

Helga Brueckl (née Riebau)

Our beloved Helga Brueckl (née Riebau) was born in 1923 in Bremen, Germany, and grew up surrounded by love, laughter, and the companionship of her three siblings – a happy start to what would become a remarkable life.

Her fondest memories were from the town of Vegesack, where their large family garden stretched all the way down to the Weser River. Countless afternoons were spent climbing trees, picking fruit, and running to the river's edge, surrounded by laughter and the simple joys of childhood.

Her father, a well-known author, often welcomed fascinating guests from all walks of life, and her parents ensured the house was always filled with conversation, laughter, and stories – a lively, creative atmosphere that shaped Helga's love of people and ideas.

Everything changed when the war began and the family was forced apart. Helga, then a young kindergarten teacher, devoted herself to her class as well as displaced and orphaned children. Many nights were spent in basement shelters, where bombs thundered overhead and Helga played her accordion, singing with the children to help calm their fears.

The horrors she witnessed were unimaginable, yet she carried herself with quiet courage and grace – traits that defined her for the rest of her remarkable life.

At the end of the war, Helga's creativity and resourcefulness continued to blossom. Together with a dear friend, she opened a toy shop where every piece was made lovingly by hand. An English soldier fell in love with every item and bought out the whole store. She later followed her sister and brother-in-law to Canada, settling first in Edmonton at a time when the city still had wooden sidewalks. Though she held a teaching degree, she explored many paths and new beginnings.

It was in Edmonton that Helga met her husband, Alois, on a blind date over Kaffee Klatsch. They married in 1957 and later welcomed two children, Klaus and Heidi.

A holiday to Victoria in 1964 changed the course of their lives. Helga and Alois fell instantly in love with the garden city. They returned to Edmonton, sold their home, and soon made Victoria their permanent home, where decades of friendship, laughter, and creativity would follow.

In Victoria, Helga became a beloved German language teacher. Her famous Friday night children's classes were so popular that parents often told their kids they couldn't attend unless their chores were finished. She also taught adults, university students, and professors, becoming well known for her clarity, patience, and lively approach. She worked as a translator, was a published author, and contributed to magazines – always finding joy in words, stories, and connection.

Her love of crafting never waned. She was exceptionally talented, designing intricate handmade gifts, and her own line of life-sized dolls. Never one to follow the crowd, she disliked Raggedy Ann dolls and created her own delightful, distinctive alternatives that reflected her imagination and skill.

Helga lived by her simple but profound philosophy: *"Make the best of everything – and if you have no expectations, you won't be disappointed."* It was her quiet strength, optimism, and grace that drew people to her.

She was endlessly curious – an avid reader who loved everything from literature to magazines, a devoted listener of Mozart, and a self-taught musician who played the button accordion, recorder, and piano – all fluently, and all by ear. Her family's Christmases and birthdays were unforgettable celebrations, filled with candlelight, music, laughter, and love.

Helga had a gift for conversation and connection. She was the best listener and a thoughtful friend, and her warmth touched people deeply. Even in later years, many of her children's friends – now adults– continued to reach out to her, drawn by her wisdom, humor, and kindness.

After the passing of her husband in 1984, Helga began a new chapter across from Beacon Hill Park, where she lived independently for more than 30 years. She rode her bicycle daily, surrounded by nature and community, continuing to make friends wherever she went. Her final years were spent at Mount St. Mary, under the care of a compassionate team who came to love her as family. Her joy for life never faded – she still played her accordion, shared stories, and celebrated each milestone, including her 102nd birthday.

Helga's life spanned more than a century of profound change, yet she remained constant in the things that mattered most – kindness, grace, creativity, and love. She will be remembered always as a woman of light and depth, who made every life she touched a little warmer and a little brighter.

She is survived by her children, Klaus (Dianne) and Heidi (Doug) grandchildren Taiha and Mattaius (Barb) and great grandchildren Rowan and Emery, and many nieces and nephews, who will forever cherish her as their greatest teacher, inspiration, and best friend.

It is impossible to capture a life like hers in a few paragraphs. You can only say *thank you* – for the beauty she created the music she shared, and the love she gave so freely.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

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