

Helen Nelson Jarvis was born in New Sweden, Maine, in 1920. After graduating with undergraduate and graduate degrees from Simmons College and Vassar College, she moved to Rochester to take a job as a research chemist at Eastman Kodak Company. In Rochester, she met the love of her life, Gordon Jarvis, and they married in 1947. They had two daughters, Barbara and Nancy, and the family had a wonderful life filled with projects and many skiing, hiking, backpacking, and traveling adventures.



Helen Jarvis was a remarkable, brilliant, and talented woman. At a time when most young women did not even go to college, Helen not only pursued a graduate degree but earned it in a famously difficult and highly unusual field for a woman in the early 1940s – organic chemistry. She loved the following years that she worked for Kodak inventing plastics and testing materials.

Helen wasn't only a scientist. She was a talented seamstress and master of needle arts, and their house was filled with beautifully hand made items ranging from quilts and needlepoint upholstery to sleeping bags and hiking gear. When her two daughters were in college, Helen became a weaver, which beautifully combined her love of hand crafts with her talent for taking on complex tasks. She rapidly became well-known for weaving 18th and 19th century traditional American coverlets, taught scores of workshops across the US, wrote a book on coverlets, and donated her hand woven reproduction coverlets to many museums. During the US Bicentennial, she wove a reproduction coverlet for the Lincoln Room of the White House and helped First Lady Rosalind Carter install it on the Lincoln bed.

Helen was a life-long learner who read voraciously, loved documentaries, and always went well-prepared with background to the many places that she and Gordon visited around the world. At Cherry Ridge, where she and Gordon moved in 2004, she quickly made many friends, co-hosted Saturday night movies at their cottage, and worked side-by-side with Gordon to organize dozens of guest speakers for the community as well as many Great Courses series.

Helen was a warm and gentle person. She passed away in hospice at Cherry Ridge on September 9, 2016 and is survived by her two daughters, her three grandchildren, Carolyn, Alex, and Jackson, and her great grandson, Connor. Helen also leaves behind many nieces and nephews and their families. Her beloved Gordon passed away in 2014.

We will celebrate Helen's life on Sunday afternoon, September 25. Friends and family are invited to a memorial and reception beginning at 4 pm in the Community Room at Cherry Ridge, 900 Cherry Ridge Blvd., Webster, NY.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the "Nicholas Nelson Endowed Fund for the Sciences" at Simmons College, 300 The Fenway, Boston MA 02115-5898.