

*The following is an editorial written by Margaret Zoeller which appeared in the Fall 1976 issue of Home & Country. It captures the special relationship between Women's Institutes and Helen M. McKercher.*

**a friend —**

Around 5:00 p.m. on October 29th, 1976, Helen M. McKercher stepped onto the elevator on the 5th floor at 1200 Bay and headed toward street level.

It was the final afternoon of work. The dried flower arrangements, the personal pictures and momentos had been packed up for their journey to Stratford and her office was neat and tidy for the Acting Director, Miss Margaret Myer, Supervisor of Foods and Nutrition, to walk into on Monday morning. The final suggestions and last memos had been written.

Everyone had mixed feelings and

all were sad and happy at the same time. Everyone from head office staff to each Women's Institute member felt they were losing a personal friend. Someone who had been "there" for 20 years, giving advice and assisting all — Helen McKercher.

One outstanding quality, and a priority with her, was the balanced devotion she gave to both the work of the Women's Institute and the Home Economics Branch. This was not easy, for both placed heavy demands on her time, energies and talents.

There was warmth embodied in this special lady and a wit and wisdom to match. She packed more ideas, guidance and charisma into 24 hours and yet found time to suggest solutions to hard-core problems.

There were parties and gifts, luncheons and reminiscings; each and every special event a genuine token of friendship and love.

Miss McKercher's goals were

always superior and she encouraged all to give of their best. She was an image maker and expected all to uphold the high standards of life styles that were worthy of the Ontario Women's Institutes. She fostered co-operation and a sense of responsibility at all levels.

Women's Institutes have been fortunate to have had Miss McKercher as director — always ready with thoughtful advice and always looking ahead for the future of the W.I. As members, we are all personally grateful to the Department of Agriculture for appointing her 20 years ago.

She was indeed mindful of providing extra benefits to assist us — the help of the home economists, the up-to-date courses, training schools, 4-H, printing Home and Country, were only a few.

When one looks back to 1897 when the original Women's Institutes' constitution was written, the first appeal from the new organization for co-operation and financial assistance was to the Honourable John Dryden, Minister of Agriculture. In 1919, when the organization had grown and a provincial board established, Mr. George Putnam, Superintendent of Women's Institutes, Department of Agriculture, was named honorary president.

Seven persons with varying titles have served as liaison between agriculture and Women's Institutes during these years and each has worked hard to encourage programs to keep Women's Institutes up with the times and still hold onto the identity for which they were founded. The ministers of agriculture over the years have been generous to our W.I.

Through the ministry, Helen McKercher's contribution to the Women's Institutes has added another milestone in the annals of our history. Your talent for dealing with people has set you apart, we always felt you were one of "us" and we thank you for just being you. Happy retirement!



*The opening of the Erland Lee (Museum) Home in August 1973 was a special day for Women's Institute members. Pictured here are (left to right); Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Bennet, Helen McKercher, and Margaret Zoeller.*