

Preface

Helen and I were married on June the second, 1956. During my married years, I have actually been living with two very different Helens. For the first five decades, I lived with the *Real Helen* that I married: a most remarkable woman; wonderfully wise, lively, creative, and courageous. In the late 1990s, however, Helen began showing increasing effects of Alzheimer's disease. Since then, I have been living with the completely different *Alzheimer Helen*, with Helen's physical and intellectual capabilities steadily diminishing due to the advancing limitations of her Alzheimer's disease. The record of our lives together, during those Alzheimer years, was published recently in the book titled, *Our Lingering Farewell*.

In 2020, Helen and I are both in our 87th year and feel very fortunate to have shared such an exciting and fulfilling life together, a life brimming with an array of wonderful memories. We started as high school sweethearts and have been dating for sixty-nine years and married for sixty-four. We have successfully launched our three children and eight grandchildren, and we have enjoyed travel for business and pleasure in more than sixty countries around the world.

Our company, Optech Incorporated, led in the development of the laser technology that took Canada to Mars in 2007 as part of the NASA *Phoenix* mission. Along with the other members of the Phoenix team, Helen and I have our

names engraved on an archival silicon mini DVD in the Phoenix spacecraft on the surface of Mars; it's a permanent record of our participation in the story of space exploration.

This book, *Memories of the Real Helen Carswell*, was initiated on Mother's Day in May. At that time, Helen had been in palliative care for more than five years, unable to stand, speak, or do anything for herself, requiring 24/7 care. We were continuing to live at home together; other than her Alzheimer limitations, Helen remained in good health with no signs of pain or discomfort. I was trying to decide what Helen and I could do to recognize the occasion, when I came up with the idea to provide Helen with some of the memories that Alzheimer's disease has stolen from her. I knew that countless others had shared memories with Helen over many years and in many situations. Helen was to celebrate her birthday on June 10th, and for that occasion I wanted to assemble a record for Helen of those missing memories.

Thus, for a Mother's Day project for Helen, I decided to invite those who knew Helen well to send along a memory or two. I sent out the following invitation by email to all of her friends and members of our extended family:

A Mother's Day Invitation (*Some Memories of Helen*).

I invite you all to send along to me, a few highlights of your recollections with Helen.

The response to this invitation was far beyond my greatest expectations; to document the results, I have decided to assemble these beautiful memories into this book.

These replies have been presented in the order that they were received during the few weeks between Mother's Day and June 10. The words are those of the authors and only minimal editing has been done to convert them to a common font and presentation format. A total of forty-five individuals, ranging in age from about three to ninety-plus years, have provided some memories. They all had shared with Helen a portion of her life.

In reading over these memories, I realized that they were in fact providing an overview of how Helen was recognized by the people around her; in other words, Helen's reputation. Everyone has one be it big or small, good or bad, and a person's reputation matters a great deal because it defines who they are and what impact they have on the world around them. The reputation described by the memories in this book is of special importance, since it provides a true picture of the *Real Helen* who disappeared more than a decade ago.

Helen had a strong and multi-generational family focus, loving to entertain and keep close to our extended family on both sides. These memories span the full extent of Helen's lifetime. Some are short glimpses of important incidents, often limited by the young age of the child involved, others are more detailed descriptions that highlight special family occasions or particular lifetime events. Overall, they display

the amazing diversity of Helen's activities and the profound influence she has had on the people around her. I do not try in this Preface to provide any overview summary of Helen's personality, but prefer to have the extended memories throughout this book define *the Real Helen*.

Helen's smile is frequently cited as her main characteristic. Helen is described as a wonderful, sweet, and considerate person, showing kindness and generosity to everyone she dealt with; a real lady and a beautiful person, inside and out.

She is never to be forgotten.