

Memories of Helen

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May 14, 2016

I first met Helen Kukuk when I joined the choir soon after I arrived at UniLu. (At that time, the choir and organ were in the chancel, and we wore cassocks and surplices!) Helen and I soon became friends. Our friendship lasted 48 years.

If I had to describe Helen in one word, I would say, “determined”! Helen pretty much did what she set out to do in life, despite some physical challenges. In that determination, Helen included maintaining contact with her many friends over the years in any part of the world. In recent years, as her sight and mobility diminished, she relied on her friends to help her reach her goals, including a trip to Alaska in 2014.

Helen became part of our family celebrations at Christmas in 1979. She joined us for Christmas every year after that, except for the three Christmases that we spent in North Carolina with our son Eric and his family. Others have mentioned that Helen joined them for their holiday celebrations too; she often shared her holiday time. Our family celebrations were in the evening, so she often spent midday celebrations with some friends and dinner with us. Helen also came to many other family celebrations for many years.

Helen particularly liked young children and sent birthday cards to many of her younger friends into adulthood and sometimes even to their children. She remembered many of her friends with birthday and anniversary cards every year.

Many know that Helen had an extensive bear collection—over 250 bear items including stuffed bears, figurines, dishes, photos, cards, ornaments, pins, and cloth bags. This collection began in 1985 when Helen was about to retire from Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). Our young daughter, Sabina, felt that Helen would be lonely in retirement, so she suggested that we give her a large honey-colored bear. Helen named her Sally. (Ann Ferentz and Chris Pollari have since adopted Sally.) The next year, we gave Sally a pal, Thaddeus. He now lives with Whitney Barth. These bears

and many others became Helen's "kids". Helen also gave many bears in various sizes to newborn friends and for birthday or Christmas gifts. Our grandchildren have several bears from Helen. Some bears are on chairs in front of the altar and will be on the tables at dinner. They were gifts from Helen or were adopted last year.

Helen enjoyed giving parties, especially in her small apartment on Sacramento Street. She also fancied herself UniLu's matchmaker since several couples met and married after attending her parties or dinners. Some of the couples are: Imogene and Bruce, Anita and Bilal, Jennifer and Mike, and Michael and Agnes.

Helen also enjoyed attending her friends' parties. One New Years' Eve, as Helen was leaving our home, she turned to say goodbye and fell off the front steps. EMT's brought her to MGH, of course. About 2:00 a.m., the phone rang. Jennifer Brown, then a resident at MGH, was on the phone and reported that Helen had broken her hip. She apologized for the lateness of the call, but said that Helen suggested that she call to report her condition because I would still be up. Helen told Jennifer that I never went to bed before everything was cleaned up after a party. Of course, she was right!

Helen enjoyed cooking and baking, especially for her many friends. In addition to good dinners, she also made some amazing sweets for her friends: hot cross buns, cakes, breads, and cookies. Most of all, I remember the Christmas stolens that she made every Christmas Eve until a couple of years ago. We enjoyed Helen's stolen on Christmas morning and her cookies at Christmas dinner.

Helen loved gardening; she had a large garden on Sacramento Street and even a small container garden on her deck at her condo. She knew that I especially liked pansies, so for about 35 years, she gave me a box of pansies on Easter Sunday. This Easter, when Helen was at MGH, she was glad that I carried on her tradition by planting pansies in the planter on my front stoop.

Helen was a good and generous friend who touched the lives of many of us regardless of our age. We will miss her dearly in our midst, especially here at UniLu. Memories

abound! May we share our stories with each other as we grieve our loss of a special friend. Rest in peace, dear friend Helen!