

Helen was a legend in Albany Presbytery and at First Presbyterian Church of Hudson Falls. She was a lifelong Presbyterian who never missed a Sunday. She was presbytery moderator in 2004 and served on the Committee on Ministry. Helen also served on the Hebron Camp Committee and the Hebron Center Board where she worked faithfully and long to serve the children, young people, and adults of Albany Presbytery in that beautiful "thin place" in Washington County -- and all those who had one of their most cherished times of closeness to God in that place. She was a delegate to the General Assembly. She taught Sunday School and even led church services in emergencies if the pastor was gone.

She taught 5th grade for 35 years. She stood with the other teachers and picketed when the school had budget issues. She was co-president of the wrestling club when her son was on it. She was an excellent athlete in her own right, playing on the undefeated softball team: The Untouchables, and her boys have her to thank for their knowledge of baseball.

She knit, she sewed, she did pottery, and all kinds of crafts. She loved history and that love instilled in her a deep patriotism. She and her husband, Ron, visited 46 state capitals in her retirement. And if you've ever once been to her home, there was no escaping her love of eagles and strawberries. They were everywhere. She was an unforgettable, remarkable, brilliant, savvy, confident, powerhouse of a woman. And then came Alzheimer's. People began to notice that her razor sharp mind was starting to slip. And it was sad.

But what started as sad became tragic as that vicious disease dug its claws in to her brain. She got sick. She had to be hospitalized. She needed extra care. She stopped recognizing people. She became furious when people would come around. She would shout profanity and threaten violence. It was awful. This once bright, happy, influential woman had been reduced to a shell of her former self: one that no one recognized, and one that recognized no one. And she was trapped in that body. Not for a day, or a week. But for months and months and months. She was a prisoner. A slave to an ailing body, and a mind crippled by a cruel disease. It was heartbreaking to see.

She held on longer than anyone expected. But then, a couple of weeks ago, she died. And as hard as that is, in some ways she died a few years ago. She hasn't known me, or you, or even her sons, or Ron, for a long time. She's just known unhappiness and suffering. But now it's over. The psalm says, "God makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters and restores my soul."

About midnight on January 4, Helen was finally set free from her prison. And though that disease had dug its claws into her, it couldn't hold on any longer. And when the sun came up on that Wednesday morning, for the first time in months she could appreciate it, because she was no longer a slave to disease. She was walking by God's side. She sat, very ladylike and dressed to the nines, in the green pastures. She took God's hand and walked beside the still waters. She felt the sun on her face and breathed deeply and knew herself again, for at long last, her soul was restored.