



## Marjean M. Halopka

June 8, 1924 - September 13, 2017

Marjean Halopka's story as told in her own words in 1993:

Every person who lives on this earth has an interesting story to tell and so I would like to write mine. I am Marjean Metzger Koperski Hang Halopka born June 8, 1924 in Panama City, Panama, of American parents. My mom and dad came to tropical Panama because of the construction of the Panama Canal. My brother Bill was born 18 months after me, and sister Marilyn two years after that.

It is hard to sort out early memories from stories told about myself at that time. I remember a four family dwelling we shared. It was all wood with a wide wooden porch and a screen door. We went on a trip to the US every two years on the Panama Canal Steamship line on a two month summer vacation. One year my dad bough a car in NY and we drove from NY to Minnesota.

Our family moved to Cristobal, Colon on the Atlantic side of the Canal Zone in 1931. We had a duplex for a couple of years where I met Arleen Randall. We were friends all the way through High School and I sang at her wedding in 1945. We again met in 1992 at our 50th High School reunion. In 1933, Dad became an Electrical Supervisor and we rated a house on the beach front facing Colon Bay. All ships transiting the canal sailed into the bay in front of us and then disappeared into the Canal entrance. We had binoculars and could watch activities on the ship. My brother Bill was investigated by the FBI because he was seen checking out the ships.

We had many friends and life was good. My parents were involved with Cristobal Union Church. Mom always taught Bible study or Sunday school and dad was active in the church as well. There was an old upright piano and we all had to take lessons until mom gave up on us! Bill later played the violin and I the flute. We played in the High School Orchestra and learned enough music to enjoy through our lives. I also took voice lessons and sang solos at Church and Rainbow girls. I also on the tennis team (I have a gold tennis ball to prove it) and swam breast stroke, and won some prizes. Cristobal High School had excellent teacher and we were sheltered from the harder life in Colon around

us.

Dad had a big radio on the upstairs porch where we listened to the news or we listened to Fibber McGee and early programs. This is where I remember President Roosevelt telling us that the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor. That night we had an emergency black out for fear the Canal would be next.

I had been told since a small child that I would be going to Carleton College in Minnesota when the time came, so it was that after I graduated from High School, 9th in my class out of 95, I was accepted at Carleton. I was excited about flying to the US by myself via Pan-American clipper...it was a wild trip with stops in Havana Cuba, Miami, Florida and then Orlando where I was offloaded because of service men and I had to take the train. I rode for two days before arriving in Chicago where my Aunts picked me up. I was sent to Carleton because of my family history. My grandmother, and Aunts and Uncles all attended back in the 1890's.

Winter was a climatic shock. I would grab my books and run out the door to class and be hit in the face with the reality of snow and ice and a need for coat, scarf, mittens and boots. What a nuisance! The temperature sometimes got to 25 below. I learned to ice skate; swimming was in another building across campus but hair would be frozen even under a scarf coming back. I sang in the chorus of some 200 voices and singing the Halleluiah Chorus still gives me goose bumps from my first experience.

The summer after my junior year I was employed at War Shipping administration. Soon after my return I was walking to the Washington Hotel for a Sunday dinner with my parents, when we saw the Koperski family across the street and they waved. I knew Barbara and Bob well...that afternoon Bob called and we talked for a long time. He was working in Venezuela as a station manager for PAA and thus deferred. He asked if I would like to play golf the following Sunday afternoon. I accepted although I had never played golf before. He was good looking and I wanted to go out with him. Bob had a month vacation from PAA but then enlisted in the Army Air Corp and was stationed in Panama at France Field. I was dating many others at the time.

I needed credits for only one more semester at Carleton to graduate so I returned to college and completed my degree in January. Bob and I became best friends and fell in love. I went back to Carleton to finish my degree wearing his beautiful ring. He wrote to me every day and we made plans for our lives. I graduated with a BA degree, but was qualified for nothing in particular. An Episcopal minister married us in Cristobal Union Church. We had to get married a second time in the Canal Zone, so the wedding party

drove into the Zone and the ceremony was performed again in the car. We flew to Medellin, Columbia for our Honeymoon at the Nutubara Hotel. Bob spoke fluent Spanish. I remember lavish food, the Spanish culture and shows with orchids, and being chased by a bull down a mountain.

Bob returned to Army duty, and we had a furnished rented apartment where I began to learn how to cook and keep house. The following spring Bob was discharged. We were entitled to transportation to the US, and I was classified as a War Bride. Bob was entitled to schooling, and he chose the aeronautics school in Santa Maria, California. We rented a room, and I went to work at Rosemary Packing Company operating a teletype machine, and Bob went to school. We were there for a year and had a good time exploring the beaches, mountains, parks, and taking our single sleeping bag and sleeping under the stars. The year came to an end. I was pregnant, and the FAA called Bob back to work in Miami.

February, 1948 we drove from California to Miami in our little green car, stopping often so I could get out and walk. I was seven months and very big. Housing was impossible to find but we rented a converted garage. My parents urged me to come home to have the baby since I didn't know any doctors or friends. Bob was loading airplanes and working a night shift. I was lonesome and bored, I flew to Panama the end of February and Robin was born on May 13th, Thursday. They put him on a high table beside me. He was adorable! No hair, waving tiny fists and kicking vigorously. I spent the next six weeks learning how to be a mother. We flew back to Bob early July. Bob saw us across the crowd. I had to go through Immigrations, Customs, carrying baby and baby stuff. I was able to hand Robin over a fence to Bob, their introduction.

This is the end of what Mom had written...the rest of her story from her notes:

Had two more children, Bill 1950 and Marion 1953, three grandchildren; Bill, Brian and Chrissy, and two great grandchildren; Curren and Lou.

1951 President: West Miami Women's Club- Helped Establish town library, community child care and kindergarten

1955: Kindergarten administrator-teacher

1959: Teacher Public schools for next 18 years. Boy Scout, Girl Scouts, little league, summer camping, kids activities

1964: Trip in Camper from Panama to Texas via Pan-American Highway. Forded streams, Mayan Culture, seven countries

1977 Masters of Education, University of Miami, Library and Media; began libraries in two new elementary schools

1986: Retired to Lake house in Avon Park, organized Union Congregational Church library, Church Choir, Women's Fellowship

1987: Bob died of a heart attack, Nov. 11

1989: Married Cornelius Hang. 2 step sons, 2 grandchildren; traveled much. Elder Hostels: Budapest, Canary Islands, Hawaii, Alaska, Arizona, and Colorado

1992: Corny died suddenly of heart attack; I had spine surgery following a fall

1993: Married Earl Halopka, church friend. Hawaiian cruise, moved to the Bluffs in Sebring, Florida

1995 Cruised through the Panama Canal with family; sold Lake House

2001: Moved to Clermont, Florida to be near Robin and Marion...many trips and activities: PEO, Clermont Garden Club, and First United Methodist Church (choir, women's club, bulletin folding)

2008: Earl died

On September 13, 2017, Marjean passed away

She wrote as her mission:

"I will continue to serve my church, my community and my family for as long as I am able. I strive to bring a bit of joy, hope, laughter, faith and peace to those making this life journey with me"

To all who knew her we know she accomplished her mission!

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Mike Conley Hospice House, 2100

Oakley Seaver Drive, Clermont, FL 34711.

# Cemetery

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## **Lakeview Memorial Gardens**

854 Memorial Drive

Avon Park, FL, 33825