

## ***No Disabled Souls***

### *CHAPTER 6*

#### ***LOVE, LAUGHTER LIFE AND HEAVEN TOO!***

Her name is Helen. She was one of the most joyous people I have ever known. When Dr. Richard Beam presided at her funeral service, he remarked, "We loved Helen at our church. She brought a special joy to us all and we will miss her. Last Sunday, my sermon was about Christians who have maintained joy in adversity, and I used as illustrations saints from ancient church history. After the service one of our members said, 'It was a good sermon, but you left someone off the list of saints who maintained joy in adversity.' I said, 'Who?' He answered 'Helen Cinnamon.' Indeed, she is on the eternal ledger of those who maintained joy under adversity to the end."

I will always consider her one of the best friends I have ever had. She was an older client in the rehabilitation facility I directed. Because of severe cerebral palsy, Helen could not walk, her speech was difficult to understand, and her hand usage was poor. She received therapy to improve these skills. When placement in our program was no longer beneficial, she was referred to a sheltered workshop where she created ceramic pieces to sell. She enjoyed her work and her fellow workers.



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To express appreciation for my role in finding her a new job, she gave me a fruit basket for a 1967 Christmas present. Her act of kindness started a family tradition that lasted until her death. During Christmas week each year, my wife, daughters, grandchildren, and I went to her house for a party. Throughout the years, the giving and receiving of twenty-six fruit baskets built a lot of memories.

Another enhancing ingredient for our friendship was our attendance at the same church. In the early 1970s, Johnson Bible College started offering the course, "Teaching the Exceptional Person in the Church." To provide hands on experience for the students, we developed a Sunday school/church program on the campus. Several people with disabilities were transported to the campus each Sunday during the school year for Bible lessons and worship. Helen was a participant.

Sally Ashby, the teacher assigned to Helen, was a wonder. Knowing that Helen couldn't read, Sally drew pictures to illustrate the major parts of our Lord's life and ministry. The gospel lessons found a place in Helen's heart, which had not been affected by the cerebral palsy. After a few lessons, Helen told her teacher she wanted to become a Christian. Wanting to be sure Helen understood the concept, Sally requested that I talk with her. I asked her why she wanted to be baptized. In labored speech, Helen responded, "Be like Jesus."

After her baptism, Helen developed her spiritual being in the Woodlawn Christian Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. The program from Johnson had been moved there to ensure year-round participation. Helen was a vibrant part of the congregation. She was an excited, generous contributor to the church's building fund. She enjoyed giving gifts to members of the church, especially for weddings and new babies, and helping people in need. Helen was an inspirational Christian.

Without saying a word, she challenged her friends to her standards of life and commitment. She enriched the lives of people around her. She was a fun person. She liked to be teased. She was—from August to November—older than I am. During those months, I enjoyed calling her "the old lady." She would beam.

Her life was not one of disability, but one of ability. Helen was not a victim of cerebral palsy; she was a victorious human being. Her life was evidence that her soul had been rehabilitated by the salvation made possible by Jesus, God's Son.

Shortly before Christmas, 1994, Helen was hospitalized with pneumonia. A few days after she came home, her condition worsened. Home health care ordered. But sometime on the morning of January 6, 1995, after her mother turned her at 6:00, and before the nurse arrived at 7:00, Helen died. When I received the message from the nurse, I wept with grief at the loss of my dear friend. My wife and I drove to her house to be with her mother. As we were seated at the kitchen table while the morticians were removing Helen's body, my grief turned into incredible joy. I remarked to her mother, "Well, we don't have to worry about Helen's residential placement. She is now living with her wonderful Lord." The physical therapy, expensive communicative devices, and other programs had not caused major changes in her functional level, but Helen's acceptance of God's gift of eternal life through His Son provided her with the ultimate in rehabilitation.

This eternal achievement for Helen began when Sally Ashby, a student teacher in Bible college, wanted her student to know about Jesus. A few

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days after Helen's burial, her mother gave me the set of pictures Sally had drawn to explain God's plan of rehabilitating the soul. As I looked through the pictures and the lesson plans, I rejoiced that the goals had been met. Helen's wheelchair and communication devices were no longer needed. Her soul, freed from her flawed body, had returned to its creator. As her mother continued to go through Helen's belongings, she found a letter from Sally. This Christian rehabilitator wanted to express her love for and encouragement to her client! In part the letter read, "I'm in Massachusetts this summer. I'm serving in an internship program. I'm telling people about Jesus. Helen, have you told anyone about Jesus? Are you reviewing your pictures? I've missed you, Helen, and I'm eager to see you."

Helen was a joyous person. Her life made a difference. While I will treasure the memories of the many times we spent together (especially all of those Christmases and fruit baskets), my greatest treasure is knowing that through a caring, dedicated Sunday school teacher Helen found faith, a relationship with her Lord, and now enjoys everlasting life.

Those rewards are available to everyone. There is no greater accomplishment on earth than to introduce someone to Jesus Christ. People with disabilities need a friend to make this introduction.