

Gibsons' treasure Helen Alp passes

MEMORIAL



File Photo

A treasure of Gibsons, Helen Alp a.k.a. the shopping cart lady, passed away on March 1 at St. Mary's Hospital. She was 82-years-old

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A treasure of Gibsons, Helen Alp (aka the shopping cart lady), passed away on March 1 at St. Mary's Hospital.

Alp suffered a stroke several weeks ago and was being cared for at the hospital as her health was in steady decline. She passed away last Saturday at the age of 82.

Seen almost daily picking up bottles, cans and trash in Gibsons, the small Greek woman was beloved by Coasters for her enduring smile and desire to keep her community clean.

Gibsons Mayor Wayne Rowe made a point of taking some time to honour her at the March 4 council meeting.

He referred to Alp as a "long-time fixture in the Town of Gibsons." She "was definitely one of those unique individuals who does make the Town," Rowe said.

To honour Alp and her late husband, Rowe unveiled a bronze plaque the Town made that will be placed on a rock by the marina, "near where Helen used to sit," Rowe said.

The plaque reads, "In honour of Helen Alp and her late husband Edip for their dedication in making Gibsons a special place to live. God bless."

Coasters came together in grief over social media this week.

"Helen was part of Gibsons as the cougar ladies were of Sechelt," said Mark Teflon Bullock on a Facebook thread. "A big loss to our community."

Darlene Kells said she would miss Alp's smiling face and that her life was "that much sweeter" for knowing her. "I know heaven has a new angel [who] will help keep the place clean," she wrote.

While many knew Alp by sight, rumours about her life abounded until Coast Reporter wrote a story about her in August, 2012.

It was then Coasters learned of her difficult upbringing that saw her working long days baking bread by the age of 10 so her family could survive in Greece.

In an effort to make more money, her father decided to send her away to clean for rich families. It would be the start of a life-long cleaning career for Alp.

After meeting and marrying her husband Edip, the pair ended up moving to Vancouver for a cleaning job with Eatons. In 1980 Eatons helped the Alps purchase a home in Lower Gibsons, where she lived until her death.

On the Coast the Alps started their own cleaning company called Janitorial Ltd., which was very successful until Edip became too afflicted with Alzheimer's to continue.

That's when Helen started to pick up bottles and cans around town for a little extra money.

A lifelong cleaner, Helen couldn't pass by the garbage she saw and decided to pick it up as well. Soon the practice would turn into a daily routine for Helen, who pushed a buggy to collect the recyclables and refuse.

The sight caused rumours to surface that Helen was homeless or perhaps mentally unstable.

"Sadly, as a kid I believed the rumours," Nicole Jones wrote on Facebook this week. "It was when I met her in Grade 9 when I went walking in Lower Gibsons, I talked to her. She helped me realize keeping our town clean will only make us appreciate how beautiful it is. Because we worked for it. Because we contributed. When I got my car I made sure to help her out. Take her to recycle. Take her out for lunch. Drive her home. I will miss her."

Helen's family has scheduled a funeral service at Devlin Funeral Home this Friday, March 7, at 1 p.m. that the public is welcome to attend.

Following the service, which is expected to run for about one and a half hours, there will be a reception at Leo's Tapas and Grill in Lower Gibsons.

"I know there's a few people who may want to say something and if they don't want to speak at the service they can certainly speak at the reception," Helen's son Edward said.

In lieu of flowers the family is requesting donations to the Alzheimer's Society in Helen's memory.