

# HELEN FRISBIE: GOD'S GIFT TO US

A gift? It looked more like a crisis on January 17, 1910, when, in the midst of a snowstorm, Helen Frisbie made her premature way into the world. Expected on St. Patrick's Day, Helen decided it was time to get life started with a rush, a full two month's ahead of schedule. And not a neo-natal ICU in sight in Saratoga Springs, New York, nor any where else.

What did they do with an eight week premie a hundred years ago? Easy. They wrapped her in cotton soaked in olive oil, gave her small, frequent feedings of milk, and trusted in God. Good plan. See what it did for our friend, Helen! Never underestimate the power of olive oil and prayer.

The oldest of three daughters, Helen remained in Saratoga Springs for her academic education. Her association with the Lutheran Church began as a child, but one parent was Lutheran and the other Roman Catholic. German was the language of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Saratoga Springs, while Latin was the language of the Mass at the Catholic church. The matter was resolved thanks to a grandmother who gave Helen a book about Lutheran worship--in English! To this day, Helen retains her membership in her original Saratoga Springs home congregation.

After her marriage in 1939, she and husband Carl, moved all the way to Ballston Spa, New York, a whopping eight to nine miles distant where they established a home and welcomed son John David. Helen's working career was spent entirely with the New York Telephone Company; 25 years as an operator, and 15 years in management. No glass ceiling in her working world, Helen directed the activities of 28 male employees whose job was keeping us connected. Clearly, she was appreciated. They saw to it that each morning fresh Danish and hot coffee awaited Helen's arrival.

Having lost both her husband and only son in the late 80s and early 90s, Helen joined her sister, Nancy, in the Lowcountry. It wasn't long before she discovered St. John's and became an associate member of our faith family. She has delighted us with her smile, upbeat outlook on life and the sharing of her communication skills as part-time volunteer receptionist in our church office until just three years ago.

Recently, when we shared pictures of our Advent/Christmas cast of Madonnas and Child for the last five years, Helen was reminded of a childhood memory from old St. Paul's. At her Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in Saratoga Springs, one feature of the Christmas celebration was not only the presence of the Holy Family, but also the arrival of a female Santa, wearing black, and bearing gifts of fresh fruit for each child. No recollection of how that unique visit became a Christmas tradition, but a reassuring memory of what that visit meant to children with the threat of a World War on the near horizon.

These days, as a resident of Helena House in Port Royal, our newest centenarian begins and ends each day with prayer and meditation. When she rises, while letting her limbs catch up with her clear, active mind, Helen has an informal chat with God, asking simply, "Well, Lord, what do you have for me today?"

Looking back over the week of her birthday anniversary, she was given a full agenda. WELCA members honored her at a luncheon meeting at Dataw on Tuesday, and sister Nancy arranged for a gourmet Saturday dinner with family and friends (some of whom came from as far away as England and Oregon) at the Dataw Club. St. John's picked up the celebratory theme with a post-service reception on Sunday when, as typical Lutherans, baked treats were abundant, especially a memorable, centerpiece cake made in the shape of the numerals 100. Not finished yet, later that day Helen hosted a dinner at her favorite Port Royal restaurant, Dockside.

An indication of how widely Helen is remembered and cherished is a basket in her apartment containing 125 birthday greeting cards. This is a lady who savors the full flavor of each day her Maker grants her, and is consciously grateful for every moment. She shares the obvious thought that you can't last forever here, and isn't hesitant to discuss the next act of her life's journey. With typical foresight, she has submitted her desires for services following her death, but she has added a wish: Somewhere in the final mix of Scripture, prayer, hymns and memory, she would like to have the congregation sing, "When the Saints Go Marching In!" Happy to oblige, Helen, happy to oblige!



Helen Frisbie, 100 years old  
on January 17, 2010

