ridge Turnpike on January 6, 2018 at 2:00 pm. Rev. Tandy Scheffler will be officiating. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made the Endowment

Funds of the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church. Special thanks from the family go to Betsy and Martin Bauer and Marty Adler-Jasny who helped the Hank and Helen in countless ways over the past five years. Martin Funeral Home is in charge of the arrangements

Comments



“ Dear Anne, Jean and family,

I stumbled upon your mom's obituary as I was searching for my dad's obit. I'm so sorry for the death of your mom. It is hard to loose one's mother.

She was such a kind and gentle woman and you both resembled her in beauty and personality. I fondly remember her warm smile, selfless service and encouraging words.

My favorite memory is when our families took the canoeing and camping vacation through Okefenokee Swamp together with the Grosses. That was one memorable trip! I can't place when that was, though... Jr High? ... High School?

Thinking of you all with both sympathy and empathy,
Becky (Bauman) Doman

Becky Doman - January 29, 2018 at 04:35 PM



“ Louise,

I was so sorry to hear of your mother's passing. You did have her for a good, long time. It is always a delight to read of the early Oak Ridgers and the early days. It was a great group of people. She did lead an interesting life that gives you good memories.

Lynn Asmanes Moore

Lynn - January 05, 2018 at 01:33 PM



“ Dear McKown Family,

We were so sorry to hear about Helen's passing. We lived next door to Helen, Hank and Louise when we spent a year there in 1995/96. They were lovely, kind neighbours and they helped make our year in Tennessee special. We always tried to visit whenever we came back to Oak Ridge. We have many happy memories, which we will always treasure.

Thinking of you all, with all good wishes,

Pam and Sven Hammarling, Woodford Halse, England.

Pam and Sven Hammarling - January 04, 2018 at 10:23 AM



“ Dear Louise, I was so sad when I read of your Mother's passing. I never met your Mom but she must have some kind of strong lady to do all the things that she did. As I read in her obituary the part about her coming to Oak Ridge and standing at the bottom of that hill with her suitcase in her hand I smiled. It must have taken a huge amount of courage and drive to climb that hill not knowing what was at the top. Your Mom may be gone physically but she does live on. I say this because I see a huge amount of courage and drive in you as you fight for justice to right what is wrong in this world. Louise, if there is anything I can do please just ask.

Darlene M Thurman - January 04, 2018 at 01:14 AM



“ Dear Louise, Bob and I were saddened to learn of the death of your mom. I remember her so well from my years at the UU Church. We are thinking of you during this time of sadness. Yours truly, Toni Stephenson

Toni Stephenson - January 03, 2018 at 10:08 AM



“ Jean, I was very sorry to hear of your Mom's passing. I will always remember her sweet smile. I lost my Mom back in July, it is very difficult to lose a parent. Thinking of you and praying for your family.

Donna Moody
Oak Ridge, TN

Donna Moody - January 02, 2018 at 08:49 AM



“ We are sad to learn that Helen has passed away. We met Helen and Hank in Vienna, Austria when we both worked for the IAEA in the late 70's. On weekends during the winter months, we both found ourselves skiing together in the Alps. What wonderful memories of the slopes and gatherings. After we got home, we saw Hank and Helen several times, but mostly communicated through an exchange of Christmas Greetings. Helen's Christmas Card usually contained a short poem about family and activities that she composed. We will miss receiving them. Our condolences to Helen's family.
From Marv and Dee Dee Schnaible, Puyallup, WA.

Marv and Dee Dee Schnaible - December 28, 2017 at 05:24 PM