



## Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder

August 24, 1931 - June 10, 2019

Helen Marie{Kerschbaum}Crowder died peacefully at home surrounded by her loving family on June 10, 2019. We will celebrate her life on Wednesday, June 12 from 6-8 pm at Cantlon Otterness & Viets Funeral Home in Buffalo, MO.

There will be a Funeral Mass at St. Williams Catholic Church in Buffalo on Thursday, June 13 at 10 am, and interment and blessings to follow at Charity Christian Cemetery. Afterwards, all are invited to a dinner at St. Williams Parish Hall.

Helen was born on August 24, 1931 in Seattle, WA – a place she returned to and remembered fondly many times throughout her life. Her father, John Kerschbaum, worked in the shipyards there, and instilled a love of the sea (and fresh halibut and salmon) in Helen from a young age. She also had a fondness for hydrangeas and rhododendrons her entire life, because those thrived at her childhood home.

A beautiful moppet with a head of curly blonde hair, Helen won a Shirley Temple look-alike contest at age 3, but her family declined the prize of a trip to Hollywood.

At a time when divorce was uncommon, Helen's parents divorced. The Seattle Times covered the story, and published a photo of little Helen in the courtroom, clutching her doll.

Helen and her younger brother Ronnie moved with their mother to Michigan, where life was very challenging. Helen didn't see her beloved father again for many years until at age 16, she boarded a train bound for Seattle, and her real home. Ronnie was able to join her there later. Her entire life, Helen was plagued with feelings of guilt at leaving five half-siblings with an alcoholic mother and an abusive father. Although it took many years, she was able to reestablish and maintain a close relationship with her little sister, Claudia. The two spoke by phone every month, and in 2017, Claudia visited her Helen in Missouri, and two sisters were finally able to hold hands, share their deepest feelings, and cry together about the past and wasted time.

At age eighteen, by now graduated from school and working at a ticket booth at a Seattle movie theatre, Helen met the love of her life. Sydney Crowder was tall, dark and handsome, a former rodeo cowboy with an easy smile, now in the Air Force stationed at nearby Neah Bay. Lightning struck, and the two wed on January 31, 1953. That day was the one that started it all – thirty years of travel, across the states and the pond, five children, 14 grand kids, and 17 great-grands to love and enjoy. During the early years, Helen excelled at packing up the household for the next move, sewing her children's clothes, cooking, and pinochle with friends.

A vibrant thread weaving its way throughout Helen's entire life was her strong Catholic faith. When times were difficult, the church provided strength and comfort. Mass and the rites of Catholicism were constant anchors to the Crowder family wherever they lived, from Madrid, Spain to Columbus, Ohio.

The time between moves included road trips whenever possible to “the farm”, Sydney's parents' dairy farm in Elkland, MO. Early visits involved baths outside in a metal trough, the outhouse, and retrieving potatoes and canned goods from the dank root cellar for meals. A city girl from birth, Helen came to

love and appreciate the beauty of country living, and when Sydney retired from the AF in 1972, the family moved to their own plot of land in Elkland and built a house, the home they were fortunate enough to remain in the rest of their lives.

Over the years they raised cattle, horses, pigs, chickens and goats, nicknaming the small fenced bit of land next to their back yard “the menagerie pen”. The cattle and pigs were for money and food, but the horses were about pure pleasure – Sydney loved to ride, and they both loved seeing the horses outside their kitchen window. Every tree, bush and perennial they planted, they got to watch grow to maturity. After so many years of travel, the Missouri friends they made and neighbors they met were for life.

In her early fifties, Helen became ill. She was eventually diagnosed with idiopathic cardiomyopathy, and placed on a waiting list for a heart transplant. She waited a year, during which time she became increasingly frail and reliant on cardiac medications. Knowing it might be her last Christmas, Helen's children arranged for her brother Ronnie to fly in from Seattle for a surprise visit. Four days later, on Dec. 29, 1989, Helen received a healthy heart at age 57 (donated by the family of a 17 year old motorcycle accident victim) at St. Louis University Hospital. In a sad twist of fate, her brother Ronnie died suddenly less than a month later, so it was their final visit after all. Helen also outlived her transplant surgeon, world renowned surgeon Dr. Larry McBride, who died at age 60 after suffering a heart attack on his treadmill. Helen visited Dr. McBride many times after her transplant, and remained ever grateful to him. His skill, and her new heart allowed her another thirty years of living fully. She was also eventually able to communicate her gratitude to the donor family, and became an outspoken advocate for organ donation and the American Heart Association. She was very actively involved in the Springfield Transplant Support Group, and spearheaded a fundraiser for her local fire

department to purchase their first AED.

Over the years, Helen's life on the farm was complicated by cancers and other serious health challenges. Many times the family would gather in an ICU waiting room at Mercy, reminiscing about “life in the Crowder family” and waiting to see if she would beat the angel of death once again. And, she did - every single time. Helen Marie was strong, and a fighter. Despite many odds, she just kept going. Her children attributed her strength to farm life, where there was always something to fix, something to feed, something to plant. She was relied on, and maybe that was the secret to her longevity. Her babies grew up, all five healthy and happy, each instilled with the gift of a strong work ethic. Helen was smart, she liked to be right, and she usually was.

Life slowed, as it does. The calves were sold, and not replaced. Two horses were the last to go, adopted by family friends who promised them a good life on their Halfway farm. Every year Helen looked forward to a road trip to Gulf Shores and New Orleans with Sydney and daughters.

Every Wednesday afternoon for decades, Helen and her best friends (they called themselves the Charity Belles) would meet in nearby Charity to visit. These women, from all walks of life, formed a strong bond celebrating the week's triumphs, mourning losses together, and solving the problems of the world and small town America – together. Weeks became routine, making life easier. Helen's hair appointment every Friday morning, and Mass at St. Williams in Buffalo every Thursday and Sunday morning. Her last year, Helen enjoyed going to the Engel Senior Center in Buffalo as often as they could, not just for lunch but for the socialization. When Helen, then Sydney, stopped driving, they were so grateful for the OATS bus, and the kindness of their drivers.

Reading, one of Helen's life long pastimes, became difficult, as her eyes tired.

Breathing with exertion became labored. Helen grew to enjoy quiet time sitting on their back porch looking out at the beautiful yard, the flowers all around, the wind chimes tinkling in the breeze. Sometimes, if she was still, rabbits would come up on the porch to nibble on the straw mat at her feet. It was peaceful time, spent reflecting on a long life well-lived, on a family well-raised, on a job she did as best she could. She and Sydney bought headstones for themselves, and had them placed in the little Charity cemetery just down the road, where Sydney's parents rest. She picked out songs, and instructed her children that when the time came, she wanted a party, not a funeral.

We (Helen's children) would live to thank all of her and our friends for their support during Mom's passing. We would also like to recognize Mom's primary care physician, Dr. Raj Anand MD, and Dr. Craig Naugle MD, her dermatologist, for their wise and compassionate care. Both of these Springfield physicians treated Mom (and Dad also) frequently for many, many years, always with dignity and respect.

In lieu of flowers, you are invited to make memorial contributions to the American Heart Association, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, or St. Williams Catholic Church.

Online condolences may be directed to [www.cantlonotterness.com](http://www.cantlonotterness.com).

We hope you can join us as we celebrate our amazing mother.

Debra Burgess (Springfield), Nancy Rikard (Springfield), Susan Krueger (Elkland), Patti Thornton (Bolivar), and John Crowder (Elkland).

# Cemetery Details

## Charity Christian Cemetery

Charity, MO

# Previous Events

## Visitation

JUN **12**. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Cantlon-Otterness & Viets Funeral Home - Buffalo

931 W. Main St.

P.O. Box 993

Buffalo, MO 65622

(417) 345-2211

[info@cantlonotterness.com](mailto:info@cantlonotterness.com)

<https://www.cantlonotterness.com>

## Service

JUN **13**. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Williams Catholic Church

BUFFALO, MO

# Tribute Wall



“ *Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder*

October 09, 2023 at 12:27 PM



“ *Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder*

October 09, 2023 at 04:09 AM



“ *Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder*

October 05, 2023 at 11:14 PM



“ *Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder*

October 05, 2023 at 05:41 PM



“ *Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder*

December 20, 2022 at 10:20 AM



“ *Helen was a wonderful, loving, caring woman. She will be greatly missed by many. Our thoughts and prayers are with you at this time.*

*Curt & Kathy Wilson*

*Aaron & Casey Wilson and family*

*Leslie & Brandon McCarthy and family*

*John Wilson and family*

Leslie McCarthy - June 12, 2019 at 05:42 PM

EP

“ *Employees and owners of Schultz and Dooley's Pub purchased the Country Basket Blooms for the family of Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder.*



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**Employees and owners of Schultz and Dooley's Pub** - June 12, 2019 at 11:27 AM

CL

“ *Claudia and Larry purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder.*



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**Claudia and Larry** - June 11, 2019 at 10:42 AM

PT

“ *Best mom ever!! I'm gonna miss you*

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**Patti Thornton** - June 11, 2019 at 10:39 AM

CJ

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



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**Claudia Jorgensen** - June 11, 2019 at 09:52 AM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder.*



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June 11, 2019 at 08:52 AM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Mrs. Helen Marie Crowder.*



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June 10, 2019 at 09:57 PM