

Denise ([00:00:03](#)):

Women have been a part of carrying the gospel where it's not for generations. And part of the legacy they've left can be found in the courage their stories inspire in an entirely new generation of women who would go, but that legacy can only be realized if their stories are told. Welcome to the Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast.

Denise ([00:00:46](#)):

Hey everybody, and welcome back to the Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast. I'm Denise Beck here with Sarah Hilkemann, and we are so grateful to each of you who have made this podcast a part of your monthly routine. In fact, I have run into more and more people recently that are loving the inspiration that they find through these stories, and they're wanting the inside scoop on who we will cover next. Sarah...

Sarah ([00:01:07](#)):

I love that. Hey, friends, Sarah here. We are so excited to be bringing you the story of Helen Roseveare. She was a doctor, a teacher, evangelist, a writer, a speaker, and really she was just a kind and passionate and enthusiastic woman. And there are so many interesting parts of her life that we cannot wait to share with all of you. But before we get started, here are a couple reminders and just things, um, that we want you to know. First of all, I know we say it often, but we just want to remind you we are not experts. You know, we are reading and listening and pulling together details, um, but we are not the experts. And so want you to go on from this and do your own reading, get excited about these stories. Also, today, Helen's story does include trauma, including sexual assault, although we will try to talk about this really tenderly if that is triggering for you.

Sarah ([00:02:07](#)):

We just want you to have the grace that you need to do what is best for you today. And so if today is not the day to listen to this podcast, um, all the grace to you for that. Much of Helen's story takes place in what is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. It has had several names over the years, and so just to make things really simple for ourselves and for you all, we will just refer to it as the Congo, no matter what it was known by at that point in Helen's story. So Denise, I think one of the more well known stories about Helen has to do with a hot water bottle. And I love this story so much. Can you just start us off? I feel like this is such a good place for us to begin.

Denise ([00:02:51](#)):

I agree. This is one of those stories that when I first read it, I actually told my family over dinner. So this story takes place, um, while Helen is working at a hospital that also has an orphanage with it where, uh, they kind of are using the same space. And while Helen was working there, um, there was a mother that actually died giving birth. And she was giving birth to a premature newborn, but she also had a two year old with her. And there was no incubator. There's, there's no electricity. And so how they kept these babies warm was they really relied on hot water bottles. And so the first night, you know, there was a woman that actually just spent the night caring and keeping this baby warm, but they knew that that just wasn't sustainable. And so Helen had one of her assistants go fill up a hot water bottle.

Denise ([00:03:39](#)):

And when she was doing that, it actually burst and they realized after it burst that it was the last one. And Helen was actually on her way then to go pray with the orphans. And she gathered them together and, and she's just told them what had just happened. She was filling them in on their day and, and they

decided, You know what? We're gonna pray. And a 10 year old named Ruth began the prayer that day with, Please God send us a hot water bottle. It will be no good tomorrow as the baby will be dead. It must be today. And while you're at it, can you send a dolly to the little girl so she will know that you love her? And Helen is just, you know, probably at one moment thanking the Lord for the bold prayers of this child, but then also going, Ugh, I'm so sad, because that is an impossible prayer.

Denise ([00:04:27](#)):

And she is gonna be disappointed because she has prayed an impossible prayer. Cuz in the back of her mind, she's, she knows the pharmacies in rural Africa and she knows there there's no hot water bottles. And in fact, the only way to get a hot water bottle to the Congo would've been for a package to arrive from what she called the homeland, from the UK. And, and she, she had never once received a package in the four years she had been there. And, and she said, Even if I did, somebody decided to mail a package who would mail a hot water bottle to the equator where we're hot all the time. You know? So it's just like all of these things in her mind were stacking up to why this was an impossible prayer. And so as she walked back to her home that afternoon, on the doorstep was a box.

Denise ([00:05:15](#)):

And, and she took it inside and she saw where it was from, and she realized, you know what? I am not gonna open this here by myself. So she carried it back to the orphanage and had all the children gather around her as she opened it and began pulling things out, you know, things that they actually really were excited for and needed, things for the kids, things for the hospital. And then she pulled out a hot water bottle, and this girl Ruth ran up and said, Well, if he put the hot water bottle in, he must have put the doll in too. And so they began, finished digging through the box, and sure enough, at the bottom there was a doll. She realized that that package had been on its way for five months before the need had ever arisen and was really convicted about how small her faith had been. We will go on to hear exactly how big her faith was, in my opinion, through all of these stories. But let's go back to the beginning and learn a little bit about the early years of Helen Roseveare.

Sarah ([00:06:19](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I love the provision shown by the Lord in that story. Well, Helen was born on September 21st, 1925 in southern England. She was the second of five children. Her father was a mathematics professor and then a school inspector. And they were, um, in Helen's words, they were a middle class family. So they, there were some aspects of privilege. They had a maid while Helen was growing up. They went camping in different places around Europe. And, um, Helen also went to boarding school. She was very smart growing up, but also her whole life. And she also was always ready to share her opinion. Helen's family was religious. Uh, two of her uncles were bishops in the Anglican church. And she wrote in her books that she loved going to church on Sundays and experiencing the beauty and kind of the austerity of the high Anglican church. But in a lot of ways it was just routine. It was like, this is what we do on Sundays. It was tradition. And Helen would later say that she wasn't yet a Christian in those years.

Denise ([00:07:32](#)):

And I think for some of us listening that may not be familiar with that tradition, Anglo Catholicism is really a church that holds many of the same doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, but it's not under the same authority of the Pope. And so Helen would later say that she would feel short

term relief after confession, but on leaving the services, she felt powerless and just was ready for something more.

Sarah ([00:07:57](#)):

Yeah. Well, Helen was still at boarding school when, um, in 1939, the Prime Minister declared war on Germany. Her family members were involved in the war in various ways. So her older brother was involved in a top secret classified work that no one in the family knew about. It was 40 years before they found out how, uh, what he had done in the war. But it turned out that he was a codebreaker. We had said her father was a school inspector, but during this time he was appointed by the Ministry of Food to design and implement the system of ration cards that would be used. So since the UK imported, I even saw like up to 70% of their food from other places, they knew that if those supply lines were bombed or the Germans cut those supply lines off, they needed to be really mindful and make sure that everyone had enough food in case that happened. So during World War 2, Helen's really coming of age in this time, and as she saw all of the bombing and the suffering, she struggled with even believing in God, it didn't seem like God was able to cope. Those were her words. What was the point of God if he couldn't control or stop the cruelty of the war? And there was a particular story that we read of when she was on her way back to boarding school and really saw this cruelty up close and personal.

Denise ([00:09:31](#)):

Yeah. So they, you know, even though there was a blitz happening in London, they had to travel through London, she and her sister to, um, get to school. So they were heading back on a bus. Her and her sister Jean, they had, they had gotten on the bus after they had been home and they were having to travel through London when they heard German planes overhead. Helen would later say there was like 900 planes at a time that would fly over. I can't even imagine the sound and then the darkening of the sky that, that would, um, affect as you were sitting there. And so the people on this bus just started freaking out. And so women began pushing, and two women in particular pushed past them, and they were trying to get off of the bus and into this building. And so the Bus has just stopped, and Helen and her sister are trapped on the bus. They're not able to get out because of all the panic that's happening. And as they are stuck on the bus looking out of the window, they watch a bomb from the planes hit the building that the women had just run into, and it bursts into flames. And Helen recalls being able to hear the screams. And she realized then that, but for the grace of God, she would have been in there herself and begins to kind of question, you know, maybe God has saved her for something.

Sarah ([00:10:48](#)):

Hmm. Well, because of the war, there was a great need for medical personnel. And so Helen decided to study to be a doctor. So because of this, you know, urgent need, they had shortened the amount of time needed to study, um, to become a doctor. So she went to Cambridge. And medicine at this time was still very much a man's world. There were 250 students in her year, and only one of 25 of them were women. But by the end of her time of study, 13 of those women had dropped out because it was just really hard to be a woman there.

Denise ([00:11:28](#)):

It reminds me, even like of the Betty Green that we just covered last week, how many of those, so many men in the flying and only a few women, this is kind of a recurring theme here that we're talking about.

Sarah ([00:11:40](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Sort of pioneering in some of these hard areas. Well, on Helen's first day when she first arrived at Cambridge, she just felt this heavy loneliness. She didn't know anyone there. She hadn't really made friends easily at boarding school. So she kind of comes in with that mindset. But on that first day when she arrived, she found a note from a woman named Dorothy saying, If you don't have anything else to do, come to my room at eight o'clock tonight for coffee. So Helen had this miserable dinner and dining room experience, and I think she was just like, I don't know what I'm doing here, I can't do this. But she decided to go ahead and go to this young woman's room for coffee. And there were several other girls there, and they all just put Helen at ease. Um, they eventually invited her to a prayer meeting and it just really struck her.

Sarah ([00:12:42](#)):

She had never experienced the depth of relationship that it seemed these girls had with God. They prayed in a way she hadn't really heard, to a God they knew intimately. And this was really a new experience for Helen. And so in this time, she was introduced to the concept of individual Bible study, um, which she was used to, Okay, that's, you know, the, the vicar's job. That's the pastor's job they study and then they tell people at church what they need to know. So individual bible study was something that was really new and unique for her.

Denise ([00:13:24](#)):

And so as she begins to, you know, have this curiosity and begins to be introduced a little bit more to the Lord, who would've thought that mumps would play a key role in Helen's eventual, you know, giving her life totally to the Lord. So it was Christmas time and she gets word that her sister had caught the mumps, her younger sister. And many of us don't understand mumps because they, you know, don't, aren't around very much at all anymore, but it's more dangerous for adults than children. And so, because Helen was an adult, her parents said, Please don't come back for Christmas. We really would rather just protect you. And so she agreed to stay home and you know, she was invited over to some people's home for the actual holiday, but there was more than that, you know, school's out and she's just remaining there instead of at her home.

Denise ([00:14:11](#)):

And so she agreed to attend a Christian House party over the holidays with some of those students that she had met. And we kind of think this is maybe like a little conference that they were having. She felt out of place. This was kind of out of her wheelhouse. They all knew stuff that she didn't know and think about how smart she was. She's not used to being a person in the room that doesn't know the most. And so she, um, learned a new way to study her Bible. And so one night she stayed up the entire night reading Romans and, you know, just like soaking everything in. But there was one night when she was at dinner and she did lose her temper over something and she became so embarrassed that she actually lost her temper in front of all of these people. And so she ran to her room, just flopped herself on the bed and just cried out to the Lord, like, I just wanna know once and for all that you are real.

Denise ([00:15:03](#)):

And as she looked up on the wall in her room, was a verse that read, Be Still and know that I am. And we know that the rest of that is be still and know that I am God. But because the roof had been leaking in Helen's room, the God part was washed off. And so it seemed to her as if he was literally answering the question, I wanna know for sure that you're real. And he says, Be still and know that I am. And so immediately she felt her burdens fall away and the amazing wonder of the friendship of Christ was

revealed. And so as she comes back down to dinner, they all like what happened? They could tell immediately that something had changed. And she, she told them, you know, what had happened? And so, um, Graham Scroggie, I think his name is Dr. Graham Scroggie in that, um, conference, she was able to have her very first Bible given to her. And so he wrote a verse or underlined a verse in her Bible, and the verse was Philippians 3:10. And it talks, you know about that I may know him and know the power of his resurrection and share in his sufferings and become like him in his death. And I just can't imagine that he had any idea what that verse would mean for her and for her life.

Sarah ([00:16:21](#)):

Right. And, you know, I think he said, you understand the first part of this verse now, to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. But this is just the beginning. There's a long journey ahead of you. And like you said, he didn't know what that meant for Helen. And she probably was like, Well, that's not the most encouraging to think about sharing in Christ's sufferings. But, um, but this verse just yeah, really became an important theme in her life.

Denise ([00:16:54](#)):

I actually remember as we were talking, I remember her voice saying, and something I listened to, it's like, I had literally been a believer for like 30 minutes and he is already telling me, Get ready. It's hard. And she was saying, maybe that's what we need to do. The first impression that we have is not, it's gonna be so wonderful, but be prepared because there is a lot of hardship that comes with following the Lord.

Sarah ([00:17:18](#)):

Yeah. Well I feel like she is such an example for us in that, um, and that just theology of suffering. But we will get more into that more as we go along <laugh>. Um, so the next part of Helen's medical training was to work at West London Hospital. And even in this, you know, as a new believer, she brought her enthusiasm for the gospel. That, that night when she, she says she fell in love with Jesus. She also just, um, also this love to share Jesus with others, grew in her as well. And so part of that was in her work at the hospital, but she also became involved in something called the Girls Crusaders Union, GCU. And she would meet with young women in her parents' garage and teach them about Christ. And she loved seeing their, their hunger for the Lord and digging into God's word with them. And GCU actually was an important thread really in the whole tapestry of Helen's life that we're gonna see come up, um, a few more times. So one of those was, it was actually the GCU girls that sent that package that you talked about at the beginning of the episode.

Denise ([00:18:41](#)):

The in-Transit package was from these girls. Oh my goodness.

Sarah ([00:18:45](#)):

Yes. Yeah. And so, you know, they had lovingly put together this gift having no idea, um, that it was gonna be this answer to prayer for her. Um, so yes, GCU was, was a really important part of her life. Well, in 1949, as Helen is kind of finishing up her studies, she was invited to watch a documentary, um, about the organization WEC, um, W E C, and specifically about their work on the border of North India and Tibet. the person who had helped put together this documentary was there after the movie. And Helen got to speak to him, and she had all these questions. Already there was this desire to, um, share Jesus with people who didn't know him yet. And so eventually they asked if Helen would be willing to

come to their headquarters and care for a woman who had been working in the Congo with leprosy patients who was suffering from cancer.

Sarah ([00:19:50](#)):

And so Helen actually moved into the WEC headquarters to care for this woman. In her final days, this woman was named Edith. And even though she knew she was dying, she didn't have much time left. She spent that time praying for the mission work in the Congo. And this just really impacted Helen. Um, and yeah, Helen had known that she wanted others to know about him, but she didn't know exactly what that would look like or, or where or what. But the WEC leadership invited her to stay on at the headquarters and sort of go through training. Um, and she got to hear from all of these different missionaries as they came through. But there were also some parts of her training and her time there that were maybe not what we would normally think of <laugh>.

Denise ([00:20:41](#)):

I actually love this story. So one of the things that was pointed out to her during her time in training was she never had learned how to do housework. So because they had a maid and she was at boarding school, this was not something she learned how to do. So this was something that was expected of her and it became very obvious how poor she was at it. So one day she was bringing coffee into a room where some of the leadership were having a meeting and she realized as she got closer, they were discussing her. And as she overheard what they were saying, things like, she's stubborn, she's not easy to work with, she is horrible at housework, she decided she was not gonna go ahead and walk in there and deliver their coffee. So she set it down outside of the room, traded tasks with somebody else and decided she would go wash the sheets and hang the sheets outside to dry.

Denise ([00:21:32](#)):

When she was doing that, she's doing, she's struggling to hang up sheets. That is a talent. Those of us who have had to hang laundry outside, especially overseas on a windy day, it, it takes a little bit of finesse to do it correctly. So she's out there wrestling with getting these wet sheets on the line, and unbeknownst to her, this is all happening in front of the window where the leadership were having their meeting that she overheard. So not only did she overhear them, but now they are watching her play out how horrible at housework she is. And she turns around to walk away and realizes that the clean sheets have fallen into the mud and the realization of, I'm gonna have to wash all of these again. And, you know, so she's just sitting there and, and they're inside watching her expecting maybe a tantrum.

Denise ([00:22:23](#)):

I don't know what they were expecting, but what they saw was her just begin to laugh and laugh at herself and laugh at this whole situation. And when they saw her laughing at the tragedy, they said, She is perfect for the mission field <laugh>. They began to, you know, support her decision to go. And, you know, that that initial the question of, okay, but where, because doctors were in high demand, you know, I'm assuming she could have probably had her choice of several different locations. But one thing that the Lord did to kind of hone her in on a specific place had to do with a verse in 2 Chronicles 24:4, and it talks about restore the house of the Lord. And there were three times in a matter of a short time that this verse just came, kept coming up.

Denise ([00:23:13](#)):

So one time it was in a devo that was laying open in a room that she was in, and it was set to that. And then not too long later a letter prompted by a friend arrived that says, I don't know why, but I believe I'm supposed to give you this verse. And then another time, not too long after that, a missionary from Congo was speaking and they were using this verse as a reference asking for others to come. And the following sermon that she heard from a pastor said, If you hear the Lord tell you something three times, you better be listening cuz it's probably from him. And so she was like, Okay. In her mind that meant she needed to turn her heart toward the Congo. All of these things seemed to be asking her to consider serving there.

Sarah ([00:23:58](#)):

Yeah. And Helen had initially, you know, wanted to go somewhere where there weren't already believers in, you know, sort of a pioneering kind of work, but it was through this confirmation of the verses. But then also there was a call from the Congolese church that really impacted her. They wanted to have a doctor come and care for their pastors and evangelists so that, you know, these people could keep sharing the gospel. And so just for her, that it was from the Congolese believers that that really impacted her. And so she continued her training and preparation. She actually went to Belgium and studied French in preparation to go to the Congo. And she took courses in things like tropical diseases and parasites and how to identify deadly snakes, things that she probably had not gotten in her regular medical training. And then she traveled around to fundraise, and share with individuals and churches about her work.

Sarah ([00:25:00](#)):

So she had, you know, several years here of really preparing for the work that God had for her. Then finally, Helen was able to set sail for the Congo on February 13th, 1953. It was a long journey. She went by ship and then by land to finally arrive. She started out in Ibame where there was already an established mission station. And like many of us have experienced, there were a lot of barriers. When she first arrived, she knew French, but not the local language. Despite having her medical degree, she lacked a lot of experience. You know, she'd had her time in the West London hospital, but she had not worked really after that. And I thought this was interesting for someone who went into a medical profession, she had a lot of trouble with the sight of blood.

Denise ([00:25:54](#)):

That's hysterical. <laugh>.

Sarah ([00:25:57](#)):

Yeah. She also, all of a sudden the responsibility was on her. You know, there were these high expectations as we finally have a doctor in the area. She had cases, you know, from pediatrics all the way to geriatrics and everything in between. When she arrived, she had never performed a surgery. Even in her medical training, she had probably observed them, but she had not actually performed a surgery. So when she had to do her first surgery, um, it was a C-section and she said she had a nurse and she had a textbook and she just had to work her way through it. That sounds absolutely terrifying to me. But somehow she did it and she kind of had to just learn as she went along. She said she would try to do like a spot diagnosis, and she felt like the Lord just really gave her wisdom in the moment in so many different cases where as soon as she saw someone coming in, ideas would start to form in her mind of, okay, this is what this could be. And she just had to keep learning and keep trying and, and really, um, work through a lot of these challenges and barriers. But I loved this. When she got there, she became

known as Mama Luca after Luke, the physician in the Bible, and just really, people really loved her as she got connected there.

Denise ([00:27:29](#)):

Well, and that later became the title of a documentary that was kind of made of her life where she, they took her back to visit some of the places. I think at least as I'm recording this, it's free to watch on Amazon Prime maybe, um, or

Sarah ([00:27:44](#)):

Cheap. Yeah, it's, it's on Amazon.

Denise ([00:27:46](#)):

On the cheap. Anyway, but so, so Helen recorded actually, what does a day in her life look like? So imagine getting up at 5:00 AM to have tea, then communal morning prayer and bible study. At 9:00 AM she would begin seeing patience. She talked about the noise, the heat, the smells, the waves of nausea, everybody talking all at once, crying babies and running sores and that it was dusk before she was left to clean the rooms and sort through what was left of the drugs, constantly making lists of what was urgently needed. She was absolutely overcome by waves of weariness. And the slight dread of the inability to cope was always just present in the background <laugh>. So anybody have that slight dread while you were on the field or while you're just like, Can I cope? Can I do this? Um, then she would have supper and it was time for family bible study prayers.

Denise ([00:28:41](#)):

And I really appreciated this hot cocoa in the evening. How precious is that? I think you would need hot cocoa every day to look forward to bed. And then by 10:00 PM lights are out. And so only to repeat itself the next day. This was Helen's life for, for many years. But in 1955, she met a doctor who had a vision with her to create a specialized leprosy unit and combine it with a nurse training school. So she really believed that if you were there in Africa doing something, you needed to be training Africans to also do this. So this was something that spoke to her heart, and she assumed that this vision would just be taking place in her beloved Ibambe, where she had already had a hospital that was functioning and she was kind of upset to hear that the mission's leaders wanted her to move seven miles away to Nebabongo, where there was just a small mission station in an orphanage.

Denise ([00:29:35](#)):

So this is where that first story took place that we talked about where the orphanage was there working with it. But, but that meant for her to move. She was going to have to start from scratch. Starting from scratch in rural Africa means you make the bricks, you don't just haul the bricks, you know, you have to create everything. But she eventually surrendered, um, and humbled herself. Um, but it made it difficult for her to start training nurses. And she asked some of her national friends to please pray for her bad attitude. And she was really surprised at their response because they said that when she is being a doctor and when she's speaking French and she feels really far from them, like somebody they can't reach or understand or attain to be like, but when they see her working and hauling bricks with them and talking in their language in the market, not just the French of the hospital, then she becomes like them and they learn to love her, and they learn to trust what she said and want to know that what she says is true.



Denise ([00:30:38](#)):

And so God used this humbling of Helen through the building of this hospital to actually reach more people. And she would later view this as a blessing to her ministry, not the distraction she originally considered it to be. And so, you know, all of these things happening, continuing to build, she, she would have to take her car and go get supplies, um, from neighboring villages and cities. And it was after one of these supply runs. It was a 60 mile trip. Um, and for any of us who, you know, live near villages, those are, those are hard, hard on you trips. You never know what's gonna happen to your car or the road or officials that might pull you over. So she arrives home totally exhausted and feels immediately blessed because someone had cared enough to leave a plate of food out for her. And, and she, as she sat to eat, she just realized after one mouthful that she was too tired to actually even eat, and she would much rather just go to bed. So she gave the rest of the food to a puppy that they had at the house. And in the morning she awoke violently ill, and to find that the puppy actually had died because she was poisoned with that plate of food. And also to learn that while she was violently sick, her poisoners had come into her home and stolen everything that they could from her house. And imagine the emotional toll of serving in this way and feeling like it's not appreciated that that would take on anyone despite Helen Roseveare.

Sarah ([00:32:17](#)):

<laugh>. Yeah. Well, I mean, all of these things, all of the pioneering work that she was doing, these challenging circumstances, by the end of five years, Helen was weary and it showed up. One of the ways that it showed up was being irritated with her co-workers and the people around her. And so, so one of her students actually came to her and said, This isn't the way that God would treat people. Helen had dealt with the overwhelming needs and the lack of resources and the training and the work. And so it was, it was time for a break. And so Helen went home to England for a furlough. She had been under this great deal of stress. She wasn't really feeling well physically or emotionally, and at this point, she also wasn't sure if she could go back to the Congo. She still felt this burden for the medical needs there, but she thought maybe it would be better if I had a husband to go with me.

Sarah ([00:33:19](#)):

She had been single up to this point. So she decided that she was going to try and find a husband to go with her. So she did end up meeting this Christian doctor, and she thought, Okay, this is, he's the perfect guy. So in one of her books it says that she bought new clothes and she got her hair done, and she was even ready to, you know, resign from her mission in effort to win him and to marry him. And it, it ended up not working. She, he wasn't called to the mission field. And so even though this was a hard time and she had hoped, um, something would happen, and it didn't, with this doctor, she really kind of came to grips with her singleness. She really grew, uh, she grew to embrace her singleness with thanksgiving. And she got to a point where she said, I, I really didn't want anyone else. She didn't think of singleness as the gift necessarily, but Jesus was the gift in her life. And it was really this time of, of sort of cementing her call to the Congo, um, but also just growing in her singleness and her love for Jesus.

Denise ([00:34:38](#)):

So when she did in fact decide to go back, there were things changing in the Congo. And what had been under Belgian control was now independent. And when independence comes to a third world country, it's not a stable process. Um, we were a part of one of those happening in South Sudan, and it just isn't an easy transition of power. So anytime a colonial government pulls out, it leaves a vacuum of leadership and there's different tribal leaders or parties, different people that wanna wrestle for power.

And so this independence brought on a crisis, and there were assassinations that lasted for about five years. So near Helen's home where she was working, the December rebellion broke out in 1964. And that was where the Congolese National Army was fighting against the Simba gorillas. So it was a gorilla warfare kind of thing that a lot of young boys were a part of.

Denise ([00:35:40](#)):

Uh, teenagers were leaders in the Simba Rebellion. And so the missionaries were actually caught by surprise when the rebels arrived to take over their hospital, and they were described as teen boys that were brutal, drunk. They struck people, they kicked people, they swore they were just not having the most healthy part of their life revealed at this season. And so, um, they were, the missionaries were roughly taken. They were put in prison, they were humiliated, they were threatened. And one evening, you know, for the most part, Helen, you know, Helen stayed, she continued the work. She wanted to still be a part of helping people because they needed it now more than ever. And so even where others chose to leave, she chose to stay. But there was one night, um, it was October 26th, 1964. At 2:30 in the morning, a group of soldiers forced their way into her cottage.

Denise ([00:36:34](#)):

Her home was ransacked, and they destroyed and smashed and kicked anything that they didn't steal. And when she thought they were leaving and was about to breathe a sigh of relief, one of the commanders told her to go into her bedroom and get undressed. And she knew what that meant. And so she ran into the woods and was hoping to hide out there. She was found, she was drug back, she was kicked in the face, lost several teeth, jaw broken, severely damaged her face. Uh, some of her male nurses that she had trained that were there to protect her were actually beaten so severely that she didn't know until several months later that they actually survived that night. And then Helen was raped.

Sarah ([00:37:24](#)):

Well, and in the midst of all of this trauma, these horrible circumstances, um, being held prisoner and this situation that went on, you know, for, um, weeks and weeks, she really struggled to be able to sleep at night. And she told this story that I just thought was really sweet. So Helen had been around Americans, um, in her work, and they would call each other that, you know, these American couples would call each other honey. And apparently that's not a British thing to do, I don't know. But, uh, she just thought that was really special. And so one night when she just was crying out to the Lord and thinking, you know, if I had, if I had a man here to protect me and could have his arms around me, but I can't have that. And so in the darkness and the loneliness, she called out to God and called him honey. And it was just this like, you know, God, I need you. And she just felt his comfort. It was almost like God was putting his arms around her. And so in the midst of this night, she was able to sleep when many others couldn't. And even the next morning, they were like, Helen, you slept through the night. You know, what an amazing gift. And so in all of this tragedy and these horrible circumstances, God was able to give her these moments of comfort. And these just these sweet reminders of his presence.

Denise ([00:39:07](#)):

As you hear Helen later in her life reflecting on this time, she talks about, you know, while all of this is happening, feeling deserted by God, but then this peace that comes over her as she really felt the Lord saying to her, They are not doing this to you. They're doing it to me. And all I am asking for is the loan of your body as they do this to me. You know, she described the peace that you talk about, Sarah that just comes over her. And she says later she really recalled that the Lord was saying, Helen, can you thank me

for trusting you with the privilege of suffering for me? And she talks about this like, I can't ever imagine the Lord thanking me. I thank the Lord for things. Yes. But she's like, Can you thank me for trusting you with the privilege of suffering for me?

Denise ([00:39:58](#)):

And, and she's like, I thank you for so many things, Lord, but I never thought of you trusting me with anything. I trust you for things, but you are entrusting something to me. And, and so she just really chewed on that and felt like the Lord was just asking her and revealing to her a gift of saying, Yes, this is a privilege to suffer for you Lord, and that you counted me worthy, and you trust me with this gift is an honor. And boy looking through your trials and your suffering for through that lens totally resets and reshapes how you view, uh, the trial that the Lord has put before you. So this was just, to me, an amazing point of view to hear her be able to wrap her mind around this truth from the Lord that this is a privilege. They're not doing it to you. They're doing it to me.

Sarah ([00:40:51](#)):

And it goes back to the verse that the pastor had highlighted in her Bible, you know, many years before this when she first became a believer. Unfortunately, this horrible time continued for weeks and weeks. And in the midst of this time, Helen, and, you know, the other missionaries endured rape again and beatings again. Eventually they were taken to a Catholic convent and, you know, held kind of under prison conditions with a close guard. And here they, you know, they watched the nuns treated terribly as well. And there were several times that they thought they would be killed. And then they weren't. They were spared. But during this time, Helen was able to encourage one of the nuns at the convent who had also endured rape. And this nun was despairing because she felt like she was no longer pure before God, and so unable to serve him. But Helen was able to just really encourage this woman and share, you know, you are precious to God, and that is not how God sees you. And so even in the midst of these trials, Helen was still able to encourage and share and even share these moments of peace. And the way that God was ministering to her, she was able to share that with others. Eventually, they were moved again in December as this whole, um, process continued.

Denise ([00:42:26](#)):

Things just began to deteriorate. And they realized that, that things were going well for the Simbas and that they were really being used as shields and to negotiate with. And so, but after five months of being held in captivity, they were actually rescued on New Year's Eve in 1964 by international mercenaries. And very soon after that, Helen was flown home to England where she stayed for 14 months. And during this time she wrote her first memoir, Give Me This Mountain. She doesn't in this book actually mention her rape. I think when you think about the time that this happened, it was so fresh that she wasn't ready to process that accurately yet. And so later, books do recount this, uh, these circumstances. But, but during this time, after the rebellion finishes the total of the devastation, there's 200 missionaries that were killed. Thousands of nationals were hurt, tortured, and beaten. And, and she's sitting here 14 months in, she, she doesn't know that they even want her to come back. She's, she's not sure what her future holds, but a lot of that is just, you know, do they even want me? Am I still gonna be useful for them in the Congo?

Sarah ([00:43:44](#)):

Well, and she definitely needed these months, I think, you know, for healing and processing and resting recovering. And it was interesting, I was listening to a podcast where there was this Scottish pastor who

is interviewing Helen many years after her time in the Congo. And he was asking her specifically about forgiving the man who had kicked out her teeth and beaten her so badly, but really all of the men who had been so brutal throughout her entire captivity. And Helen responded to his question, Well, there is this woman named Corrie Ten Boom. So of course I perked up at that, um, since we just recently did a podcast about Corrie. And in this interview, Helen shared a little bit of Corrie Ten Boom's story and how it had actually brought her comfort. And also, you know, we talked about in our podcast about Corrie when she had the opportunity to meet one of the guards from the concentration camp and how she had this moment where she had to choose to show forgiveness.

Sarah ([00:44:51](#)):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and Helen said she had really much that same decision. There was an opportunity to go and see one of her captor who was in prison. And she had to remember that God had forgiven these men and that that forgiveness could flow through her. She couldn't do it in her own strength. She couldn't show forgiveness after all of the atrocities that she had experienced. But it was just a reminder to me as I was listening to all of this, of why we share these stories. You know, it's not that we are putting any of these women on a pedestal or making them out to be perfect heroes, but as, as we hear of another woman who has maybe had a similar experience, you know, the way that Helen knew Corrie Ten Boom's story, um, and maybe they've had a similar experience or they've learned a lesson in the midst of something, and so then we can look at our own lives and say, Okay, I can gain this encouragement. Maybe I need to learn this lesson too. So it was just a really sweet example of that.

Denise ([00:45:56](#)):

And Sarah, we were even noticing the, they were contemporaries of each other. I mean, Corrie Ten Boom would've been a little older, but they were alive at the same time. And so it's not even that it has to be stories of people that live so far apart. You may have a story that someone else needs to hear right now to help them get through whatever they're in.

Sarah ([00:46:15](#)):

Yeah. Well, and like you were saying, Helen had spent time just healing while she was in England. And I don't, for me, I probably would not have wanted to go back at all. And you know, even initially, I don't think Helen did either, but she and the other missionaries were starting to look at that possibility. And it was actually the local people who sent a letter that convinced her to go back. You know, the missionaries had suffered tremendously. There was, um, you, like you said, the 200 that were killed, but the local people had suffered tremendously as well. And so Helen really wanted to go back and be part of helping them rebuild and recover from this.

Denise ([00:46:57](#)):

So when she got back, she kind of was like, Okay, take stock of the landscape, what has happened? And so she returned in March of 1966 to find that 90% of what they had built had been destroyed. And she kind of personally took on the relief effort and rebuilding at Nebabongo. And during this time, she had an offer from another doctor in a town called Nayunkunde to build a 250 bed training hospital as a cooperative effort between five different missions organizations. And like I said earlier, Helen truly believed that no white man is justified in working in black Africa unless he or she is teaching, teaching. She was quoted as saying, That was really where my gifting was. Medicine drained her, but teaching gave her life. And so she really felt like this was what her next stop would be. And so she decided yes, she would do that.

Denise ([00:47:52](#)):

She moved the 450 miles to Nayunkunde and was ready to start teaching students. But when she arrived, she realized they had the land, but they had no housing for students or money to build it. And she was like, I'm not about to waste a year of my life fundraising and building a building. So she just put the word out that qualifying students who wished to be trained should arrive the first week of August. And so 22 students showed up ready to start classes and found there were no buildings. So, um, Helen kind of just filled them in and said, Okay, so here's the deal. I will teach, but you first have to build. And they were less than enthusiastic about that, you know, showing up probably, you know, expecting to be a part of a different class of working Africans, you know, not the people that were building.

Denise ([00:48:44](#)):

And this was a humbling experience for them. And so she, they, they were given a time to show up in the morning. She was kind enough to let them think about it and realize that it would take an adjustment on their part. So she said, 6:30 in the morning, show up, We're gonna get to work and I'm gonna work alongside of you. Well, 6:30 came and went and no one showed up. Which, having lived in Africa really didn't surprise me because time is a little bit more fluid there, you know, it's like ish. So at 8:45 AM people began to show up and they decided that they were willing to work to make this a reality. So they, they chopped down trees. They dug toilets. Helen worked there right beside them as they made and hauled bricks. And it, it only took them three months until they were able to finally begin those classes.

Denise ([00:49:34](#)):

But this season of Helen's life and this work with the school was laced with a lot of tension between the doctors and the students. And, you know, maybe it started here where they felt like they were tricked into building when they just came to be taught. And so there were several times when this lack of trust that maybe was started then birthed itself. They felt like they were being taken advantage of, that they were free labor, that, you know, the doctors weren't treating them well, um, when actually the doctors themselves were not wealthy. They didn't have any money. They were also volunteering their time in a lot of places to do this service. But it was just that there was a discrepancy in how each other viewed each other. And so it caused a lot of problems. And so seven years of being there, Helen begins to feel like, You know what?

Denise ([00:50:28](#)):

I have left my aging mother to be cared for by my siblings. I have these frequent illnesses. I'm having anxiety, you know, maybe I need to start looking at my exit. And she's knowing she's the doctor in charge of everything. She's like, I can't do this unless somebody's here to take over. Well, a married couple who were doctors showed up. And so things began to be put in place for he Helen to actually consider this. Well, at this time, another rebellion against the students, uh, arose and it wasn't dying down. And so Helen decided she would submit a letter of resignation, but was actually unpleasantly surprised to realize that her hospital staff accepted it. And she knew that they didn't view her as the problem, but the staff also knew that the students did. And that they didn't see any way to end this strike unless they got rid of her.

Denise ([00:51:21](#)):

And so she faced the end of her time, she was feeling unappreciated. She didn't know if it was worth it. She felt like it was a waste, that she wasn't valued, her time wasn't valued. And she's, she's like dealing

with all of these hurt feelings and yucky feelings. And so she takes them to the Lord. And in one of the, um, sources that we were looking into, they describe this season of her transition like this, um, that Helen felt like the Lord was stripping her away of anything that wasn't pleasing to him. He's, he, he really like revealed in her heart you wanted to go out with trumpets blaring and you wanted to go out being the victor and the, you wanted people to be saying how wonderful you are. You wanted photographs that you could take back and share with other people at home.

Denise ([00:52:11](#)):

So they would know how wonderful you are, how much you achieved, you wanted to feel needed, you wanted to feel respected. You actually wanted them to believe they couldn't go on without you because you were so important. And, you know, she just felt all of these things that she had, her pride had been harboring unbeknownst to her or coming to the surface. And she felt like it was the Lord's grace to reveal that to her. He was saying, You want Jesus plus, but you can't have it. You either have Jesus only, or you'll find you have no Jesus cuz you'll substitute Helen Roseveare in his place. And so what what makes Helen so relatable and what later makes her such a good speaker is because she was so honest about her pride. And, and I feel like what she described right there for any of us who are serving or who have served, I think you might have to wrestle with, you would be lying if you said those things hadn't come up to you.

Denise ([00:53:09](#)):

Was it worth it? If people aren't having a hard time with me leaving, why not? Wasn't I so valuable? Or, you know, just like wanting to be able to return to your passport country feeling victorious, wanting to be able to share with people all of the wonderful things you had done. You know, whether we say that out loud, it is something that is hidden in us. And I love that Helen was so open with it to say, You know what? That's not what I want. And thank you Lord for not allowing that to be my story. And, and so by the time she was actually leaving the field, you know, that after the resignation and some time had passed where she was actually leaving, they did offer her a nice farewell party. And she did feel loved and appreciated and she left with that heart full of the years and the friends and the faces and all that she had accomplished.

Sarah ([00:54:02](#)):

Well, after all this, Helen returned in September of 1973. And like you said, Denise, her mother was ill at this time. And so Helen wanted to go and be able to help her brother and sisters with the care for her mother. So she and her mother were actually invited to live at the WEC UK headquarters, which was kind of a sweet arrangement actually, because um, there were others around who could also help look after her mother. But it also allowed Helen to travel and share about the organization and the work that she had done in the Congo. And she especially loved sharing with young people, you know, in youth groups or university students and really encouraging them in their love for Jesus and encouraging them to serve cross-culturally. And this also allowed her to have the space to write. So during this time she wrote her second book, he gave us a valley, which was the follow up to the book she had written when she came back from her time of captivity before going back to the Congo.

Sarah ([00:55:13](#)):

Well, in 1975, Helen was invited to speak in the United States and Canada through WEC. But it was actually while she was away on this trip that her mother passed away. And then after the speaking engagement, Helen returned to the UK and she was diagnosed with breast cancer. So it was just kind of

one thing after another in this season she had surgery and a long recovery, but you know, she lived for four more decades after this. But even in these trials and challenges, she started thinking about returning to Africa after her recovery. But the Lord really showed her that he had other things for her. And so she continued writing, she continued speaking, she taught at the WEC Missionary Training College in Scotland. And one of her, one of her speaking opportunities was sharing at Urbana, which is a large Christian student missions event. And the first time she did this, she felt really out of place, like, you know, who am I and what am I doing here?

Sarah ([00:56:21](#)):

<laugh>, there were some other, other speakers that might sound familiar. Billy Graham, John Stott, and Elisabeth Elliot. So she went in sort of like, What am I doing here? Um, but she did speak at Urbana several more times after that as well. And she also stayed involved with the Girls Crusader Union, the GCU. Um, she taught at their camps and different events that they had. And, um, she was known for creating her own visual aids for this. So, uh, there were several, um, you know, she would draw on like large sheets of paper and like build on these diagrams as she went along through the lessons. And, uh, this was just like a really sweet way that she was able to stay involved and continue sharing and, um, being a part of the lives of young women.

Denise ([00:57:21](#)):

I love the impact that she had during her travels and that season of ministry that the Lord had for her. One of the stories that came out of that time when she was traveling, and remember she's from England and she, I think later ended up in Belfast, but so she's in America, she's not familiar with the way the country's set up or all the different places she might travel. So she was staying with a pastor and his wife and all she had to help her know what her next destination was, was the big book of airline tickets. So this is back before you had your little QR code on your phone and your ticket was literally a piece of paper that you had and you could, you know, for each trip you had a different ticket. So hers was a thick stack of tickets cuz she had so many speaking engagements.

Denise ([00:58:08](#)):

So it was time for her to, you know, make it to the next destination. So this pastor and his wife were driving her the two hours to the airport. She had them drop her off at 6:00 AM and she's like, Don't wait for me, just carry on. You know? So they left her there, she gets inside and she's wrestling through her bag and realizes she left her passport, her wallet, and her big book of tickets on the bed. They have driven off, it doesn't matter because it's two hours away, and she just walks up to the ticket counter saying, I, I just need you to help me. And she explains the situation to them, and Helen is persistent. You know, she's not gonna walk away without a fight, you know, So she's, she's explaining what happened, and the lady's like, No ticket, no flight. That's just the way that it works.

Denise ([00:58:56](#)):

And, and she's just keeps saying, Please, you have to help me. And, and she's like, Okay, well, do you know where you're going? And Helen's like, No, I actually don't have any idea. I was just gonna hand you the right ticket and get there. You know? She's like, Well, do you know your name? And Helen's like, Yes. And so she gives her the name and this woman was actually able to find her reservation, but she's like, But I can't prove that you're Helen because you don't have have your ID. And so Helen's like, Please, you know, I believe you know that I have a seat on this flight. And she's like, Well, the only possible solution

that I can figure out is if you would have anybody that would be willing to be a guarantor who would cover the cost of your flight. If it turns out you are not who you say you are.

Denise ([00:59:42](#)):

Well, remember, Helen doesn't know anybody. She's not from here. And so in a brilliant moment of the Lord probably, she says, Do you have a phone book? And so Helen has her open the phone book to the first name that would have the letters, r e v in front of them. And for those of us who might not know that would stand for Reverend. So she's looking for someone who would've been a pastor, the first one, just call him. So the agent found the first one and gave a very early morning 6:00 AM call to this random person as she explained what was happening. There's a woman here named Helen Roseveare that needs someone to guarantee her flight, Will you do it? And this man says, I'll be there in 20 minutes. And so he arrived as promised and asked for Dr. Helen Roseveare, and he had taken out cash, and he brought it for her knowing she would need some for her journey.

Denise ([01:00:37](#)):

And Helen is expressing this great gratitude. And he's like, No. He goes, I'm here to express my thankfulness to you. Because years and years ago, before I was a believer, me and my girlfriend were in Afghanistan. We were in Kubul, and we had gone to a nightclub and we had taken some drugs that were not good, and we were in a really bad way. And we happened to make it to the British Embassy where someone took us to this really simple hostel, and my girlfriend just went right to sleep, but I could not sleep. And so as I opened the bedside drawer, the book that was in there was one that I just could not put down. I read it from cover to cover, and it was so impactful that I ended up trusting the Lord that night. And Helen, it was your book, Give Me This mountain. And so of all of the pastors in the phone book, she happens to call the one who was brought to the Lord by the words that Helen wrote right after her, you know, her hostage situation. And so to me, that that is just the most precious, sweet moment that the Lord orchestrated for both of them, the encouragement, the little tender touch that was. And so I, uh, I couldn't not insert this story. It was just too sweet to not include.

Sarah ([01:01:55](#)):

Yes, I love that so much. And it, I think it's just one example of the impact that Helen's books have had on people or the people that have been touched by her speaking. I think her, her life and her story really impacted a lot of people. Well, through the years, Helen's health slowly started to decline. She became hard of hearing. In 2014, she recorded the last public video in which she spoke, and the plan was actually for this video to be played at her memorial service. In the video, she said, All of us have the privilege of being called to be his servants. And that word privilege, that was a word that Helen used for so much of her life, which is really amazing. Even though she had experienced so many hardships and tremendous suffering, she really saw it as a privilege. Helen had been living with a cardiologist, Dr. Pat Morton, who had opened up her home to Helen in Northern Ireland. First it was a place that Helen could come and rest whenever she needed in the midst of her travels. And eventually she was living there full time when she stopped traveling. When she became too frail to live with Dr. Morton, she was moved to a nursing home. And she died peacefully there on December 7th, 2016.

Denise ([01:03:19](#)):

Wasn't she? What, 91 at that time?

Sarah ([01:03:22](#)):



Yeah, she had really, even up in her eighties, she had continued speaking and sharing her story and just finding whatever, even small ways that she could to serve the Lord. There's one podcast where she was saying, You know, I couldn't, I couldn't travel anymore, but I could be the treasurer for my church and, you know, sit at a computer and do that work, and that would free someone else up to go. And there are actually quite a few videos and podcasts out there of Helen speaking. And I, I loved actually getting to hear, you know, her voice and her story and hear her sharing. That was just really fun. Um, and so we'll link some of those in the show notes as well.

Denise ([01:04:07](#)):

Yeah. And one of those things, Sarah, you were even talking about was that because we, some of these women are so contemporary, I mean, she just died, you know, six, seven years ago that we do have the ability to have video and listen and see, and, and the sweetness of this is her memorial service was actually recorded. And you watched that.

Sarah ([01:04:30](#)):

I did, yeah. It's actually available on YouTube. There was a memorial service in March, 2017 where there was WEC leadership and members of GCU, um, students who had come through her training school in the Congo, who are now doctors there, all of these different people who are just sharing how much Helen had meant to them and we will link that as well. But yeah, it was just a really sweet and moving experience to get to watch this sort of culmination. And there were, you know, some different pictures and videos of Helen, of her life as well, um, to see not only the impact that she had on people, but also over and over again everyone who shared at the memorial service was like, Helen would want us to give God the glory. And that was the way that she lived her life. And so it just felt very honoring to the Lord as well.

Denise ([01:05:32](#)):

I love that. I, I would just absolutely loved learning about Helen, the powerful woman she was. Something that stands out to me is, you know, when she chose, uh, to not get married, you know, she had had a proposal early on in the mission field, and then when she was on her furlough thinking, Okay, I think this is the time, and realized it was really for her a choice between marriage or what God had called her to do. And she was like, I absolutely have the right to get married, but I give up my right for what the Lord has asked of me. And it was a willingness to give up anything that she would have entitled because of the greater privilege of doing what he was calling her to do. And, and I love that mindset today that we just don't see many people willingly saying, I have the right and I give it up. You know, there's in many things, not just about marriage or whatever, but it was just, I love that we give up our rights for the sake of what he does and in how she just lived that out throughout her entire life. She's just such an inspirational woman. Definitely so glad we got to know her a little bit through this, uh, podcast and through our studies that took us closer to her in her work.

Sarah ([01:06:47](#)):

Yes, absolutely. I keep thinking every time we do one of these podcasts, Oh, I think this woman is my favorite, and then the next woman becomes my favorite.

Denise ([01:06:56](#)):

Me too. Yes. One of, one of the things that, um, we have kind of talked a little bit about Sarah, is the fact that it's so powerful to tell your story because of others that may need to hear it. And, uh, at Velvet Ashes, that is something we are really passionate about.

Sarah ([01:07:14](#)):

Yes, absolutely. And we have something that we are so excited to be sharing about. We have been working on putting together a book, and it is very soon going to be available, Uh, it is called, Yet We Still Hope, and it is full of stories from women who are serving around the world. If you are serving cross-culturally or you have, uh, we hope that this book will remind you that you are not alone as you read these stories. And for others, it can just really give you a vulnerable glimpse into the lives of these women and the joys and challenges that they experience, and just really being encouraged by the power of stories. And so Yet We Still Hope will be available on November 15th. You can find it, you can pre-order it right now on amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com. So we are just so excited to be getting this book out into the world.

Denise ([01:08:15](#)):

Yes. And we hope that you not only take something away from the legacy that was left by Dr. Helen Roseveare, but we hope that even through the stories that these women are brave enough to share through our book, that you'll be inspired and have courage to live your life, to give glory to the kingdom. And, um, and it's always, we wanna thank Eine Blume for the theme song Daughters and Sons that you listen to every time you click play on this podcast. And remember, until next time, you may be living the story that will be the courage for someone else's legacy. Thanks for joining us.