



Mrs. Helen Oden

January 15, 1926 - April 6, 2016

Helen Ruth York was born to Ike and Octavia York on January 15, 1926. She passed away on April 6, 2016. She was preceded in death by her Mother and Father and by her husband, Drexel Booth Oden. She is survived by her children: her daughter, Brenda Weaver and her boys, Rob-bie, Kenneth, and Paul Oden and his wife, Karen. As well as by her grandchildren: Holly McAfee and husband Travis, Clayton Oden, Eric Lee, Hannah Weaver, and Christian Oden and Kevin Sunga and her nieces and nephews Kevin Oden, the Williams girls: Bonnie, Evelyn, Suzanne and Barbara Jo, and Dennis Roberts. She so loved her great-grandchildren Erica Lee, and Brooke, Ashley and Lauren McAfee. Her associations were many and usually revolved around family and close friends. She was a lifelong member of the First Christian Church of Tatum, as well as a member of the Order of the Eastern Star, Beckville chapter. She had long and deep friendships with her best girlfriends in the Good Time Quilters of Rock Hill, Texas.

Graveside services for Mrs. Oden will be 2:00 p.m., Sunday, April 10, 2016 at the Tatum Cemetery in Tatum, Texas with Rev. Jim Rawlins officiating. Services are under the direction of Hawthorn Funeral Home in Carthage.

The Family of Ms. Helen wishes to share these thoughts and memories:

We are all so grateful that she loved us so much. As she aged, she tried to

prepare us for life without her. What was the main thing she asked from us? She wanted us to promise her that we would never forget how much we were loved.

She presented a simple image. But, she had all of the insight of an accomplished psychologist. And, all of the wisdom of a great theologian. Also, she made great cornbread.

In fact, she probably never actually read a psychology book but, she knew what could help you the most: to know and feel that you were loved. She wanted you to be able to always carry that knowledge with you in life.

She grew up in a Christian home, raised in the Christian traditions. She never claimed to have any special degree of religious knowledge but she understood the simple message and covenant of Christian teaching better than most theologians: The gospel of love never came more naturally to anyone than it did to her.

She was guided in her own life by such good people: her own parents, the York Family, as well as the parents of her husband, Drexel Oden and his extended family. They were together so early in life that they were both actually raised by the same families. The Williams, the Booths, the Yorks, and the Odens. These families were joined by Mother and Dad's marriage and they all treated both of them as their own children.

She was born into a family that was the model of the traditional American family. She married her childhood sweetheart. She lived on her family's farm. She raised her own children in the care of this extended family, with a shared history going back for generations. As her family grew it might not have appeared on the surface to be exactly the same as that traditional family model she had been raised in. In fact, it only appeared different. It was always

the same. As in past generations, it included East Texas grandchildren and little blonde McAfees but it came to also include dark haired Asian and Hispanic kids, too. She knew that families are made in different ways and, through her influence, the true feeling of family never changed. That is very obvious here today.

She married young, so her own children knew her in her 20s, her 30s, her middle age and beyond, past the age of 90. She never changed. Her good humor, affection, enjoyment of family, her desire to be engaged and supportive, was the same her whole life.

She gave her children unbending loyalty. Not because you were perfect but because she wanted you to always feel worthy. Instead of finding fault, she would be more likely to listen to you fault your own self and then gently defend you against being too harsh in your judgments.

She never flinched from the challenges of her life. She graduated early from high school and, at 17, immediately began traveling around, working and living with her mother-in-law, wherever necessary, to be near her husband while he prepared to enter combat in the Great War against the evil forces of Hitler.

After that war, she came back to the same farm and sought to create a little world for her family in which they were all protected from the meanness and hardships of life.

She was remarkably successful.

There exists several generations of kids she helped to raise who were friends of her own children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. She mothered these friends and boyfriends and girlfriends and they knew and felt her loving spirit.

Some of her happiest times were spent in the company of her lifelong friends, Hoyt and Evelyn Kelly, and Ralph and Jean Williams, both recently deceased. From teenage trips to the movie shows in nearby towns, playing dominoes while the kids ran around like wild Indians, camping and traveling together, these friendships and good times were her primary recreation. She never felt like she missed anything in life. In her later years the close relationships with her friends in her quilting group also brought her great happiness. As her vision failed, the quilting production lagged but it didn't seem like quilt production was the primary purpose of the group to her, anyway. It was the pleasure of the company of her good friends.

When World War II was over, she and Daddy set up housekeeping in a small two room cabin that Daddy had purchased from the saw mill after it had ceased mill operations. She had four children and raised them all in that cabin, expanding it as the family grew, eventually, adding an indoor bathroom and a new kitchen, all built by Daddy and their friends and family.

They set that cabin down on a corner of her parents' farm. Both of their families helped raised the kids and support the general enterprise. In her life, in addition to being a full time Mom, she and Daddy both almost al-ways held multiple jobs. When just married, Daddy hauled logs and they ran a laundry in Old Town Tatum, she did factory work as a seamstress, in a munitions plant and an appliance factory. Throughout a long stretch of our childhood she was the primary manager of the family-owned grocery store, The O.K. Grocery and Market, in Tatum, originally owned with the Kelly family, (the "K" in O. K. Grocery). She

always presented herself as an unassuming person... but she took on all manner of work and was always engaged in some effort to provide as much support as she could for her family. She worked in more than one school cafeteria, a low paying job made even less lucrative if you paid, as she did many times, when some child needed but couldn't afford a lunch or a snack. Daddy used to joke that the family couldn't support some of her expensive habits, like working in the cafeteria.

It was very hard on her when he became ill. But, without complaint, she practically moved in with him into the nursing home, supervising his care, and she was lying next to him when he passed away.

She was kept young by being so directly involved in the lives of her Grandkids. Having them live with her at different times brought her such joy. We were all amused when, in her Late 70s she decided to go meet with Clayton's basketball coach to find out why Clayton was not getting more playing time. In her 80s during a period of poor health, she traveled to Dallas to watch Christian play in a basketball tournament. She loved to hear Erica sing and have visits with Eric and Kevin and was so proud of Holly as a lawyer and as a Mother.

We would have never been ready to lose her but, it is comforting to remember that it came after some of the sweetest events in her recent years. Two weeks ago she attended Easter service at the First Christian Church. The same church she had grown up in. She was so proud that her clan filled two full benches around her. She remarked that she had 14 of her family with her, having counted them herself.

She also allowed us to celebrate her 90th birthday in January. She was surrounded by extended family, her nephew Jack York and so many of her

kids. The highlight of that day was when Hannah and Brooke and Ashley did a short performance for her, by reading aloud to her from one of her favorite poems: "A House by the Side of the Road". She had, of course, lived out most of her life on that little farm on the side of the road between Tatum and Henderson. But, that was not the only reason she loved the poem so much. The sentiment of it was what mattered to her. The beauty and nobility of a simple but positive life. Being good to others. Loving without restraint. Serving without expectation of reward or pursuit of notoriety. Most of all, avoiding the tendency to judge others or to build yourself up at someone else's expense.

When we said goodbye at the end of Easter Sunday she reminded us all again to always remember how much she loved us. We always will.

Cemetery Details

Tatum Cemetery

540 S. Forrest St.
Tatum, TX 75691

Previous Events

Service

APR 10. 2:00 PM (CT)

Tatum Cemetery
540 S. Forrest Street
Tatum, TX

Tribute Wall

JS

“ I came to know Helen when I was a semi-formed adult, but her deep truly organic sweetness has stayed with me, as an example of a what a person can and should be. I have only seen the likes of that character twice in my life, so I will never forget her and will strive very imperfectly to be like her. I am sure we all will.

Joan Sanger - April 12, 2016 at 08:37 AM

LG

“ So sorry to hear of the passing of ya'lls mother. I just read it today in the Longview paper. Thinking of you all,

Laura Goldman

Laura Goldman - April 11, 2016 at 09:26 AM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mrs. Helen Oden.



April 07, 2016 at 05:22 PM