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Helen Bidwell Obituary

Helen Catherine Backlund Bidwell, 94, joined her husband, Joseph D. Bidwell in the deep purple mist on April 25, 2023. The daughter of the late E. Helmer Backlund and Margaret MacKay Backlund, Helen was born and raised in New Britain, Connecticut.

In her youth, Helen loved to sing. Radio listeners were awakened each weekend morning with her warbling the Woodpecker Serenade song. She also sang at the Walnut Hill Park bandshell on occasion. At sixteen she went to work for SNET as a switchboard operator, never forgetting and frequently telling the story of the day the entire switchboard lit up while she was in training. The operators speculated – was the war over, did FDR die? It was neither, but one of the worst disasters in Connecticut history, the Barnum and Bailey Circus Fire in Hartford. At that tender age, she was asked by her supervisor to spend the entire weekend working to ensure as many calls were connected for people trying to find out the fate of their loved ones. She was only allowed to take brief naps as the disaster unfolded. She stayed with SNET for the next decade and always spoke of the staff with admiration.

Right after the war, she met a guy named Joe and thus began a love affair that would last seventy years. Joe was experimenting with sod production and together they started Valley Farms Nursery, growers of fine turfs. They expanded to sell supplies and then expanded once again to go into retail, selling lawn and garden products. Bidwell's Yard, Garden and Pet is still in operation to this day.

Helen had been a resident of Weatogue for the last 60 years. Her many interests included designing and making her own clothing, making Halloween costumes for her boys, playing bridge with the ladies of the neighborhood, drinking her morning coffee, fashion and enjoying her backyard pool. She loved cats and had several throughout her lifetime. She also enjoyed reading and was a fan of Mary Higgins Clark mysteries.

During retirement, Helen and Joe loved spending the winter months in beautiful, sunny Naples Florida. Entertaining their children and grandchildren to wonderful seafood dinners, beach visits to the Gulf and many excursions in the Naples area.

Helen is survived by her three sons and their wives. Bruce J. and Marjorie Bidwell, Clayton K. and Toni Bidwell and Eric D. and Deidre Bidwell. She also leaves her three adored granddaughters, Margaret, Anna, and Laura Bidwell. She was predeceased by her parents, her soul mate and life companion, Joseph D. Bidwell and her beloved brothers, Kenneth, Gary and Robert.

Helen loved her family very much and always put their health and happiness above all else.

Burial will be in Curtiss Cemetery at the convenience of the family. Contributions may be made to the Salvation Army or First Church of Christ, Simsbury where Helen taught Sunday school many years ago. Please visit Helen's Book of Memories at www.vincentfuneralhome.com for online tributes.

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