

HELEN M. MCCLORAIN

A LIFETIME OF CARING

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FOREWORD

By Scott Hamilton

It's amazing how one person can change the lives of so many, and at the same time change the world.

Over time we get accustomed to hearing about these good deeds from those who want people to know what they have done and how generous they are. I applaud them and will always be grateful for their heart and ability to make a difference in others' lives.

But there is a different type of giver: generous people who don't desire a spotlight, or adoration, or even the slightest bit of acknowledgement. They are rare. Their giving is pure. I admire them more than I could ever express in words.

I know what you may be thinking. If they don't want people to know who they are or what they are doing, how do I know they exist?

I know because one of those "angels" came into my life and changed it forever.

Her name was Helen McLoraine. And even though she is no longer with us physically, her philosophies and generosity live on.

I'll start at the beginning.

In 1976 I was to have my last year on competitive ice. My parents were broke, my mother was going through many different treatments for breast cancer, and I was underachieving. My parents couldn't support my skating any longer, so I was given one more year on the ice. My only plan was to make the most of it.

Through a lot of hard work and determination it started to look like I was going to have my best year ever.

And through the process of having this great year, I had caught the eye of one of the most successful coaches in skating history. His name was Carlo Fassi. He had helped to coach Peggy Fleming to her Olympic Gold Medal and was, that year, in the process of guiding Dorothy Hamill and John Curry to their Olympic victories. But there I was—a promising Junior-level skater about to end my career because of a lack of funds.

The amazing thing was that Carlo had a solution. Sponsorship!

This is where Helen McLoraine comes in.

Helen loved figure skating. She and her husband, Frank, just happened to be investors in Carlo's training facility in Denver. Carlo went to them for help.

I had no idea during the competition that any of this was going on. It wasn't until after I had won the United States Junior Men's National Championship and the medals were given out that my mother told me about what was in the works. The only thing I needed to do to secure my sponsorship was to meet Frank and Helen face-to-face. The meeting took place as soon as possible, and I fell in love with them instantly. They were simply the nicest people I had ever met. And they were saving my skating career!

My transition to Denver and my new coach came at a time in my life when turning eighteen and having my own apartment didn't really translate into a good result that first year. In fact, it was a disaster.

Adding even more pain to my humiliation was the last competition my mother would ever see. It was the 1977 U.S. National Championships, where I came in ninth place. Placing ninth was shameful for me because it did not reflect my potential as a skater. My mother lost her battle to cancer less than four months later.

Losing my mother was the most devastating event of my life, and the McLoraines were there for me 100 percent.

Frank even told me that they would love to help fill some of the void left by the loss of my mother. The love I felt for them grew, and I knew that I was more than a kid they were helping to stay on the ice. Without children of their own, I was becoming a son to them.

Channeling my grief to my skating, I *went to work*, and in just a few short months became a different skater. Ninth the previous year, I vaulted to third at the 1978 U.S. Nationals and followed that with an eleventh place finish at The World Figure Skating Championships. I was now a contender to make the 1980 Olympic Team.

With each great result, Frank would share his humorous wisdom. By virtue of a random draw, I was the unlucky guy designated to skate first at a very important competition. Frank was awesome. He told me that in the Bible it says "The first shall be last and the last shall be first." I had no idea what he was talking about, but it made me feel better. I ended up first place in that particular skate. He always told me to "just skate the ice" and happily take what it gives me. For every occasion he had a clever saying or joke. I remember many of them to this day.

The next year became once again very difficult. My most intense rival decided to ask Carlo to coach him, and Carlo brought him in as a student. I was very hurt by this, and it changed my relationship with Carlo to the point where all the momentum I had achieved the year before disappeared. After an ankle injury hobbled me for a good portion of the year, I was unable to make the World Team in 1979. And it was just eleven months before the 1980 Olympic team was to be chosen. I needed to consider all options, and the McLoraines were there to support me no matter what.

Another coach from Philadelphia had expressed great interest in me, and Frank and Helen said that they would continue to sponsor me if I decided to leave Carlo. After a meeting with Carlo it became apparent that his interest in me had waned, and I was soon on my way to Philadelphia to take coaching from Don Laws.

It was after being with Mr. Laws for two months that I got a call while at an Olympic

Training Center Seminar that Frank had passed away. I knew that he had not been feeling well, but I wasn't prepared for this at all. Once again, my life was shattered.

Hundreds of people came to Frank's viewing to pay their respects. This kind and wonderful man had more friends and admirers than I had ever thought one person could have.

I couldn't make myself go into the room where he lay. I guess I felt if I didn't see him, maybe this nightmare would end, and I would have Frank back. I finally summoned the courage to go. I was the last one to see him before Helen said her last words, kissed his forehead, and they sealed the coffin. I was to be one of the pallbearers. It was an honor I didn't take lightly. He had that many longtime friends.

Now my relationship with Helen would take on a different importance. She was a widow, and I was like a son. I had talks with her that I had never anticipated—conversations that allowed me to better understand who this woman was—and how she was the one who had made my life what it had become.

That year, I once again channeled my grief towards my skating and made the 1980 U.S. Olympic Team.

And none of it would have been possible without Helen and her support. Every performance was a dedication to my mother and Frank, and I felt their presence every step of the way. Helen was always there with my father to cheer me on.

She was there for all four U.S. National Titles. All four World Titles. And the most important accomplishment—the 1984 Olympic Gold Medal in Men's Figure Skating. None of it would have happened without her. None of it.

Due to a bizarre set of circumstances Don and I had returned to Denver to take over Carlo's training facility. Helen had also relocated to Denver and was around to see the training and share all of my successes. It was fun having someone to share all of this with day-to-day.

I loved her like a mother and very much enjoyed making her proud of me.

When I started my professional career she was there to support me the same as she did during my competitive years. I had my first official professional show in Houston, Texas, and Helen was there to see it.

It was then that I noticed that she was having more and more trouble getting around. Her hips were stiff and painful, and I could tell that the discomfort was robbing her quality of life. We toasted with champagne and even danced in the hotel bar to celebrate my new career. The next morning over breakfast she asked me what we were drinking the night before. My first thought was, *uh oh, we must have partied too much*. It was the opposite. She said that whatever we were drinking made her hip pain go away, and the ringing in her ears was gone.

From that experience, every now and then, would try to enjoy a glass of that particular brand of champagne to keep the pains away.

This was the beginning of our lives where she wasn't financially responsible for me anymore. I was responsible for myself, but I knew that my new life had been made possible by Helen. I have always felt that nothing in my life would be as it is without Helen and Frank. It was then that I started to notice the other investments that Helen was making in people.

When a friend and competitor of mine wanted to start medical school, Helen helped. She helped another friend with law school.

She was also helping many other skaters reach their dreams. Her philosophy was that no one should give up on their skating dreams, or any dream, for that matter, due to a lack of money, since she had more than enough. The only string attached was that people had to understand the gift and show sincere gratitude. I think, looking back, she was building an army of philanthropists. She gave so that others could achieve success and start their own giving. Pretty smart!

When home in Denver, I enjoyed taking her out for meals. Lunch was fun (she liked Cheesecake Factory, but thought their portions were way too big. “What a waste!”). Dinner was great (our favorites were PF Changs and Ruth’s Chris Steakhouse). Breakfast was my favorite. We would go to The Delectable Egg in Lower Downtown Denver and sit for a couple of hours and catch up. Mostly I would tell her what I was up to, but occasionally she would tell me about her business and charity investments. She loved education, children’s charities, medical research, women in business, and skating. I learned that she wanted to do more, but only if she could do it right and well. She wasn’t one to waste money—or anything else for that matter. I figured she was probably worth millions, but didn’t live that way. If she liked a pair of shoes, she got them resoled. She wouldn’t buy a Sunday newspaper because the price didn’t represent value to her. The only thing she would treat herself to was travel. She loved experiencing new places, but loved traveling to skating competitions the best—especially to cheer on the skaters she was sponsoring.

She loved people, ice skating, and doing good.

I loved her like no one else in my life.

She loved me too.

That was why it was kind of stressful when I started getting serious with the woman who would become my wife. It would be very awkward if Helen didn’t understand my love for Tracie Rose Robinson.

When I first starting telling Helen about Tracie, she would get kind of quiet. I knew that she wanted what was best for me and wanted to love her. I think she must have been worried about what would happen if she didn’t approve. I would make sure that Tracie and Helen sat together at Stars on Ice shows, dinners, and my cancer benefit in Cleveland.

Helen was having trouble with her back at that time, and Tracie would do everything she could to help her when they were together. After several times together, Helen understood why I loved Tracie so much. Helen loved being with Tracie, and I loved the relationship they were building.

In the short time they had together, Tracie loved Helen with all her heart and admired everything about her.

One year, just before Christmas, Helen had had enough of dealing with her pain. She decided to have back surgery. I broke it to Tracie that I couldn’t be with her family for Christmas, and Tracie totally understood. I was able to get to Tennessee one day over the holiday but was

alone most of the time when I wasn't visiting Helen. I had fun decking out Helen's hospital room with all sorts of Christmas decorations. She especially liked the fiber optic tree I found. It was tacky, but it lightened the mood and made her very happy. And she was without pain for the first time in years. It was the beginning of a string of months where she had an incredible quality of life. Now she could, once again, live life the way she wanted to.

It was in that year that life with Helen would give me a lifetime of memories.

Tracie and I had bought a loft in lower downtown Denver so we could be closer to Helen when I wasn't traveling. We would be with her as much as we could, and it was that autumn during my annual cancer benefit in Cleveland that life changed forever.

I have a tradition of introducing Helen and my dear friend Maria Miller during the finale of the show. I also present them with a bouquet of roses. After I presented Maria and Helen with their roses, I introduced Tracie to the seven thousand people sitting in the audience. I then asked Tracie to marry me. I have a photo of that moment, and you can see Helen leaning forward to give Tracie her flowers.

The wedding was less than three months later, and Helen was sitting in the front row. She looked so happy. Tracie and I were thrilled to have been able to share that moment with her.

The wedding ceremony in December was small, so we planned on having a big party in January to share our joy with friends and family. Small wedding in December, *big* party a month later!

Helen was planning on being there. It was the week after the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Dallas, and we made sure that we scheduled our party so Helen and everyone else could be there.

During the week of the U.S. Nationals I was pulling into the backstage parking area in Anaheim for a Stars on Ice appearance when I received a very distressing call from Helen's great friend Kathy Casey. She was crying hysterically and told me that Helen had taken a fall and wasn't conscious. I immediately ran into the production office and told them I was out of the show and headed to Dallas.

I arrived that night and the news wasn't good. Due to a medication she was on to prevent a stroke, the bleeding in her brain wouldn't stop. She probably wouldn't survive, and if she did, she wouldn't be Helen anymore.

Six days later, on the day of our wedding party, she passed.

I flew back to L.A. to be at the party. My heart had never been heavier. A huge part of me was gone. Helen was no longer. But life tends to surprise to the point of being amazing. We informed our friends—most knew Helen very well—of her passing, and what we couldn't tell Helen before her fall: that we were expecting our first child.

Helen would have been ecstatic.

Aidan was born eight months later. He has heard so many stories about Helen that she has a big place in his heart.

The one thing people might wonder is, without children, what happened to her wealth?

Well, Helen is still a huge part of many people's lives. Soon after her funeral, Helen's "right

hand”—Bob Anderson—and I sat down to go over her will. Bob knew of Helen’s dealings intimately, having worked for her for more than twenty years. He seemed to be at a loss to deliver some interesting news.

The way I remember it he said, “Helen has never made a mistake until now. I just don’t understand how this could have happened. She left everything in a philanthropic trust with no instructions. It’s just not like her to have left this much wealth without designation or a solid plan.”

When he said that, I had my own opinion. She knew exactly what she was doing.

Helen asked me years before she passed whether I was okay financially. I told her that I was in good shape, and she said in a very direct, but loving way “good, because I’m not leaving you anything in my will.”

I don’t mean to share that exchange to make Helen look insensitive. She knew I was fine. More would just be more. She quite simply, had another plan.

Again. She knew exactly what she was doing. She was giving Bob and me the honor and pleasure to be like her and make a huge difference in this world. We were going to be her eyes, ears, arms, legs and heart. We were going to find a home for everything she had earned and saved just for this purpose.

She wasn’t able to give it away while she was alive, I think, because she couldn’t do it to her satisfaction. But she had planned all along for her wealth to be disbursed, in her memory, the way she would have done it if she were still living. This was the only way it could be done.

She had given me the opportunity to skate and build a career. Thanks to Helen, I have experienced a life on the ice that I never could have imagined.

In the dedication to my book *The Great Eight*, I wrote, *To Helen. Without you, I wouldn’t be me.*

Her modest investment in my skating has given me the ability to raise millions of dollars for cancer programs and research. I have been honored to serve and raise money for many other charities as well.

Her accumulated wealth has given Bob, Tracie, and me the opportunity to help countless organizations the way she would have. Along the way, we had assistance from fellow Pioneer Fund trustees, Jim Bye and Lark Birdsong.

In this book you will see what Helen has accomplished—what her confidence in us has done for a lot of wonderful people wanting to do good for those who couldn’t advance their cause without financial support.

Even I can’t wait to see the last ten years of giving recorded all in one place.

One person quietly *can* change the world.

Maybe Helen’s greatest and last gift is to inspire everyone who sees this to do the same.

Scott Hamilton

June, 2012