

Written by: Jerry L. Gray

Final piece he wrote for his beloved mother-in-law

There's an old saying that the best gifts come in small packages. That saying perfectly describes our mom and grandma. She was small in stature but had an enormous heart filled with love. She loved life and had a special love for her children and grandchildren.

Helen Marie Ortiz was born in Durango, Colorado, on October 12, 1927, where her father worked in the mines. Her parents were Catalino Ortiz and Cresenciana (Chana) Valdez-Ortiz. Grandma was the eldest of five siblings, including one half-sister and one step-sister.

Grandma moved to Nambe, New Mexico, in her younger years. At the age of 12, she attended St. Euphrasia Boarding School in Denver, Colorado. She had an aunt who graduated from St. Euphrasia and wanted a better education. Grandma wrote a personal letter to the school requesting admission and was accepted. She later graduated from St. Euphrasia.

As a young girl, Grandma loved to read, a passion she carried with her throughout her entire life. She loved telling stories about her time at school. Some of her favorite memories included roller skating, the crowning of our Blessed Mother on May Day, and working in the garden, where her love of gardening began.

Grandma's deep faith took root at St. Euphrasia and remained an important part of her life. Her faith sustained her through many hard times.

After returning to New Mexico, Grandma worked as a bookkeeper at St. Vincent Hospital and later years at Zia Company in Los Alamos.

Grandma met the love of her life, Joe Fresquez, at a Thanksgiving dance. She was immediately attracted to him because he was handsome and a good dancer. Their first dance together was "Put Your Little Foot," and they went on to dance the night away—and throughout their lives.

When she took Joe home to meet her family, her father, Catalino, didn't like him. Grandma told him, "This is the man I'm going to marry." After a dance one night, her dad even kicked Grandpa Joe in the seat as they were walking out after the dance.

Grandma and Grandpa were married on September 11, 1948, and were married for 69 years. They lived their entire lives together in the house Grandpa built. Grandma had married a skilled carpenter, and over the years she had many ideas for home improvements. Grandpa Joe would cringe every time she said, "Joe, I've been thinking," because he knew her thinking meant work for him.

Having a large family was a dream come true for Grandma. She wanted to raise her own children and left her job at Zia Company in Los Alamos when she became pregnant. Together, they raised six children. Grandma's life was further blessed with eight grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, and one great-great grandson.

Some of Grandma's saddest moments included losing her first child, Gudalupe Fresquez as an infant and the passing of her mother when Grandma was 22 years old.

As her children grew older, Grandma missed having young ones around and began babysitting for nieces, nephews, and neighborhood children. She loved every child she cared for as if they were her own, and many of you here today can attest to that.

Grandma's favorite times included camping in the mountains, family gatherings, patio parties, Feast Days, Baptisms, First Communions, dancing with Joe, and tending to her garden and flowers.

Of course, having children wasn't always easy. We've heard stories of Grandma getting so upset that she chased her children around the house with a belt, trying to spank their bottoms. We choose to believe these stories reflect more on our mom, aunts, and uncle than on Grandma herself.

Her wit and sense of humor stayed with her throughout her life, even as her health declined. We'll always remember her quick responses. When asked how she was doing, she'd say, "Not bad for a little old lady." When asked how she slept, she'd reply, "With my eyes closed." Other witty comments included; when tucking in her grandchildren, she would "dream of the angels."

We will miss her dearly, but we take comfort in the wonderful memories we will carry with us for the rest of our lives.

Grandma was preceded in death by her parents, Cresenciana (Chana) Valdez-Ortiz and Catalino Ortiz; her siblings and brothers-in-law; her husband, Joe Fresquez; her firstborn child; and her son-in-law, Jerry Gray.

She is survived by her half-sister, AnaBell Ortiz; her children, Horace Fresquez, Marquita Velasquez (Alex), Imelda Fresquez (John Jansonius), Velda Fresquez-Gray, Anita Montoya (David), and Veronica Cordova (Arnold); her eight grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; one great-great grandson; and many other relatives.

Grandma lived a life filled with energy and love. When asked why she was so happy, she replied, "Because I've lived the life I wanted."

We are confident she made a quick ascension to heaven, and when she reached the pearly gates, she heard a beloved voice calling "Helen," and she knew she was home and at peace.

The family of Helen Fresquez would like to thank all the relatives, neighbors, and friends who visited Grandma over the years at her home in San Pedro.

Thank you to Casa Subina in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for the care provided to our grandma, and to the relatives who visited and brought her sweets and special gifts. A special thank you to Bianca Garcia-Lucero for her kindness and thoughtfulness in sending Grandma flowers each

week. Grandma was always grateful and happy when they arrived, and the flowers brought sunshine to everyone at Casa Subina.

