

# “Oh Honey”

## A Eulogy - Helen Elizabeth Newkirk

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### Introduction

We want to talk to you about our mother. But how in the name of heaven does one talk about an entire life, the life of an 83-year old spirit of unbelievable energy and love and passion and compassion and presence?

That question has been one focus of the lives of Helen’s five children since she died - Mum asked that the five of us do this together. So we’ve taken our individual thoughts and brought them together into this.

Dave prepared and read the prayer – now we will all share *all* of our thoughts about Mom. Mom, was a born adventurer, a faithful follower of Christ, and one exceptional mom (Probably in that order). We want to talk about her through six words: love, fun, energy, fearlessness, travel, flowers.

### Helen Elizabeth Newkirk – Mom – Mum – Gramma – GG

#### Love

Love was at the center of Mom’s soul.

Patricia once asked her advice on raising children. She said “love them unconditionally”.

She simply could not live without looking out for ways to assist others. She had a “heart of gold”, and was always looking “out there” for where she could give her love, her care. It gave her meaning and it gave her pleasure, to assist others. To put a smile on their face put one on hers. Mom gave things away, gave money away and gave herself. Money and things were only important in how they could help – in what she could use them for. (“Don’t worry, Honey, it’s only money.”) Mom spent the vast majority of her time volunteering, or telephoning, visiting and helping the people she cared about or was caring for. She volunteered for so many things (and loved the feeling she got from the experience). Jim’s nephew in Australia remembers her arriving for a visit and going the very first day to the grandsons’ school to ask how she could help out by volunteering.

We can’t talk about Mom without mentioning “stuff”. Patricia labeled her a “purveyor of stuff”. She moved stuff around. If she thought you didn’t need some bit of stuff she would carry it off to where she thought it could be better used. But stuff was never something she got too attached to. After a flood turned most of her stuff into sodden trash, when we were exclaiming over something else that had to go into the massive trash pile she kept saying, “O Honey, don’t worry about it. It is only stuff.”

This love, this care, was how Mom lived out her faith. She was a deeply religious woman, committed throughout her life to her God, and deeply committed to acting out her faith – and for her this was critical – her faith was action.

Her kindred spirit and honorary family member Electa wrote us: “I always admired her way of seeing a need and taking care of it; even as her health was declining she took care of Peggy, her dying friend.”

Soon after Dad died, Mom found a new place to focus her love and energy - our cousin and his wife had triplets born at 25 weeks. There were no extended family members able to help out, so to their great delight and joy, she moved in with them in Denver for over a year, settling into their mother-in-law apartment as if it were meant to be. To quote the triplet's mother, "She walked into our house and stood in the middle of three babies with oxygen, feeding tubes, 62 medicines, a one-year old running full speed, and a 7 year old asking for help with homework! Amazingly...she didn't run or roll her eyes...she laughed with delight and jumped right in to straighten us out!!! She brought giggles, amazing stories, strange foods, and lovely snuggles each and every time!"

Mom deeply loved and was completely committed to her Bill, our Dad. This was her great adventure, having met Dad on a blind date while on a trip to California with her mother and sisters. They had almost 50 years together, sharing everything. Sure they had some rough moments, but they were one, in their hearts and in their deeds, and she took Dad with her from his death until hers – indeed, when Dad died, all that love just poured out to others.

## Fun

Mom *was* a delight – she had a great big smile at the center of her soul – just next to the love. She was a serious woman, who saw her responsibilities clearly, but she never let them get in the way of her enjoyment of life. She loved to share her enjoyment with others, and she liked making fun, which she coupled with that quick wit – so you always needed to be on your toes.

Just 10 days ago there was a whole crowd of people at Linda's to see her, trying of course to be careful about her, as she was bedridden, sleeping mostly and struggling. Her response to all of that? 'Hey, where is everybody, tell them the party is in here!' Only three weeks ago, she stuck her tongue out at Jim when he said something about how 'good' she looked. Sticking her tongue out was a statement of great endearment – in Mom's inimitable style.

We loved Mom's capacity for irreverence, and it must be said that Linda, Patricia and Lisa seriously considered wearing pink flip flops to this service, in honor of Mom's sense of sartorial splendor, and in honor of her sense of fun. She probably would have worn them, if she had attended in person today. And it is not a coincidence that most of us here are wearing pink or purple. There must be over 100 photos of Dad wearing a pink t-shirt. Only real men can wear pink t-shirts.

Mom loved games. All of us spent hours playing games with her. You probably did too. Bridge, rummy cube, sequence. And she played to win. But it didn't matter if she won, she just played that way. We used to ask her who had won at bridge that day. She said she didn't remember. "We just play for fun," she would say. But ask us if we ever thought she wasn't playing to win.

Mom got Jason to take her for a ride on his motorcycle a couple of years ago – while in her 80s!! Not some puny motorbike either! Maybe we should talk about this later, when we talk about her fearlessness.

Mom was as hardy as the land and the people of Texas where she was born, and no stranger to adventure. Sneaking a ride in Papaw's new Buick, playing chicken with her friends as they rode by the movie theater, they promptly drove it into the front of the theater. And pranking at school one night, she and her mates took all of the books out of the library and stood them on end around the school block.

## Energy

Mom had an incredible energy level – it was hard to keep up. She had way more energy than most of those who knew her. She channeled this energy into doing. Oh, there are so many stories about her ‘doing’, and her demands on others for *their* doing. While she could be described as ‘bossy’ (in fact, she was described with words similar to that quite a lot), she never really demanded more of one’s time and energy than she gave of herself. Of course, this meant she expected you to live up to her standards. We loved the ‘Honey Do’ lists, and as children had to develop schemes to constrain her impact on our free time on the weekend.

Linda tells about her coming to live with her and Lester. “I had taken care of my mother-in-law during the last year of her life, and I thought ‘I want MY mom to live with us so I can take care of her!’ Within a few months, I was worn out! Every morning as I would be making coffee to drink quietly with Lester, she would come fast-walking (she had this rapid pace) out of her suite toward the kitchen. And every morning after “Hi honey,” she would say “I know just what we need to do with your garden...” or “I read all these articles (handing them to me) I want you to read and tell me what you think - let's go on this diet!” or some other grand project to embark on. Or I would come home and she would have reorganized my entire kitchen, refrigerator and freezer included. And errands...I have NEVER known anyone who could run so many errands, nearly EVERY day! There were ALWAYS 5 or 6 errands to run - you couldn't get into the car without having to make 5 or 6 stops.”

After her radiation treatment in July of 2011, it took about 4 months for her to bounce back to a relatively 'normal' energy level. Within 1 month, she had returned to her weekly bridge club here at the church and had joined a second one, started back to her bible study class, started volunteering weekly at the second-hand store for Fairfax Hospital (while waiting to hear if she could rock newborns at the hospital), volunteered at the local Rec Center 3 times a week (so she could swim twice a week for free), and signed up with ACCA to drive elders to various appointments...these last of course go back to "love."

Mom was a YES woman, and NO rarely entered her vocabulary unless a human right was violated (or it involved passing up Nutty Coconut at Baskin Robbins). For years her common response to most questions was “All things are possible”, or “The future is open.” An adventure or the possibility of one was never lost on Mom.

## Fearlessness

Mom was fearless. Patricia tells a story about riding in a van with her, Dad, and several other friends on the way to a square dance when one of the friends in the car started making racist comments. Everyone in the car went silent for a few moments, until Mom spoke up, calling the friend on the comments and making it clear that she didn’t want to hear any more.

Years ago Mom was responsible on a number of occasions for ‘in-kind’ contributions for different programs she was involved in. She would make endless calls and visits asking companies to give goods – never thought twice about it; it was important to her, so she shared that importance with others, and anticipated - expected their participation.

At age 77 while camping at the Algodones (al go de ness) Dunes in Southern California with David, Sue and the kids (all avid off-roaders), Mom and David had the opportunity to take a ride in a friend’s four-wheeler. With Mom driving and David navigating, David directed her to a popular sand dune hill climb that is about 20 stories high! With David’s instruction, and without pause, Mom dropped the transmission into 2WD high and headed straight up the hill...with hundreds of people watching. Half way up they lost traction. So, Mom backed her down, dropped it into 2WD low and gave it another run. No luck. The third time David

told her to put it in 4WD low and give 'er the gun! Off they went, and approaching the top, bouncing and bucking, a crowd of observers could be heard cheering her on, yelling "Go Granny Go!" And she did, right over the top of that hill.

Her fearlessness could be seen too in how she approached travel – with a welcoming, an openness that said, "this will be great!"

## Travel

Mom was adventurous, she reveled in the world around her – and wanted to see and experience as much of it as possible. She once told Patricia that if she could get on a rocketship to another planet she would jump on.

She had the chance to travel, and she took that chance whenever she could. She travelled while working and she travelled to visit family and friends. She was in wonder of the world. Jim's favorite memory was a week of traveling he did with her and a friend across the far north-west of Australia. Mom made them stop regularly, *all the time*, so she could take photos. "Oh Honey, oh Honey! Stop, stop, stop, I *have* to get a photo!" Food, American and foreign, brought the same wonder, the same delight. "Oh Honey, this is just soooooo good!" Or, "Oh Honey, this is the *best* cheesecake I have ever had!" Sights, sounds, tastes, language, culture – she just reveled in experiencing more.

## Flowers/ gardens

Mom loved color. Her wish for a more beautiful world and her high energy levels are apparent in her feelings about flowers, gardens and gardening. If Mom spent most of her time caring for others, much of the rest she spent planting and watering flowers (or getting US to plant and water flowers)! It can really be said that Mom's overriding focus in life was caring for others. And flowers.

Lisa remembers it like this: "I often looked forward to Mom's trips to my home in the late spring, early summer because I knew that we were going shopping at the Garden Stores. Before Mom arrived I had a plan of what I wanted, the colors of flowers, and where I wanted to put them. I would get a cart and off we would go. Mom had her own ideas of what she thought should be in my gardens and what my gardens should look like, and as we went up and down the aisles I would put my choices in the basket and Mom would put what she wanted in. I would see what she put in and I would take it out. We would go back and forth with this for awhile and then I would say, 'Mom I don't want those', or 'I don't like that color'. She would always respond with something like 'Oh Honey, how do you know if you don't ever get them?' Or, 'You need more color!' Or, 'They are my favorite!' Well, after years of experiencing this I finally gave up and let her pick out whatever she liked. Many times we would fill up two large carts. It would take a couple of days to plant all those plants in the yard, in hanging pots and in container pots on the deck.

I would be feeling relieved that we were done with that, but Mom would say 'Honey I think we need more of these, or we need to get such-and-such'. Sooooo, off Mom would go to pick out some more plants, returning with a full van - we would spend her entire visit gardening."

## Final Words

Her grandson Anwar said this on Facebook: "Thank you Gramma for being so loving and fun loving. You made everyone's lives around you better and more entertaining every single day. I'm so happy that all around the world we get to celebrate you today. You've brought up an

amazing family and you will be remembered with smiles and laughter for years and years to come.

Those are some of our thoughts about what made Mom special. And she was special – she was no ordinary woman. Mom gave us many things, particularly through how she related to others and how she lived. She was always so present - Mom had a great gift for living in the moment. She didn't live in the past, or in the future - just in the here and now.

We sure will miss her making us an “egg on an island”, and those delicious chocolate crinkles and snicker doodles. But most of all, we'll miss the example she lived of her willingness to love those around her, wherever she could meet their needs.

What a great gift.

What a pleasure to have known her.

What a privilege to call her Mom.