

**Other Interests:** She was also a member of a Probosc Club, two Garden Clubs and many cultural activities and tours at Alan Walker Village and, along with me for many years was a subscriber to The Sydney Theatre Company and ABC Concerts.

**Growing Older:** Everyone, including her GP, said she did not look her 98 years until this last bout of illness began in November. While her body was growing frailier, her mind was not and until final months she was still able to play a mighty game of scrabble, do the cryptic and quick Herald crosswords, play cards and mahjong and other puzzles. She still had perfect hearing.

**Conclusion:**

Helen was always there for me, and we shared any ups and downs in our lives. I am proud to have had her for a sister.

I pay special tribute to our son, Ian, and the Watt nieces and nephew, Andy, for their constant care of Helen in her final weeks. Jen, especially, has organised things since her death, as Ian is in Tasmania. Thank you all for coming and caring. Ted Simpson, Helen's last surviving High school friend in Grenfell, will also be thinking of us.

Dorothy Balcomb

07/02/2023

***Eulogy for Helen***

**23/09/1924 – 03/02/2023**

As her sister, Helen asked me many years ago if I would give the eulogy at her funeral. I'll do my best to fulfill her request:

Helen was born in Nurse Matheson's Private hospital in Cowra on 23 September 1924, the eldest of what were to be three daughters of George Davidson and Annie, nee Norrie. Both parents were born on small neighbouring farms in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. They were from large families and had migrated to NSW, Dad in 1911 and Mum in 1912.

Firstly, working as a farmhand for H O McColl on his farm between Greenethorpe and Koorawatha, and then in the newly developed Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, Dad enlisted in the AIF and served in France as a stretcher bearer in World War 1. After the War he gained one of the 16 blocks on Gambarra station near Greenethorpe, cut up for soldier settlement. His block was the woolshed block with his first home the former shearers' quarters which he named, *Hillview*.

During the War Annie Norrie had trained as a nurse at The Coast Hospital, Little Bay, spending her leave at the home of her Uncle Andrew Norrie at his home at Killara where she became good friends with her cousins especially her namesake, Annie, who was later to play an important part in Helen's life.

Our parents did not marry until 1923, four years after Dad had returned from the War. While living at *Hillview* George and Annie had two daughters, Helen Margaret born on 23 September 1924 and me, Dorothy May, born on 29 March 1927. At the end

of 1928 Dad bought the neighbouring Gambarra homestead block and they moved there to live in the much grander house.

Another daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was born on 29 March 1930 when the Great Depression was beginning to bite, but we were not made aware of it. We had a good life on the farm growing much of our own food and visiting neighbours and Mum's Norrie siblings and families as seven Norrie siblings eventually settled in NSW.

Helen started school at Greenethorpe Public School in 1930 at the age of 5 years and 8 months. For all her years there, she was driven to school in a car roster of neighbours, Bryers, Pontts, Browns and Davidsons. On fine days they were dropped off at Freebairn's Lane to walk through Hodges' paddocks and cross the Tyagong Creek on a log footbridge before walking through Greenethorpe village to school.

**Mum's Death:** It was a great blow for us as a family when our mother died suddenly on 16 September 1933 after a bad cold turned into pleurisy and then pneumonia in the days before antibiotics. Helen was almost 9, I was six and Mary only three. Relatives helped look after us until Mum's cousin, Annie Norrie, daughter of Dr Andrew Norrie came at the age of 51 to live with us. She became an integral part of our family and was known to all as Auntie Bid.

After Primary School, Helen attended Grenfell Intermediate High School from the beginning of 1936. She had to board in Grenfell during the week at the home of Mr and Mrs Jim Clements in Warraderry Street. I later boarded there with her when I started High School in 1939. It was pretty Spartan with no heating in our room which opened onto the verandah. We duly did our

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**Monkeys:** Our children also benefited from their hospitality in boarding school days. Most children of nieces and nephews were remembered on birthdays to say nothing of the gift of one of her famous toy monkeys that she made from a pair of socks. Altogether Helen made 545 monkeys. **(show one)**

**Lindsay's death:** The most significant change for Helen was Lindsay's death on 13 August 1998 which brought great grief and major changes to her life. Living on her own at 4 Central Ave for two years before moving to a unit at Alan Walker Village in December 2000 she considered the lowest point of her life. She had to deal with business affairs, dispose of Lindsay's lifetime collection of tools from the garage and sheds, look after the huge garden, sell the house, clear it of surplus belongings and downsize her possessions to a 2-bedroom unit. Life improved at Alan Walker village with time, company and new interests.

**Interests:** Helen maintained a wide range of interests. Her love of gardening became quite specialised. Her bromeliads in the glass house and African violets in the house and shed at 4 Central Avenue became famous and she joined societies for both and gave talks all over Sydney and beyond on the culture of African violets. Later, inside and outside her unit at Alan Walker village, there was always an array of pot plants.

**Sewing:** On the home front she made clothes for herself and nieces and examples of her needlework and tapestry are found throughout her unit, especially framed cross-stitch pictures of English cathedrals and ballerinas.

**Church:** The Eastwood church was a continuing interest and source of fellowship and friendship, and she was involved in many activities there until she could no longer drive.

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**before the promised visit of Uncle Sandy Norrie, Mum's brother, and his wife, Auntie Maisie, Dad's sister.)**

**Marriage:** Helen and Lindsay were married on 12 February 1955 at St Stephens Presbyterian Church, Eastwood, which has now been demolished. In those days women had to resign from the permanent staff when they married and Helen never returned to teaching, which is a pity, as I'm sure she would have ended up as a very competent Infants Mistress. Also, this was the time when the woman's place was in the home. Helen and Lindsay dearly hoped for children of their own, but it was not to happen to their great disappointment.

**Role as Carers:** Then began their long career as carers for others. Firstly, for Lindsay's parents in Wyong, and after his father's death his mother lived with them at Central Avenue until she died. Lindsay was an only child. Dad and Bid, in turn were aging and needing extra care. After Dad died Bid lived firstly with her two surviving sisters and then in nursing homes until she died in her late 90s. The last of Bid's sisters was Jess Norrie who greatly depended on Helen. There were also aging neighbours for whom Helen did shopping and other jobs. Lindsay also needed a lot of care in his final years.

Meanwhile, Mary and Cedric were producing children at *Sunnyside* until they numbered eight, and as Mary found it increasingly difficult to cope, Helen and Lindsay welcomed young nieces and nephews to stay for short or extended periods in their pre-school days, for primary school holidays and later during their boarding school days. They also welcomed other relatives and their children, and the spare room was rarely empty.

homework on the kitchen table where there was a fire. Our one luxury was to listen to the nightly episode of *Dad and Dave* on the wireless.

Helen did the two-language (French and Latin) and two Maths course then required for matriculation. She was good at Latin and gained Honours in the Leaving Certificate which she sat for twice as she was too young to go to Teachers College after the first.

At weekends, after travelling home from Grenfell to Greenethorpe on the train, Friday night was for homework, Saturday morning was for doing our washing (no washing machines then), and Sunday was for Sunday School and Church at Greenethorpe Methodist and Brundah Presbyterian once a month.

**Dentures:** There was no fluoride then and Mr Sherwin, our Grenfell dentist, did not muck about with saving decaying teeth. Helen, like me and other school friends, had all her upper teeth out under anaesthetic at the hospital when she was in 4<sup>th</sup> year at High School and had to go gummy for about 9 weeks before the denture could be fitted.

**Career:** Dad made it clear to us all that we had to go right through High School and immediately train for a career. Helen won a two-year Teacher Education Scholarship for the Teachers College in the University Grounds. She boarded at the GFS (Girls Friendly Society) Hostel at 29 Arundel Street Forest Lodge, opposite the Sydney University gates, in the days of trams and when Forest Lodge and Glebe were slums.

Primary teaching was then only a two-year course and in her second year, Helen specialised in Nursery School Training the second year it was run by the Department. The plan was to provide pre-school education across the state system but only a few were ever established.

There was no choice where you were appointed. A telegram came a week before school started telling her that her first appointment was Camdenville Public School near Newtown.

After ten weeks she was transferred to Waterloo Nursery School newly opened in April 1942. She was there for two years and boarded at *Tremayne*, the WVCA Hostel at Kirribilli. In so many ways Helen paved the way for me as I later stayed there. Helen was only 18 when she started teaching and the pay was so poor there was nothing much left over after paying board and fares.

In 1946 she was appointed to Canberra Nursery School in Acton. Canberra was then only like a scattered country town and schools were still part of the NSW State system. Her travel from Greenethorpe was by train with changes at Koorawatha, Harden, Goulburn, and Yass.

Again, I followed Helen as my first teaching appointment in 1948 was to Queanbeyan so that I saw a lot of her for six months until I was abruptly transferred to my old High School at Grenfell. Helen stayed at Canberra for four years and made some lasting friendships.

**Trip to Scotland 1950:** Dad wanted to revisit Scotland as his mother was still alive and he had not seen her nor his siblings since the end of World War 1. He wanted Helen to accompany him, and they went from March to September 1950. Travel was still by ship. This gave Helen a chance to get to know her

Davidson and Norrie relations on the other side of the world. At that stage she had 17 cousins in Scotland.

**Back Teaching:** After the trip, Helen returned to teaching. In 1951, she was appointed to Blackfriars Nursery School at Chippendale and then had a Kindergarten Class at West Epping Primary before being moved to Hornsby South Infants for terms 2 and 3. In 1953 and 1954 she had a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> composite class at Fort Street Primary overlooking the Harbour Bridge. That was a tough school.

**Engagement:** She boarded at various places during these years and ended up boarding with Mrs Vaughan at Meadowbank. It was through Mrs Vaughan that she met Robert Lindsay Shepherd, a bachelor living at 4 Central Avenue, Eastwood. Both Helen and Lindsay were invited to travel with Mrs Vaughan's sister and brother-in-law, Lindsay's neighbours, to see the decorations in the city for the Queen's first visit to Australia after her coronation in June 1953.

Meanwhile, Mary had married Cedric Watt in June 1952 and was living at *Sunnyside*, Greenethorpe.

**Dad Retires to West Ryde:** Dad always vowed he would retire from farming at the age of 70, and having no son to carry on the farm, had already employed Bruce Brown who later bought it on generous terms. Helen had become engaged to Lindsay and Helen and I were given the task of buying a house somewhere near Lindsay's house in Eastwood. I was back from 15 months overseas and was teaching in Sydney prior to my marriage to Harold and so Helen and I lived in the house at West Ryde for a few months. **(Dad especially wanted to have a base in Sydney**