

Mary Helen Tweedie Parsons

April 13, 1931 ~ August 29, 2021

Mary Helen Tweedie Parsons, of Salt Lake City, Utah, died on August 29th, 2021 at the age of 90. Though everyone fortunate enough to know Mary Helen knew her to be lovely and gracious, she was much more than that. She was a woman of parts: a musician, an adventurer, an intellectual, a mother, a grandmother, and a healer.

She was born to David Hume Tweedie and Flora Beryl Workman Tweedie in Hurricane, Utah on April 13, 1931. She was the fifth of six children, and her father succumbed to a lung illness when Mary Helen was a toddler. This left Flora, a young mother, with a large family to raise alone. This created one of the first key values in Mary Helen's life: Knowing the importance of frugality and hard work. Often, that meant extremely hard work, such as harvesting strawberries when she was five years old.

Mary Helen earned a BS in Nutrition Science at Utah State University, taught at the Brigham Young University nursing extension in Salt Lake City, and earned her MS in Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Utah. She also earned her credentials as a Registered Dietitian. Mary Helen's intellectual discoveries never ended. She was a voracious reader and attended BYU Education Week year after year, dove into all manner of study groups, and volunteered as a docent with the LDS Church History Museum for twenty years.

Mary Helen met Alan Thayer Parsons when he walked into an LDS Church for a game of ward basketball, and left with a starring role in the play she was directing. Alan soon converted and was baptized as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and they married in 1956.

Six children followed in short order, with Mary Helen juggling babies, teaching nutrition to nursing students, and serving in multiple church positions. Most children are notorious for casually mentioning they promised their mom would bake three dozen cookies for a bake sale the next day. Or that they have a ten-page assignment on ancient Rome due Monday, on a Sunday night. Now imagine this times six. Yet every time cookies were baked, Ancient Rome was built in a day, field trips were volunteered for, and room mother positions filled. Not only for her children, but later for her grandchildren as well.

Mary Helen's greatest passion was music and the arts. She performed with the Utah Symphony Chorus for twenty years and served on its board of directors. Mary Helen was a devoted season ticket-holder for the Utah Symphony and Opera for decades. She prioritized visiting every art museum and attending every musical performance that she could when traveling. Mary Helen was the talented bedrock of music programs in her ward, as the chorister, choir director, and neighborhood choir member.

After twenty years of marriage, Mary Helen divorced Alan, but she insisted on civility and kindness between them. This meant he was welcome at family gatherings, holidays, even some vacations, along with his current wife. This crystalized another key element to Mary Helen's personality, her unselfishness.

But those who knew Mary Helen for her selflessness and loving nature may have missed her sharp wit, and keen intellect. Working at the Utah Maternal and Infant Clinic, a state program for supporting high-risk pregnancies, was a perfect fit for Mary Helen. She guided countless women with serious medical conditions through healthy pregnancies, often traveling through rural Utah and onto the Ute and Navajo reservations to consult on cases there. She was especially proud of her research with PKU patients, and the paper she co-published with a doctor from the clinic.

Mary Helen's wanderlust really took off when she retired, traveling all through the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. She traveled overseas, everywhere from Russia, Israel, Peru, and China, with particular stops in Fiji, South Africa, Europe, and Argentina to visit her children living abroad. But the true heart of her travels was in Scotland, visiting the Fraser clan's castle and admiring the "Fluffiest and wooliest sheep in the world!"

Mary Helen may have begun her life with very conservative beliefs, but she was never afraid of change and evolution. She had the ability to see that two opposing things could both be true. She could hold to her core values but always return to her "factory default setting," which was love. She faced the wildly challenging events of the pandemic and chaos here in America with a stern determination to, "Get people to listen to each other. Really hear what the other person has to say!" Even during the especially intense periods of political strife and discord in the past two years, Mary Helen continually marveled at, "How good people can be. There is so much love in this world!"

Here's a word that some people who knew and loved Mary Helen might not associate with her: indomitable. She carried on through challenges that would crush the strongest of us, but perhaps the biggest challenge was her diagnosis of colon cancer in November 2020, which metastasized to her liver and lungs. Her oncologist warned the family that she would have perhaps five months, but in late August she was spelunking through the Lehman Caves in Nevada and watching the Perseids meteor shower with her daughters and grandchildren.

Mary Helen was preceded in death by her son Tym Parsons; her grandson MacLean Collard; her brothers Wilden Tweedie and Armand Tweedie; her sister Barbara Poulson; and her former spouse Alan Parsons.

Mary Helen is survived by her children, Tamara (David) Pitman, Kelly (Vicki) Parsons, Erin (Todd) Collard, Jenne (Bill Allred) Parsons, Juli (Don) Ulvestad, and daughter-in-law Marcia Tapp. Her beloved,grandchildren include Elizabeth and Mary-Helen Pitman; Kyle, Lindsay, Riley, Devin, and Connor (Christina) Parsons; Zachary and Zoe Collard; Gabriel and Flora Allred; and Jake, Jenny, Zack, and Matthew Ulvestad. She is also survived by her sisters, Florine Morris and Charliene Reed.

Services will be held on Saturday, September 4, 2021, at 12 pm at the LDS 27th Ward in Salt Lake City. A viewing is scheduled for 11 am. In accordance with LDS Church and health department recommendations, masks will be required. The family respectfully suggests donations to Primary Children's Medical Center in lieu of flowers.