

# ***Helen Lavender Youth Teller Award***

## **The Helen Lavender Youth Teller Award is awarded annually by TALES Alberta.**

The Youth Teller Award is given in fond and loving memory of Helen Lavender -  
September 12, 1934 – August 2, 2015

*This profile of Helen, as written by her son Ken Lavender:*

Helen Mae Lavender was born Sept. 12, 1934 at Masefield, Saskatchewan, to parents Ira and Mildred Hunter. At the age of 6 weeks, her family packed up the wagon, hitched up the oxen and moved west over 36 days to Wildwood, Alberta. There her father worked in the lumber camps, her mother cooked and Helen was about as demanding as she would ever be. They lived at Wildwood for another 11 years and around the time the war ended, her family moved to Silver Heights. Helen went to Coronation for high school and worked in a local restaurant to earn board money. She moved to Provost, Alberta and got a job working for the local school superintendent while she completed her high school. On the first day of fall, 1953, as her little sister was being born, she started at the U. of A. where she earned her teaching certificate.

The first summer break from university she earned enough to fund her next year by working on a threshing crew, earning the same wages as the men. It was a summer of very hard work alongside her older brother, but she did what she had to do. The job was marred by only one incident. Norman Pruden, one of the men on the crew, caught a mouse under a swath and dropped it down Mom's shirt as she was pouring coffee. She managed to trap the mouse with her hand until she could set the coffee pot down, then she retrieved it from her shirt and chased him with it for ½ mile. Once again, she did what she had to do.

After university, she returned to the Coronation area for a couple years and taught school at Brownfield until her marriage to Hugh in 1958.

In a few years, they had 5 children, and the kids kept her busy until the youngest started school. After that, with some free time on her hands, she really got busy. Over the next 25 years:

She was a Girl Guide leader.

Played women's softball.

Was a board member for Edmonton Coop.

Maintained a 2400 square foot garden.

Was elected to County Council for a 4-year term.

Shoveled neighbor's sidewalks in the winter, even into her 70's.

Drove a school bus.

Became the first operator of the County Library Bookmobile.

Was a member of the women's flying club The 99's.

Was a member of SC-CC (Storytellers of Canada), TALES Alberta and, TALES Strathcona

Drove seniors to appointments with Driving Miss Daisy.

Wrote 2 children's books and many poems.

Volunteered for the County Library.

Volunteered at A Safe Place Women's Shelter from 1988 to about 2010.

Volunteered at The Strathcona Care Center, where she received an award for over 1000 hours of volunteering in one year, which is equal to half of a full-time job.

In 2010 The Rotary Club of Sherwood Park honored her with a Rotary Integrity award. These awards are given to non-Rotarians who have made a significant contribution to their community.

Until recently, she was very active in TALES, The Alberta League Encouraging Storytelling, helping to set up the Sherwood Park chapter, which continues to this day.

Mom was so busy with all of her volunteer work and meetings that she had to be very organized to keep everything straight. My sisters, who between them had 7 grandkids, tell me that Mom had to check her Daytimer before she could commit to babysitting any of her grandkids for an evening or weekend. She loved spending time with the young ones, Donovan, Katrina, Kyle, Steven, Corey, Michael and Meghan, because she saw it as an opportunity to teach them something, to pass on her love of reading, and to “undo” some of the lessons they might have learned from their parents. She often took one or more on road trips down to Dawn and Harvey’s farm, where she felt she was going back to her roots, and loved helping her sister with her huge garden, or riding horses, or helping with cattle, fencing and other chores.

For recreation, as well, Mom wasn’t one to put her feet up and watch TV. She watched as Hugh got his private pilot’s license, and thought to herself, ‘Well how hard could it be’, so she got hers too, taking lessons from her good friend, Jo Harris. Several years later, Helen and Jo and two others flew a 4-seater Piper to New Orleans and back, for fun. As a member of the 99’s, she and others spent quite a few weekends painting rural airport names on runways to aid private pilots.

She and Hugh joined a gold panning club in Edmonton and spent time in Alberta and BC panning for gold. They bought an old bus and spent several summers in the Barkerville, B.C. area enjoying the outdoors and hoping to strike it rich. Like a lot of things, it probably cost more than it earned, but the real point was getting out and doing something interesting.

Through all of these activities, Mom made friends and touched people’s lives. As my sister Kathy says, she had more friends than family, and that’s a lot!

Helen and Hugh celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the Wye hall in 2008, and friends and relatives joined them to celebrate.

Since fall of 2013, Mom’s health steadily deteriorated. In November, 2013, she was moved to the Glenrose Hospital in Edmonton, and in August of 2014 to the Sherwood Care Center, where she died peacefully in her sleep August 2.

Mom had a long, busy and, by most peoples’ standards, a fulfilling life. It seems to me that her life was spent mostly in the service of others; us kids, her parents and parents-in-law, and people in need in the community. A few key things that help to sum her up are: She gave much more than she took. She preferred outside over inside. She had what she needed and was happy to share the rest with others. Her overriding theme seemed to be that she was doing OK, so she was going to see if she could help someone else be a little more OK.

## ***What can you say about Helen Lavender? A Tribute to Helen by Mary Hays***

In August of 2015, it was with great sorrow that we marked the passing of Helen – our friend, mentor and fellow storyteller. She will be greatly missed by all. We send our love to her devoted husband and all of her family.

Helen filled our lives. She was funny and feisty! She was a great support to me as a storyteller and when I was president of TALES. She always had time for a long chat on the phone and would offer up good hearted advice.

Helen amazed us with her wonderful and diverse projects. To name a few that touched us:

- She led the TALES group who collected the local history of the Sherwood Park area. The stories were presented in a series of concerts. I particularly remember the story of courage and hard work, “The Ditch of Dreams.”
- Helen was also a self published author - writing 2 volumes about her farm adventures (*A Gift of Trouble*).
- You can hear her tell the clever and complicated story “Master of All Masters” on the first TALES CD, *A Collection of TALES*.
- Helen Lavender was honoured with a TALES Lifetime Membership for her dedicated contributions and years of volunteer work in TALES Alberta in June of 2014. Her tireless advocacy including starting the Chapter Strathcona will not be forgotten. TALES President, Caroline Stuart presented the award to Helen at the TALES Strathcona June potluck. Recently, TALES members attended Helen’s 80th birthday.
- To honour her lifetime contribution to storytelling in Alberta, The Helen Lavender Youth Teller Award was created in 2014. The Award is presented at the TALES Storytelling Festival. The first winner in 2014, was Jennifer Kennedy's daughter, Nuala.
- Helen’s son Ken has been the TALES webmaster for many years. He served us with dedication as an honour to his mom!
- Helen has been a member of Storytellers of Canada and attended their annual conference for many years. Her voice of wisdom was always greatly appreciated.
- Helen attended the TALES Storytelling Retreat for as long as she was able, contributing her stories, hugs, wit and wisdom. *Mary Hays*

*TALES member, Pearl Ann Gooding describes Helen:*

Helen wasn’t just a lover of stories, she was a lover of all people. I remember when I first came into TALES and SCCC 25 years ago, she was very welcoming. So welcoming in fact that I thought she must have me mistaken for someone else. She came over with a bright big smile every time I entered a room, would throw her arms around me and start talking about ... stuff. At first I didn’t have the heart to tell her that she must have me mistaken for someone else but as time went on and I saw her welcome others the same way, I knew she was just being herself and had that way of connecting with people and making them feel like they have known each other for years. Even when I went to Winnipeg for a storytelling function of some sort and didn’t

know many people and was still unsure of my place in the story world, I walked into a building set up for a concert evening and she was there bright as ever and came over to welcome me. I was always at ease with Helen as she never said anything she didn't mean. She was plain spoken so you never had to try to figure out what she was saying – I loved that about her.

She was no nonsense when it came to running things. You put your shoulder to the wheel and pushed along. Even if the wheel fell off, stop grumbling, pick it up, put it back on and keep pushing. She didn't have much tolerance for complainers ... and she told them that too, but if you needed help and were willing to work, she would work as long and as hard as you – probably harder if the truth be told. I traveled back from Regina with her and a couple of other tellers for a storytelling event and one of the tellers was complaining about ... everything. Helen tried to reason with her, justify her feelings, or just get her to see things from a different view point but this person just could not see things clearly. Helen then said very firmly for her to just suck it up and get over it. Then said there is no sense in leaving the air in the car with that kind of tension so she was going to tell a story and proceeded to tell us a silly story that had us in stitches before too long. How I loved Helen.

She could laugh at herself and expected everyone to laugh along. When we were in Yellowknife at the SCCC Conference a few years ago, we rode down on the elevator together for supper and she didn't have her teeth in. I just assumed that they were bothering her so she left them out as we were both talking up a story and it didn't seem to bother her. We went to go in the dining room and she stopped short saying that she had forgotten her teeth – how in the world would she be able to eat without a pair of chompers in! She laughed and turned around and went back upstairs to get them. When she came down, she came and sat by me and giggled quite a while about it. She did enjoy the meal too!

I remember her telling one of my favorite stories, 'The Cobbler and The King' and had her refer to the story as 'her story'. After that, I made sure that I never told that story when I knew she would be around. She had such a personal connection with the story that her claim to it seemed natural. I knew that if I said that I loved that story too, she would have insisted that I be the one to tell it – that was just her way.

She took her roles in storytelling very seriously as she served in every executive position in TALES both provincially and locally, as well she was as a strong supporter of SCCC. I watched in awe as she developed historical project after historical project of the areas she had lived in and made sure she shared the glory. She was a mentor to me both professionally and personally. I will ever be grateful for the times that we were able to work closely together on projects. She was an inspiring woman.