

HELEN KALPAKIAN

nee Haigouhi Koolaksezian

Born: 1901

Died: July 28, 1987

Helen Kalpakian was born February 5, 1901, in Adana, Turkey. When she was 13 years old she became a boarding student at the American school, Adana Seminary for girls. It was while at this school, where Miss Grace Towner was principal, that she was spared from death and harassment by the Turks. Both of her parents were massacred by the Turks, but her 10-year-old brother escaped. About five years later he was miraculously reunited with Helen and her family.

On October 18, 1917, at age 16, Helen married Haroutune (Harry) Kalpakian in Adana. She and a girlfriend from the school had gone to Harry's drygoods store a few months earlier and when Harry saw her, he told himself and his family, "This is the girl I'm going to marry."

They were married and lived in Adana where their first child, Angagh, was born in December, 1918. As refugees from the Turks, in 1921 the family moved to Alexandrett, Syria, where they lived for only 4 months. They next moved to Constantinople (Istanbul) and just one week later daughter Peggy was born, in March, 1922. From there they sailed to America in 1923 and arrived in Ocean Park in October. Daughter Betty was born in Venice in January, 1924.

Because Helen had promised her husband to help earn the family's living if they came to America instead of accepting his uncle's job offer to manage a store in Russia, Helen worked hard and many long hours in a job as well as caring for her family at home. Helen's older brother Arthur and sister Doodoo already lived in the Ocean Park

area and Helen already knew English from boarding at the American Seminary in Adana--so these were Helen's reasons for insisting they come to America instead of going to Russia. She won!

The Kalpakians operated several different grocery stores in the Los Angeles area, but bought only 2 homes in their lives--the first one at 6436 Haas Avenue where daughter Harriett was born in September, 1935, and her current duplex at 8645 West Olympic Boulevard.

After Harry's death in 1963--at age 62, Helen began a new career working as a housemother at USC. She was promoted to head resident of Birnkrant Hall, a high rise girls' dormitory. She served 12 years in various dorms at USC and finally retired at age 74, in 1975.

She had never been sick and was a very active and alert person until age 82 when she had her first heart problem. Even with her serious congestive heart failure illness, she bravely survived it for $4\frac{1}{2}$ years--to the amazement of all her doctors. And she was alert and sharp of mind until her last breath!

Her greatest joy and pride of her life was her family--her 4 daughters, 12 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren. She was also forever grateful for the privilege of living in the USA, the "greatest country in the world" where she and her family had found and enjoyed the blessings of freedom.

By Betty Bown
July 28, 1987