



Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke

July 7, 1925 - December 21, 2025

Helen Ann “Hayes” Parke was born on July 7, 1925, in St. Louis, Missouri. At just 18 years old and newly graduated from high school, she met the love of her life, Roy, while working at a “five-and-dime” store in St. Louis as he was stationed there with the U.S. Army. They caught each other’s eye and were married within five weeks, a love story that would last a remarkable 65 years.

Helen and Roy lived and farmed in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, until 1957, where four of their children—Cheryl, Sandee, Bobby, and Colleen—were born. Their fifth child, Gary, was born in Plant City, Florida, in 1963. Helen always said their move to Plant City was providential. Farming year-round was a dream come true, and in the years that followed, they founded Parkesdale Farms, Parkesdale Farm Market, Parkesdale Greenhouses, and Parkesdale Packing and Cooling.

In the early years, Helen worked alongside Roy in the fields while raising five “active” children and maintaining a loving home. She never missed a school play, game, dance, or class trip. Their home became a gathering place for neighborhood children and friends, where Helen made a lasting impact on countless young lives. Together, Helen and Roy served as presidents of Turkey Creek High School’s Band Parents Association, Athletic Booster Club, and PTA.

Helen’s priorities never wavered: God, country, and family. She was a devoted member of GracePoint (Presbyterian) Church of Plant City since 1956, where she and Roy once served as youth leaders.

Helen started Parkesdale Farm Market by selling strawberries from the back of their pickup truck. She was deeply passionate about the strawberry industry and the Florida Strawberry Festival, helping it grow from a small three-day event into an eleven-day celebration with more than 650,000 attendees. Many considered her the “real” Strawberry Queen. The Strawberry Festival Main Exhibition Hall was named the Roy & Helen Parke

Building in
their honor. Helen served as Parade Marshal for the Strawberry Festival
Parade and was
awarded the Hillsborough County Lifetime Achievement in Agriculture Award.

Helen and Roy always came first to each other. They worked hard and played
hard, sharing
a passion for travel. Together they visited every U.S. state, Hawaii more than
once, and later
enjoyed international travel once their children were grown. Their favorite
destinations
included Ireland, Russia, Germany, Australia, and Paris.

Family was Helen's ultimate passion. She was the proud mother of five
children,
grandmother to ten, and great-grandmother to twenty-two, with one more
great-grandchild
due in February. For many years, she hosted family dinners every Monday
night. "Grandma"
was her favorite name.

Those who knew Helen describe her as a woman of deep faith in Christ,
uncompromising
integrity, a tender heart for those in need, great generosity, and a relentless
work ethic. She

was humble, gracious, encouraging, beautiful, classy, and inspiring. Many

consider her not only the matriarch of the Parke family, but of all Plant City. Helen was preceded in death by her parents, Harry and Anna Hayes; her sister, Eldora Oxtan Nagel; the love of her life, Roy E. Parke, Jr.; her daughter, Cheryl Meeks; her son-in-law, Jim Meeks; and her great-grandson, Hayden Hitchcock.

She is survived by her children: Sandee Sytsma (Hank), Bobby Parke (Peggy), Colleen Fulton (Terry), and Gary Parke (Terri).

She is also survived by her grandchildren: Jim Meeks (Xiomara), Erin Parke, Calley Jordan (Chad), Kristen Hitchcock (Brett), Neal Fulton (Taylor), Matt Parke (Kandice), Amanda Ogburn (Michael), Devon Knight (Craig), Jordan Parke, and Joshua Parke.

Her surviving great-grandchildren are McKenna Jordan, Hunter Hitchcock, Patrick McQuaig, Connor McQuaig, Zoe Meeks, Kaden Jordan, Hannah Hitchcock, Hailey Hitchcock, Sara Parke, Piper Meeks, Parker Jordan, Presley Jordan, Kinley Fulton, Ryleigh Fulton, Eli Knight, Finn Knight, Shanna Parke, Rory Ogburn, Isabella Knight, Shelbie Parke, Leif Knight, and an Ogburn baby due in February.

Following a private family service, a Celebration of Life will be held Monday, December 29, at GracePoint Church. The family will receive friends from 3:00–6:00 p.m. In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions be made to the GracePoint Church Capital Campaign, 1107 Charlie Griffin Road, Plant City, FL 33566.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

DEC **29**. 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Gracepoint Plant City
1107 Charlie Griffin Road
Plant City, FL 33566
<http://www.gracepointpc.org>

HW Not Directing

Tribute Wall

HC

“ *Hollie C. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke.*

Hollie C. - December 30, 2025 at 10:33 PM

GJ

“ *My condolences and prayers for the entire Parke family. I knew her as Aunt Helen, and have so many fond memories over the years. She was a wonderful woman, and will be missed.*

Gary and Karen Janes

Gary Janes - December 29, 2025 at 10:58 PM

DW

“ *God called home a true Saint when He called Mrs. Helen home to heaven last week. She was the epitome of beauty, grace, and elegance, always smiling, always making a positive influence on those she came in contact with. My prayers are with the Parke and Hayes family, that God will comfort you all and give you the peace that only He can give. We will miss Mrs. Helen's beautiful smile, and her precious outgoing personality, but we will never forget how she made us feel after being in her presence.*

Much love!

Dodie White

Dodie White - December 29, 2025 at 01:35 PM

DS

“ Our families attended First Presbyterian Church in Plant City so it's safe to say I have known them all my life. I have always been impressed by Helen's very "down to earth" approach to life. The Parke family is a tribute to being raised in a caring Christian home and you can see her influence in all those females of the family. May God comfort each of you and all the memories you hold dear sustain you. Much love, Donna Campbell Sizemore

Donna Sizemore - December 29, 2025 at 11:57 AM

SA

“ Shortcake area planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke.

Shortcake area - December 29, 2025 at 10:54 AM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke.



December 29, 2025 at 10:54 AM

SM

“ Shannon M. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke.

Shannon M. - December 29, 2025 at 05:41 AM

BF

“ Barbara and Steve Thomas and family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke.

Barbara and Steve Thomas and family - December 27, 2025 at 10:25 AM

BF

“ Barbara and Steve Thomas and family purchased the Enduring Grace for the family of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke.



Barbara and Steve Thomas and family - December 27, 2025 at 10:25 AM

SK

“ Sylvia Knox lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke



Sylvia Knox - December 26, 2025 at 04:49 PM

AC

“ Ann Alicia Cowder lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke



Ann Alicia Cowder - December 25, 2025 at 09:44 AM

AC

She was a wonderful lady to represent Plant City.

Ann Alicia Cowder - December 25, 2025 at 09:55 AM

AC

She was a wonderful lady to represent Plant City.

Ann Alicia Cowder - December 25, 2025 at 10:02 AM

DG

“ *Debby Goodson*



Debby Goodson - December 25, 2025 at 07:12 AM

PM

“ *Peggy Damron In Memory Of Moody lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke*



Peggy Damron in memory of Moody - December 24, 2025 at 05:44 PM

MM

“ *Michael Myers lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke*



Michael Myers - December 24, 2025 at 05:25 PM

KR

“ Karen Riley lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke



Karen Riley - December 24, 2025 at 03:53 PM

TF

“ The Coufal Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke.

The Coufal Family - December 24, 2025 at 03:49 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke.



December 24, 2025 at 03:49 PM

CG

“ Christine Gerson lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke



Christine Gerson - December 24, 2025 at 03:36 PM

TF

“ *The McQuaig Family lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke*



The McQuaig family - December 24, 2025 at 03:26 PM

TF

She was a wonderful lady. I was so glad we were friends. She will be missed a lot. R. I. P. Grandma Helen

The McQuaig family - December 24, 2025 at 03:28 PM

AS

“ *April Fleming Sullivent lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Helen Ann "Hayes" Parke*



April Fleming Sullivent - December 24, 2025 at 12:13 PM