

When Hazel Heckman was born on April 6, 1904, Theodore Roosevelt was president of the United States. Less than four months had passed since the Wright Brothers made their first flight at Kitty Hawk. Henry Ford had just sold his first car, and Adolph Hitler had just become a teenager. Albert Einstein was still writing his first paper about the Theory of Relativity, Japan had just attacked Russia to begin the Russo-Japanese war, and the first transmission of the human voice over the radio was not to take place for several years.

During her remarkable life, Hazel observed, participated in, and survived most of the great events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: World War I & II, the roaring 20's, the great depression, the space age, the cold war, the civil rights movement, dixieland, rock & roll, the mariners . . . .

She lived through the administration of 18 presidents, nearly half of the presidents this country has had since its founding! Practically all the great heroes and goats of the century came and went, but Hazel remained. She lived, thankfully, to help usher in the new millennium, and to virtually the end of her days she lived life with gusto.

It is rare that a person attains the advanced age that Hazel did. Even more so when a single lifetime spans most of a single century, as hers did the 20<sup>th</sup>. But in Hazel's case, more than the accomplishment of longevity, we celebrate a life that was passionate and vital. From this passion and vitality sprung many memorable contributions, and with them fame & recognition.

How did a young woman from Kansas end up becoming a great author and living nearly half her life on a remote island in Puget Sound? Hazel's life story and accomplishments are well-documented and familiar to all of us. What we should dwell on in celebrating her memory are those attributes of her character that made her special.

Passion and vitality are two qualities of Hazel's personality which frame my memory of her. It is hard to tell whether one sprung from the other, or they just naturally emerged from a deeper well in her soul. She was passionate about many things, and she pursued her life's interests with a vitality that few of us will ever match.

One of Hazel's great passions was her interest in people. She had a vast circle of friends, ranging from the very famous to the simple and humble. She was a keen observer of character and speech, which enabled her to make people come to life in her books. She befriended the young and old, rich and poor. One of her favorite past-times was to load up the big trunk of her mercedes with produce from hers and other islanders' gardens and drive it in to the Presbyterian Church's Food Bank. If she was unable to make the trip, she couldn't rest until she was able to line up someone else to take care of it. Complete strangers would see the name on her mailbox, and, perhaps thinking that celebrities were public domain, would knock on her door and ask if she were *the* Hazel Heckman. She was unfailingly gracious in such trying circumstances, and would always invite them in to chat - well, almost always! Her love for people translated into a passion for history. When Hazel was in her 70's, she received a copy of an article about Leander Wallace, supposedly the first white settler on this island. For several years, she was like a little girl, chasing down leads and pursuing clues about the mysterious Wallace. Many gained their introduction to island history through her book, *Island in the Sound*.

Besides her interest in people, Hazel had a great love and appreciation for plants, animals, and natural beauty. There was probably nothing she enjoyed more than her tramps through the woods, looking for the first trillium of the spring, or that patch of morels someone had mentioned. Her keen observations of island flora and fauna are vividly recorded in her classic *Island Year*. I remember meeting Hazel at about 2:00 in the



morning to observe the conjunction of the moon and Saturn. It was cloudy! Once, just after her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, she persuaded me to take her to inspect the ruins of an island house she'd never visited. I remember picking the way through the poison oak and wading through seas of huge sallal until we were both scratched and bleeding. We got lost and it became dark, but she kept up her spunk and frequently mentioned it as one of her favorite adventures. Nothing excited her interest more than someone calling about a new plant they couldn't identify, or a rare flower in bloom. She kept and cared for numerous birds and animals, and it was devastating to her when some misfortune overtook any of them.

Her many honors and forms of recognition seemed not to change her. She is probably the only islander to ever receive an honorary doctorate, yet she would laugh out loud whenever anyone called her "***Dr. Heckman.***"

At the time I went into the army, my mother gave me a copy of a new book called *Island in the Sound*. As I read it in my barracks, I realized "now here is something worth fighting for!" Fortunately it never came to that, but Hazel told me she considered that the ultimate compliment. In her own special, remarkable way, she rallied us and herself fought, passionately, for the things she observed, appreciated and loved. We have a wonderful legacy to remember and defend.

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