



Helen “Grandma” Boyd

(1928 -)

“I think people today live far too fast and material things seem to mean more than life itself.” Helen Fretts was born in Medicine Hat, Alberta. She quotes Rudyard Kipling, who said that “Medicine Hat has Hell for a basement” in reference to the natural gas that flowed underground. Helen was much younger than her four siblings, and spent a lot of time as a very young child hanging around with her mom, while she attended to her daily duties. She credits her mom, a very hard worker, with being the most influential person in her early years.

She met her future husband, a member of the Princess Patricia Regiment, on a train trip when returning from a vacation. They were married in November of 1950, not three months after having met, and had 8 children in rapid succession. While her husband was wonderfully supportive with the children when he was home, Helen raised them mostly by herself, because he was on active duty with the army, and away most of the time. Through this experience, Helen learned to be highly organized, maintain a regular schedule of tasks, and used patience as her main guiding principle.

After retiring from the army, and 44 years of marriage, her husband unexpectedly moved to Ontario. Helen says that this separation, while painful and difficult, made her a stronger person. She had to sell everything and get on with her life. She found it helpful to keep busy and be with people.

Helen’s volunteer life began in 1993 at her granddaughter’s school in Abbotsford. She immediately saw how much the school system needs volunteers, and when they moved to Mission three years later, Helen continued to volunteer in her granddaughter’s new classroom and on field trips at Mission Central Elementary. Then, when no one could be found to run the concession at lunchtime, Helen offered. Ten years later, she continues to operate the concession.

An article in Canadian Living Magazine about their Breakfast for Learning Program caught Helen’s attention, which resulted in a \$1700 initial sponsorship. For the last five years, Helen has arrived at the school every morning by 7:15 to prepare and serve a hot breakfast, attended by approximately 40 students. She says it makes her feel good because she has “given them a full tummy”. One boy who used to be “just wired” in the morning, and who is a regular at the breakfast, now arrives in class calm and attentive.

Helen thinks her nickname, Grandma Boyd, originated because of her granddaughter being a student at the school. At first, the students started calling her Grandma, and now she says, all the teachers and even the district superintendent refer to her as Grandma Boyd. Helen says, “I just do things because it feels good. I hope I’ve made an impression on just one child.”

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