

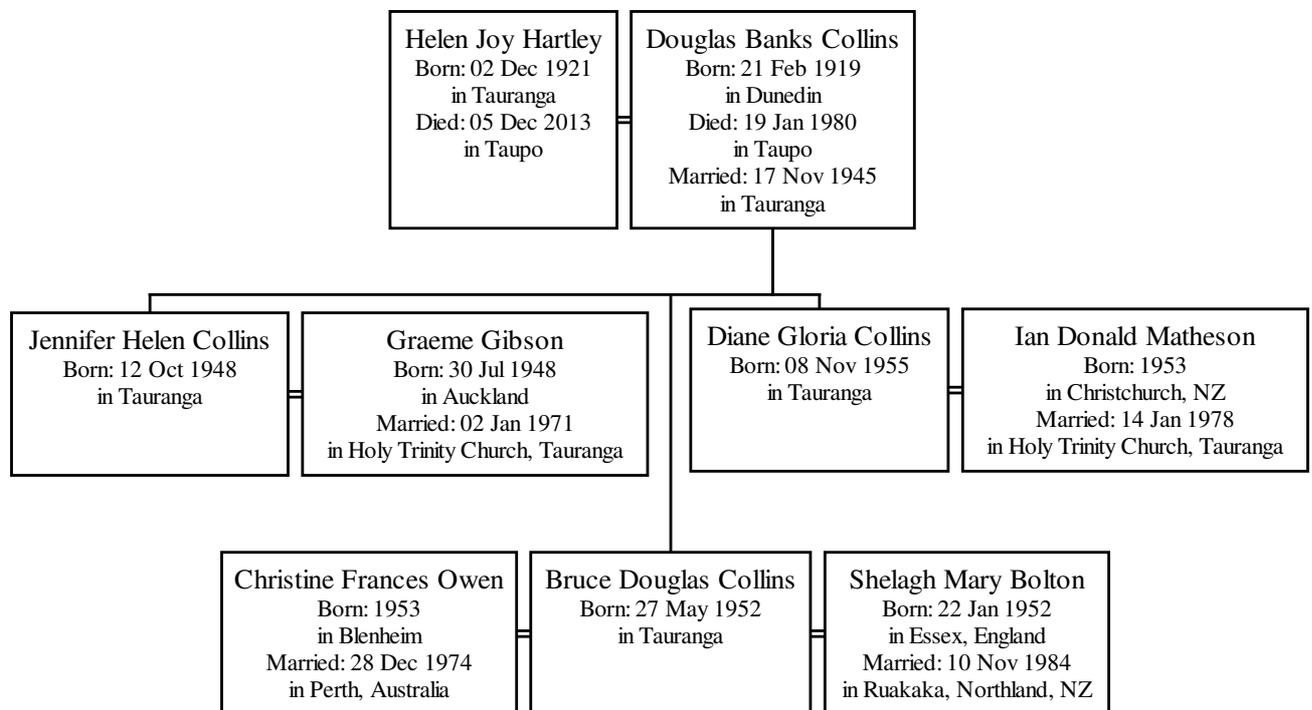
*Helen Joy
Hartley*





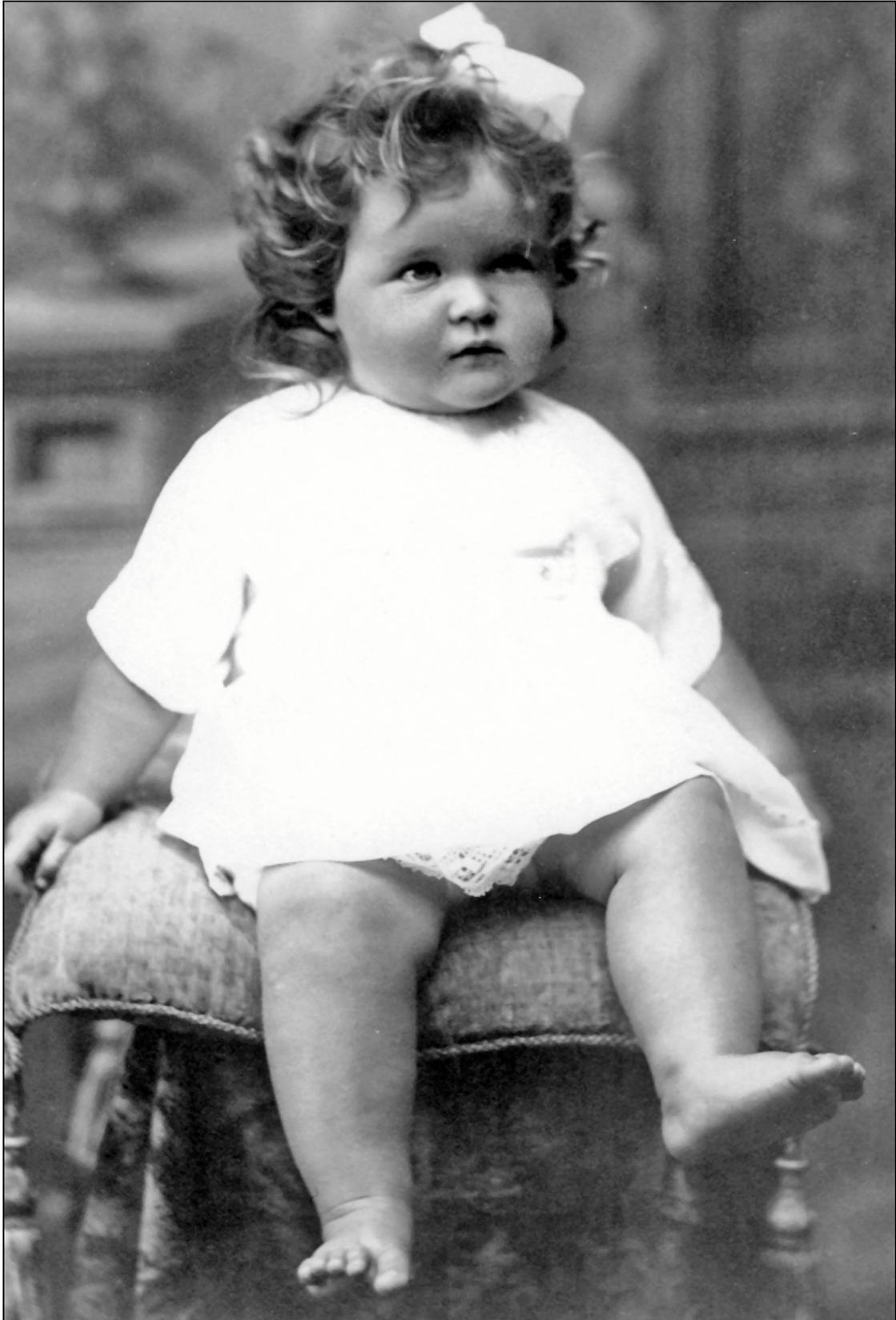
Helen Joy Hartley

Children of Helen Joy Hartley



Helen Joy Hartley

Helen Joy Hartley, third daughter of Charles Hartley and Mabel Emma Sharon, was born on 2nd Dec 1921 in Tauranga and died on 5th Dec 2013 in Rotorua, three days after her 92nd birthday.



Helen Joy Hartley



Helen Joy Hartley



*Helen Joy Hartley's Baptism Certificate
6th May 1923*

The record of the baptism (No. 1242) states that she was born 2nd Dec 1921, her parents were Charles and Mabel Emma Hartley of Tauranga. It stated that Charles' occupation was a draper. The sponsor was Rose Sharon (Mabel's sister). The baptism took place at Holy Trinity Church, Tauranga and the officiating vicar was Rev. A McCutcheon.

At her funeral her three children, Jenny, Bruce and Diane delivered the following eulogy which they wrote together as a tribute to their mother.

On the 2nd of December 1921, our Mum was born in Tauranga to Mabel and Charles Hartley. Her father told her that when he heard he had a 3rd daughter he said "Oh Hell" but then when he saw her, he was filled with Joy and hence the name Helen Joy.

Along with her siblings, Phyl, Dawn and Charles, early holidays were spent at the family bach at the Mount. The bach was situated where the Mount hot pools are now.

New Year's Day was the big event where the girls showed off their new bathing suits. Surfboards were painted to match the outfits and it was all a big secret till Jan 1st every year.

Mum's father died when she was 6 and her mother carried on the family drapery business for many years. Her Aunty Rose and good family friend Ada, helped with the children and meals, while our Grandma Lamport ran a very successful business. If the kids needed money for anything they were told to just help themselves from the shop till and return the change. Her lifelong best friend Glo Tanner was a huge part of her life. They started school the same day, were bridesmaids at each other's weddings, and it was through Glo that Mum met Dad.

Mum and Dad were engaged on her 21st birthday. Because of the war this engagement lasted 3 years and so when he returned from Tonga they wanted to marry as soon as possible. A special licence was obtained and so 2 weeks later, on November 17th, 1945 she became Mrs Douglas Collins. Because the wedding was arranged quickly she had told Dad she would be wearing a blue suit. Apparently, he was thrilled to see his love walking down the aisle in a beautiful white wedding dress - he wasn't to know it was made from curtain material.

Here started a long and happy marriage. Mum was not your usual domestic goddess of the time and was proud to tell everyone she never learnt to cook, sew or knit. Perhaps the birth of 3 babies born over the next few years, each weighing well over 10lbs, meant none of us needed too much feeding up. And of course, one of the perks of owning the family drapery store meant her total disinterest in learning to sew or knit was not an issue.

Mum had a magnet on her fridge saying "I kiss better than I cook" But we never went hungry and her roast dinners were a legend.

Once again holidays at the Mount beach were a big part of our lives. This time the bach was on Marine Parade right next door to the family bach of her brother Charles. So as kids we had a wonderful time with our cousins. To our cousin's amusement, Mum would ring a little bell when she needed us home for dinner and boy did we run when we heard that.

Mum loved all her nieces and nephews and was a favourite aunty to all.

As kids, we were allowed a succession of pets but only on a short-term basis - I'm still looking for Horace. One Xmas we decided to buy her a puppy as you can't give Xmas presents away. So, Sadie became part of the family for 9 years and Mum was devastated when she died.

We also had a caravan on the beach at Acacia Bay, Taupo within a few feet of the lake. Wonderful holidays there were spent sailing, water-skiing, swimming and trout fishing.

To celebrate their 1st wedding anniversary, Dad had one long stemmed red rose delivered. He continued this adding a rose for every year. The last delivery just before he died was 34 red roses.

Their special song was Vera Lynn's "Yours" and as kids we were amused at the way they would carry on like a couple of lovebirds whenever it was played. When Dad died we never heard the song played again.

With Dad's passing Mum's life changed dramatically. It was difficult for us to think of her without her soulmate.

She travelled overseas a number of times and enjoyed seeing new places and meeting new people. She also moved house many times using the excuse that the oven was dirty - how that happened when we never saw her use the oven is a mystery.

Her flare and passion for interior design meant that she created some beautiful homes.

Along with buying and selling homes she also bought and sold caravans. She loved camping near the lakes and continued swimming well into her 80s. When the opportunity arose she purchased a fishing cottage at the Ohau Channel, near Rotorua. She bought a pair of waders and went on a course to learn to fly fish. She was taught how to clean and gut trout but flatly refused to eat them as she hated the smell and taste of any fish. She bought her own little boat and successfully navigated the Ohau Channel weir to spend many happy hours fishing on Lake Rotorua.

It was at this stage the adrenaline buzz phase of her life kicked in. She had tried paragliding while on holiday in Thailand and now wanted to try a parachute jump. The opportunity presented itself when she met a family while tenting with her sister, Dawn. This family ran a parachuting school at Parakai Airfield and she joined one of their and the children and household was looked after by Aunty Rose and Ada, while Mabel was at work. After this initial adventure, she made sure she celebrated each subsequent birthday in a similar style.

For her 70th the whole family went to the Waitomo Caves to experience Black Water rafting with her and she always said it was the best birthday ever.

This was followed by Whitewater rafting, gliding and several tandem skydives. As fundraising for the Rotary Club in 2005, Mum jumped from 12,000ft at the age of 84. As she always said " How else am I going to get a six-foot man strapped to my back at my age"

As Helen's children, we are proud and grateful for our fun-loving mother. Over the last few years, it has been a privilege to give her back the same love and care she gave to us.

Helen Joy Hartley was born in Tauranga, third daughter of Mabel and Charles Hartley, and the family lived in Monmouth Street. Helen was only six when her father died and she vividly remembered the smell of the lace curtains as she watched from a window when the hearse passed by.

After Charles's death, Mabel carried on the family business. The children and household were looked after by Mabel's sister, Aunty Rose, and close family friend Ada. When Helen was ten, Mabel married Alfred Lamport, and Alf and Helen shared a special bond throughout their lives.

Helen went to primary school in Tauranga, starting her first day with her lifelong friend Gloria Tanner.



Helen and Glo performing together. Helen was upset because she wanted to wear the red shoes



Sisters, Dawn & Helen



Helen with Grandpa Sharon

1927 TAURANGA PRIMARY SCHOOL

(Written on request by Mrs Helen Collins of Tauranga)

"I remember my School days, when a Teachers word was law, no arguments. The School bell rang on the dot of nine and children assembled in the school yard. A wind up gramophone played while we marched to our rooms with great gusto.

In the Winter a small fire was kept stoked up in the corner of each classroom but with large rooms and high ceilings it was probably imagination which helped us keep warm, although we wouldn't have dared to complain even if we shivered each day.

The children loved stories and poetry especially, was really enjoyed and learnt by heart. When we were taught to write, the teachers were adamant that the pen must point at a certain angle over the right shoulder, and to be a good writer was very important.

In the Summer some days when we marched with our bathing suits down to the swimming baths at the end of First Avenue, we had to walk down a long winding path to the beach and the "baths" were surrounded by wooden poles to keep out any sharks. The tide controlled the regularity of our swimming lessons.

Cookery classes were only for girls and we wore large white aprons with our names embroidered on the front, and a white square on our heads covering every strand of hair. "Cleanliness was next to Godliness". Every morning the children were checked to make sure they had a handkerchief which was generally pinned to the clothing. Every pupil had his or her own crockery mug which was filled at lunchtime with lovely hot cocoa, one of the highlights of the day."

*great piece
of historical
info.*



As a child Helen had to travel to Auckland on the ferry, Ngapuhi

As a child Helen had to travel to Auckland on the ferry, *Ngapuhi*, for annual appointments with an optician. It was an overnight boat trip from 7pm till 7am, and Aunty Rose always travelled with her. Helen would stick her chewing gum under the bunk above her so that she could tell whether she was in the same bunk the next time she went.



Aunty Rose Sharon, Mabel's younger sister



Helen at Monmouth Street

Leaving Tauranga at the end of primary school, Helen went to Saint Cuthbert's Boarding School in Auckland. She remembered attending her confirmation, wearing the customary white dress and veil, but with black stockings and heavy back shoes.

Helen talked about the crowded dining hall at boarding school, and how the girls had to link arms to be able to fit around the tables. Because the girls were not allowed to speak during a meal, if they needed something passed they kicked the person beside them. Helen told the story of how she kicked the girl next to her repeatedly with no response, and then discovered the girl had a wooden leg.



Helen & Charles

After leaving school Helen was employed in the family business. She got her Drivers Licence at the age of 14 and continued to drive confidently well into her 80's. In the war years, Helen had to reverse a large furniture truck through the gates of the Tauranga Domain to get her Heavy Trade Licence, and she always renewed this licence until she stopped driving at the age of 84.



Charles & Helen

Weekends and holidays were spent at the family bach at the foot of the Mount, and one of Helen's fondest childhood memories was watching the Tiger Moth planes land and take off from the beach. Sir Charles Kingsford Smith was raising funds for his plane 'Southern Cross', and Helen would save her pocket money to go on a flight for 2/6d. Her love of planes and flying stayed with her throughout her life.



Tiger Moth flights on Mount Manganui Beach in the 1920's.



Charles Kingsford Smith's plane 'Southern Cross'

Summers at the Mount consisted of days swimming and surfing at the beach on individually decorated surfboards. New Year's Day was a special event when new bathing suits for the season were revealed after much secrecy.

In the evenings over the holiday season, the girls dressed up to head for the local dances.



Helen and Glo



Helen stepping out

As a young woman Helen had several boyfriends including Eric Tanner, a young man she and Glo had grown up and gone to school with. About this time, Glo met a new boyfriend, Doug Collins who had been sent to Mount Maunganui from Whakatane, to train as a RAF radio operator. One afternoon Helen and Doug went sailing while Glo was busy, and they ended up spending the afternoon clinging to the bottom of an overturned yacht on Tauranga Harbour. This was the start of their romance. Helen and Doug's first engagement ring was a shell from the Mount beach. When Glo and Eric Tanner also became engaged, the two girls chose matching engagement rings. Helens' mother Mabel told Helen and Doug they could not get married until after the war ended. So, it was to be a long three year engagement. During the war Doug was in the Airforce, stationed in Tonga. Helen remembered that Saturday afternoon, when she and her mother were working at Hartley's Drapery shop, ticketing goods. The phone rang and Doug said, "Would a fortnight be too soon?"

The couple managed to get a special licence and arranged to be married within two weeks. There was frantic trip to Auckland with Mabel and Alf, to buy material for the wedding gown and Glo's bridesmaid dress. However, with the shortage of available bridal material at the end of the war, the dresses for the wedding on November 17th 1945, were made of curtain material. Helen's dress featured bows and feathers around the neck and was made by the same dressmaker who made her mother Mabel's wedding dress when she married Alfred Lamport. Helen and Glo were bridesmaids at each other's wedding and remained best friends throughout their lives.



Helen and Doug were engaged on Helen's's 21st birthday



Helen and Doug were married at Holy Trinity Church, Tauranga on November 17, 1945



Gloria Olding and Helen with Doug on right



*Helen on her wedding day
with Mabel and Alfred*



Helen



Gloria Olding and Helen Hartley

Helen and Glo grew up and went to school together. Helen was going out with Eric Tanner and Glo's boyfriend was Doug Collins who had been sent to Mount Maunganui to train as a RAF radio operator. The two girls eventually exchanged partners and both became engaged – Helen to Doug and Glo to Eric Tanner. The two girls chose matching engagement rings.

Helen and Doug started married life in a flat in 13th Avenue where Doug studied for his accountancy exams. At the County Council where he worked, Doug's boss was Morland (Ted) Fox. Helen was very nervous about meeting Ted and his wife Mary for the first time. She prepared a plate of water crackers and tomatoes for afternoon tea and was terrified she would drop them in Mary's lap. Ted and Mary Fox became close family friends and when Helen and Doug's son Bruce was born they were asked to be his god parents.

When Doug passed his exams to become a Chartered Accountant, he decided there was little future for him at the Council. He accepted an offer to join the family business of Charles Hartley Ltd as the firm's accountant.

In 1948 Jenny was born, followed by Bruce in 1952 and Diane in 1955. Over this time, the family moved from the flat in 13th Avenue, into the new home Helen and Doug had built at the top of the hill on the corner of 13th Avenue and Grace Road, Tauranga.



Jennifer & Helen



Bruce & Jennifer

Helen and Doug supported their three children in whatever they wanted to do, and the children were always encouraged to try their best. Jenny and Diane went to piano and singing lessons, and Helen was a very proud mum sitting in the audience at the Tauranga Competitions in the May School Holidays. Diane also went to weekly ballet classes with her cousin Trish, and recitals were exciting occasions for all the family. Bruce was (and still is) very involved in sailing, starting at P Class level at a young age. Doug loved being on hand to prepare the boats for racing at the Tauranga Yacht Club and later at the annual Rotorua sailing regattas.

Doug always asked the children, "Did you win?" after any major event, and Helen's answer to the times that weren't successful was that a big chocolate ice-cream was the consolation prize. Helen often said she couldn't sew so when the children needed costumes or fancy dresses, she created the most amazing outfits using her wonderful imagination, a piece of material and a stapler.

Family holidays were always looked forward to. Most were planned but sometimes it was a spur of the moment decision to take a break. Helen always said you never stayed home for the weather and she was usually right as some of the best holidays started off in pouring rain or freezing cold, followed by beautiful weather the next day.

The whole family moved to the Mount bach over the Christmas break, and then went to Acacia Bay in Taupo for the last two weeks of the summer school holidays. Weekends from Labour Weekend through to Easter, were usually spent at the Mount or Taupo.

In the Winter, the family toured the country, towing a caravan, and the children visited most places in the North Island during their childhood.

The last family holiday before all the children left home, was a trip to Australia, staying for a week in King's Cross in Sydney. None of the children had ever left New Zealand or flown on a big plane before. It was a very special family holiday, clearly remembered along with all the other wonderful childhood memories.



Jenny, Bruce & Diane

Helen and Doug made the most of weekends and holidays. Helen's mother Mabel, bought eight sections on what would become Marine Parade at the Mount, and gave one to each of her three younger children. The sections were situated at the end of the beach road. Sand blocked the road at that point and it wasn't until some years later that the road was opened up to continue all the way to the Mount township. Two of the sections were made into a tennis court where many happy and competitive hours were spent.

Helen and Doug's first holiday home was a small one-bedroom bach which they had transported onto their section just over the sandhills from the beach. Doug spent many hours putting in a red formica bench top, adding another bedroom, and eventually a toilet and shower. Years later Dawn and Bill Reid bought the bach and had it transported to the Ohau Channel as a fishing cottage. Eventually, a new modern beach house was built on the original site on Marine Parade.



The family home on the corner of 13th Avenue and Grace Road, Tauranga

As well as loving their holidays at the beach, Helen and Doug enjoyed spending time at the lakes. Helen loved catching fish but stubbornly refused to cook or eat her catch as she hated the taste and smell of fish.

One thing Helen never enjoyed was cooking. When Helen and Doug were first married, she decided to have cabbage for tea and as neither of them were very keen on cabbage she put in one leaf each. She was surprised to find nothing left in the pot when she went to serve dinner.

Although she always said she was a terrible cook, Helen's roast dinners were legendary. And she actually cooked the cakes for her daughter Jenny's three tier wedding cake. The recipe was one of Auntie Rose's and had five eggs in it. One after another the eggs she used were double yolkers and Helen was unsure as to whether that counted as five or ten eggs. She kept going, surrounded by bowls of eggs and eventually managed to get the right number for the recipe. The double yolkers were scrambled for tea.



Trout fishing on holiday

Over the years whenever Helen moved house, she always said it was because the stove had got dirty. A magnet on her fridge read, "I kiss better than I cook."



Hula Dancing in Surfers Paradise, Australia

When the children were young, Helen was a stay at home mum. She loved music and was always singing and whistling around the house. Joining the local Operatic Society, Helen enjoyed being part of productions such as "Oklahoma" and "The Desert Song." On one occasion, she took great delight in appearing on stage dressed only in a shirt top as there were not enough trouser bottoms to go around.

Helen was a spontaneous person and life was always fun. Many plans were made on the spur of the moment, with short trips to Australia and Fiji often booked at the last minute. She particularly loved going to Surfer's Paradise on the Gold Coast in Australia.



Performing "There's a hole in my bucket" at Surfer's Paradise, Australia

On one memorable occasion, Doug mentioned he would love to buy a boat so Helen went into action. While he was in the shower one Saturday morning she was on the phone answering a Herald advertisement. Doug came back into the bedroom to be greeted with the news that the family were going to Auckland that day to pick up the new boat which Helen had just bought unseen over the phone for 75 pounds. Doug was sure you couldn't or shouldn't buy a boat over the phone, but they went to Auckland anyway and had "Opo" for several years.

Over the years a number of pets came and went in the household, as Helen was not an animal lover. One Christmas her husband and children decided to surprise her with a gift she had to keep, as you could not give a Christmas present away. So, Sadie the Sydney Silky joined the family. Obviously, the plan worked as Sadie became a much-loved member of the family for many years and after she died Helen happily welcomed another dog into the household, a black poodle called Cilla Black



Helen with her Christmas present, Sadie

Once the children left home, Helen returned to work at the family drapery business as the window dresser. She had a talented eye for colour and fashion design and created some wonderful shop window displays. Helen and Doug worked together at Charles Hartley's for many years, and when Mabel passed away, Doug became managing director of the firm.



"Helen had a talented eye for colour and fashion design and created some wonderful shop window displays for the family shop, Hartley's"

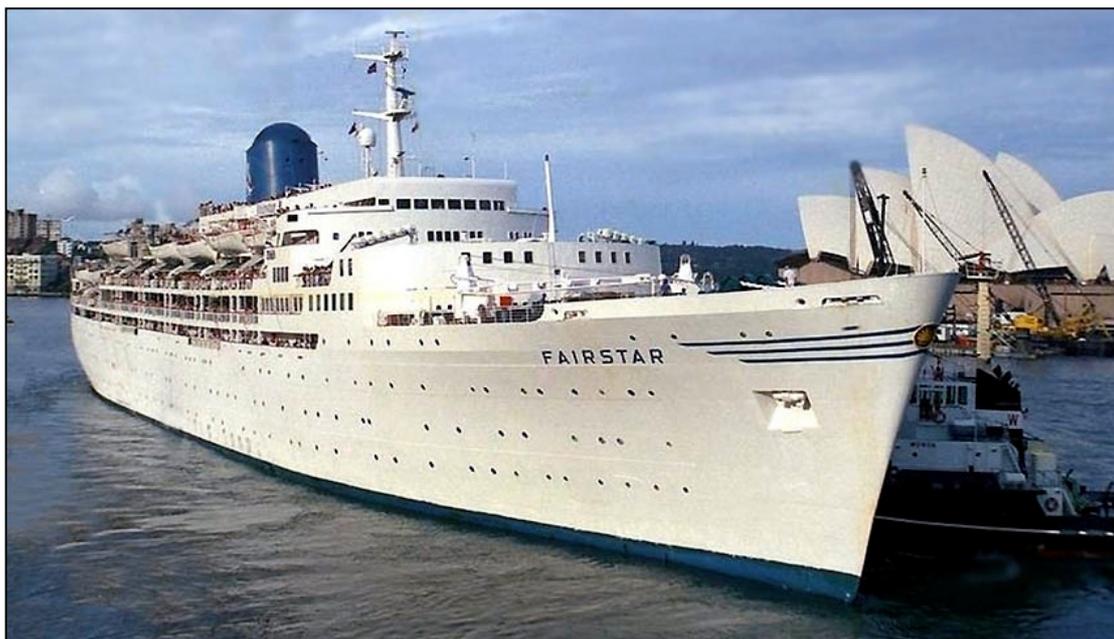
After 27 years, Helen and Doug decided to sell the family home in Grace Road and move to Tainui Street in Matua, Tauranga. A full-sized swimming pool, complete with diving board and a changing gazebo, were part of the plan and Doug spent many busy hours keeping the complex in pristine condition.



Home at Tainui Street, Matua, Tauranga



Cruise on the "Fairstar".





Bike riding on Rottnest Island off the coast of Perth, Western Australia

Helen and Doug loved camp life and after years of owning tents and caravans decided to buy a big caravan to leave permanently on the beach at Acacia Bay right beside the lake in Taupo. It was an idyllic setting and many happy days were spent boating, fishing, sailing, water skiing, and swimming.



Caravan on the beach at Acacia Bay, Taupo



Jenny and Graeme Gibson's wedding 2 Jan 1971 – Bruce, Helen, Jenny, Diane & Doug



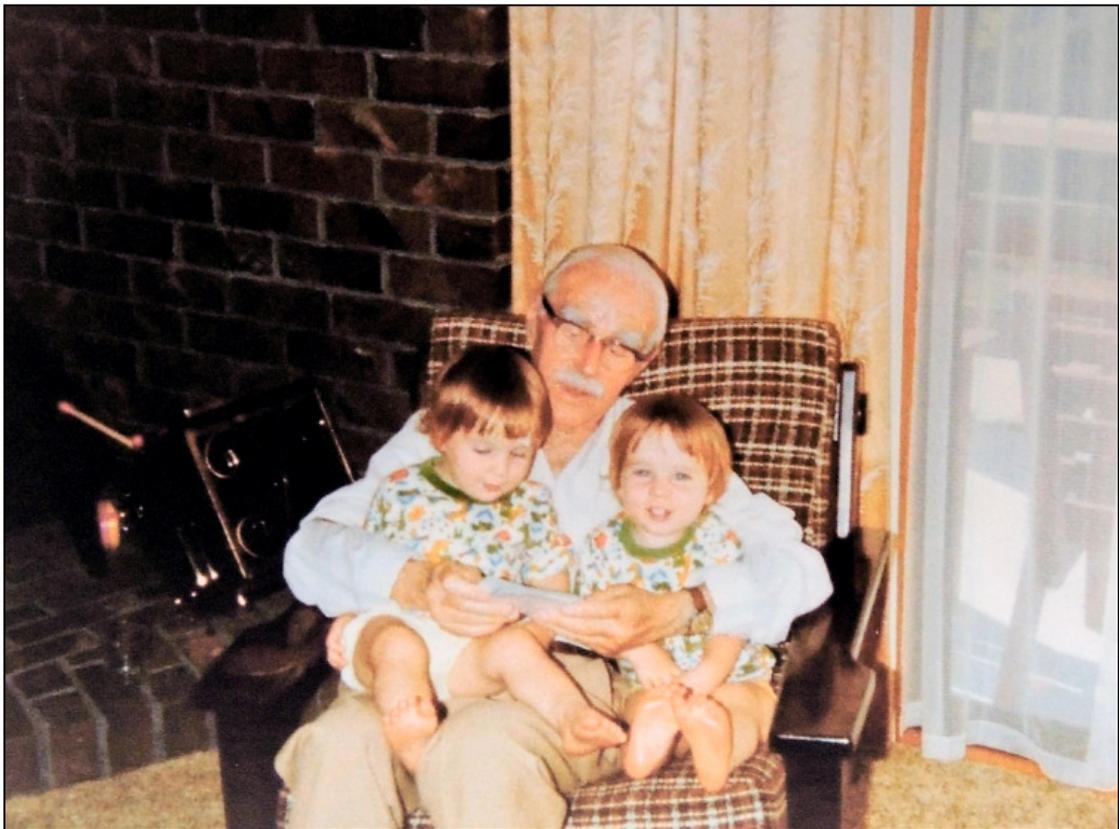
Diane and Ian Matheson's wedding 14 Jan 1978 – Bruce, Jenny, Ian, Diane, Helen & Doug



Doug, Helen & Diane



Bruce and Shellie Collins with their two daughters



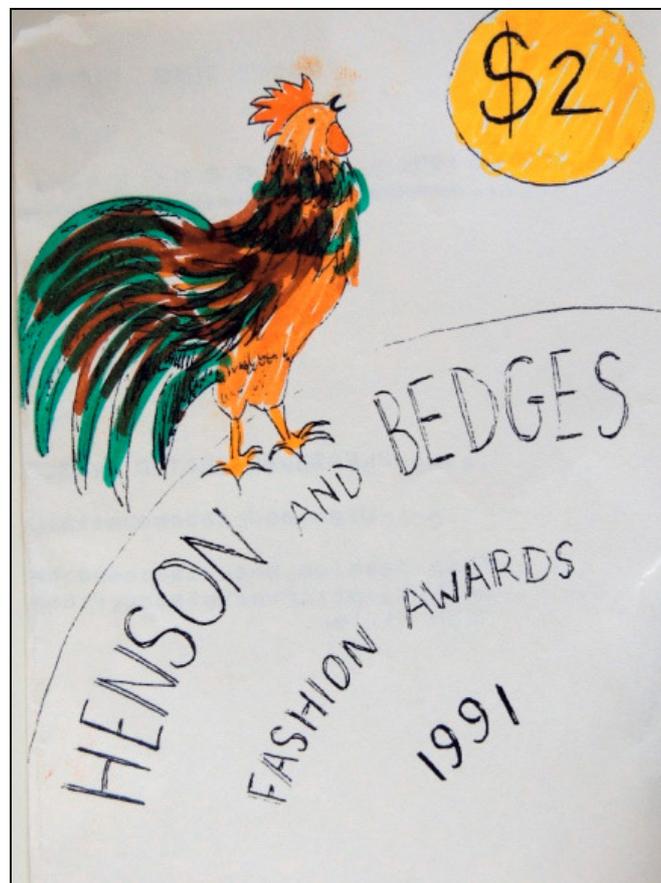
Poppa Alf with his twin great-granddaughters

In 1978, after Aunt Sophie (the owner) sold the camp ground at Acacia Bay, Helen and Doug bought a unit in Taupo. But life changed drastically within a few months with Doug's sudden death from unexpected heart problems. On January 19, 1979, one month before his 61st birthday, Doug was launching his boat for an early evening fishing trip with Helen when he collapsed on the beach beside the boat ramp at Acacia Bay.

Helen found the strength to carry on and decided to sell the house at Matua and buy a smaller townhouse with a spa pool. Over the next few years there were many changes of address but Helen loved the excitement of buying and selling property and often said she would like to be a Real Estate Agent. With her flair for colour and interior decorating she created some beautiful homes but it wasn't long before she was onto another project, always looking for the next challenge.

Helen eventually moved into Greenwood Park Village in Tauranga, and enjoyed the friendship and company of other people there. She became involved in village life and organised a very successful Fashion Parade called the "Henson and Bedges Evening", using recycled garments. She had wonderful time buying beautiful unwanted evening wear from second hand shops and designing costumes for the show.

Life was to be lived and Helen did not stop at anything which caught her imagination.



'Henson and Bedges' fashion parade invitation.

Helen made close friendships over this time, one gentleman in particular. She still preferred to live her own life but enjoyed going away for a weekend, and then coming home to his home cooked meals. She chose to stay on her own for the rest of her life as Doug was her soulmate, and she believed that no one could love their children as much as he had.



Helen as Ship Captain

Helen loved overseas travel, and was always planning new ventures, including her big OE to the UK and Europe in 1984. Other holidays included cruises around the Islands and a trip to Asia.



Tropical beach holiday in Fiji



Sorrento, Italy

Helen continued to love planes and flying as she had as a child and joined the local gliding club where she won a scholarship giving her hours of gliding time. On a holiday in Thailand she went paragliding, insisting on wearing her glasses for the flight, despite being told they would fall off and she would lose them. Helen always said she couldn't think without her glasses on.

Later, on holiday with her daughter Diane, at Parakai near Helensville, she met a family who had a parachute business and arranged to do a parachute jump. On the weekend of the jump, Helen spent five hours training and then did what she had always dreamed of doing. Diane said watching was terrifying but Helen achieved her goal and from then on there was no stopping her



Christmas at Greenwood Park Village



Snakes in Asia



Ukule lessons



Pedicure on the beach in Thailand

The parachute jump was followed by White water rafting, even though she admitted she lost her paddle on the first bend. For her 70th birthday, the family took Helen Black Water rafting at Waitomo.



Five hours training for the parachute jump at Parakai



Helen preparing for her first parachute jump



Walking to the plane for the jump



White water Rafting



Black Water Rafting at Waitomo

Helen still enjoyed camp life and the people she met. She loved caravans and was proud to say she had owned 19 over her lifetime. She knew the names of every caravan on the market, and spent many happy hours walking around caravan sales outlets, probably knowing as much if not more than the salesmen.

Helen also bought a tent and happily went away on her own or with her sister Dawn, saying she never stayed home for the weather. She explored different lakes and beaches and always loved swimming wherever she was she staying. She insisted on making sure she had her first dip of the season at Labour weekend, no matter how cold the water was.

When Helen had the opportunity to buy a bach at the Ohau Channel Lodge near Rotorua, she decided to learn to fly cast. She bought a boat so she could go fishing on the lake as she and Doug had always done, and became very adept at taking the small craft out through the weir at the top of the Ohau Channel, onto the lake.



Fly fishing at the Ohau Channel



The Ohau Chanel cabin



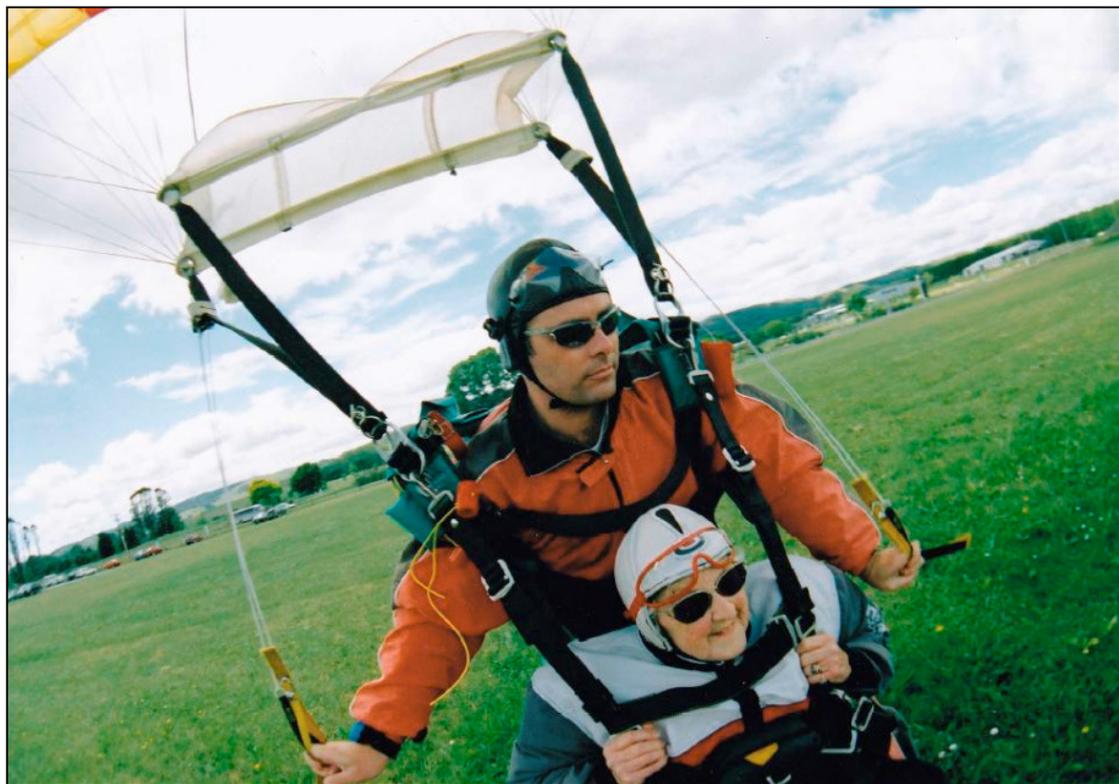
Helen with her boat

Then after 81 years living in Tauranga Helen announced it was time for a change and she was going to buy a home at Regency Park Retirement Village in Rotorua. However, this was not to signal the end of her Adrenalin Junkie lifestyle as she then discovered tandem sky diving and after several sky dives, did her final one at the age of 84, to raise money for Rotary. As she said how else was she going to get a six-foot man strapped to her back.



Tandem Sky Diving, Rotorua, 2005

She landed safely on the ground and as the event was captured on TV One News she was heard to say, "That is the most wonderful thing I have ever done."



Skydive swansong for flying gran



OCTOGENARIAN Helen Collins freefalling for one final time with Rotorua's NZONE tandem master Brendan Jack.

PICTURE: HERBIE RATAHI

By ABIGAIL CASPARI in Rotorua

THE first words out of 84-year-old flying granny Helen Collins' mouth after jumping out of a plane from 3650m [12,000ft] said it all.

"That's the most wonderful thing I have done in my life."

The adrenalin junkie, who is not afraid to give anything a go, jumped out of a plane for the fourth time yesterday.

Having already completed a solo jump at 914m [3000ft] and two tandem skydives at 2430m [8000ft] and 2740 [9000ft], all Mrs Collins wanted to do was jump from 3650m with "a six foot man strapped to my back".

She attempted last weekend but it was too windy. Yesterday she "fulfilled her dream". And Mrs Collins, who turned 84 on Friday, doesn't reckon there is a better way to celebrate your

birthday. "Everybody should celebrate their 84th birthday by doing this."

Mrs Collins, who was still feeling a little giddy when she spoke to the *Daily Post* moments after landing, is adamant she is hanging up her parachute for the final time.

"This is my swansong... You've got to stop somewhere. If you push yourself too much you don't enjoy yourself."

However, Mrs Collins still has a few

other adventures planned — swimming with dolphins and taking a hot air balloon ride. Mrs Collins was one of 18 people who skydived for charity yesterday raising between \$7000 and \$9000. The Rotarians over Rotorua charity skydive was organised by Rotary Club of Rotorua Lakes.

Spokeswoman Annette Burgess said it had not been decided which charities would benefit from the money raised.

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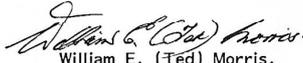
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FOR HELEN
(Girl of the Skies)

Six decades is a long time to hold a thought - seemingly it is never too late to tee off for a parachute jump at 68 ! Restless resident Helen Collins fulfilled an ambition of a lifetime. Since she was eight years old, the thought of a parachute jump was in her fold; she held onto that thought through girlhood, womanhood, marriage and widowhood - what is meant to be will be - was not a plea with her, it was a conviction - a tenting holiday was the catalyst to reality;

A family running a parachute jump school at Parakai, quietly one weekend Helen left Greenwood Park for pastures new at a parachute school north of Helensville. Five hours exercise of spills and drills, would her body stand the strain as she obeyed commands again and again. A twenty questionnaire, before she took to air - all questions right, the jump was in sight. Sitting in the open hatchway of a small plane - "your turn now", the instructor said, firmly planting her feet on the wheel strut holding with thumb and fingers the slanting brace of the wing, wind tugging at her trousered legs, leaning back as she had been told, it must have taken courage to work that thumb and fingers free. One split second facing what might have been eternity.

She was in a given place watching a cotton ball sky floating lazily by; juggling toggles of the chute listening to instructions from the ground the radio in her helmet a life-line - she had no thoughts as she floated free under an orange and gold canopy. Just a spec in a great expanse a panorama of space, the earth taking on contour shape and form, a pencil thread of white becoming a roadway, as 'terra firma' hovered in sight. Others landed far away, Helen hit the spot she had planned to hit all day, then her feet were on the ground gathering folds of her chute gazing in astonishment at a blood bespattered suit, a torn thumb as she left the plane unnoticed in her ecstasy of floating free. A cheering crowd, kisses from 26 people who would follow in her wake - she was the oldest by far - but far too spry to be a grandma!


William E. (Ted) Norris.
14th March 1990.

This poem meant a lot to Helen. It was written by William (Ted) Norris, an archivist with the Tauranga City Council who wrote war poems. He and Helen each had homes in the village at Greenwood Park. She always said he was/had been a poet laureate!