

The Qualities of Helen Duggar Conwell

(1922-2016)

by

Llewellyn and Susan Toulmin

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It would take a lifetime to recount all of Helen's achievements and adventures, so we will stick to her terrific qualities. Helen had a fabulous memory, and she was smart, kind, generous, decisive and bold.

Memory: Helen and her sister Mary both were able to remember virtually all their relatives, classmates, neighbors and colleagues. They remembered their names, relations to each other, their family trees, their interactions, and then they kept up with their life histories. No-one today can do that – how did they do that?

Smart: Helen's 1941 graduation letter from the University of Alabama Medical School states that she has accumulated a remarkable 487 points out of a possible 500, and "this is indeed brilliant work." She got "A+" grades in Pharmacology, Neuro-Physiology, Bacteriology and numerous other difficult courses, and the rest of her substantive grades were all "A"s. She got several "B"s – but only in Phys Ed!

Kind and generous: Helen always gave generously of her time, was always welcoming, and always knew the right thing to do or say. When Susan Little (soon to be Toulmin) was brought down from Washington, DC to meet the large Toulmin-Duggar clan and participate in a family reunion, Helen was busy managing the event, but she recognized that Susan felt at a loss among so many strangers. Helen made the time to welcome Susan to the gathering, spent time with her, asked her questions to learn about her background, introduced her around, and put her at ease.

Decisive and bold: Helen met her husband David Conwell in New Orleans in 1951 for a few minutes when he came to call on her roommate, but the roommate had left for Wisconsin. Six weeks later David, a ship's officer, was back in port, and Helen had made such an impression that he came calling on her instead. She invited him in, but unfortunately he had a bladder infection and his antibiotics were making him sick. As Helen says in her memoir, David "proceeded to vomit eleven times in my bathroom." He finally got to the point that he was able to take her out for a drink. That was their first date. On their second date, the next night,

David took Helen to dinner in the French Quarter. As Helen says, “he broached the subject of marriage, and I promptly refused.” A good negotiator, David said that she should call him in Virginia in the next few days, if she changed her mind. Ever decisive and bold, and perhaps knowing that things could only get better after this rocky start, Helen called David several days later and “told him to come on back to New Orleans, that I would marry him.” This, after 2.1 dates, 1 drink, 1 dinner and 11 vomits!

They lived happily ever after.

[Helen Duggar Conwell was the younger sister of Mary Morgan Duggar Toulmin, and thus the aunt of Llewellyn Morgan Toulmin.]