

Helen Fern (Haugan) Ackerson was born on May 6, 1938, in St. Paul, Minnesota, to Helmuth and Anna Pegorsch. She grew up alongside her older sister, JoAnn, with whom she shared a very close bond. The sisters loved singing together in the choir at House of Hope Church and shared a lifelong passion for horses.

Helen attended Macalester College, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies. To help support her education, she worked in Admissions at Miller Hospital. It was there she met Dr. Haakon Haugan, a radiology intern. They were married in 1961 and soon moved to the Black Hills of South Dakota to raise their family. They were blessed with three daughters: Joan, Ruth, and Mary.

The Black Hills became the backdrop for Helen's greatest joys. She and Haakon eventually purchased ranch land, and Helen devoted herself to family life and horsemanship. Her happiest years were spent training horses, supporting her daughters in riding, and traveling together to horse shows.

In 1988, the Westberry Trails fire devastated their forested ranch in the Black Hills. Following this loss, Helen and Haakon relocated to Williston, North Dakota, for a fresh start. Haakon worked as a radiologist at the local hospital, and Helen quickly built new friendships through her shared love of horses. Tragically, Haakon passed away in 1990.

In 1994, Helen returned to the Black Hills to be near her daughters. She once again found joy in the familiar landscape, spending cherished time with family, horses, and many adventures in the hills. She was especially proud of her three grandsons and loved supporting them at their soccer games and sharing her horses with them. In 2004, Helen married her longtime friend, Ronald Ackerson. They began their life together in a cabin near Deadwood, South Dakota, and shared many adventures. Later, they moved to Spearfish, where they opened Yesterdays antique store and enjoyed several years as business owners, building friendships with the community.

Following a severe stroke in November 2025, Helen's health declined. In her quieter days, she found comfort in bird watching and spending time with her daughter's horses, Scout and Chief. We are grateful for all of those quiet days of reflection on a life well lived.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made in Helen's honor to Rainbow Bible Ranch, a summer camp in Sturgis, SD, dedicated to teaching horsemanship and Christian values.

Helen was preceded in death by her husband, Dr. Haakon Haugan of Rapid City; her sister, JoAnn Enstrom of California; and her daughter, Joan Pillen of Sturgis.

She is survived by her husband, Ronald Ackerson; daughters, Ruth Haugan and Mary (Alan) Anderson; son-in-law, Jubal Pillen; and grandsons, Haakon Anderson, Henry Anderson, and Holden Anderson.



In Loving Memory
Helen Fern Ackerson

May 6, 1938 ~ June 20, 2026

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go

George Matheson

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that follows all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seeks me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee.
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that lifts up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blooms red
Life that shall endless be.

In Loving Memory

Helen Fern Ackerson

BORN

May 6, 1938

St. Paul, Minnesota

PASSED AWAY

June 20, 2026

Spearfish, South Dakota

MEMORIAL SERVICE

Friday, June 26, 2026 - 1:00 PM

Kinkade Funeral Chapel

Sturgis, South Dakota

OFFICIATING

Jim Thompson

SPECIAL MUSIC

“Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” ~ Bach

“O Love That Will Not Let Me Go” ~ Chris Rice

“Amazing Grace” ~ Alan Jackson

HONORARY PALLBEARERS

Al Anderson Jubal Pillen Haakon Anderson

Henry Anderson Holden Anderson

FINAL RESTING PLACE

Mountain View Cemetery