



Helen Ernst

March 26, 1927 - April 7, 2026

Helen Louise Ernst, who had just celebrated her 99th birthday, passed away suddenly on April 7, 2026, at Davis County Hospital in Bloomfield, Iowa. A lifelong resident of Bloomfield, Helen was born on March 26, 1927, in Davis County to Benjamin and Ruth Berry Hasting.

Helen was a diamond—formed under relentless pressure, shaped by time and resistance. She carried a strength few will ever fully understand. Each facet of her life reflected grit, brilliance, adventure, and wisdom.

Her grit was forged early, growing up on a small farm where hard work was plentiful and money was scarce. As a young woman, she fell in love with a handsome neighbor, Ivan Mason, and married her childhood sweetheart shortly after graduation. In 1945, tragedy struck when Ivan was killed in World War II, leaving Helen nine months pregnant with their first child, Victoria Jean (Steve) Cary.

Her brilliance emerged in the years that followed. As a young widow and single mother, Helen proved herself a determined entrepreneur—renting the upstairs of a building on the town square and subletting rooms for income. She worked as a soda jerk at Davies Pharmacy, where she famously won the heart of a new love, Wendell Ernst, by adding extra malt to his chocolate malts.

Adventure followed when she married Curtis Wendell Ernst. Together, they built a life rooted in hard work and ambition, creating multiple successful businesses, including a dress shop, a Chevrolet dealership, real estate ventures, and agricultural operations. They gave Vickey four spirited siblings —Shelly (Jeff) Bassett, John (Rosalee) Ernst, Joe (Dee) Ernst, and Allison (Jeff) Wroe—who brought both joy and energy to their home, along with a few well-earned visits for Wendell to the American Legion and Helen's signature white hair.

Wendell passed away on September 16, 1997, just as they were entering their twilight

years together. In the years that followed, Helen embraced travel, visiting Europe, Hawaii, and destinations across the United States. Later, she found companionship with a neighbor, Bob Wuthrich, with whom she shared his final years until his passing on April 17, 2020.

Adventure didn't slow in her 90s—it simply took a new form. Helen became an overnight social media sensation when a video of her singing a Carnation Milk jingle from her childhood went viral. With millions of adoring fans, “Grandma Helen” was soon embraced as one of Carnation's own, appearing in a series of heartfelt cooking videos alongside her family. The Carnation team welcomed her as the true diamond she was—showering her with love, attention, and even a brand-new front sidewalk.

Helen, a rare and sparkling diamond, left this world quickly and quietly. One can only imagine that on the afternoon of April 7, she arrived at the pearly gates with a twinkle in her eye, greeted by her dear friends—Billie Wright, Ada Petefish, and Nancy Logan—and, with her unmistakable wit, quipped, “Well, well, well... he did let me in!”

She is survived by two daughters, Shelly (Jeff) Bassett of Bloomfield and Allison (Jeff) Wroe of Colorado Springs, Colorado; one son, Joe (Dee) Ernst of Des Moines, Iowa; six grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; a nephew, Elwood (Norma) Ernst of Dixon, Missouri; and a niece, Margaret (Ann) Wilcox Schach of West Burlington, Iowa.

She was preceded in death by her parents; her husbands; her daughter and son-in-law, Vickey and Steve Cary; her son, John (Rosalee) Ernst; five siblings, Marian, Myrtle, Margaret, Vanietta, and Benjamin; and her special friend, Bob Wuthrich.

Graveside services will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, April 11, 2026, at IOOF Cemetery in Bloomfield, with Dr. Susan Warner officiating. No visitation is planned. In lieu of flowers, a memorial has been established to Sherman Chapel Cemetery in Davis County and may be left at the graveside service or mailed to: Helen Ernst Memorial, Wagler Funeral Home, 304 W. Jefferson St., Bloomfield, Iowa 52537.

Cemetery Details

IOOF Cemetery

620 North Madison Street
Bloomfield, IA 52537

Previous Events

Graveside Services

APR 11. 10:00 AM (CT)

IOOF Cemetery
620 North Madison Street
Bloomfield, IA 52537

Tribute Wall

BI

“ Bill, Cindy, Nicole, Max, Amber, Lindsey purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Helen Ernst.



Bill, Cindy, Nicole, Max, Amber, Lindsey - April 10 at 02:13 PM

BI

“ Bill, Cindy, Nicole, Max, Amber, Lindsey planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Helen Ernst.

Bill, Cindy, Nicole, Max, Amber, Lindsey - April 10 at 02:13 PM

JD

“ John & Denise Dean purchased the Full Of Love Bouquet for the family of Helen Ernst.



John & Denise Dean - April 10 at 09:46 AM

LR

“ Lynn Roberts lit a candle in memory of Helen Ernst



lynn roberts - April 09 at 08:34 PM

YT

“ your AEL Inforce Management Team purchased the Treasured Lilies Spray for the family of Helen Ernst.



your AEL Inforce Management Team - April 09 at 03:06 PM

RG

“ *Richard Grim lit a candle in memory of Helen Ernst*



Richard Grim - April 09 at 02:29 PM

PC

“ *I had the pleasure of meeting this sweet lady, while working the 2000 Census! She was always cheerful and just a little ornery! I'm so happy that I ran into her at DCH while waiting on an appt! Pamela Collier!*

Pamela Collier - April 08 at 07:55 PM

PF

“ *Paul and Ann Seals and family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Helen Ernst.*

Paul and Ann Seals and family - April 08 at 07:36 PM

PF

“ *Paul and Ann Seals and family purchased the Full Of Love Bouquet for the family of Helen Ernst.*



Paul and Ann Seals and family - April 08 at 07:36 PM

KH

“ *Kevin & Lisa Hastings lit a candle in memory of Helen Ernst*



Kevin & Lisa Hastings - April 08 at 07:07 PM