

Memories of Helen Clara Louise Wolf Shanteau

in honor of her 90th birthday

written by her sister Carol Ann Wolf Marshall

December, 2010

I am writing these memories with a heart full of gratitude of the moments, days, weeks, months, years we shared, dear Sister!

The earliest memories are when we lived in the big house on Idlewood Road, (not sure if that spelling is correct?) being bundled up in a wicker chair, watching couples dancing, perhaps for a New Year's Eve Party. I am guessing I was 3-4 years old at the time. And I remember Helen curling my hair using the kind of curling iron that had to be warmed up on the stove. The memory is of me sitting in a high chair or perhaps it was a kitchen stool?

The next memories are of times at the Ruberta St house. Two very vivid memories stand out – one of Helen choking at the dinner table on some fruit juice. I was very scared as she could not catch her breath for a long time. The other is when I had a severe case of whooping cough – Helen served as my nursemaid through it all. I also remember going to the Union Train Station in Los Angeles – it had recently opened and was the biggest space I had ever been in – seemed like we walked forever to get from the front door to the gates for train passengers. Helen was going to the YOU (Youth of Unity) Conference at Lee's Summit, Mo., for a two-week (?) conference. I sort of remember that she went twice in 1937 and 1938?

Also at that house, there was the annual ritual of separating fire-crackers the day before the 4th. We would all sit around the dining room table – unwrapping the packages of fire-crackers. We each had a box into which we would put our share. The 4th was a huge day for our father .

Helen made her own clothes, a talented seamstress , and often made me outfits which she decorated with bits of material left over from her dresses. She took such good care of me!

We moved to the Newby St house in 1939 – Helen was attending Glendale College by then and going out on dancing dates. I remember greeting her date/s at the front door, taking the ever-present corsage back to Helen so she could pin it on before she

came out of the hall door, so glamorous and beautiful! There was the Christmas ritual, too, of Helen washing and ironing the doll clothes and then placing her precious dolls on the top of the upright piano that stood against the wall in the dining room. She played the piano all the time – music was ever-present in our home. Helen and I shared a bedroom and I remember crawling into bed with her (twin beds, mind you) when I had nightmares and she would comfort me. Speaking of the piano, she taught me to play “chop-sticks” and I remember her very patiently coaching me to recite “How much wood could a wood-chuck chuck if a wood-chuck could chuck wood”. I hope that memory makes her laugh!

There was a very special vacation we all had at the beach one summer – maybe 1938? Somehow, the family rented two side-by-side cabins at Anaheim’s Landing. The boys occupied one side and the girls occupied the other. I have a picture of us all sitting in a row boat. I remember a paddle board being tied to the dock – I could paddle myself out as far as the rope would reach and then one of the group would pull me back in.

The early 40s brought weddings – Baxter and Ruth April 1941, Walt and Betty April 1942, and of course, Helen and Bob July 1941. I was fortunate enough to be a member of their wedding party and oh, how exciting it was! Weddings were emotional times, of course, and I remember Mother crying as she packed up the formals that Helen kept in the hall closet. Their wedding was at the Church of the Lighted Window, as was Baxter’s and Ruth’s – and, in those days, receptions were held at the home of the bride, with one room dedicated to the display of the wedding presents. I remember the lovely evening outdoors – it was July after all – and it all went well – except that Mother forgot to place the gardenias a neighbor had given for the occasion, around the cake. She was devastated when she opened the refrigerator door and saw them there!

During the WW II days, both Baxter and Bob Shanteau were deferred because of the importance of their work at Lockheed. Gas was rationed – 4 gals a week was the standard amount – and I can remember going to the gas station in a white Oldsmobile, I think, with Helen to buy gas – for around \$.10 a gallon or something like that. I also remember a trip we took, that is Helen, Bob, Jimmy as a wee baby, Mother and I, to visit Bob and Jo in Alameda where he was stationed (drafted into the Navy). I remember we were stopped by a policeman questioning Bob on how he was able to drive so far from home – or at least I think that is why he was stopped. Could have been some other reason, I suppose! It comes to memory now, as I re-read these notes, it was because he had made an inappropriate u-turn.

The births of the other boys are not so prominent in my mind, except for Bill. He was due just about the time I was to graduate from High School (the same high school all the Wolf children attended). Helen came with a very big belly! Oh, a story about high school. I took chemistry from the same teacher, Helen Moir, that Helen and Walt had. I remember her remark the first day of class “So, you are the youngest of the Wolf family!” I think she assumed that I would be as good at science as Helen and she gave me an “A” for the first quarter grade. Thereafter, it was down hill – winding up with a “c”. oh, well!

When my first son, Brent, was born in November 1954, Helen was a godsend. I had no idea how to do anything! She came over day after day, coaching me in how to bath him in the bathinette, how to take care of my breasts which became very sore from nursing, how to properly sterilize the juice bottles, etc.

There were family gatherings at the Shanteau home in Burbank for the 4th of July celebrations – lots and lots of fire works and those snaky kind of things that would squirm and writhe along the sidewalk when lit. Sure made a mess on the sidewalk and sure was fun watching them!

When she and Bob moved to Saratoga, I was absolutely lost and missed her so very much! As it turned out, the winter after Ann was born, our growing Marshall family moved up north in search of work for Dick and we visited Helen and Bob several times. There wasn't much work to be found, so we returned to Burbank within a few months. She came to Burbank from time to time for a visit – this was the time when she had enrolled in San Jose State and was pursuing her teaching credential. How amazing and wonderful that this talent for teaching was able to flourish and grow! I can imagine many, many of her students remember her still as their very favorite teacher!

In July, 1963, Helen came to Ventura to help care for our Mother who was living with Bob and Jo at the time. They had scheduled a vacation trip to the Redwoods. While she was there, it became obvious Mother was on her way to her next great adventure, so she was hospitalized and I believe, willed herself to live until Bob and Jo returned. There were also the many times Helen came to Los Angeles and then to Santa Cruz to assist Bill through his illness. I remember the grace and courage she showed at his memorial service! One strong, powerful, full-of-love woman you are, dear Sister!

After Helen and Bob moved to Arizona, I was privileged to visit them two-three times. One time was with my son Brian and his wife Jeannie and their toddler daughter Claire. Helen very patiently demonstrated to Claire how she could toss

popcorn or some other kind of treat for the ducks, out through the metal fence that separated the back yard from the “lake”, and she and Claire laughed and laughed as the ducks scurried to retrieve their food. Such wonderful memories!

And, of course, the most precious memory one of all – the 50th wedding anniversary celebration! It was planned for April instead of July inasmuch as Helen and Bob and many of their friends were “sunbirds” – driving to Idaho for the summer. My son Brent, his wife Erin, their baby boy Clay, my daughter Ann and I flew over together. Helen had arranged for us to stay in a mobile home nearby. Our dear and beloved brothers, Bob and Walt were still with us then. After the dinner was completed, Walt stood to speak and told of his honor of giving Helen away at the wedding (our father had left the family a few months earlier). As he relayed the memories of that time, tears came to his eyes as they did to all of the family members and most of their friends. I am sure as I sit here typing away on my computer, that Helen and Bob were touched by our presence. The most memorable moment of all - absolutely – was when Helen and Bob took to the dance floor and they did what they had done all of their lives together – dance! dance! dance!

And so, my dearest Sister, the years have flown by – and how cherished and precious are my memories of our times together. Your influence of making music, sewing, baking cookies, smiling and loving life filled those moments of my life with joy!

Thank you!

I love you!

Thank you!