

The Empty Nest  
and other  
Stories and Poems

by

Helen Garn



# **Stories and Poems by Helen Garn**

## **Preface**

When I moved from Cadillac to Arbor Oaks in Spring Arbor, Michigan, I joined a writing class that met periodically to share poems and stories that members of the class had written. Over the years I accumulated a number of these stories and have selected a few to include in this book

When I have been able to find the date that something was written or submitted to the class, I have included that date.

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## Seasons

1998

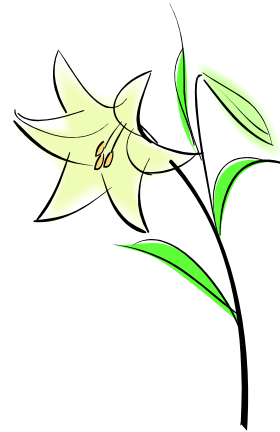
### *Spring*

It was the sights, smells and sounds that made my childhood beautiful. As I heard the crackle of crumbling ice, the rushing torrents of melting snow rippling and gurgling in the meadows, and saw the honey-combed snow banks yielding to the earlier sunrise, I knew spring was arriving. There was no longer the threat of winter blasts, and when the last chill was gone from the air, we went barefooted. Spring had come indeed!

The earth purred with joy, and around me was the dank perfume of the woods where I found growing plants and opening blossoms. The horn of plenty had emptied itself, for the world was green, as if a robe had been thrown over the land. Like over-ripe peas, the buds on the trees were bursting, and the pussy-willows flushing into new life.

With the longer days, when the sun's rays beamed down fingers of warmth, I listened to the joyous voice of the birds calling me to the out-of-doors. I watched and listened for the "harbinger of spring" –the bluebird with its merry chirp, and for the robin's lusty rainsong. Peewees twittered, mourning doves

crooned their songs of longing and migrating goldfinches decorated the leafing trees, and dipped on tireless wings. The wood-thrush's song thrilled me as he threaded his silver notes on strings of sound. The birds were celebrating spring, as I was! The very woods pulsed with the symphony of bird-song and the heart-beat of a new season.



The air smelled of newly-turned earth where the mellow furrows had been rolled back by the shiny plow shares.

As the night lifted with each new dawn, the golden radiance of the sun flushed the world, bringing not only leafy trees and singing birds, but also flowers. I liked the trailing arbutus that opened its pink and white blossoms, and the bloodroot full of scarlet fluid which the Indians long ago used as war paint. Lady slippers and "boys and girls" (Dutchmen's britches) presented themselves in the grass and fields,

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and nodding daffodils lined the roads.

Early spring brought the bird-like chorus of spring-peepers in the marshes. These little frogs were claiming their territory by sound as the feathered creatures do. Their amphibian throats vibrated to a high pitch that I found pleasurable as did the booming of the frogs in the millpond as they chug-a-rugged their evening chorus.

I often sat at my bedroom window and looked at the moon-washed outdoors, as the great orb hung in the sky, bathing the earth with light. I was content to listen to the nocturnal owl winding down the shadows of night, and the whip-poor-will's one last sleepy song. Though the world was sleeping, it was alive with springtime introducing itself to summer.

### **Summer**

“And what is so rare as a day in June?” a man once asked. Poets and song writers cannot describe the joys of “the good old summer time.” The glory of June hangs over the land and days fly by on wings of sunshine. The world is beautiful with springtime blossomed into summer.

Sweet incense, flying by light-fingered breezes fills the air. Summer shimmers in the streets and along the dusty roads where barefoot

children play, the insistent sun on their backs.

During the hot months of summer, storms often move in on dark agitated clouds that pile and roll. The gentle whisper of an approaching wind stirs the heavy air. Soon brilliant jags of lightning and billows of thunder warn people and animals to seek shelter. Winds lash the fields and trees as the rain pelts down in torrents, sometimes lasting all night. Usually storms are very welcome, but at times they spell disaster.

This season is the period to expect forest fires because of lightning or careless campers. Forests and homes are threatened, and fire-fighters are busy trying to save buildings, trees and crops.



Work in the summer months never seems to be finished. Crops and gardens flourish and need to be cared for; haying time soon arrives; cattle are driven to pasture each morning and later brought home for the night milking; the separator must be turned on to get the cream for churning into butter – delicious on the fresh baked loaves of bread.

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Laundry is done on Mondays and dried on the clotheslines in the hot sun; ironing is done on Tuesdays. House cleaning, sewing and mending as well as hoeing the garden take time, and the housewife, too, gets tired and warm.

After a busy day, carefree pleasant evening tiptoes across the luminous, crimson sky. The red sun rests on the horizon, then slips quickly behind the trees, leaving tatters of scarlet above it. Colorful rays of the sundown linger overhead, paling but radiant. The hazy sky turns shaded-blue, then a deep velvet-blue. Stars dust the sky with their bright lanterns. The moon peeps out, flooding the world with a gold and silver light, and perhaps it winks, too, in this blissfully happy summer evening. Nothing moves – not even the wind. The earth feels tired and needs to rest before moving on into the night. Laughter, the murmur of the pines, barking dogs, and the incessant song of the katydids, and sometimes the comforting sound of a horse chewing grass breaks the silence.

Dawn arrives quietly with the moon retaining sovereignty for awhile. The stars grow less distinct and the sky turns blue as the new day is born and the hot sun shines again on the waiting earth.

Summer is so many things; a mixture of work and play; cutting wheat and swimming; picking potato bugs and jumping in the hay; playing hide-and-go-seek among the rows of growing corn, and picking

berries. It is a time to grow, and a time to think about who we are and what our future will be; about our family, our friends, and our God.

Summer is good and life is good. Too soon this season ends with the premature breath of autumn.

## **Autumn**

Autumn sweeps with dignity across the land with a tremulous whisper. Like gossip, it ripples the leaves on the trees that a very young Jack Frost has recently touched with his chilly fingers.



Autumn days are gilded with thick yellow sunshine, and touched by the gold and red of the first fall colors. These are days of golden ripeness and crisp, tangy, spicy air.

Everywhere there is plenty. In the woods berries are ripe, and tree and limb bend low with their gifts for harvest. Stacked corn shocks stand like sentinels near the ripened squash and yellow pumpkin in the fields. The breezes are fruity with the breath of tart, ripening apples.

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Peace and quiet reign over the land. The subdued notes of the birds in their panic of busyness as they prepare for the winter, the calls of migrating geese honking their winged way tell us fall days are here. Katydid and chirping crickets cease their songs as the weather gets colder, and many squirrels begin gathering food for the winter season. Their throaty, chuckling songs, their shoe-button, shining eyes, and their flitting, question-mark tails are fun to see and hear. Does God warn these little creatures that snow is coming?

In the autumn rivers croon their lullabies as they drowsily flow, and fog gathers over the water, rising in wispy patches like smoke, to settle in nearby trees where it looks like white wool.

The branches of bare trees scrape together in a dirge for the summer that is dead. The falling leaves scatter like chaff, flayed by the wind, as they whirl in their death dance. Autumn winds, always insistent, recklessly blow the leaves that have lost their resilience and are sapless. They whirl the dry leaves along the roads and fields in a ballet, and sweep the brown grass in the meadows.

Autumn winds bring rainstorms. Ponderous storm clouds form and mushroom, obscuring the sun. The wind churns them, driving them by its power, violent and shifting. It frets the leaves that have stubbornly refused to leave the branches. Thunder rolls, and knotted ropes of

lightning flash, and the wind blows the last of the leaves from the trees.

As evening draws near, the clouds hide the westerly sun which is poised for its drop behind the curtain of night. This great orb looks very red, large, and disappears fast as it goes down. Tatters of crimson, left behind, fade into darkness as night spreads its coat over the earth. The fire of the sun leaves only a glow at the edge of the world.

The gray dawn breaks as morning's hand wipes the darkness from the sky. Relentless, the sun's rays announce the birth of a new day as the polka-dot stars fade from the sky where they shimmered and winked during the midnight hours. Soft bird calls, and the crooning river break the silence of morning.

Days grow shorter, and the yellow and gold of the autumn months disappear as the earth waits for winter's burial shroud of white.

### **Winter**

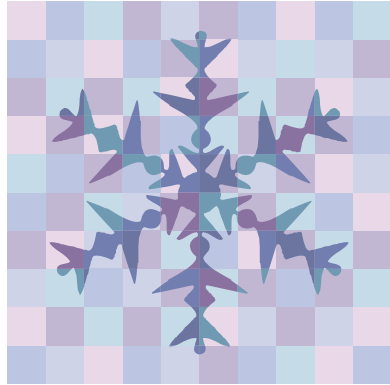
Red leaves have burned themselves out as December brings the chill whisper of winter. Freezing nights nip the earth and put a period to the sentence Indian Summer wrote about beautiful autumn and warm weather.

Early winter winds are invigorating, but later grow cold, blowing without mercy straight from



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the north, hard and searing like whiplashes.



Overhead, the lacy tangle of the leafless boughs creak, flayed by the wind which tears at the bare branches and drags out old dry leaves from the ditches, sending them off like dervishes through the air.

During the nights, the frost turns the landscape into a sparkling fairyland, painting every limb and fence with icy crystals.

As snow descends from the blue-black sky, it begins to embroider the window cross-bars. Posts, stones, fences and stumps wear white woolen hoods. The flakes cover the shriveled remnants of the garden's frost-shrunk stalks. As the snow piles higher, the wind blows flakes off the fields and onto the drifts which shine like a robe of diamonds. The sun blazes upon the rocks, trees and shrubs, and quivers in the treetops, bent with their burden of snow. It hurts the eyes with its splendor.

Twilight comes early in the winter months, settling gray on the crest of the hills and dark in the hollows. The trees make long blue-black shadows, like bruises on the snow as the sun sets in the wintry sky.

At night the wind howls around the house like a banshee, with a depressing sound, sighing and keening as if mourning. Vines near the window panes do skeleton dances as the gales blow wildly. Clouds form in the leaden steely-blue vault of the sky, and cold, aloof, distant stars dot the heavens.

In spite of the cold winter days, children play outdoors – skiing, skating, sliding or making forts, snowmen or angels in the snow. How quiet the days are! No call of birds or insects – just the scrape of bare branches and sometimes the baying of fox hounds on the trail of their prey. “Heavenly music” the hunters call the dogs’ songs that ring out in the frosty air.

Winter is beautiful, but not always so. It isn’t always nice or fun. It can be dangerous and treacherous when ice and snow cover the roads. Many accidents and deaths occur due to collisions on the slippery highways. Temperatures dip below zero, and people get frost-bitten lungs which is much more dangerous than frozen fingers, toes, noses.

Unexpected blizzards are troublesome, marooning travelers. People take these strangers into their

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homes for extended periods until the snow plow arrives. (Before the snowplows, men shoveled to clear the roads.)

Winter is pretty and often bad but it doesn't last forever. As the

sun rises earlier, and the earth warms, winter's ice and snow, wind and cold lose their force, and finally surrender the fight to the invasion of spring.

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### My Christmas Star

*The quiet of the moonlight night was broken by our crunching footsteps in the snow and the doleful sound of branches rubbing together in the bare trees, silhouetted against the sky.*

My parents and I were walking to the Christmas program to be held in the schoolhouse. I felt no discomfort in the cold because of my heavy winter garments. I thought the night was beautiful and I gazed about at the glistening snow and the sky dusted with stars.

Suddenly from the east I saw a shooting star blazing across the sky, and rapidly descending to the earth in the west.

I learned later that it was a meteor making an ionized trail as it entered earth's atmosphere. I was

sure it had landed in the pasture at our right. It seemed so near. My parents told me it probably landed many miles away.

The next day we learned that the residents of the little town of Luther, several miles southwest of us had found a meteorite, which looked like a mass of metal or stone which had plunged into the earth. I wanted to go see it, but couldn't.

When I think of that falling star, I am reminded of the star the wise men followed until it hovered over the place where Jesus lay.

No man, wise or not, could have followed my fast-traveling star that night. I shall never forget it. It makes the story of the Star of Bethlehem more real to me.



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## **Learning Through The Years**

Every decade in my life has been a time of learning. Just when I thought I had everything figured out, someone would tell me, "You don't know it all." Then I had to have more lessons.

I was born into a family where there were five children already. I must learn to fit in – to find my place. From ten to twenty – my second decade – I was in school, learning square root, diagramming sentences, location of countries, oceans and deserts of the world.

I also learned how to take care of my four younger brothers. I learned that every two years another baby was born in the family.

At twenty, I learned how to manage a one-room school (the same one I had attended). I learned how to keep children busy, how to stretch their minds, and how to keep them happy. I also learned that decade how to catch a husband.

When I reached thirty, I was still learning how to manage a husband. I also learned how to wash diapers. Many changes were taking place! People had said that planning to have a family was like planning to have a headache. I didn't think of the three boys as a headache (not very often), but the oldest was three when the third was born, so you know there was not much planning done!

Life begins at forty. My biggest lesson was learning to cope with three sons who went to bed with more energy than I got up with. I had to learn to discipline fairly. I learned that the line between firmness and over-strictness was very hard to detect. I learned that when my knees trembled because of great responsibilities, I could kneel on them and have the burdens lifted.

At fifty, I was giving advice to high school and college boys. They were dating and didn't care for my advice. The hard lesson to learn was to be quiet. I learned as they chose girl friends, that I was not on the selection committee; but I was on the welcoming committee, the refreshment committee, and the clean-up committee. I also learned that

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decade to be a mother-in-law. That's when I learned not to give advice, unless asked.

When I turned sixty, I learned that grandchildren are wonderful and smart and adorable. The teaching school days were over that decade, and there were only two of us now. I learned that two is not a bad number. We had more time together and could participate in more things than before.

I was learning about retirement. When someone asked what we did every day, I told them, "We get up in the morning with nothing to do, and go to bed with it half done." We traveled a lot – going to see our sons and their families, and just enjoying each other.

Then the eighth decade was upon us. In our seventies we began going to Florida for the winters and it was there Stewart had his near-fatal heart attack. I learned that our lives hang by a single thread, as I cared for him for five years, trusting God who answered my prayers.

When I was 75, I lost my husband after he had several strokes. As Catherine Marshall said, "I have had to learn to walk with one leg instead of two." That isn't always easy, but God was my director, comforter, and strength.

I am learning about the jigsaw of my life now in my eighties – my ninth decade. There aren't too many pieces left to fill in. The picture is nearly finished. I see the basic pattern, but I don't care to finish it too soon. I wouldn't care to change the picture, for God has led through the decades. I don't know what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future.



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## Dawn

Sept. 16, 1996

Robins from treetops are singing  
Just at the break of day  
And the Sun on the horizon  
Sends up its first feeble ray.

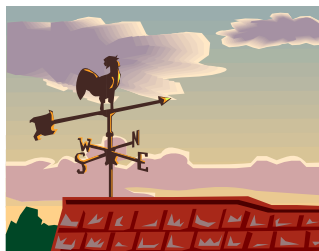
A million stars up above me  
Pin the darkness to the sky  
While in the dawning of the day  
The pale moon goes gliding by.

Pearly-pink is now showing  
And holds its place up on high;  
On the velvet bowl of the night  
Pink yields to coppery sky.

Everything holds itself waiting  
For the first touch of the sun;  
The sky seems unpinned from the earth  
For a new day has begun.

The paling stars now grow dimmer;  
The dome of the sky grows bright;  
The birth of a new day! How holy!  
I feel God's wonderful might.

This is the day the Lord has made  
And all that is within it.  
I want to breathe its beauty in  
And live for God each minute.



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## My Mockingbird Tree

### Chapter I

Have you ever heard of a mockingbird tree? It was a grapefruit tree in my Florida back yard until I saw a slim, gray bird perched there watching the neighborhood and then it immediately became a mockingbird tree because I knew there must be a nest in the dense growth near its top.

The tree looks like an eight foot round ball of leaves, which are rather thick and rubbery, from tree top to those touching the ground. As the sun shines on them, they look shiny, almost white, but looking past the exterior toward the trunk, I see darkness, even blackness. I cannot see the tree trunk, and I know the birds have chosen a well-hidden place for their home.



I had first seen the bird as he was guarding his chosen territory. He was sitting on the window ledge across the street from my house, and was trying to drive another bird away. He didn't know that the strange bird was his reflection. He spread his wings, showing the white bars on them, flitted his tail back and forth, revealing the white lining on both sides of it, and flew up the window to be rid of the usurper. The bird evaded him because there was something hard he bumped against before he could reach his enemy. Not just once, but dozens of times each day for a week he charged, only to see his enemy lift its wings and charge also.

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At last he gave up, and flew to a car next door where he saw the same bird again. Bang, bang, he flew against the chrome until the owner drove the vehicle away, and the birds also went away.

Later, I saw in the road by my home, two mockingbirds. I was so happy to see them, and exclaimed to myself, “Oh, he’s found the girl of his dreams, and they’re out on a date, dancing in the street.”

And they were dancing! Two invisible parallel lines, drawn about six inches apart were where they stood. They faced in opposite directions and pranced down their line, with wings unfurled and heads bobbing until they came to the end of their line where they each gave a quick half-turn to waltz, stiff-legged back, following the same routine until an approaching car interrupted their courtship dance, and they flew away.

## Chapter II

I wanted to learn all I could about these little feathered creatures who had set up housekeeping in my mockingbird tree. I talked with people who had watched them, and I read what I could find.

They are called mockingbirds because they imitate the sounds they hear, repeating them many times. I immediately named them Pete and Repeat. Since male and female look so much alike, I had to guess which was the Mr. and the Mrs.

Mockingbirds are slimmer than robins and are about ten inches long, with a longer tail than the robins. This tail flits from side to side, especially when the bird is agitated. The male helps build the bulky nest with rootlets, twigs, grass and twine. They both incubate the four or five bluish-green eggs that are covered with reddish-brown splotches, and they often raise two broods a year. Both birds take turns guarding their territory, and are very aggressive at times.

These All-American birds, as they are sometimes called, have a scientific name—Mimier Polyglots, which means Mock Bird. The Indians called them the bird of 400 tongues. Mockingbirds are of the Thrasher family, and it has been said they are the lark and nightingale all in one. They sing while perching or in flight and sing at night more than any other bird. In fact, if the moon is shining, they may sing all night—a song of a long succession of notes and phrases, repeated over and over. It is said they can mimic 39 bird songs and 50 bird calls, and only electronic devices can distinguish which is the mimic.



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People often think a cat is near for they hear a “meow”, but it is the mocker. He may sound like a squeaky gate, and my niece told me she heard one say, “pretty boy, pretty boy.” She thought he might have lived near an apiary at some time.

A friend in New York taped the songs of the mockingbird near his home. When he played the tape, several mockers came, but when he played the same tape in Florida, no birds appeared, so he concluded that the dialect was different.

## Chapter III

From my easy chair I could see the back of the tree where the birds had a perch, slightly hidden from the road. I called it their back door observation perch. Always one bird was in sight, usually at that perch, and their routine was the same each day, except in cold weather when neither of them appeared.

I thought it was Pete that sat as sentinel more than Repeat. He sat at their back door nearly an hour at a time, then skipped to the tippy top of the tree where he could see the street easily. I wondered what he thought of all the white haired people going by in their golf carts or riding the three wheeled bikes. No doubt he was happy there were no boys with BB guns or sling shots!

Did he notice the buzzards winging in circles over the near-by swamp? I’m sure he wasn’t afraid, because buzzards eat dead things and he was very much alive. But when the buzzards leave the sky to the owls at night, does he become concerned? Owls steal birds’ eggs, but both are guarding the nest at night so not to worry!

Many butterflies, some yellow, some orange flew by his tree, but he paid no attention. Not once did I see the birds dart out after a bug or fly.

What is he thinking as he sits there, ever watchful, ever vigilant? Do birds think? Do they converse? Does he say, “What day is it? Only the sixth? And we have six more to go? I’m getting tired of waiting. Every man likes to get out and work.”

She replies, “Don’t worry, you’ll have more to do than you’ve ever had. You’ll need to gather food for our little ones. M-m-m! Precious darlings! You’ll wish you had time to just sit. But go along now. Go over to your favorite restaurant and eat your berries, wild fruit and worms. But hurry back so you can help keep these babies warm, and I’ll get out and relax.”

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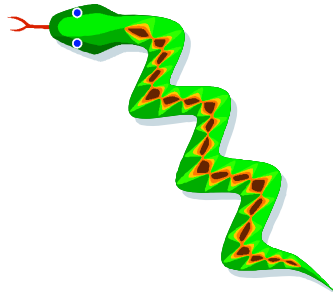
It seemed that he had flown only a few feet away from his top branch before she popped up from the leafy pit by their back porch. Although I couldn't see the front entrance, I knew he must come back very soon to sit on the eggs while she became the sentinel. She had emerged so quietly, so suddenly, so sneakily and climbed to the back perch that I would have missed seeing her if I had blinked. I often thought they watched to see if I turned my head before they climbed out, for they were very fast in their exchange of jobs.

How do birds tell time? Did God put a timer in them! They always seemed to stay the same amount of time on the back perch before flying to the top perch. The one on the nest seemed to know when the mate had flown away. How did they know it was time to get off the nest to be the watchman? How did they know how soon to return to sit on the eggs? Their team work was unbelievable, as I saw how well they worked together. I only wish humans could work so well and loyally with each other.

### Chapter IV

Some afternoons I sat in my easy chair and never saw a sign of the birds, and I fussed and fumed like an old grandmother! Were they both on the nest, or were they off together, forgetting their responsibilities for a while? Were the eggs protected? Were they warm enough? What if something happened to those eggs?

I knew bird's eggs are never completely safe from enemies, and I also knew that snakes like eggs, and snakes in Florida can climb trees. I had heard about the lady who had called my cousin to come kill the snake that was looking in her kitchen window from the limb of a tree. Also, I had heard of the snake that fell from the rafters of the almost finished church and landed on the platform near the lady who was playing the organ at the service that day.



I had seen snakes in the bushes by the house next door. His head protruded above the sheared top of the shrubs as he watched the people go by. I knew snakes were around and were enemies of the birds!

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One morning as I watched, I saw one of the birds sitting near the back perch, and I felt it was the female, Repeat. She was scolding, flitting her tail and unfurling her wings, then like a feathered bullet she flew to the ground where she sat looking into the bushes next door. In her fury she was twice her usual size, and every feather showed she was MAD. In her rage she darted into an opening in the bushes, and very soon came out as though to say, "There! I taught him a lesson."

I was sure she had scared a snake away and I remembered the story a neighbor, Mr. Webb, told about an incident where a snake was crawling toward his house when a mockingbird flew down from a tree and landed just out of reach of the snake, spread one wing toward the snake and shook it just as we would shake our finger at someone. The bird seemed to be saying, "You rascal! You're a naughty snake! You get back where you belong.!" The bird turned and shook the other wing at the snake, turning again and again. The snake seemed to be hypnotized, and lay very still, but finally turned and crawled away. The bird flew back into the nearby tree where it watched as Mr. Webb killed the rattler, then it cocked its head to one side as if to say, "Right on Sir! He got what he deserved." It then flew away.

### Chapter V

One day I woke up to see it was raining. The sentinel was on his perch getting very wet. He was probably thinking, "A woman's place is in the home, and that's where she is, and here am I getting half-drowned. I'll be glad when this is over."

Was it instinct, obedience or devotion that kept him there? After the rain, I saw him shake himself and continue to keep watch. Many times as he acted as watchman, I thought of the man at the hospital waiting for his first child to be born. He was sweating, wringing his hands, pacing the floor, waiting, just waiting. At last the doctor came and said, "You have a fine baby girl." The man, much relieved, replied, "Oh, I'm so glad it's a girl, she'll never have to go through what I've been going through!"

On the cold windy nights are the birds together on the nest? Or is he sitting nearby as protection? How does he let her know he's there, loving her? Does he put a wing over her shoulder and give her a kiss on the bill? Is his bird brain aware that duties must be performed?

As the day approached that I must fly north, I became anxious for the birds to hatch, but I realized at last I wouldn't get to see the babies. I had already named

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them Peter and Repeater, Mock and King, and I would have enjoyed hearing their first mocking peeps. I could just imagine how the tree would come alive with six mockingbirds mocking.

So I had to leave and say good-bye to my little feathered friends. They would never know how much enjoyment I had had watching them. I hope they set up housekeeping next year in my mockingbird tree. I'm sure they will be good parents and have many hours of merry mocking.

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## Home

October 3, 1994

What is home? It's a place where I have lived – a place where there was love – a place that made memories – a place where I grew.

My first home was a little house where I was born, the sixth of my mother's ten children. She had lost her first husband and married my father, bringing with her three little tots and memories of a fourth who had died.

The "little house" was home for me for nearly six years. There were four rooms for ten of us. One bedroom held two boys. The kitchen cot is where my sister slept. My brother slept on the living room cot, and in the two beds in the other bedroom my parents and the new baby slept in one bed, and my two little brothers and I in the other. The home was crowded, but love was there.

My next home was the "big house". When my grandparents died, we moved across the yard to their house, where there was room. My sister and I shared an upstairs room. Here I lived for nearly 18 years. I went to grade school and then to high school and county normal ten miles away, returning home for each weekend. Then I taught my home school, and lived at home for three years. In three more years I taught at a school seven miles away, and returned each weekend to my own home.

Then I made the "big move." My belongings were moved to a new home where my young husband and I were starting life together, and where once we had 19 cents to live on for two weeks. But God supplied. We were in love. We were content and happy.

Another move the next year was to a farm house, where I returned each night from the little country school where I taught.

The next year we bought our first home for the sum of \$300. How proud we were! It was where our first two sons were born – the second one arriving before the doctor did.

This little home was too small, so we traded for a bigger house. Here our third son was born. It was this home that was destroyed by fire, with most of our earthly belongings going up in smoke, but many good memories lingered.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

With no home to live in, we searched for a home. There was one empty house – an old, drafty place where we could live. There one son got mumps and whooping cough at the same time. Care and prayer brought us through that crisis.

Our next home was one my husband built after work and on Saturdays. At this home, we lived in the basement until we could move upstairs. Here the boys grew up, married and returned for visits, bringing their growing families.

Finally, I was alone in that home. My family prevailed in the discussion about selling the house, and I moved to the retirement center here in Spring Arbor. I am content here in my new home.

What is home? Home is where we live – where there is love, contentment and memories. Will there be memories in Heaven, my next home? I believe so, I know there will be love, contentment and God!



# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

## A True Fish Story

May 20, 1996

The funniest fish story I ever heard was about my friend, Bertie (short for Alberta), who lived in a little one-horse town, where there was only one street. A grocery store, drugstore, doctor's office and of course, a tavern were the buildings on main street.

Running along the edge of town was a creek, teeming with rainbow trout, and Bertie loved trout. Most of all she liked to fish for them. So with her new rod and reel, she ventured forth. She had practiced casting and fully believed she could get that line to go where she intended it to land.

Upon arriving at the water's edge, she noticed a man a few yards downstream, but as she baited the hook with a wiggly angleworm, he came nearer. He wouldn't bother her any, so she cast. Whoops! He had come too close, and as she threw the line out, the hook caught him – not in his hat, not in his clothes, but in a nostril. Bertie was horrified, and they both tried to unhook him, but the pain was too great, so he suggested they get help.

"There's a doctor's office right up the street, and we can go there," Bertie said, grabbing her rod and starting for town with the stranger following a few feet behind. Right through the town they went, past the drug store, by the busy grocery store, and in front of a group of men loitering by the saloon. With boisterous laughter following them, she led him into the doctor's presence.



The doctor took one look at the couple, guessed what had happened and asked as he reached for his instruments, "Why didn't you cut the line?" Bertie realized that neither she nor the man had thought of it and knew the laughter was not about her catch, but at the ridiculous picture of a fellow being led by a woman through town at the end of a fish line with the hook in his nose.

Talk about catching a man! That is one painful, but effective method!

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

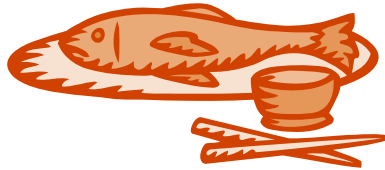
### Another “Fish” Story

May 20, 1996

Bertie was young and engaged to be married. They hadn't set the date for the wedding, but talked a great deal about it. Her fiancé said, “All we'll need is the license, and we'll get that some day and then we'll get hitched.” That satisfied Bertie and they both seemed content to wait until he earned more money.

One day he said to her, “My brother in Pittsburgh has invited me to come out, so why don't you drive your car, and you can be there with me? You can visit with my sister-in-law and I can go fishing with my brother.” The idea caught fire in Bertie's brain, and away they went to Pittsburgh, arriving late at night.

Early the next morning, her boyfriend said, “I think the offices are open now, so I'm going down to get the license,” “Let me go along,” Bertie begged, but he told her she didn't need to go because he could get it alone, so she stayed and chatted with the lady of the house. She was so happy! At last, while they were here, they would be married and his relatives could “stand up” with them.



The morning passed and at last he returned. “I got the license,” he said, but I had to stand in line. There were several ahead of me.” “Let me see it,” Bertie said eagerly. He took the license from his pocket and handed it to her. Angrily, she threw it at him and said, “It's a fishing license. I thought you were getting our marriage license.”

With these words she flew into her bedroom, packed her suitcase, walked out the door and drove home to Michigan.

“I married him,” she told me, “but it was ten years later.”



## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

### My 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary Celebration

1994

There were 14 couples at Light and Life Park waiting for the big social event of the year – the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration to be held Friday, February 10, 1989. Two days before, on the 8<sup>th</sup>, one of the men died suddenly, but the rest of us marched proudly to the church platform where we sat, waiting for our turn to take the Honor Seat.

We had chosen our oldest son, Dennis, to represent us. Here are some of the thoughts he had in his speech which will be remembered by many who heard him:

“I am here tonight to honor my parents. At home we learned Scripture, and my mother used to quote, Honor your father and mother that your days may be long upon the earth, but she had a way of changing it to ‘Honor your father and your mother or your days won’t be long on this earth.’ So I am here out of respect and also out of guilt.

My mother kept calling my two brothers and me asking if we could come to help her and Dad celebrate. She always said, “Your brothers are coming.” So all three of us are here, each one feeling he’s been had. My brother came all the way from Okinawa, Japan because she said it would be like a Free Methodist Sunday School contest – the one who came the farthest would win the prize!

My parents met in high school. Dad was walking down the hall and pulled one of her long curls, and she gave him a dirty look. He’s been getting those dirty looks ever since. After high school, Mother taught elementary school and Dad worked on his uncle’s farm.

Their wedding started with a bang. I’ve heard the story many times about the dynamite going off outside just as they started to repeat their vows. Dad gulped and nodded, but didn’t speak up. Are they really married? I asked my uncle who attended them about the dynamite, and he said he wasn’t sure if it was dynamite or a shotgun. That was September when they were married and I was born in March... (long pause) three and one-half years later. Mom had a form of dyslexia where instead of seeing words backwards, she said

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

them backwards; so when the minister came into the hospital to see her and her new baby, Dennis, she pointed at me and said, 'I have Sinned.'



My mother taught school while we were growing up, and had much to do in church work, and my dad worked as part-owner in the Garn Glass Company, installing store fronts and windows. He spent many hours also, working for the North Michigan conference on the Board of Trustees and as delegate to annual and general conferences.

We three boys have been encouraged by them through the years as we work at different kinds of jobs. I have taught at Spring Arbor College since 1965 in the English Department. My wife is a nurse and we have 3 children.

Lynn is a research physicist at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. His wife is a librarian, and they have three children. Stanley is a commander in the U.S. Navy and is a physical therapist, now stationed in Okinawa. His wife is a teacher and they have three sons. Altogether, my parents have nine grandchildren – six of them wonderful and good, and three of them are mine.

We are grateful for our parents and their interest in us and also grateful for our heritage. We had a good life and my story might have been different if it had not been for their love, guidance and prayers.”

# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

## A Winter Wonderland

January 25, 1999

**I** woke up to a white world this morning. During the night great blanket flakes of snow had fallen softly, silently from a windless sky and settled like a robe over the land. I beheld a world adorned in the gala dress of winter ---- a majesty of snow from the heavens above.



**O**verhead, the arched branches of the leafless oaks were garbed with accents of white embroidery. Silhouetted against a winter sky, they appeared penciled with slivers of snow.

**T**he plummy pines wore lacy sleeves of white on all the branches. The pine cones hung like upside-down candles on

the underside of the boughs on a Christmas tree.

**S**now had settled on the roof of the house in soft mounds, melted only slightly around the red chimney.

**T**he bird feeder wore a white hood, and my birdseed bell had a cream-puff-top.

**T**he splashy red of a cardinal in the pines, a blue jay at the bird feeder and black squirrels racing from tree to tree brought life and color to the fairyland scene.

**W**hat a dazzling eye-blinding picture! Once again God had showed His love in this winter wonderland. It was magnificent.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

### They Got Me Good

April 1999

As Sunday School Superintendent, I often asked the young people and children for their choice of chorus to sing in the opening service. My ten year old son raised his hand and with an innocent look on his face said, "Could we sing the one that says 'Andy's just the same'?" I tried not to laugh because I knew he was thinking of the night before, and was trying to pull a joke on me.

I had been taking an audio-visual class where we were expected to learn how to run all the projectors, cameras and recorders until we could do them even in the dark. A man, Andy, from our church was in the class, and I told him to bring his wife Saturday night to my house because I had permission from the school to borrow a projector. We could learn how to run it, and his wife and my husband and three sons could be the audience.

On Saturday night I told the boys to hurry with the dishes because we were having company. My husband said, "But I have a business meeting to attend." He left and soon a knock on the door told me Andy had arrived. "My wife couldn't come,"

he said. (I think I heard a snicker behind me where the boys were standing).

We practiced threading the film on the wheel and both of us soon learned how it should work. Then we turned out the lights to see if we really knew what we were supposed to do.

My youngest son was whispering to his brothers, and later I learned he had wanted to say aloud, "Boys, it's our bedtime. Don't you think we ought to hit the hay? But he didn't say it.

So we sang that morning in Sunday school:

Jesus is the sweetest name  
I know,  
And He's just the same  
As His lovely name.  
And that's the reason why  
I love him so  
For Jesus is the sweetest  
name I know."

The twinkle in my husband's eyes told me the boys had told him the news that Andy and I had sat in the dark on Saturday night. What else they told I don't know, but they did "get me good" that morning.

# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

## Church Bloopers

Several years ago I began writing down the mistakes I'd heard both children and adults make. I hope you won't think I'm sacrilegious, but all these "bloopers" that seemed funny to me are, in one way or another, church related. While a very few may have been intentional, almost all were committed unwittingly.

### Out Of The Mouth Of Babes

Children often go home from church and report what they've learned, or ask questions.

One child said he knew who the Virgin Mary was, but who was the King James Virgin? Another told her mother that the widow took two mice to church and put them in the offering plate. Still another reported learning that "many are cold but few are frozen."

It's tough for children to sit quietly through church. One boy reported that the "hushers" went around to tell them not to talk out loud. A little girl said that when church was dismissed the people sang "Praise All Preachers; Here We Go!"

Our little neighbor, Jessica, was in the hospital. Her pastor visited her and asked if he could pray. "No, it's not Sunday." Another little girl, after hearing a song in Sunday School, named her three dolls Shirley, Goodness and Mercy.

The pledge to the American flag has been changed since some children were heard to say "to the republic for which it stands, one naked individual, with liberty and justice for all." Most get the words right, but when asked what "indivisible" meant, one youngster said "you can't see it".



### Song Twisters

We've all heard of children, still trying to learn the English language, getting songs all mixed up. Here are some of my favorites.

Jesus, save your pie for me  
(Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me).

Bringing in the sheets, or,  
bringing in the cheese (Bringing in  
the Sheaves).

Have a little taco, Jesus  
(Have a Little Talk With Jesus).

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

Up from the gravy, Rose  
(Up From the Grave He Arose).

My country, 'tis a bee, sweet  
land of liver tea.

(My Country 'Tis of Thee)

The King is exhausted on high  
(The King is Exalted on High).

Fight in the corner where you  
are, or, Right on the corner where  
you are (Brighten the Corner Where  
You Are).

Gladly, his cross-eyed bear  
(Gladly His Cross I'd Bear).

Four year old Laurie was certain  
they were singing a song just for her,  
"Laurie, Laurie, Hallelujah."

Scripture also sometimes has its  
words twisted by innocent children,  
as in this composite from The Lord's  
Prayer. "Our Father, who art in  
Heaven, Hollywood be Thy name.  
Give us this day our jelly bread.  
Forget our debts as we forget our  
debtors (or,  
Forgive our Christmases as we  
forgive those who Christmas against  
us). Lead us not into Penn Station,  
but deliver us from Eagles. Inez, the  
kingdom, the power and the glory."

### What Was That Again?

Adults pretty much have the  
songs figured out, but sometimes  
there is a short circuit between the  
mind and the mouth.

Our minister called on a very  
sick man in the hospital. After  
visiting a while he said "Well, I'll go  
now and let you die in peace." The  
man recovered and never let the  
pastor forget it. I think it was the

same pastor, who, after preaching a  
funeral service, announced the  
luncheon, "We will have  
entertainment after the burial."

Once, while visiting a church for  
the first time, I witnessed an infant  
baptism. As the minister held the  
baby, he said "It doesn't seem  
possible. It seems like I just married  
these parents a little while ago."

My friend, Laura, visiting a new  
church, looked around and saw  
another friend. Without thinking she  
said aloud, "Why, Sue, are you  
regular?"

A lady went calling on  
absentees, and asked a woman what  
the church thought about the soon  
return of Christ. The woman  
responded "I don't know. I've not  
been there for two weeks."

A widow testifying in our church  
said "I've served the Lord forty  
years; my husband died and I've  
never been happier." Then I heard  
of an elderly lady whose testimony  
ran on and on. First she spoke of an  
incident from her childhood. After  
relating several more stories, she  
ended the last one with, "And that  
happened only a hundred years ago."

Old Sister Rauch had only days  
to live, so two preachers went to call  
on her and her husband. When one  
asked if they could have prayer, the  
old man responded "Yes, but before  
you pray, could you sing "Why not  
tonight?"

A Sunday School Superintendent  
had been counting the credits for  
inviting people to church. He  
looked up after prayer, and seeing a  
new family, blurted "And who asked  
you?"

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

One pastor had asked all the people to bring a boiled egg to church Easter Sunday. At the close of the service he invited every- one to come forward and “lay an egg on the alter.” Another announced a work-bee at the church, “We need wood workers, painters and strippers.” An evangelist said he had three points in his sermon, the world, the flesh and the devil. After covering the first two, he stated “Now we will go to the devil.”

An old maid told her pastor that she really liked his sermon, especially when he read his text: “If any man will come after me, let him.”

Sometimes errors creep into printed matter, despite proof reading. Our District Superintendent sent a notice to our church announcing that if we had less than thirty full members, the conference could help us. The bulletin read “less than 30 ‘bull’ members.” The choir director’s note in another bulletin read “the choir will be sinning Sunday.” A Christian bookstore had a sign in its window to say “Spring is the season to sing.” Somehow, the final “g” got left off.

### Mixed Messages

In Sunday School or when they get home, children often say some curious things.

Once we were singing “Walking on the King’s Highway,” but little Andrea sang “Walking to the Burger King.” Instead of repeating “Love one another,” one child said “Love

one or the other.” After his teacher told the story of the loaves and fishes being fed to the multitude, one lad reported that the multitude loafs and fishes.

My son was teaching the preschool children. He told about the man with a crippled hand, explaining that the man couldn’t wave, write or work, but then Jesus came along. “What do you think He did?” he asked the class. One little fellow spoke up: “He shook with the other hand.”

Sometimes, even prayers take a strange twist. A child praying at the table repeated what he thought was his grandpa’s prayer. Bless, Oh Lord, these gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bunny (bounty).” Another child, trying to repeat a prayer he’d heard, said, “Bless this food for its tender juice (intended use).” My grandson, trying to imitate his father, prayed, “Bless the hands that repaired the food.” Leftovers, perhaps?

An old man prayed about the time “This silent tongue lies stammering in the grave.” A lady was heard to end a prayer with “This I ask for “Pete’s sake.”

### A Picture is Worth . . . .

Sunday School teachers often have children draw pictures of what they have learned. One boy depicted a manger scene with Mary, Baby Jesus, and a very large man nearby. When asked about the man, he explained, “Oh, that is Round John Virgin.”

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

Another child drew a picture of an airplane with a young woman in the foreground, holding a baby. Two men stood near her. This puzzled the teacher until the youngster explained that it was Mary and Joseph, all ready for the Flight to Egypt. "And who is the extra man?" Well, that's Pontius, the pilot."



One young artist explained his drawing of an animal with purple, green, red and black spots and stripes all over it. It was "Joseph's goat of many colors."

A mother, with three young daughters, arrived late for church and paused at the door of the sanctuary. An usher limped toward them, saying, "Walk this way." Down the aisle the three girls limped after him, with their embarrassed mother following.



# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

## My Three Sons

Let me tell you of my three sons.  
I'm as proud as I can be.  
Some days they're like their father,  
And at times they're more like me.

Dennie was our very first- born.  
And we watched him as he grew.  
He liked languages and music-  
One would be his work, we knew.  
He teaches college English now  
And likes his work a lot;  
He picks up most any story  
And soon figures out the plot.  
He was always rather quiet,  
People say that he's reserved,  
But when he's with his brothers  
That name is not deserved!

Then Lynn came second in our home,  
Much more sober than the rest.  
He never cared for toys or games  
But liked experimenting best.  
Now he's a research physicist,  
His fun-times paid off, I know.  
He's working for the government  
And that's how he makes his dough.  
He's worked in the Night-Vision Lab,  
At computers he's a whiz;  
He can't tell me what he's doing  
For he said it's "Army biz."

Stanley our third son joined our brood  
Just three years after the first,  
And when still in diapers  
At mischief he was the worst!  
And now he's a Navy Captain  
With responsibilities,

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

But he misplaces his wallet  
And needs help to find his keys!  
As a physical therapist  
He cares for sprains and bruises;  
He's special-service detailer  
And sends men where he chooses.

My three sons all have lovely wives  
And each one of them's just great.  
They've given me nine grand kids,  
And of course, they're all first-rate.  
I heard my husband tell our sons,  
"You have made a lucky start,  
For all of the children you have had  
Are really very smart!"

I've felt God's hand upon my life,  
I am sure He's with me still,  
And because of all these "blessings"  
They will all be in my will.

October 1996



# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

## A u t u m n

October 21, 1996

Summer is gone and now we hear  
The whisper of autumn around.  
Geese are honking up overhead  
And frost now covers the ground.

Some curds of clouds are in the sky  
They're touched by the sun's golden rays;  
They gather like old rags up there,  
Then the shreds are swept away.

Leaves are spreading over the earth,  
Bare branches reach crookedly tall;  
We'd better prepare for the changes;  
Winter always follows the fall.

The autumn of our lives is here;  
Are there cloudy or sunny hours?  
Don't count the days! Make the days count  
Spring will again bring the flowers!

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

### R a i n

Silver showers fall at night;  
Needles of rain,  
Sharp spears of rain,  
Torrents of rain.

Raindrops still dripped at daybreak;  
Not stormily,  
Not heavily,  
Just soddenly.

The river then rose higher,  
Rushing, pushing,  
Ever moving  
With liquid sound.



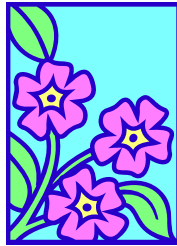
Then fog condensing soon rose,  
Ghostly—fingered,  
Tarnished pewter,  
Thick morning mist.

# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

## Springtime

September 23, 1996

From the great murmuring forest  
Comes the whisper of the pines;  
The wind is playing hide-and-seek  
Among tiny columbines.  
All along the woodsy pathway  
Lady slippers lift their heads;  
Under nearby leafy bushes  
Violets snuggle in their beds.



Spring peepers along the lakeside  
Keep on singing, loud and long,  
While the Owl from the forest  
Echoes back his questioning song.  
Unafraid, three deer are grazing  
On the lawn by the front door,  
And some birds in all their beauty  
Soar across the lake once more.

With regal carriage, swans go by  
To feed among marsh grasses;  
A great blue heron wings its way  
To fish as morning passes.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

A kingfisher, like a blue bolt  
Darts upon its unwarned prey;  
Peewees twittering in the bush  
Are announcing it is day.

Canadian geese advance shoreward –  
It's time for food, then a sleep;  
They take possession of the lawn  
While sentinels vigil keep.  
Mallards linger in the rushes  
At the lake's edge, finding food;  
Fuzzy ducklings swim among them  
As the parents watch their brood.

Wild canaries eat the finch food  
At the feeder by the house,  
While from the distant timberlands  
Comes the drumming of the grouse.  
He's calling for the attention  
Of the lady who will hear,  
For springtime is the mating time  
Of God's creatures, far and near.

The meadowlark alights nearby –  
An old fence post fills his needs;  
His little wife is on the nest  
In a tunnel made of weeds.  
He is full of joy and gladness,  
His melody simply floats;  
He is singing in his rapture  
Joyous songs with love-filled notes.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

### 82 and Going Strong

For my birthday  
November 17, 1996

Years have been flitting fast away.  
Some say that I'm getting old –  
They say I've slowed down quite a bit  
But I don't like what I'm told.

One by one body parts give out;  
Accidents have taken their toll.  
With broken ankles, injured spine  
I still hope to reach my goal.

I have worn glasses many years,  
Now bifocals fill my need.  
They help me with my cross-stitching  
And the many books I read.

When all my teeth began to ache  
I knew that they soon must go.  
“False teeth,” the dentist said to me,  
“Would be helpful, don't you know”?

My legs began to cripple up  
So that I could hardly walk.  
Then I began to use a cane;  
At a wheelchair I would balk.

Each time folks spoke in their soft voice,  
I'd yell back, “What's that, my dear”?  
So hearing aids became a must  
Now voices are loud and clear.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

I take my pills for arthritis,  
For blood pressure when it's high.  
My heart sometimes skips a beat –  
I keep my medicine nigh.



I write down items to myself  
And then I say, "Where's that note"?  
My memory is pretty bad;  
I've forgotten many a quote.

I really don't feel very old,  
I've been equipped with all these "things."  
I'm turning 82 today,  
And the pendulum still swings.

I've taken care of all my ills,  
I no longer think of that.  
But what in the world, you tell me,  
Shall I do with all this FAT?



## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

### Oh, I Thank You, Lord

November 23, 1998

I am tired, Lord—and I think of You.  
As You trod the roads of Galilee  
And touched the people, and made them free.  
How tired You must have been at night  
After the people had all taken flight.  
Oh, I thank You, Lord. I thank You.

I am weak, Lord—and I think of You.  
As you carried the cross toward the hill  
You stumbled and fell, but You knew God's will.  
Though your body was weak, You must go on.  
You would do as God wished till the battle was won.  
Oh, I thank You, Lord. I thank you.

I feel worn, Lord—and I think of You.  
As you hung there between earth and sky  
With the crowd hating, and raising a cry,  
You were willing to die for even me  
And every person who e'er they might be.  
Oh, I thank you, Lord. I thank You.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

### Whip --- Poor --- Will

His poignant call comes from the hill.  
It echoes back when all is still.  
“Whip - poor – will! Whip – poor – will!”

The darkness deepens in the sky  
And then I hear a quick reply.  
“Whip – poor – will! Whip – poor – will!”

These are the birds that always sing  
Their mournful songs in early spring.  
“Whip – poor – will! Whip – poor – will!”

Who’d want to whip poor Willy so?  
Now, that’s the thing I want to know.  
Whip poor Will? Whip poor Will?

Will can’t be bad! I can’t be wrong!  
I think they ought to change their song  
to

“Don’t whip poor Will!”

Please,

“Don’t whip poor Will!”

# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

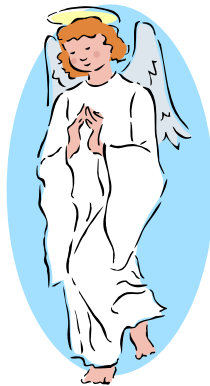
## Christmas --- Then and Now

### A Play

1<sup>st</sup> Narrator

The evening shadows gently fall, and over Galilee  
Is heard the night wind murmuring across the placid sea.  
The spicy scent of pine and fir pervades the hill and glade  
Enfolding with its soothing balm a silent, lovely maid,  
Who calmly rests beneath the shade in dreamy, sweet content  
When suddenly her calm repose is stirred in wonderment  
As to her startled eyes appears an angel from above:  
“All hail the Lord has chosen you most blessed one of love.”  
At these strange words the maiden grows alarmed beneath the spell  
For she is troubled at the news the angel has to tell:  
“Fear not, the Lord has favored you, most honored of the earth,  
To bear a son who shall be called Christ Jesus at His birth.  
For He shall be God’s only Son and rule with love divine.  
Be great in wisdom and in power and filled with grace sublime.”  
And Mary asked, “How can this be?” The angel speaking said,  
“The power of the Holy Ghost shall be upon your head.  
The great Jehovah shadowed you and watched each step you trod.  
Among all women you are blest and chosen one of God.”

Solo: “Ave Maria.”

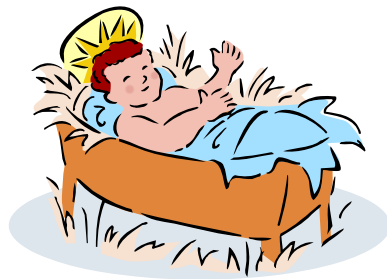


1<sup>st</sup> Narrator, continues

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

And Joseph, he of David's house, is told of God's great plan  
For he is worthy of the trust, a kindly, godly man.  
He shields sweet Mary with his love, but often in dismay  
He muses at the mystery and humbly bows to pray.  
He labors at the bench all day a smile upon his face,  
His neighbors feel his friendliness -- his shop a meeting place.  
And many wonder and would ask, but always seek in vain  
As Joseph calmly labors on with busy saw and plane.  
And then the time of taxing comes—the emperor's command—  
And Joseph taking Mary comes into a distant land.  
And in the town of Bethlehem they seek room in the inn  
For Mary who is in distress, and weary of the din.  
No place of comfort can be found, no cot to lay her head.  
No room, no kindly, helping hand. And then within a shed  
They find a shelter in a stall and rest throughout the night;  
And here upon the clover bed is born the King of light.  
A guardian angel hovers near to shield from all alarms  
While Mary rocks her Babe in gentle, loving arms,  
And Joseph standing ever near with watchful, tender care,  
In contemplation bows his head in thankful, fervent prayer.

Organ – “Holy, Holy, Holy.”



2<sup>nd</sup> Narrator

But in this modern age of hurry all day through  
The modern men and women forget the story true.  
They have replaced the Baby with a little Christmas tree  
And to trim the lower branches, they, too, go on bended knee  
The tree becomes a symbol of all that Christmas means  
And every modern home today repeats the happy scenes.  
Of moms and dads and children with all the gifts galore,  
With paper and with ribbons spread out across the floor.  
They worship, yes, they worship, but not the heavenly guest  
They worship round the Christmas tree with decorations dressed.

# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

Song - "Oh, Christmas Tree"

1<sup>st</sup> Narrator

As shadows fall across the fields the herdsmen tend their sheep.  
One shepherd stands as sentinel while comrades rest in sleep.  
The sky above is filled with stars, and earth is calm and still  
When suddenly a light appears and spreads o'er plain and hill.  
The shepherd calls out in his fear, and comrades rise in fright;  
They huddle close together as they view the wondrous sight.  
An angel then descends to them in robes of light arrayed;  
He speaks in sweetly, solemn voice as they draw back, afraid:  
"Fear not for I have come to you, and to the world I bring  
A message of great hope and joy—to you is born the King.  
Arise, and go to Bethlehem and this shall be the sign—  
The swaddling clothes, and manger bed which cradles the Divine."  
An angel chorus then appears and sings with one accord;  
Good will and peace to men on earth! All glory to the Lord!"

Song: While Shepherds Watch



1<sup>st</sup> Narrator, continues

The glad hosannas fill the air as hallelujahs ring,  
And earth responds in joyousness while angel voices sing.  
Then suddenly the host is gone, the night is still again,  
But never will these shepherds' hearts forget the sweet refrain.  
The trembling shepherds whispered low, "Let us go see this thing.  
Of which the angel tells tonight—this story of a King."  
With hope renewed and faith restored they go in eagerness  
To claim the prophecy foretold of truth and righteousness.

Chorus: "Hark! the Harold Angels Sing

2<sup>nd</sup> Narrator

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

In eagerness the children come to trim the Christmas tree,  
With tinsel and with icicles, they're busy as can be –  
They watch the glittering lights that flicker in the night and “Ooh” and “Aah”  
at what they see—it is a pretty sight  
But they've forgotten all about the Child, the gift of Love,  
The Baby, God has sent to us—the great gift from above  
In almost every home in our great and happy land  
The Baby Jesus we forget, and worship THINGS so grand,  
The shepherds hastened to the barn to see the Babe so wee  
And now today the children come to gather 'round the tree  
The star that stood above the barn so very long ago  
Now sits atop the Christmas tree, and gives a special glow.



Song: -- “Why the Star Shone”

1<sup>st</sup> Narrator,

The shepherds find the cattle shed lit with celestial ray,  
And there the mother and her child at rest upon the hay.  
The shepherds bow in humbleness and praise God for the birth  
Of Him who came from Heav'n above to reign upon the earth.  
Arising they still ponder on this poor and lowly place,  
But Mary smiles assurance with her kindly, gentle grace.  
Within her heart she, too, holds awe at blessings she is giv'n,  
While in her arms she gently holds the miracle from heav'n.  
The herdsmen leave the holy shrine to spread the sacred word  
Proclaiming wide that all may know the birth of Him, their Lord.

Chorus: “Silent Night”

2<sup>nd</sup> Narrator

The story says the cattle shed, lit with celestial ray

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

Was where the mother and the child were resting on the hay.  
The animals stood round about and worshipped and adored,  
They seemed to know that Christ had come with happiness in store,  
For all the animals that night who saw the baby's birth  
Had heard the angels' song proclaim the news of peace on earth.  
But who replaces all those beasts – those animals present here?  
Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Santa's four reindeer  
Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen – now we have all eight  
But look! Another one appears, and he's not second rate  
For Santa chooses Rudolph to guide his sleigh at night.  
With Rudolph's shining nose, the pathway becomes bright.  
They sail with Santa to our homes through the great Christmas sky—  
The same sky where angels sang of Christ who came to die.

Song 32 Feet and 8 Little Tails



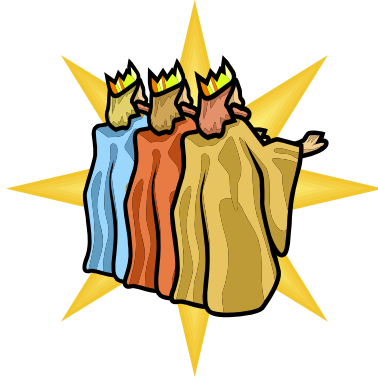
1<sup>st</sup> Narrator

King Herod in his splendor rules upon his mighty throne  
When tidings of this mystery to him are first made known  
By Magi, who have come to see the things they have been told,  
And they would go to seek and prove this prophecy of old.  
They tell King Herod of the sign to lead them on the way,  
For they have seen this beacon light—a star of lustrous ray.  
Then Herod in his haste and fear tells them that they may go  
And search throughout the distant land and learn if this is so.  
And in his anger he demands that they return and bring  
The proof of birth of this strange child proclaimed the newborn King.  
“Go now away upon the road before the star grows dim,  
Bring back to me the place of birth that I might worship him.”  
The Wise-men hasten on their way until the star above  
Drops low to light a cottage home where all is peace and love.  
They find the lovely mother there, and child so pure and sweet,  
And bowing in humility they worship at His feet,  
Arising they accept the truth of this strange mystery  
For light of understanding fills their hearts with ecstasy.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

Then from their store of treasured gifts they shower wealth untold:  
Pure frankincense and pungent myrrh, rich jewels, and pure gold.  
They leave and in a dream God warned them on the way  
To return not to King Herod for he in his rage would slay  
This child of God who is to rule forever on the earth.  
It is for this the God of love designed this holy birth.”

Song: - “We Three Kings”



2<sup>nd</sup> Narrator

But who brings gifts to us today on every Christmas Eve?  
It is Mr. Santa Claus, the children all believe.  
He drives to the rooftops down he comes with a bound,  
He sees the decorations, and turning around,  
He fills all the stockings and with nothing to say  
Up the chimney he goes so happy and gay.  
The reindeer are waiting and to them he does a whistle  
And away they all go like the down of a thistle,  
With Rudolph leading the way.

Song – Rudolph





## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

2<sup>nd</sup> Narrator

Dates A.D. & B.C. come from the famous night  
When our savior was born in that circle of light.  
And all over the world people know of His birth  
And they celebrate Christmas for all they are worth.  
Some worship before Him and reverence His name,  
But others love Santa with all of his fame.  
Yes, the "Spirit of Christmas" Santa is called.  
As through the dark sky in his sleigh he is hauled,  
"I never meant it to be this way,"  
Santa in sorrow is heard sadly to say.  
So all Santa's followers must get down on their knees  
And look up to Jesus, for it's Jesus who sees  
All of our sins and our weaknesses, too  
He'll hear our confessions and make us like new.  
So, this Christmas Day, get your priorities straight  
And someday you'll enter Heaven's great pearly gate.

Song: "Joy to the World."

## **Stories and Poems by Helen Garn**

### **How I Teach Reading**

At the beginning of the first lesson I tell the 1<sup>st</sup> graders that there are 26 letters in the alphabet. We name them together and even sing them. I tell them I call them letter people. There are 5 vowels and I call them girls, and the 21 consonants are boys. Different boys get together to make a word, but they can't ever make one word without at least one of the girls. No word in our English language is without a vowel (sometimes using y as a vowel).

I give them each a letter and explain their sound, which they will use throughout the year. 5 of the girls get vowels and are reminded of the sound. A few girls are also chosen as substitutes. 21 boys get letters and soon learn their sound.

Now the fun begins. I write a word on the blackboard and the children run up and stand in position and sound off.

The girls soon learn that when two vowels go walking, the 1<sup>st</sup> one does the talking and the second one is silent. To show the sign for a long vowel sound, the girl puts her hand flat on top of her head to show she knows the name of the letter. If a vowel is short, they sound off the short sound without any sign. They soon learn that if they are between 2 boys, they use the short sound.

The boys all have their same sound throughout the year- all except c and g. They learn that if Little Miss E follows them the c says the s sound, and the g uses the j sound.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

As the months pass they learn about consonant combinations and vowel combinations, diagraphs and then how to divide into syllables. I tell them that 2 boys together sometimes causes mischief, so we separate them and that makes two parts of the word called syllable, with a vowel in each syllable.



The children learn fast and soon know each other's sound. They enjoy making words- maybe because they can get out from their seats often.

The PTA asked for a demonstration and I wrote several words on the blackboard then I wrote the word Constantinople. The children ran up (with some of the substitutes) and sounded off. The parents were amazed when I told them it was a new word for the children.

This system works and the children have fun and so do I!

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

### The Empty Nest

What is an empty nest? It is an event - something that happens and is distasteful for almost every parent. It hits where it hurts - at our hearts. The parents have to face the inevitable. It's the time when their grown children move out of their childhood home to go to college, to a job, or to get married and make their home in another city. The father and mother hurt - some even wishing the young people were still in their "terrible teens," or even in grade school so they could still be at home.



I remember when our neighbor lady said to my mother, "I wish my kids didn't have to leave. I'd love to keep them here forever." My mother gasped as she answered, "You must not wish that! The children are loaned to us. They are our treasures, and their utmost joys are ahead of them. They are destined to leave - but don't worry - they'll be back. It's not all bad."

Sure enough, the same lady, some time later, told my mother, "The kids were all home this weekend, and I got so tired of cooking, washing dishes and cleaning! You were right. It's not so bad with them gone."

I knew from that conversation that some day my seven brothers and my sister and I would leave and occasionally go back to visit. It happened, and we all went back, but not at the same time, and never again did any of us live there. My parents always seemed glad to see us, and probably were glad when we left. They had adjusted well.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

People react in different ways when they realize they have an empty nest. For around twenty years they watched over their children, but now they're gone, and emotional depression sets in.

Other parents find they have not much in common any more, and often there is divorce, while others stay together and live with good memories and hopes for their children's future.

How to face an empty nest is a big question. To some it is a problem. Some parents are happy to be no longer in harness, caring for their offspring. The mother's only harness now is with her husband who appears to be happy. He may be already changing the locks on the doors. She may think of cleaning out the empty ice cube trays and empty milk cartons from the refrigerator. She is glad there will be no more three-hour showers, and dirty clothes lying around.

This type of mother is unusual. She just seems to be glad, although she misses her children very much, and has an empty feeling inside.

Taking care of our children is woman's most precious duty and life's most rewarding experience, but the time comes when that work is completed and we must let them go.

Some mothers feel like they would like to die. There is no reason to live now with the children gone. She forgets that her husband, the father of her children may be sad also. Both have given their lives for the kids, and now they are again alone. She is emotionally upset - depressed.

The apron strings have been cut, and the umbilical cord is knotted, twisted and tangled. She can't get the children out of her mind. When she sets the table for meals, she looks at the place where a plate used to sit, and she says to herself, "I wonder if he has enough to eat? Is he hungry? Is he making enough money to pay his bills? Does he miss me?"

Some women withdraw from their friends and from others of their relation - even close relatives. They allow no callers and make no visits. All social activities cease, and there is gloom. The nest is empty, except for her husband. What will they do now?

We don't shake children out of the nest like birds and animals do. An eagle takes a youngster on its back, flies through the air and tips the little one off. If it can fly, it spreads its wings and goes. If it can't fly the parent catches it on her back again, and the lessons go on until the little one can fly or is left to fall.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

Beavers kill the young if they refuse to leave the nest when the parents believe they should. Birds also kill their young if they cannot fly when pushed out.

One man said parenting is like the bow and arrow sport. Preparation has to be made before the shot. Training makes the arrow point toward the place we want the arrow to land, and then we let go.

Preparation must be the rule for the parents. They want the child to be ready in every way to "hit the mark." They must prepare that child for what is to come - for the work they choose to do out in the world, for they know the child will eventually leave to find his work, and that will be the first apron string to be loosened.

Parents should approve of the type of work their children choose. They should not squelch, but realize that a child who lives with approval learns to like himself and have a good image. He has needed boundaries, and parents should have convictions and courage enough to enforce those convictions and send the offspring off knowing there will be new temptations for the child. A praying parent will want the child to follow God's plan and directions. They want the arrow on course.

The fathers and mothers are sure the child will be back, "His suitcase gets homesick," one mother said. He comes to visit, puts down his load, and goes calling on his friends. A lady told me she gives \$5.00 into the thank offering when her child comes home, and \$10.00 when he leaves. Home is a place where they eat and sleep and leave to go visiting, and they will gradually get weaned away from it, but the father and mother are still there.

Teenagers love the thought of being free. Time has passed more slowly for them than for their parents, who feel with Alan Alda who said, "Yesterday morning you were born, last evening you started to school, and today you are gone."

No doubt the hardest years for parents are those teen-age years. Even though the diaper years were difficult, these years are harder as they go through the "You're too strict", "You're too old fashioned," and "All the other kids are doing it," stage. They wonder what has gone wrong.

"But now we won't have to worry about them" they say. That's what they think, but what parent doesn't worry about their son and daughter, and then the grandchildren?

Many youngsters leave home long before they take all their belongings. I have been in homes where one corner of the guest room is filled with goodies the

# Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

child will take “some day.” The mother dusts them and longs for her child, but knows that part of loving him is letting him go.

## Separation

If one doesn't feel like living after the children have left the nest, they should read in their Bible what Philippians 4:8 says and think of the things the verse tells you to be thankful for - lovely things, good things. It says to be happy and joyful for what you have. Only your children have left you. There is beauty around you - an incentive to keep on living. You are stressed out now, but think of the real values of life. You have done your part. Now take courage and live with confidence, love, integrity and trust. Live in the presence of love. Extend a helping hand to a friend. Don't forget the children, but live joyously where you are.

There are many separations after the children leave home. The divorce rate goes up. Why do couples separate then? Is it because of a lack of communication? If time hasn't been spent in developing a lasting friendship, for many, it is too late now. There is so much togetherness when the kids are gone. They have been a wife and husband for twenty to forty years, and parents for a long time and no foundation for a continued friendship was made while both were too busy - she with the housework and family, and sometimes with a job away from the house - office work, teaching or other jobs. He has been away each day at his work. There wasn't much togetherness before. Why not go separate ways?

Something must have happened to make two people who had been in love, separate. Perhaps her job kept her late and she felt rushed when she arrived home. She fixed a meal, then disappeared into her room, office, or to rest, leaving her husband to put the children to bed. In dual-income homes, the man often pines for more alone - time with his wife, and because of the work-life-struggle marriage is sacrificed. They do not try hard enough to even talk on the phone to each other during the working hours. It is too late now. They may speak but mostly with criticism.

They do not like, love, or respect each other, so why not split? The family is gone. Why not go their separate ways? Does he miss the children as much as she does? She thinks not, but he may long for the good old days when the nest was full. Letting go of children for whom we've been responsible is foreign to the nature of a person with a high level of concern for others. Parents are concerned people. Unless they let go at the opportune time children may not develop the feeling of being a successful adult.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

A broken family is a bereaved family and the children, although not at home, feel like the rug was pulled from under them; they suffer. How are they going to spend equal time with each of them? Often they don't. They visit one and seem to forget the other. They say, "That marriage destroyed a beautiful friendship."

The divorce rate is increasing. More parents are separating in the last few years. They have forgotten the two sentences that help. "I love you" and "I am sorry." The lasting friendship is gone!

Somewhere, through the years one or both may have forgotten to be fair, considerate, compassionate and companionable, and even to be self-controlled. A few short, sharp words can cause trouble, just as a forgiving spirit may mend the chink in the marriage. A relationship with Christ could help most to make a real marriage last. They had experienced together dreams and disappointments, struggles and sacrifices, success and failures. Perhaps a money shortage caused unhappiness. It is too late now. Perhaps they could have made adjustments but they felt they could and should be somewhere else. Sometimes there is a nervous breakdown.

My husband and I never thought of divorce when our three sons left. We had vowed before God to be true to each other till death parted us. We had love and companionship and many shared interests. I was teaching and he worked at Garn Glass Company that he and his brother owned. We shared the adventures of the day each evening. We were both avid readers, and we also liked to watch game show and sports on television. He had a beautiful tenor voice and he liked to sing while I played the piano.

We both worked in the Free Methodist Church and he spent many hours as a trustee on the board. He often had to go to meetings in Winona Lake, Indiana, or the official meeting at the Spring Arbor Church. We were both busy and lived happily together in Cadillac Michigan. We could visit our children. This we did often and they brought their families to see us.

Our marriage was like a long conversation. We had much to discuss, and we didn't always agree, but we felt that in sickness or in health, for richer or poorer, for better or for worse, we would go forward together. We could and would make it. We liked, loved and respected each other.

Marriage, to us, was companionship, respect, and admiration. It was made up of dreams, disappointments, success and failures, sacrifices and struggles experienced together. It was difficult now and then, but we made adjustments, and the rewards more than repaid for the sacrifice.



## **Stories and Poems by Helen Garn**

We were both willing to work for success, and used the recipe; 1 cup of keeping on, giving our best, and trying to make the best better. A sense of humor helped a great deal.

We could face the future with trust in each other and in God. We had spent time during the years, when the children were with us, developing a lasting friendship. A close relationship with God helped.

As I saw broken families and bereaved and suffering children, I knew I never wanted a divorce. We could bottle up petty differences and go on with faith, courage, and love. Divorce was not for us! Life was good!

### **Living in Memories**

The nest is empty! The kids are gone! What are the two of us going to do? We could get depressed, but we didn't want that. We could separate and go different ways as some couples do, but we couldn't do that. We could live in memories and we had many good ones of our three sons, and we often talked to each other about them. We had watched them grow up, had disciplined them, laughed with them and maybe cried with them. It had been wonderful watching them grow. We saw them learn to walk and talk, and start school, and finally graduate. Time slipped away, and they were grown.

Dennis, our 1<sup>st</sup> was born was a tiny baby boy, but he grew fast. We were so proud of him.

Lynn was born two years later on - a big ten-pound boy.

A year and a half later on Stanley, our third son came. A neighbor lady came to see the new baby and said, "Now three is enough!" I agreed, but thought about her six children. Three hadn't been enough for her.

My memory goes back to when Dennie was three years old. He had two brothers by that time and used to watch over them. A hired lady kept them by day as I was teaching, and we were all five together at night.

As they grew I could see there was a lot of mischief in them. They were like their father in that respect. The youngest son, Stanley could aggravate his brothers very easily. He could always think of something funny to do, or some mischief to get into. Dennie was a quiet child, and always seemed more understanding of my feelings than the other two were. He seldom needed scolding and was very obedient.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

Lynn was the inquisitive one. He had to find out what made things go. At the age of 5, he told his father what was wrong with a machine that failed to run. When that was fixed, we were amazed that he had studied the cause, and his suggestion was correct.

The three boys played well together and the lady I hired to care for them during my days at school loved them.

My memory goes back to the time when they were little. We had put them to bed, all in the same room, and they kept talking and giggling until their father said, "You boys go to sleep! If I hear one more word, I'm coming in!" All was quiet, and then we heard a little voice say, "Good night Daddy," then another, "Good night, Daddy" and still a third "Good night, Daddy." Daddy smiled, and didn't go in. and I knew the boys were snickering with their heads covered. To this day I wonder which one of them thought of that.

Memories come back as I think of their years in grade school, high school, and finally college. I think of the perplexities and challenges of the world. Each child had the spirit of adventure that we nourished.

We didn't stifle it, but tried to encourage them. They knew what they wanted to do and be. We had wanted them to be prepared for the work they wished to do.

The oldest son, Dennis, chose to be a teacher. He loved books, and read much. After one year of his graduation from college, while he was teaching in a high school, he was asked to join the staff at Spring Arbor College to teach English literature. In October (2005) the College (now a university) celebrated and honored him for forty years as a professor there.

Lynn chose to be a physicist. All his investigations and questions as a little child paid off. He has worked thirty-five years in the Night Vision Laboratory and on retirement the government asked him to work at another. I don't know what he does now for his country.

Stanley was drafted into the Army a few weeks after his marriage in 1969. He chose to join the Navy instead. He did well and retired as a Captain. The United States Government asked him to stay in Germany and teach Science to the sixth grade military children. This he is doing now. He is also a physical therapist.

The empty nest was filled with fond memories, and a great interest in what the boys and their families were doing. But what about us? What were we to do - just the two of us? We had felt the sting of having the boys leave, but we felt prepared. We might feel lonely and anxious about them, but we got a new lease on life.

## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

We had insulated ourselves against their departures. And we had a healthy relationship with them, so we adjusted. We were ready to embrace this new stage of our life together. We hadn't had time to go places and see things before.

All three boys had married as soon as they graduated from college, so we made visits to them. Writing letters and phone calls were often used, and then e-mail became a possible way of communication.

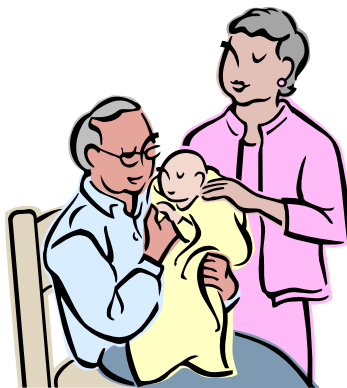
I was still teaching and Stewart was still working at his Garn Glass Company. We had raised the boys, knowing they would leave and we were ready to pursue activities we couldn't find time for before. We still felt the sting of the parting, but we dealt with it constructively.

Our kids were born, grew up and left us, and we, the parents remained. Good memories sustained us.

Then in 1989, my husband's heart attack took him, and my nest was finally empty. Relatives and friends helped me during those sad days, and I realized I would some day go to meet him. At first living without him was difficult, but I learned to quote what one woman had said, "I must learn to walk on one leg instead of two." I, too, learned to live alone and be happy.

### Grandchildren

My three sons each married lovely girls and have given me nine grandchildren, three to each family. There are six boys and three girls - all born between 1970 and 1980. Each one is special, and each one helps me to realize why I shared my sons.



## Stories and Poems by Helen Garn

Grandchildren link me to my motherhood and also to my childhood, reminding me of my parents and grandparents, and of the stories I heard about my ancestors.

Grandchildren also link me to the future as I wonder what they will become as they grow. So far I am very proud as they take their place in society. All nine have done well. My oldest granddaughter, Lisa, is a home-school teacher. Her sister, Nicole is an echo-technologist. Their brother is a Marine serving his country and is stationed in Okinawa. Barbara is an editor, and her brother, David, works with computer forensics. Steven works on computer digital hardware designs.

Jeff is a lawyer, J.D. is an Art teacher and Nathan is a minister. All nine worked hard in their college years, and I believe they will do well in the future as their vested interests lead them.

Six of my grand children are married and have given me five great-grandchildren - the youngest one born on my ninety-first birthday in 2005.

Grandchildren are wonderful and give continuity.

My son, Stan, asked what I would have taken out of my life. I couldn't answer, because I don't know. There have been a few sad times, like deaths and a divorce, but I can see good in those cases, too. Sad times make me appreciate the good times more. God has been good to me and I am satisfied.

The time came when I must move from my home at Cadillac, Michigan to a retirement center. I chose Spring Arbor because my son, Dennis, was a professor at the college here, and he and his family lived near. I have been here at Spring Arbor Oaks almost thirteen years and am contented and well-cared-for. Life hasn't lost it's zeal but I'm spending my time - doing cross-stitch, cryptograms, and reading, writing, and watching game shows on television.

I don't sing the blues or resent growing older. I don't despair, but am self-confident. I respect what J.C. Penny said at the age of 95, "My eyesight may be getting weaker, but my vision is increasing."

We are born, we suffer, we love as time goes by. Seed-time and harvest come and go, and the earth remains. We have our memories of those who needed us, and now they have others that need them. I pray for each one each day. Life is good and rewarding and my empty nest is filled with good memories.

I know death is inevitable but it is my journey that matters - whether I succeeded or have failed. I have lived with honor and respect and with faith in God, and really my nest is not totally empty - I'm still here.