I penned the following words, entitled “Some Extra Memories of Helen”, to send to the Aboody Clan with the following explanation:

Since Dad and I were in Fremantle, Western Australia, and were not able to attend Helen's funeral, I thought I would pen a few extra memories of Helen. I also know that Mum would want me to express something of the bonds of friendship that have united our families across the generations. I begin with some reflections on growing up in Wiangaree in the 1950s where the Halls and Aboodys, bakers and grocers, formed an extended Catholic clan in those northern (predominantly Protestant!) hills north of Kyogle. In writing this I am indebted to her niece Anne’s wonderful Eulogy and the photo-page for being a catalyst for thoughts and memories. Anne’s Eulogy for Helen follows my reflections.

Gerard Hall SM: Feast of St Benedict, 11th July 2005

Wiangaree in the 1950s

Growing up in Wiangaree in the 1950s, Helen was the closest I knew to having a big sister; and the closest Mum and Dad knew to having a daughter. Helen responded to these roles with her characteristic grace and common sense. For example, she would help Mum care for my ill brother, Peter, or provide relief by taking me aside to play games, tell stories or read exciting tales from books. Or she would arrive with unexpected gifts such as a classic book she gave me for a childhood birthday, *The Myths of Greece and Rome*, which I treasure to this day.

I recall when I was six, Helen (who must have been fourteen) taught me to ride a "two-wheeler" bike all the way along the "footpath" from Aboody’s emporium via Gleeson's Post Office, Wade's Shop, Hall's Bakery, and the imaginatively-named "The Flat", to Herd's butchery and the Wiangaree Hall – and back again. Thanks to Helen, I remain an accomplished bike-rider to this day! Later on, Dad tells me, Helen taught Mum to drive the car so she could attend Quota meetings in Kyogle.
When confronted with those primary school assignments on "The Steam Engine" and the "Kokoda Trail", my mother would happily send me to the Aboodys to extract the appropriate information. One needs to recall these were days well before the internet; and Wiangaree library facilities were somewhat limited! I don't recall whether or not these projects were particularly successful, but I do recall the excitement of visiting the Aboodys, and especially Helen, who would teach me to search through the history books and encyclopaedia.

Helen & young Gerard, Wiangaree Railway Station c. 1955

She introduced me to worlds beyond the dreams and imaginations of my childhood – or was it to that place where the dreams and imaginations of childhood abound? In any case, Helen became for me a gateway to knowledge and wisdom.

There were also the festive occasions, the visits of extended family from Lismore and Brisbane, a day trip on the "Billy Goat" (now who remembers that!), picnics by the Richmond River at Wiangaree, or trips to the River Street house at Ballina where Helen's parents, Nancy and Mick, hosted the extended clan. When I recall those occasions, I can still hear Helen's distinctive voice.
and laughter ringing in my ears (including her disbelieving "aaww Chappy" at yet another hyperbolic tale!). Her laughter expressed both purity and fun.

**Barbara, Joe and young Peter, Helen at Richmond River, Wiangaree c. 1950.**

I was also part of Helen's rite of passage from country schoolgirl (uniformed and waiting for the bus to take her to the Kyogle Convent School for the Intermediate Certificate) to city nurse. Helen, Chappy, Mum, Dad and myself all piled into Joe's blue Holden (according to Barbara, the Halls beat the Aboodys in the car-acquisition stakes!) on route to Princess Alexandra Hospital Brisbane for Helen to begin her nursing training (which, in those days, was like entering the convent!). For some reason, I recall we drove via the (very unsealed) Kyogle-Murwillumbah Road – and had barbecued sausages along the way! This was for me a great adventure. For Helen it was the start of her dream of a nursing career – and a life beyond Wiangaree!

**The World Beyond the 1950s**

Indeed, there was to be life for Helen beyond both Wiangaree and the 1950s – as Anne has documented. I too remember the excitement we all shared in Helen's graduation and then the announcement of the big trip to England and Canada by boat. I was about fifteen and recall writing and receiving letters/cards from Helen from exotic overseas locations (and pretending to the other boys at Woodlawn I was the boyfriend!). In fact, Helen did have a
Canadian boyfriend, Ken, who pursued her across the Pacific. He was even brave enough to meet most of the Aboody clan! If Helen was interested – and I think she was – she was not interested *enough* to leave home, family and kin to live in Canada. [By comparison, three of the six nurses – from memory – were married *during* the trip!].

Both before and after the overseas trip, Helen had several stints working in Sydney. For part of this time, she stayed with my mother's sister and brother-in-law, Agnes and Phil Gay, in the Belmore family home. When I went to the seminary in the late 1960s, I saw quite a bit of Helen at Sydney family gatherings or seminary visiting days. And I recall visiting her when she got her own pad. She always had such beautiful things, especially books and music, brought back from overseas or collected since. And she continued to surprise with the elegance and poignancy of her gifts: for my 21st birthday, she gave
me a blue lambskin edition of *Lord Alfred Tennyson's Collected Poems* (still treasured alongside *The Myths of Greece and Rome*).

In those days, Helen was a mixture of avant-garde (she smoked "Kent", a popular choice of Sydney nurses at the time!) and what we would call today classically religious. She often attended daily Mass at St Patrick's, Church Hill, and Marist Chapel at Circular Quay. She loved discussing philosophy, theology, art, literature and other topics. Helen's knowledge of history and culture plus her experience of the wider world provided her with passion, insight and originality which she brought to these discussions.

Helen's integrity, intelligence, moral sensibilities and increasing scrupulosity led her to question many things including medical ethical practises in hospitals. For example, she objected to the way in which nurses were being pressured to participate in medical abortion procedures. These and other factors led her to discontinue her nursing vocation and, for a while, to rid herself of many personal possessions including her car.

Helen (middle) with her sister Barbara & Gerard
Looking from the outside, something seemed to snap in Helen as if all the suffering in the world weighed upon her. This is a profoundly spiritual experience that only the most sensitive are called to undergo. In the words of the poet Virgil: *sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt* ["There are tears of the heart and mortality touches the soul"]. While Helen's personal journey in these latter decades was one of dealing with inner-struggle and various forms of ill-health, she retained her intelligence, wit, ability to laugh and love for family. She also developed what Anne calls her "eclectic collection" of things beautiful, exotic, historical, cultural and religious. [See Anne’s Eulogy for Helen below]

**Finally**

I always think there is something in birthdays. Helen's birthday, 6th January, is the Feast of the Epiphany which celebrates God's presence in Jesus at his birth through the story of the Magi, the "three kings from the East", who follow the star to Bethlehem to discover the Christ-child. Helen's Christ-likeness, evident in the purity and simplicity of her life, grew though her scrupulosity, religious questioning and struggles with the world's moral ambiguities. She also followed the stars of love and adventure, truth and goodness, integrity and rectitude, generosity and kindness.

Fittingly, Helen died in Holy Week when we recall the suffering and death of Christ as a prelude for the Resurrection. Now that Helen's life-adventures and life-struggles are at an end, we pray she may share eternal life with God when every tear will be wiped away, every hope fulfilled and every dream come true. May the angels greet Helen in Paradise and rejoice, as we have, in her shy but beautiful smile, her sense of fun and humour, her exquisite intelligence, her love for reading, music and every fine thing that reflects the divine mystery in human life.
I penned the above words, entitled “Some Extra Memories of Helen”, to send to the Aboody Clan with the following explanation:

Since Dad and I were in Fremantle, Western Australia, and were not able to attend Helen's funeral, I thought I would pen a few extra memories of Helen. I also know that Mum would want me to express something of the bonds of friendship that have united our families across the generations. I begin with some reflections on growing up in Wiangaree in the 1950s where the Halls and Aboodys, bakers and grocers, formed an extended Catholic clan in those northern (predominantly Protestant!) hills north of Kyogle. In writing this I am indebted to her niece Anne's wonderful Eulogy and the photo-page for being a catalyst for thoughts and memories. Anne’s Eulogy for Helen follows.

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HELEN ABOODY’S EULOGY
by
Helen’s Niece, Anne Thacker (Aboody)
28 May 2004

Helen Aboody was born Edna Helen Cecelia Aboody-Zahloot on 6th January 1942, the youngest daughter of Michael and Nancy Aboody. They were immigrants from Lebanon. She had four sisters: Olga, Nezza, Regina (now deceased), Barbara, and two brothers Chappy and Greg. They lived around the Kyogle – Lismore – Ballina Districts. [Note: With the death of Barbara in 2017, all siblings are now deceased. RIP]

Helen went to school at Wiangaree and Kyogle. After school, she trained at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane and became a Registered Nurse. The graduation photograph re-produced on the card being distributed today had written beneath it “From the Finished Article”. Helen nursed at Crown St Hospital, Sydney and achieved her Obstetric Nurse’s Certificate there in 1964. Later, she returned to live and work at the Kyogle Maternity Hospital and while there delivered her niece, Margaret Aboody. She also worked at the Lismore Base Hospital.
Helen spent her life keeping herself informed, mainly through the radio, and then sharing the information with her extensive family and friends. She was a great communicator and wrote letters full of her views on the world. She was not judgmental of people but vigorously spoke her mind on all sorts of things. She had a flair for all things French – she loved Paris, had a Renault with a number plate that laughed “HA” and she used Este Lauder perfume... She collected books, records and videos. She has left us her elaborate Book of Kells, and “Art Treasures of the World”. She also loved music, especially Dean Martin who took precedence over completing Sunday 7.00pm Mass as Helen did a bolt back home to switch on the television ready for “Everybody loves somebody sometime...”

In the mid-1960s she travelled around the world with five nursing friends, working in Canada and England. Those were the last days of touring by ocean liner and via the Suez Canal. She was away for over two years and returned to inspire others with the “travel bug”, including her adventurous mother, Nancy.

Helen was the link between the generations. She lived with her mother here in Ballina until Nancy passed away in 1979. In their house at Brunswick Street there was always healthy debate over a good coffee. That house housed an eclectic collection of interesting studies including shells, cactus, music, St Francis of Assisi and Helen’s developing skepticism which of course was the link to the younger generation made up of her nieces and nephews. She didn’t take things on simply because they were modern but she was, always, contemporary. Her wisdom and knowledge will be sorely missed.

She dealt with her declining health with great dignity and fortitude. She did not enjoy good health for some ten years but did not become embittered.

Helen lived her Christianity. Nursing gave her the opportunity to develop her love and care for people. She will be remembered for her generosity, love and kindness to people. This extended to being thoughtful and attentive. She always spent the time to greet individuals be they children or adults and enquire about what they were doing. This quality kept her close to the wide variety of people in her network of influence. We will miss her.

Anne Thacker