

In Loving Memory Of
Helen Irene Erk

Born

February 8, 1931
Nisland, South Dakota

Died

March 13, 2023
Rapid City, South Dakota

Baptized into the Family of God

The Lutheran Church
Nisland, South Dakota

Mass of Christian Burial

Monday, March 20, 2023, 2:00 p.m.
St. Mary's Star of the Sea Catholic Church
Newell, South Dakota

Officiant

Father Dan Juelfs

Musicians

Dr. Barry Furze Myron Volk

Musical Selections

"Come to Jesus" "Crown Him With Many Crowns"
"Eat This Bread" "Taste And See"
"Come To Her Aid" "On Eagles Wings"

Pallbearers

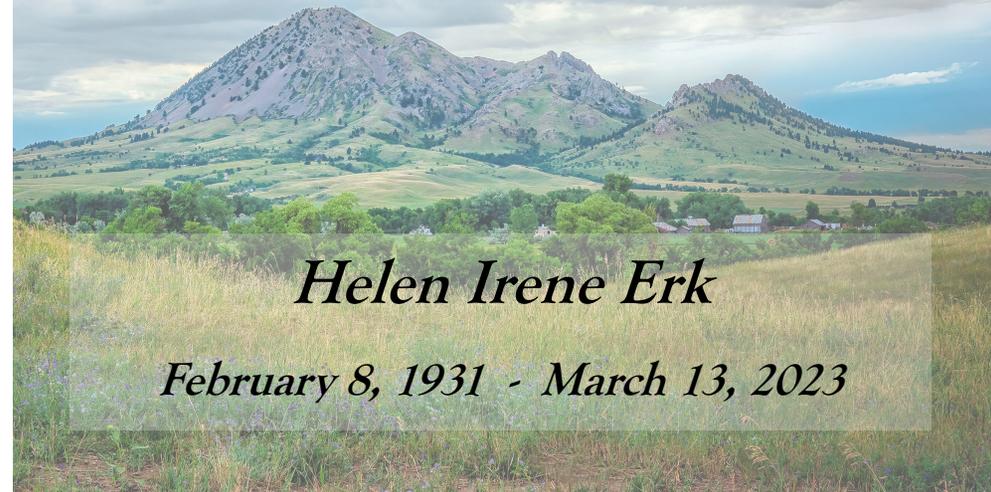
Mike Erk Jim Erk Paul Erk
Teresa (Erk) Chicoine Tim Erk Bill Erk

Final Resting Place

Hope Cemetery
Newell, South Dakota

*"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew
their strength; they shall mount up with wings as
eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they
shall walk and not faint."*

Isaiah 40:31



Helen Irene Erk

February 8, 1931 - March 13, 2023

Helen Irene Ruff was born February 8, 1931, on a farm at Nisland, SD, to David and Lillie (Meyer) Ruff. She was the oldest of five children, followed by David (Dan), Robert, Delores, and John. Helen was baptized into the family of God in the Lutheran Church in Nisland, with Conrad and Emma Schuldise as her Godparents. She was later confirmed in the First Lutheran Church in Newell. Helen's faith was her strength throughout her life.

Helen grew up in the Nisland area, her family living on and working various farms in the area until her father purchased his own farm 3 miles west of Vale, SD, in 1947. During this time she also attended school in Nisland through the 10th grade. Helen's parents provided a home filled with love, faith, and hard work ethics. Their farm life was the setting for many wonderful experiences and memories, which she often shared with her family over the years. She never forgot the blessing of having her own pony, Star, as a child, nor the hard work in raising chickens, turkeys, hogs, and crops. She helped in the hay fields behind a team of horses and worked in the beet fields along side her siblings and parents. She developed a talent for resourcefulness and a love of the amazing natural world God created.

Her junior and senior years of high school were spent at Vale, SD, high school, where she graduated in a class of five students in 1949. Following her father's wishes, she attended Black Hills State College for 3 months, earning a teaching certificate. Then in the fall of that year she was hired to teach at the Chase country school north of Nisland, near Arpan, SD, for the '49-'50 school term. She had 13 students, and earned \$300 per month. Helen's love of reading remained with her always. And her enjoyment of letter writing blessed everyone she knew throughout her life.

On August 16, 1950, Helen married George L. Erk at the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Rapid City, SD, in a 7 A.M., double-ring ceremony conducted by Fr. Bernard Drew. Joe Erk and Ida Mae Renelt were their witnesses. Following a brief honeymoon, the couple made their home on a ranch owned by George and his brother, Joe, two and one-half miles northwest of the Deer's Ears Buttes in Butte County, north of Newell, SD. Joe lived with them for a time before moving to a farm near Vale, after which Helen and George continued living on their place, raising registered Rambouillet rams and ewe flocks and a ewe flock with premium fine wool fleeces. They also raised crossbred Hereford cattle and later farmed alfalfa, wheat and sorghum.

Their marriage was blessed with three sons: Gregory George, born in 1951; David John, born in 1953; and Mark Allen, born in 1958.

Life on a sheep ranch was hard, even for a seasoned farm girl. In Helen's own words, "We had no electricity or telephone until 1953. There was a 32-volt light plant in the garage that generated current for the lights in the house. I cooked and heated my wash water for clothes in a copper boiler on a 3 burner kerosene stove, did the washing of clothes in a gas motored machine, ironed with a gas iron, had an ice box for the butter and milk and got the ice from the ice house at the Erk homestead, 3 miles away. We hauled our water from Newell, 35 miles away, so there was none wasted. I washed clothes in a wringer type washer until 1985, when I got an automatic washer."

Helen was not only involved with the ranching, alongside George, but also was a devoted mother, raising three active boys as they attended the nearby country school and then headed off to high school in Newell. When Gregory and David attended high school in Newell, she moved into town each year during the school months to care for them there. They all lived in the home of Ludwig and Anna Erk, going home on weekends when they were able to. This continued through Mark's freshman year in Newell, but his enrollment in St. Martin's High School in Rapid City as a sophomore, meant she could return home to help George full time. She then spent three years transporting Mark to and from school on weekends, but was finally back at the ranch full time. They remained there until George's failing health forced them to move into Newell in the fall of 2006.

After George's death in 2008, Helen remained living in Newell where she greatly enjoyed living across from the school, delighted with the activities of the schoolyard. She also enjoyed multiple weekly games of cards, and coffee, with friends and family, even learning to play Bridge, which she admitted was a great, but enjoyable, challenge.

In October 2011, Helen moved to The Sandstone Assisted Living facility in Spearfish. Here she carried on her love of card playing, reading, watching various sports on TV, and sending cards she made herself to family and friends. Like many, she also endured the harshness of the Covid lockdown of nursing facilities in 2019-2021, even celebrating her 90th birthday behind a glass barrier, away from family and friends.

After a short illness/fall, and battling Parkinson's disease, Helen moved to the Avantara Nursing Facility in Rapid City last Sept., where she remained until her death on March 13, 2023, surrounded by loving family.

During Helen's adult life she was a member of St. Mary's Church where she participated in choir, Alter Society, and as Religion teacher, attending workshops and Laywomen's Retreats at St. Martin's in both Sturgis and Rapid City. She also participated in Christian Women in Spearfish, Inter-denominational Bible study, and Right to Life. Other service groups included PTA, Wool Growers Auxiliary, Butte County Historical Society, Castle Rock Birthday Club, Newell Seniors, and American Life League. One of her most enjoyable involvements came with her membership in Butte County Extension Homemakers, and as a member of her local extension club, Chix From the Stix, in which she held many offices and received her 25-year pin in extension work in 1984.

Helen was preceded in death by her parents; step-father Vernon Holst; husband George; brothers-in-law, John Erk, Joe Erk, Neil Chauncey, Marshall George, and Don Moore; sisters-in-law, Violet Erk, Sister Celine Erk, Elizabeth Chauncey; and nephews, Tommy Erk and Rob Ruff. She is survived by her sons; Gregory (Reni), David (Phyllis), and Mark (Candy); grandchildren, Tausha, Alisha, Summer, Daesha, Jason, Heather, and Colton; and 16 great grandchildren. Also by her siblings; David (Marian) Ruff; Robert (Carolyn) Ruff; Dolores Moore, and John (Pat) Ruff; and sister-in-law, Mary Erk; along with many other beloved family and friends.

In honor of Helen's passions, memorials are being made to Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary and Black Hills Raptor Center.

Condolences may be sent the family at www.kinkadefunerals.com.

"Friendships may fade but family lasts forever."

"Inheritance is a gift not a right."

"You have to make wind your friend..."

"You can live with about anyone - but - there is One, you can't live without."

"Many hands make light work."

Helen Erk

*The family invites you for a time of refreshments and fellowship
in the church basement following the burial.
Thank you for your presence and condolences.*