

Helen Antaya

Helen Antaya of Grande Prairie, Alberta passed away peacefully on Tuesday, April 21, 2015.

Born Helen Bodnarchuk March 18, 1929, she was one of the most generous and nonjudgmental people I have ever met. She spent most of the latter part of her life trying to help those who truly needed it; feeding the elderly, palliative care, knitting caps for newborns, slippers for hospital patients, mitts for underprivileged children, making soup for the soup kitchen and many incidental things. It was really her philosophy of life to help whoever needed it.

The quintessential volunteer, she actually has awards and plaques for her service, but that was never what it was about. She did it for the interesting old lady or the fascinating gentleman who wouldn't eat unless she fed them; or the burnt-out families who needed a break from caring for their loved one. Meeting the families she helped was an exercise in humility. They thought she was some kind of angel and had huge respect for her skills, patience and kindness. To her, people were a priority.

Helen was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and was raised on one of the original homesteads. With so many people in such a small home, I guess you had to be close. Lovely Sally (mom), Wasył (dad), Helen, Mary, Vera, Sophie and Morris lived in a cabin not much bigger than a holiday trailer, but way more rustic. Hauling water, chopping wood, breaking land with a tractor, baking bread, looking after the family when her mother was very ill. . . .Helen did it all. Some of Helen's most cherished memories date back to this time. She loved looking after animals, riding a horse to school and going to Auntie Dora's for pancake breakfasts made by her Uncle Bill. Then of course there was all the mayhem and mischief with her sisters. One night when the parents were out visiting neighbours, they got into the delicious raspberry cordial. . . which they weren't aware was highly fermented. Her mother was horrified by the state they were in. Helen was never too fond of spirits after that. Helen never forgot her wonderful childhood and always tried to maintain the connection with her sisters and brother, and the rest of the family. All I can say is thank heaven for phone plans. I believe Helen had just about reached the age of twenty when she decided to spread her wings. She moved to Manitoba and embarked on a nursing career. It was to become a lifelong passion. In the North, she provided all kinds of care to patients: setting broken bones, stitching wounds and dealing with serious ailments. She was the closest thing to a doctor in the many areas where she later lived. She loved looking after patients in any capacity.

It was in these early days of her nursing career that she met Bill, an articulate young man who loved nature and the North.



1929-2015

He was to work at Indian and Northern Affairs, and they were to marry and raise a large family together. Bill's job took them to many northern communities including Ile a la Crosse, Fort McPherson and Inuvik. Times were busy. The babies came close together: Chrystine (Jeff), Stephen (Monique), Cathy, Joe, Bill (Nancy) and John. All beloved. She was so proud of you all.

As if this wasn't enough, there were also foster children and neighbours who were often in her kitchen. Such a good cook. Such a generous person. As usual, people needed her and were drawn to her. Each and every one of them important.

The kids grew up and moved away. Opportunities being what they were in Inuvik at the time, it was inevitable. This

was an intolerable situation for Helen, so she packed up her worldly goods, said a tearful goodbye to good friends (many of whom she stayed in touch with forever) and came south to Grande Prairie. She worked at the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital until her retirement.

It wasn't long until the grandchildren came along. Helen loved children anyway, and was probably the most enthusiastic Baba on the planet. Charlene, Carl and Sarah became her new favourite hobby. Everyone should have a Baba like that. She enjoyed spending time with them. As usual, Helen forged her very tight bonds with them.

Even at the Grande Prairie Care Centre where Baba stayed after a debilitating stroke, Helen continued to connect with staff and other people. She passed rather suddenly and they were shocked and tearful. They told us how much they appreciated her feisty spirit and sincere appreciation. Many were asking about the funeral, and wanting a copy of her memorial program. She had nothing left physically, but she was still connecting and bonding with the people around her. They told us they couldn't help getting attached. I am inspired.

An interment was held Sunday, April 26, 2015 at Shipman, Saskatchewan.

Memorial donations may be made to the QEII Hospital Foundation
10409 98 Street, Grande Prairie, Alberta
T8V 2E8 or Stollery Children's Hospital
1502 College Plaza, 8215-112 Street,
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2C8

Care entrusted to Bear Creek Funeral Home, Grande Prairie 780-830-7742
www.bearcreekfuneral.com



Helen was a truly special person with a warm heart and larger than life personality. She will be missed.