



Helen (Kauffman) Thurmond

May 20, 1929 - February 6, 2026

Helen (Kauffman) Thurmond, 96, of Sarasota, Florida, passed away peacefully on February 6, 2026. Born on May 20, 1929, Helen grew up on a farm in Plain City, Ohio, in a large loving family. She later graduated with an associate degree from Goshen College, preparing her for a life rooted in faith and family.

Helen was married for 60 years to her best friend and devoted husband, James “Bud” Thurmond, who preceded her in death. Their marriage was a beautiful example of love, partnership, humor and adventure. These qualities defined both their life together and the family they built together.

Helen is survived by her sisters Carol French and Jean Swartzentruber; her children, Doug and wife Denise Thurmond, Cindy and husband Michael Brown, and Kristi and husband Dwayne Geib; her grandchildren, Rachel Thurmond, Josh and wife Darlin Thurmond, Greg Christo, Ashley and husband Mike Hornberger, and Melissa and husband Collin Benyo; and nine cherished great grandchildren: Sophia, Carter, Kaylee, Cameron, Darlin, Makenze, Grayson, Carter, and Sloane Rae. She was preceded in death by her sisters Irene Allan, Anna Mae Miller, Mary Plank, Ruth Mast, and Betty Silks, as well as her brother, Ed Kauffman.

A homemaker throughout her life, Helen also worked as a secretary for the

Mennonite church conference and as a local Avon lady, forming many friendships along the way. Creative and talented, she loved to sew, making dresses for Cindy and Kristi as well as custom outfits for their dolls. Her artistic touch was just one expression of her deep love for her family.

Helen was also blessed with musical gifts. She played piano, rang bells in the bell choir, and sang regularly in church, both in small ensembles (often alongside her equally gifted siblings) and as a strong alto in the choir. She had a love for classical music and for a while hosted a show on the local Christian radio station, where she played favorites by Mozart, Tchaikovsky and others. Music was woven into her life and faith, and she shared it generously with everyone around her.

Helen and Bud shared a spirit of adventure and together traveled the world. They especially loved Austria, Germany, Italy, Japan, and England, and they cultivated friendships across many countries. For decades they were faithful members of Bay Shore Mennonite Church, later joining the supportive church family at Bethel Mennonite. Helen's faith was central to who she was; she loved Jesus deeply, and she loved people with a kindness that touched the lives of others. She had a wide circle of friends and an even wider circle of people who felt at home in her presence.

Her greatest joy was her family. Her grandchildren were the lights of her life, and she invested herself completely in their lives and memories. In retirement, she and Bud spent summers at their second home in Rogersville, Tennessee, where the grandkids joined them for fishing, collecting wildflowers, hiking, and catching fireflies on warm summer nights. Helen's siblings often came as well, making those seasons rich with the laughter and connection she treasured. Family gatherings were always especially important to her.

A memorial service will be held on Thursday, February 12 at 11:00 a.m. at

Bethel Mennonite Church, 2985 Bethel Lane in Sarasota, Florida.

Committal and burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Mission Fund at Pines of Sarasota Foundation, supporting residents who have outlived their financial resources. Ways to Give | Pines of Sarasota Foundation

Helen's family is deeply grateful for the wonderful caregivers at Pines of Sarasota and Sarasota Memorial Hospital who lovingly cared for her in her final days.

Helen lived a life of devotion to her faith, her family, her friends, and the world around her. She will be profoundly missed and forever cherished.

Previous Events

Memorial Reception

FEB **12**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Bethel Mennonite Church
2985 Bethel Lane
Sarasota, FL 34240

Tribute Wall

KG

“ 1 file added to the album Helen



Kristi G. - February 09 at 09:00 PM

VH

She was always so beautiful!

Vicki Hornberger - February 09 at 09:21 PM

JS

I've been doing a lot of thinking of our growing up and all of the traveling Homer and I did with my sweet sister Helen and Bud. They were such wonderful times! I will miss her greatly! I'm sending you all my love!

Aunt Jean

JEAN SWARTZENTRUBER - February 12 at 10:47 AM