

In Loving Memory of

Helen Vanessa Hill



21.01.1956 - 06.03.2020

Wenallt Chapel, Thornhill Crematorium. 4.15pm. 31st March

Entrance procession

Music: *Jesu Man of God's Desiring*

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Jon Linforth

Hymn - When Peace Like a River (It is Well with my Soul)

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Refrain:

It is well with my soul,
it is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
let this blest assurance control,
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
and hath shed his own blood for my soul.

(Refrain)



My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

(Refrain)

And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
even so, it is well with my soul.

(Refrain)

Fond Memories of Helen

Graham Hill (Husband)

Emily Hadad (Daughter)

Charlotte Dunning (Daughter)

Bible reading and address

Jon Linforth



Hymn - Here is Love

Here is love, vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life, our ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten,
Throughout Heav'n's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion,
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And Heav'n's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love.

Committal & Closing Prayer

Exit

Music: *Amazing Grace*



Helen's Story

Graham's Prologue

As Helen's memory began to fail, she started to draft an autobiography of her life by writing a few notes of people, places and events from her past that she wanted to incorporate into her story. Alas, Alzheimer's disease overtook her, and she was unable to complete the task; her notes lay untouched, gathering dust on the office desk. As the Alzheimer's progressed, Helen found engaging in speech increasingly difficult and her speech therapist suggested that we should compile a book of Helen's memories to help others engage in conversation with her. Remembering her draft notes from years earlier we dug them out, and reading through them, the old memories re-surfaced and together we reconstructed the short autobiography that Helen had intended to write.

Here it is:

My Birthplace



I was born on the 21st January 1956 in Maldon which is where I spent my childhood. Maldon is a small Essex coastal town famous for its sea salt (widely available in the UK) and for the Battle of Maldon in 991 AD when we fought against the invading Vikings and lost. One thousand years later I attended a re-enactment of the battle on the very same site when we lost again!

My Childhood



I was the middle child of three children: Linda (or Lindy as we call her) was my elder sister and Alex my younger brother. I had a happy childhood enjoying all the usual things – school, Sunday school, especially the annual outing to Walton on the Naze with tea in the Pier Head Café, climbing trees and hanging upside down by my knees, roller skating down the hill, riding my bike and going on the funfair rides. Lindy and I used to go to ballet lessons. We both remember the time when we were given small bottles of bubbles to blow as we danced. I spilt mine all over the floor and burst into tears. Kind Lindy led the other children around to where I was standing and following her lead, each poured a little of their bubble liquid into my bottle.

My Schooling

I went to primary school in Maldon. I remember my teacher, Mrs Cardy, rapping me over my knuckles for rubbing out my pencil with my finger, and for writing my name as “Helena” which I thought sounded much more exotic than plain “Helen”.

When the time came for me to move to secondary school, I attended Great Baddow Comprehensive School in Chelmsford where I did both “O” and “A” levels, I also learnt to play the piano. I was a little disappointed with my “A” level results as I had wanted to go to St Andrew's university, but my grades were not good enough for that. Instead I went to Mid-Essex Technical College, where I obtained a Diploma in European Languages with a distinction in my French Oral exam. I then became a member of the Institute of Linguists.

Moving to Braintree

We were living with my granny in Suffolk Road Maldon, but when she died in 1971 my parent's sold that house and we moved to Braintree, initially into Nayling Road and then a few years later we moved to “Court View” on London Road which became our family home; my brother still lives at that house.

Becoming A Christian

I became a Christian when I was about 15 after a meeting at Pear Tree Farm when I heard the Gospel. I wasn't sure which church to go to so I tried the Quakers and attended our local “Friends Meeting House”. It was very strange: everyone sat around saying nothing. They were waiting for the Holy Spirit to inspire them, but He never did, so eventually we all went home – I didn't go back! Later, I became a member of Braintree Baptist Church where I taught in the Sunday School in the morning and then I played the piano for the Salvation Army's Sunday School in the afternoon.

Starting Work

I started my first job in 1976 as a secretary in the probation service at Chelmsford Prison (where they filmed the series “Porridge”) and then after two years I moved to the position of secretary to the Head of the Essex Health Authority, his name was Don Brassett.

My Marriage



I met Graham at the Baptist church in Braintree in 1975 and we married there just three years later on the 17th June 1978. We didn't have a lot of money, so we had our reception in the church hall; the ladies in the church prepared the food. They did a wonderful job and we were very happy to have our friends and relatives share the time with us, although we did hear that the lack of alcohol was a bit of a disappointment for some of our guests! Afterwards we went by train to Eastbourne for our honeymoon.

Our Children

Our two children were born in a small maternity hospital in Braintree just a few minutes' walk from our house: Emily was born in February 1982 and Charlotte in December 1983. I stopped work when Emily was born in order to become a full-time mother.

Our Homes

When we got married, Graham and I lived at 15 Kenworthy Road in Braintree until 1987 when we moved to a house in a small village near to Stamford in Lincolnshire called Ryhall. Six years later in 1993 we moved again, this time to Lisvane in Cardiff where we still live.

Israel

Throughout my Christian life I have been very interested in the Holy Land of Israel and the Jewish nation; I visited Israel three times, first in 1977, then in 2005 and again in 2007.

Family History and The Clan Gunn Society



I became interested in my family history and I did a lot of research to find out who my ancestors were. I knew that my mum was half Scottish and that her mother's maiden name had been Campbell, but I discovered that my Great, Great Grandmother's maiden name was Gunn. My Uncle Don Ross who lived in Canada, and was also very interested in

family history, told me that there was a very active Clan Gunn Society so I decided to join; I attended many events and started to help out with some of their activities, including being their membership secretary. I became President of the Society between 2009 and 2012.

Our Children and Grandchildren

After attending schools in Braintree, Ryhall and Cardiff, Emily and Charlotte both went on to study at university: Emily went to Cambridge to study English and Charlotte to Cardiff to study Journalism.

Emily married Ady Hadad, who she had met at Cambridge in June 2012, they had twin girls Georgina and Alexandra on 23rd October 2017. They live in Maidenhead. Charlotte married Tom Dunning in October 2009 and they have one boy William born 29th September 2010, and one girl Sophie born 19th March 2012. They live in York. Here's a photo of our family on Mother's Day when the twins were just babies. I have such happy memories of the family that I love.



Graham's Epilogue

And there Helen left her story. With disease rampaging through her brain, her ability to remember, or think, or even speak were taken away, but to her last breath the love of her family remained untouched by the illness, buried deeper than any mere disease could ever reach.

My Helen—A tribute from Graham

Helen was never one for throwing things out. Had she had her way we would have kept every pair of worn out shoes, every birthday card, every piece of art that our children and now grandchildren presented us with, every ... well you get the idea. I on the other hand would have kept nothing. Left to my own devices every physical vestige of our years together and our daughters' childhoods would have been binned long ago. We never argued about it, but items in the bin one day, somehow found their way into boxes and cubby holes around the house the next and vice versa. Eventually we settled on a small collection of mementoes of our life together and the passing years. How strange then, that it is now me that treasures that collection, and far from wanting to dispose of it, I find myself adding a blue striped woolly hat into it.



It's the hat that Helen wore whenever we were going out in cold weather. It brings back memories of walks with our daughters and our grandchildren, of our Sunday afternoon strolls through the local park and of winter visits to Scotland. Mainly though it reminds me of an inconsequential trip just a few weeks ago. I can't even remember where we were going, but we were running a few minutes late. Helen by now had lost her ability to speak and needed help getting her shoes, coat and hat on. I duly obliged, got her ready for the cold weather outside and sat her down whilst I got myself ready. It took me a few minutes and when I was finally ready to help

Helen into the car, I realized that I'd pulled her hat right down over her eyes. Unable to comprehend why the world had suddenly gone dark, she sat patiently and quietly. I pulled the hat back up, allowing her to see again. She looked at me and smiled. Helen's smile. Helen's sweet, gentle, lovely, gorgeous, room filling, beautiful, delightful, bountiful smile. And *that* is what I want never to forget. A smile that says, "I knew you'd remember me ... eventually", a smile that says, "thank you", a smile that says, "I love you".

Farewell my love, I'll hold on to your hat, and with it the most precious memories any man could hope for.



Pure Love—A tribute from Charlotte

The bible tells me that I was knitted together in my mother's womb. I don't think God could have picked a safer or more loving a place to create me. Ever since I can remember, I have had my Mum as a constant in my life. Some of my earliest memories are of going to the Mums and Tots group with her, at the vicarage in Ryhall, of playing with her and around her. Of her patience as I darted under her long skirts through her legs, like it was a tunnel. And Mum, ever gentle would just give me a smile and remove me from her legs with a hug and a kiss.

As I got older and started school she would always be there for me. Each day I would run out of infant school to her and jump into her arms, to be given a twizzle and a kiss. This is something that I have been able to have the privilege of doing with my own daughter, each time remembering how safe I felt in my mother's arms.

It was a childhood filled with love and joy. There is too much to mention; there were birthday cakes and parties, school trips where Mum helped and I held her hand the entire day because I was so pleased she was with me. There were friends over to play and numerous episodes of Doctor Who in black and white. If I was anxious in the evening Mum would pray with me, and sit on my bed until I fell asleep, comforting me with her presence. She was not a disciplinarian, with common phrases such as 'wait until your father gets home' and 'you'll be in big trouble' pretty standard. The first one had some effect, the second none at all, she could barely keep a straight face.

Once we moved to Cardiff and I became a teenager my lovely mum graciously endured my attempts at home spa treatments and makeovers, and with that growing up came a mutual love for tea and cake, with trips to cafes and coffee shops becoming a regular feature of our relationship. My first attempt at leaving home to go to university did not go well and my mental health suffered. During that time mum was a light for me in my time of great darkness. When I look back at the worst time of my life to this point, my memories are of her loving me through it all and being there for me.

She used to say that she wanted to be a mother, and once we got older, she used to say that she wanted to be a grandmother. I know she was so excited to be a granny, and she was thrilled when it finally happened.

Throughout the whole time of her illness she has exhibited a love to her four grandchildren which has been extraordinary. Even a week before she died she would smile proudly at photos of them. It is a tragedy that they will not have the granny that she would have been for them. Mum inspires me to be that bit more patient, to pause and love that bit more. That is her legacy. The world has lost one of its most beautiful souls; my comfort comes in knowing that she is now fully complete, praising God in heaven with her parents and her best friend Rose.

With that in mind, I'd like to share this poem:

Away –by James Whitcomb Riley

I cannot say and I will not say

That she is dead, she is just away.

With a cheery smile and a wave of hand

She has wandered into an unknown land;

And left us dreaming how very fair

Its needs must be, since she lingers there.

And you-oh you, who the wildest yearn

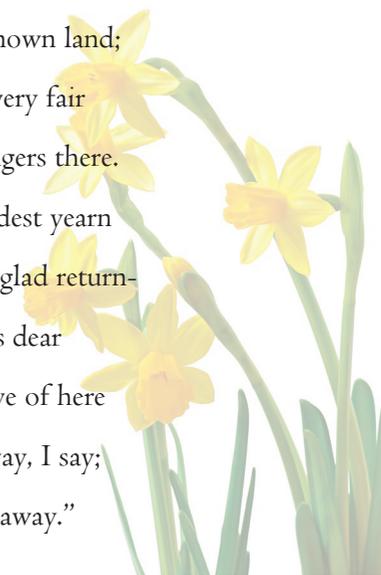
From the old-time step and the glad return-

Think of her faring on, as dear

In the love of there, as the love of here

Think of her still the same way, I say;

She is not dead, she is just away."



So Much More—A tribute by Emily

Charlotte has written so beautifully about the infinite love Mum showered upon us as children and young women, so I'd like to talk about the last decade of Mum's life. It seems an odd choice as this is of course when her Alzheimer's disease made itself known and slowly tightened its grip. Yet it's also a period of Mum's life that deserves to have a spotlight shone upon it, for the way she stayed true to herself and her beliefs right to the end.

As Mum entered her 50s, something changed. Her short-term memory was suffering noticeable lapses. Her reactions to events became muted. She lost some of her sparkle. For a few years, all of us, including Mum, put her symptoms down to other things: stress, tiredness, empty nest syndrome. But by the age of 56, it was clear this was something bigger, and she was diagnosed with young onset Alzheimer's disease.

It was the diagnosis she had feared. We didn't talk about it a great deal in the first few years, but she did say one thing that has stayed with me: "I am not my illness".

It is almost impossible to put into words what Alzheimer's does to a person. It is so much more than just a memory problem. It is a terminal illness that literally destroys the brain, a piece at a time. Over the course of her illness, we watched Mum lose almost everything: the ability to write a letter, to play the piano, to drive, to cook a meal, to hold a grandchild, to speak, to eat.

But there was one thing Alzheimer's could not take from Mum: the essence of who she was. Right up until the end, she remained sweet, loving and warm. She kept her pure heart, her beautiful smile, her faith in God, and her sense of humour, even if we were often none the wiser as to what was making her laugh so much!

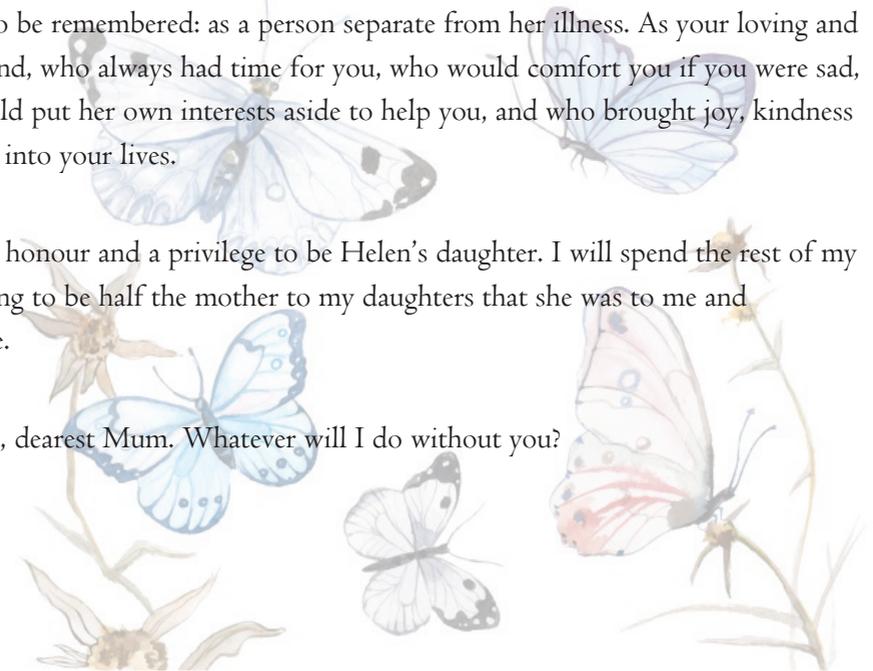
Her maternal instinct never faltered: she always knew when I needed a hug, even long after she lost the words to go with it. Her love for my daughters, born only two years before she died, was limitless. She recognised all her loved ones until the very end, which is astonishing for someone in the final stages of Alzheimer's.

So, when Mum said all those years ago, "I am not my illness", she was right. With the help of my Dad, who devotedly cared for her without ever complaining, Mum lived a full and active life. She and Dad joined the Forget Me Not Chorus: a wonderful choir that brings joy to the lives of families affected by dementia, and for whom we are fundraising. For many years, Mum continued to participate in the Clan Gunn Society, of which she was once President. She enjoyed family get-togethers, days out and holidays. She remained very involved in her local church and its bible studies and coffee mornings. Mum had no intention of wallowing: she had a life to live, and she did a splendid job of living it.

All that remains is to ask of you, her friends and family, to remember Mum as she wanted to be remembered: as a person separate from her illness. As your loving and loyal friend, who always had time for you, who would comfort you if you were sad, who would put her own interests aside to help you, and who brought joy, kindness and light into your lives.

It was an honour and a privilege to be Helen's daughter. I will spend the rest of my life striving to be half the mother to my daughters that she was to me and Charlotte.

Goodbye, dearest Mum. Whatever will I do without you?



Donations in Lieu of Flowers



Please donate to the Forget-Me-Not Chorus, a wonderful choir which gave Helen and Graham a place to go each week where they could enjoy singing together, just like they had done over the years.



The Forget-me-not Chorus (FMNC) supports people with dementia and their families through weekly singing sessions. FMNC brings people together using song to overcome the isolation often experienced by those living with and alongside dementia, and choristers range in age from 20 to 100. Their innovative approach is not about bringing back memories singing old songs, but about using music as a tool for communication and engagement. Each choir is testament to the potential of music and creativity to enrich lives at a time often fraught with anxiety and loneliness.

