

Helen Marchese, Woman of the Year 1983



Helen Marchese is a child of the South and one has only to hear her soft drawl to realize this. As a young woman living in Raleigh, North Carolina, she attended St.Mary's College. In 1935, while at college, she met and married Anthony Marchese in a double ceremony with her sister Lois and her fianc♦. In the years that followed she and Tony lived in Knoxville and Chattanooga, TN, Atlanta GA. And Helena AR. In 1946, World War II ended, they returned to Tony's native home, Poughkeepsie.

Helen's parents imparted the strong message to her and her six siblings that they were not here just for "self". Helen certainly lived up to their expectation. She created a home for her family wherever they lived. For eleven years, she was employed by St.John's Lutheran Church as Executive Secretary until a stroke put an end to her work there.

Her volunteer career of over thirty-seven years is extraordinary.

For 30 years she volunteered with Taconic district PTA; 15 years on the board of the Mental Health Association. In 1979 she helped to organize REACH, a service group for families of the mentally ill; she supported efforts leading to legislation in the area of mental health. In addition, she volunteered on the Dutchess County Child Development Committee, served on the boards of the YWCA and the Friends of Val-Kill Inc. She has received awards for her service from the Dutchess County Mental Health Association, Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val Kill, Hudson river Psychiatric Center, New York State PTA, and the Foundation of Religion and Mental Health. She has been named Woman of the Year by the Rotary Clubs of Poughkeepsie and Arlington, Kiwanis International, Trinity Methodist Church and in 1983 by American Association of University Women.

**In 2001, Helen Marchese moved back to Raleigh, NC to be near her son, Don Marchese and two of her sisters. On February 6, 2013 Helen will be 100 years old.

Poughkeepsie Journal -- Monday, September 26, 1983
By Carol Trapani, Journal staff

Helping others is the goal of the Woman of the Year

"My mother and father did get some things across. They felt strongly we are not here for self."
- Helen Marchese on the impetus for her volunteer work

Helen Marchese is a pink-complexioned, white haired woman who lives in a house with a pink and blue living room and who, it would seem on the surface, might view life through rose-colored glasses.

Such is not the case.

Life has not been a rose garden for this soft-spoken woman who has been named Woman of the Year by the Poughkeepsie branch of the American Association of University Women.

Despite a stroke eight years ago, despite a losing battle against her husband's Alzheimer's disease which left her a widow four years ago, Mrs. Marchese remains rooted in the conviction that those who are able to do for others simply should.

Since 1946, when she first moved to Poughkeepsie with her husband, Tony, Helen Marchese has tried to live up to her own expectations. For 30 years she volunteered with the Taconic District PTA; for 15 years with the board of the Mental Health Association; In 1979 she helped organize REACH, a group which provides service to families of the mentally ill; she has been a volunteer with the Dutchess County Child Development Committee, the YWCA board and Friends of Val-Kill Inc.

In addition, she worked at St. John's Lutheran Church in Wilbur Boulevard, and made a home for her husband and their two sons in a little Cape Cod in James Street, Town of Poughkeepsie. In the years before that, she was more than glad to make a home for herself and Tony as they traveled around the country while Tony worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Atomic Energy Commission through the U.S. Public Health Service.

She was born in Warsaw, N.C. and moved to Raleigh at age seven. She met Tony right after he had graduated from the University of North Carolina and while she was at St. Mary's Episcopal School. They married in 1935 and lived in Chattanooga, Knoxville, Augusta, Atlanta and Helena, Ark., among other cities, before moving to Tony's native Poughkeepsie.

"When we moved to Arkansas I thought it was the end of the world," said Mrs. Marchese. "Tony was with the Atomic Energy Commission then, working with the U.S. Public Health Service. The people in Helena were wonderful to us, and I'm glad to report that," she said.

She said she had decided early on in their marriage to enjoy every state they lived in, and to really make a home in each place. "We mostly bought homes, and every place was home. Truly, there's something to enjoy every where you go...My mother and father did get some things across. They felt strongly we are not here for self."

It was that belief that propelled her into her volunteer activities once she and Tony had finally settled in Poughkeepsie, Tony with the New York State Department of Transportation.

During her 37 years of active volunteerism, Mrs. Marchese is especially thankful for legislation in the areas of mental health. "We still have a long way to go," she said, "but we've had legislation that's helped people." She was referring to the community care concept for people heretofore institutionalized.

For 11 years Mrs. Marchese was the executive secretary at St. John's Lutheran Church. The job ended when her stroke hit and she went to the Burke Rehabilitation facility in Westchester County.

This was a time, she recalled, when her husband's Alzheimer's disease, a chronic illness which affects the brain and which can result in complete physical and mental disability, was at its worst. "I told them at Burke that I had to get well, and they said if you have to, you will."

She did.

Although Mrs. Marchese was never to go back to work, she kept on volunteering, all the while giving emotional support to Tony who, by this time, was in the Canandaigua Veterans Hospital. It was there he died, at age 69.

"I had never heard of Alzheimer's before," said Mrs. Marchese, speaking about the time before Tony was afflicted. "The devastating part was there was no hope, no cure. You can imagine what it did to two boys, their wives, their children.

"We had a wonderful life together and a lot of fun. That's important. I think the boys had a good home life."

The Marchese boys, Michael, Tucson, Ariz., and Don, of Clinton, have made Helen Marchese a grandmother four times over.

Were she to live her life all over again, Mrs. Marchese said she wouldn't change much, except to further her commitment to others, and she would have liked to have been closer to her two brothers and four sisters, who still live in North Carolina.

"We had a wonderful time," she said of growing up. "Mother was an only child and she vowed to have a family. She enjoyed us and made us take advantage of every opportunity available. She reared a black boy from age eight until he received his doctorate. He was wonderful.

"I truly have had a wonderful life, and I'm truly grateful."

She said she is touched by the Woman of the Year award. "I'm overwhelmed and I am very humble about it," she said.

One of the few things that troubles her is she feels she is running out of time. "I'm 71," she said, "and I'm hurrying, trying to enjoy life."