

Threads OF HUMANITY

Helen Green

COVER Depicting humanity's threads:

THE BEADING - The sari fabric, bought to just treasure and share.

THE CARPET - The colour, woven with vibrancy.

THE FONT - The needle, sewing with thread.

PAGES TO FOLLOW:

FABRIC COLLAGES - I keep a keen eye out to identify items that reflect the nature of the country where I've been. Just the texture of a fabric or the sight of colourings brings a tide of beauty in a sea of brokenness. Oh the colour! And the fabrics! My mother would have adored it with her appreciation of thread. In the poorest villages of humanity the beauty of colour, fabrics and cut, stand proud.

2004 Thailand 'The market was indescribable, tucked away in a funny maze of alleyways, but I did buy some batik cotton for a bit of fun...'





Helen Green, Kabul, Afghanistan 2017.

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APPENDIX

Atfaluna - Founded in Gaza for the prevention and treatment of deafness, providing a skilled and professional service in the midst of huge difficulties.

CBM - Christian Blind Mission, Christoffel Blindenmission (the German definitive).

CBR - Community Based Rehabilitation. CBM uses this approach to reach those with disabilities living in communities away from central services.

CCBRT - Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation Therapy, a hospital in Dare es Salaam founded by CBM to provide surgical and therapeutic interventions for people with disabilities.

Fistula – Each year 50,000 to 100,000 develop Fistula. It's directly linked to obstructed labour grossly mis-managed. Only 16,000 are treated each year so it's estimated two million young women live with untreated obstetric Fistula. Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation has one purpose and one purpose only: eradicating fistula - www.hamlinfistula.org

HI - Handicap International, sensitively referred to as HI

IAM - International Assistance Mission.

OMF - Overseas Missionary Fellowship, founded as a missionary society.

WV - World Vision (NZ and International)

GLOSSARY

In my diary text I have introduced associates with just their first name unless they've been mentioned several times.

Elsewhere in the body text I have introduced associates with their full name and association.

The projects written of are sourced through various ways: where WV or CBM field staff knew of villages wanting to progress; where neighbouring villages took interest in another village's development work and approached WV or CBM; or where a humanitarian disaster was followed by rehabilitation and long term development programmes.

The work, the programmes, the ventures, the schemes I visit are all, unless stated otherwise, funded by the Charity at the time, WV or CBM.

Photos by Greg Low I have the rights to re-publish.

THERE'S A WORD COUNT OF 102,000 herein, the most frequent:

SEEDS of LIGHT, COMPASSION, TRUST and EMPATHY that HONOURABLY WEAVE TRUST into HEART-BREAKING, HEART-WARMING PROGRAMMES in a TAPESTRY of HILARIOUS, INCONGRUOUS, ANKLE TWISTING, MAGICAL GRATITUDE,

capturing the entire essence of one word in particular:

HOPE.



ABOVE Southern India - Therapy for Cerebral Palsy, she is richly embroidered and festooned with love. Such hope, such a common thread in humanity regardless of race, creed, religion, status.

BOTTOM LEFT IMAGE 'The Tuis' is a sewing project I embroidered a while ago, all done freehand on the sewing machine and I am very proud of it!

“I’ve always loved the intricacies of embroidery and the threads that embroidery weaves, the way the colours meld and the fabrics mesh.”



AUTHOR'S NOTE

DAD LOVED US ABUNDANTLY. When he was alive, life was wonderful. We were poorer than church mice but then no-one in Karangahake Gorge had two pins to rub together. My family was further down the financial barrel than most. We had three acres, and a cow and a goat, and not much more. But Dad always said, 'You're my special little girl.' I believed I was all he had. It was heaven, the stability and his irrefutable strength in my life.

I loved being out with him and working down the paddock.

"Ok," he'd announce, "that's enough work," and we'd lie on the ground beside each other gazing up at the sky. He'd tell me stories pointing up to the sky,

"See that cloud Helen? It's a rabbit and it's hopping across to see its friend," another cloud of course, and I'd lie there alongside him, entranced. I couldn't dream up a story like that, so I believed and I imagined. Frustratingly, I can't write stories nor tell imagined stories, not like Pete could with The Girls.

What is a story? It's an explanation, 'The story is...' Or it's a covert untruth, 'The story is...' Or a 'storey' is a level in a construction. So I choose to now write a story of facts and feelings through a construction of layered storeys.

On the whole, people are keener to tell me their stories rather than delve into the reality of my experiences. The ingredients aren't in our brains or imaginations to process the facts of poverty wrought by traumas and tragedies, genocide and war. It's easier for doubters to

not broach the subject or to sum it up with a quick appraisal, 'I've been to Fiji, I've seen poverty.' A tropical island is not the reality of poverty.

I was conscious the family felt a duty to wade through my daily experiences, diared as faxes and emails: dated, written and depicted thus in [green](#) throughout [THREADS OF HUMANITY](#),

[2007 Tanzania](#) 'The more I have seen on this trip the more I realise how privileged I was to see the work I saw in WV. With WV I saw the poorest of the poor in extreme circumstances and got to share their lives. With CBM I have seen very poor people, still the bottom of the heap, but more so in the desperate category of disability.'

I felt the family needed to know where I was, what I was doing, and besides, I wanted them to know all that. They'd send me off and would have no idea if I didn't make contact. My brother Maurice could always throw light on a subject, in his reply emails to me,

'June 2016 - Hello Nigeria, It's good of your captives to let you have access to the internet. Unfortunately I could not find the code to determine the ransom demand, which is just as well because my health insurers declined to pay for my eye op. Mor'

Reading as a source of knowledge is probably more my modality than writing. However diarying my experiences became a source of knowledge for my family and now a nostalgic archive. Kirsty once told me the staff at her work would read my correspondences at morning tea and if they didn't have news, what would they all talk about!

DEDICATION

My work, sustained by faith and driven by mission, is thus written. It's impossible to ignore the complexities of personal history but through these writings I have celebrated the ties between the weight of the past, the levity of the present, and the hope for the future. I can honour the past and am not bound to it.

It is always with the benefit of hindsight that we can see things which we wish we had done differently, but one cannot deny one's heartfelt mission at the time. Some professional relationships I encountered haven't always been easy nor benign of mis-intent. That is regrettable but does not outshine the magnificent friends, partners, sponsors and recipients I am all the richer for serving.

Global traumas and tragedies touch us all, either personally or remotely, but to all they are a painful legacy of humanity. As a consequence, my mission is to aid those who have suffered immeasurably. Bridges for development have been built in my few years of involvement and I have seen the threads of success in bringing hope to humanity.

Through faith I have dreamed, I have imagined and I have believed. With God I have traveled, I have journeyed, I have strayed and I have followed. For all I am enriched, I am empowered and I am blessed.

“I have faith in God’s protection in all I do.”

Helen Florence Green

.....

TO OUR FUTURE’S HOPE,
THE THREADS THAT WEAVE
HUMANITY
- THE CHILDREN

Helen Green

*BELOW With problems and solutions
whirling in my head, astringent heat
and rutted roads, the world stops
when a child is placed in my arms.*



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OPPOSITE One of my most harrowing journeys was to Northern Uganda to the town of Gulu, during the war caused by Lord's Liberation Army.

During the Northern Uganda war children were at extreme risk of being kidnapped by the Army to become child soldiers or, if they were girls to become slaves or prostitutes, or just to be killed.

In isolated rural huts it was not safe for children to stay in their homes at night. So each night the children, 'The Night Walkers' as they're known, gathered together and collected more as they walked into the town to sleep in safety in places such as the railway station and other town buildings. The sight was beyond heart-breaking to watch. They'd appear silently and solemnly through the mist, their eyes hauntingly devoid of hope, hollow and broken. The next morning they would rise and walk back to their homes to carry on with what was required during the day. Such was the gravity, and I am sure the exhaustion, of this nightly walk.

Comparatives are judgmental at best. However the reality is, and the cause for the drive of my forward mission for The Children, that back home in NZ there are children of equal age and worthiness, rolling over in their beds, folding away their iPads, flicking off lights, yelling out, 'Night', to anyone listening, and falling asleep, to wake in the morning to family hum and drum, breakfast, tv news and sauntering off to school, listless and bored with safety.

2001 Africa 'It took an hour to get us all on the bus...passengers, bags, kids amidst lots of noise and negotiation as to what and who would travel on the roof. While they were arguing, there were kids with babies in their arms, crowding around the bus, begging.'

FOREWORD

PETE 'I've done hundreds of trips to Auckland Airport over all the years, and only late twice, I might add: once when the plane was early and second when the traffic was backed up. The longer the distance Helen's plane trip was the more likely it would be early, rather than a quick hop over the Tasman. I've also waited hours and hours in Auckland Airport when her plane has been delayed at the other end. It's a two-hour drive each way so I've often left before the news comes through of a delay. There's one flight she gets in at 6 am. I'm up at least two hours before that and afterwards make the long drive home. But you don't let people drive cars off a long flight.'

September 2001 'The flight from Bukoba was a marathon: they told us the plane was broken and yet people were boarding. Then they told us they had over-booked the flight and we couldn't board. We four were the only white people to be seen. Finally after much haggling they told us to get on another plane. Instead of the one-hour flight we flew six hours all over Tanzania. Finally, at Nairobi Airport there was the expected haggling so that I didn't have to pay another visa fee.'

"Wherever she's come from, and whatever the time, the first thing she says is,

"Hi, I'm home," the connotation being, 'I made it.'

My reply has equal subtle inference,

"That's good." It takes her a little while to settle back in, meaning you don't have an intelligent conversation straight away. There's been a high personal cost in terms of Helen's health with contracted fevers and sicknesses, and physical injuries - being offered an AK47 as a crutch for a sprained ankle, you've got to relate to the world she works in. I think the greatest cost is when she comes home emotionally wrung out. It takes a bit to build her up again. She knows she's exhausted, she accepts it and works through the

process of emptying out and making sense of the experiences. Nothing can prepare you for when someone pokes a gun under your chin the first time. The second time isn't so bad, it's not any less serious, it just means you're not totally freaked out.

It's quite a strange thing, Helen spends six months of the year away and as far as I'm concerned, while you're separated, you run your own life. When she returns, well, then you fit back together again. I don't feel worry or feel anxiety nor do I take on people's remarks and incredulous faces as if I don't care, "You don't worry?" For one, if I did, I'd be a nervous wreck. Secondly Helen and I reached an agreement initially that we wouldn't communicate: she's not in the London Ritz. She's in any place on earth where invariably, more so in the early days, communication is variable. So if she rings, fits in a quick 'Hello' and the line drops off, you try three or four times more before you give up. What on earth's going on? Has a bomb exploded? Has she fallen off the side of a mountain road? So I'm best to not worry, not dwell on it and not communicate and just look forward to the day she returns to me. Of course, with email now, she regularly can convey to me and to the girls her love of what she's doing and her belief in the results, 'It's my calling' she's says. And I believe that too.

She doesn't very often take people with her, partly for security reasons. On her own she can talk herself in and out of trouble. It's not so easy with somebody for whom you are responsible and in such an environment. The Helen in the Developing World comes alive. Really alive! It's like she's on steroids. Yes she could be comfortably middle-aged, working at Waikato Hospital and we'd have evenings together and weekends together. But nothing compares to seeing your girl living her calling. It's a thrill to see my wife glowing!

There's been a monetary cost to us, that's our choice. For example, they'll pay for Helen to sit

in the back of the plane. If you want to sit in the back you're good for nothing. So I top it up and pay for business class. She can more readily work on arrival and it means she's home two or three days quicker. As far as I'm concerned, the sooner she's home the better. There's also a financial cost to seeing my wife, and that's the way it is.

I was attracted to Helen's intellect more than anything else. She's a bright and clever lady. However she's unassuming and she can annoy the heck out of some people because she's so quick, decisive and usually correct. After fruitful debate she'll announce, 'We should do this and it will be right.' She will know. She will take charge and she will know the best outcome. She will approve a project, her organisation will provide the funds, she will check on progress and if you haven't committed, well you're in serious trouble. She's not faint-hearted. Such was the situation in Mongolia on a trip I attended with her. She spoke to the community,

"You haven't applied by the rules of funding." They coughed and spluttered and she continued, "You've got until tomorrow morning to get it right."

They stayed up all night working out a resolution and delivered a satisfactory process in the morning. She's commanding and demanding. At a similar meeting a fellow came to present a case for money. She let him run his spiel and then spoke,

"I think you will find you told me you started that project some years ago, and in fact, you didn't."

"Yes I did."

"No you didn't."

"Well, no other New Zealanders have been here," and he stood his ground. Helen wears a double time piece wristwatch with NZ time and the local

time. Indicating the projector screen she asked for a re-viewing of three slides back.

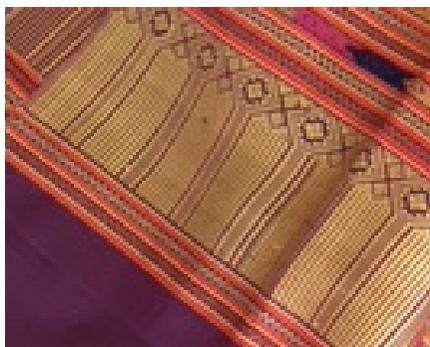
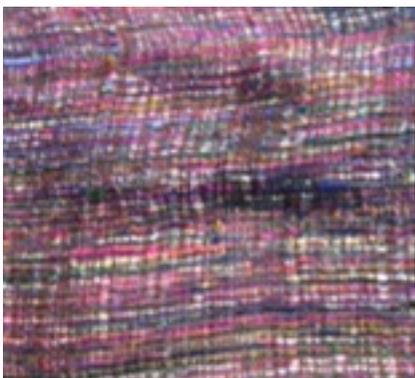
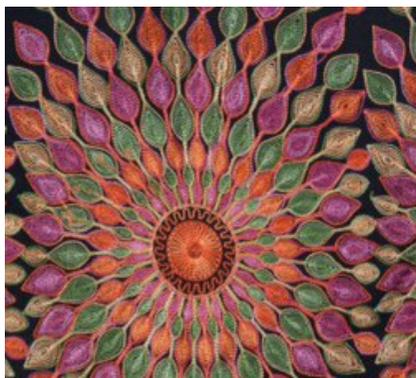
"See that woman's arm with the double wrist watch? Does that look like this one?" Indicating the watch on her arm, she wasn't afraid to expose him for what he was.

Under normal circumstances Helen would have been a doctor. Regardless of her father's tragic untimely death, her mother's startling mental ill health and Helen's intense childhood loneliness and isolation, she still had the resolve to save herself. She had the belief in herself as a care-giver and a provider of comfort, and hence applied for nursing. A lot of us are usually knowledgeable at one or two things. With Helen it's fair to say she has reasonable knowledge of a lot of things from her nursing, to community work, to accountancy, marketing and development work. She's a unique set and that's what stands her apart. As a caring nurse Helen is good at fluff-the-pillow bedside stuff. But as a crisis nurse Helen is dynamite at post-operative. She's all over it. So take that crisis handling ability and her inherent street smarts and you've got your answer for how she's survived as long as she has amongst hostility and depravity.

What I love most about her is the fact she loves me. She and I meet on equal terms but I know she would do anything for me. If you said what keeps the fire burning, for want of a term, it's her intellect, her firm beliefs and her fluid opinions. We can have such a discussion about anything, not necessarily agree and yet I come away so stimulated by her.

THREADS OF HUMANITY will be read by readers who know the story and by readers who are introduced to the story. What all readers will feel is humility for their own good fortune and admiration for a humble, down-to-earth woman's work. Inspiration however will be the page-turner right through to the end.'

Pete Green





LEFT Southern India, post
Tsunami - Colourful canvas
shelters sourced from elsewhere
in India. Such beauty in the
brokenness.

THE WEAVER

*My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colours
He weaveth steadily.*

*Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.*

*Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.*

*He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.*

AUTHOR IS BELIEVED TO BE
BM FRANKLIN

WRITER'S NOTE

Helen Green gives a single glance, cool and appraising, and if you meet her eye the glance turns to an embracing, trusting, deeply humorous smile that's relaxing and compelling. Her warmth rises from under the waft of grey waves and warm-hued skin. Be it a blessing she's of this image, neither anglo nor islander, for the multi-cultures her mission was deemed to serve.

Her fulsome carriage depicts abundance and hope to cultures of thin-skinned, angry stomachs and impoverished souls. She adorns the dark cultural garb solicitously, cloaking her handsome build with intellect and empathy. A svelte frame would be engulfed, removing her charitable mission's conviction and purpose. She embellishes the ethnic fabrics naturally, wrapping her carriage with compassion and benevolence. There was no background of privilege nor position that advanced her pathway but these characteristics and image were recognised by others, surprising her with offers of privilege and positions.

The readiness for laughter, intrigue for cuisine and passion for thread inextricably weave balance to the rigors of obdurate hopelessness, impoverishment and discrimination seen daily in her developing world of community and institution, corporation and aid. There is no time for this woman's work to be done such is the weight of a divine gift. Her divinity was constructed from childhood pain and teenage vulnerability. The good fortune of adulthood lifted the mantle for her to follow Jesus, 'I suffer so that I may gain'. Through faith she had the belief her path's preparation would award her humility. She had worn the heavy shroud of grief, poverty, judgment and seclusion for years before developing into a woman of significance. She graduated magnificently in humility and reverence. In the face of all humanity she

is qualified to emanate a regard of honest experience, projecting through spirit, 'I have been devoid of hope too and I have healed through faith'.

A faith with a mission is motivation but, alone, is insufficient to emotionally and physically survive the developing world's inhumanity. Helen's distinctively unique *THREADS OF HUMANITY* clearly depicts a woman of inimitable character who intrinsically combines leadership, self-promotion, fearlessness and shrewdness, thrust with deep prayer for a mission's fruition. One happily feels equality with Helen, then feels in awe of her, humoured by her, in horror for her, anger and then sympathy for her. And so as she takes us through this tumultuous journey, she travels back and forward consistently with references to past memories, experiences and vocations, candidly detailing with frank reality how each past negativity has produced present positivity.

Children are significant in Helen's mission, and as the reader will view, children are eagerly placed in her arms but the child is already drawn to her, Helen is already reaching out and she becomes the centre. People become the circumference of her circle, wherever she is, reaching for her heartfelt care. From there, results and achievements revolve around her pivot.

Christ healed with, 'I am of God.' Helen's actions are destined as she believes she works as the 'hands and feet of Jesus'. As she serves this belief she gives you a programme to follow. Using the measured steps of her quietly-firm tone, she converses, and your name is repeatedly reinforced. Your name is her key to your understanding. The connection with your name opens your portal

to the knowledge she offers, draws you back to her tuition and your absorption of the possibilities. Primarily recognising isolation of the vulnerable and displacement of the disabled, her heartfelt desire and determined expectations are purely hope for humanity.

Abundance to Helen is a surprising by-product of gratitude. The more gratitude she gave thanks for - her husband, her girls, her mother's healing, a home, friends, education, a career - the more profusion in all its beauty settled around her, piling in private assets, personal love and professional respect. Conversely Helen became a source of professional jealousy and subterfuge. She was subjected to unruliness and betrayal from quarters threatened by her inherent composure and compassion. Under fire she faltered, retreated and questioned all she knew and believed. Weary, but indomitable, the drowning was over and she was propelled to the surface. She rested a while in the flow before facing God and diving further into her calling. Experiencing being hemmed in by community ignorance, constricted by career constraints and shoved around by bureaucracy, healing was flight and flying was freedom, taking her back to the open pastures of dreaming with her father. The wide and sparse plains, rugged mountains, desert terrain, war-torn rubble and destruction that has become 'home'.

PROVISO

Trust by nature is personally subjective and we rely on trust in Helen as we relate to the experiences of a woman with her family, her community and her career. However, it's all a great challenge for Helen to recall the facts of overwhelming experiences from a grievous

childhood sadness to professional persecution to the tormented developing world and defenceless children. The reader is tugged in two ways: the simplicity and humility of a rural NZ country girl and the ambition and motivation of a global executive. We read of a girl who was not born extraordinary, but from whom as a woman extraordinary things have been borne. Helen and I delved deeply as the autobiography proceeded, stirring raw feelings and revealing the frankness of humanity from famine to board room.

Although *THREADS OF HUMANITY* relies on memory and Helen's colourful collection of archived written and photographed material, it has mostly been written from the heart. From the heart, Helen has written with intelligence and with all the senses. She has stood up to the cathartic process where writing of occurrences, such as with her mother, deepened a sense of warmth. Helen's narrative is sometimes personal, and sometimes in unison with the massive population of developing countries.

She has written with shy humility too, reluctant to extoll her virtues. Hence I have attempted to extract from Helen, and write alongside her, with objective scrutiny to provide context that explains and supports her existence, and acknowledges her outstanding international acclaim. At times her text is fragile, just as the nature of memory is fragile. As with the fragments of memories there remain questions and contradictions. So we invite readers with compassion who share that human condition of memory to unfold the pages herein. Ultimately, as ghost writer, the responsibility lays with me for any inaccuracies.

Julie Brown
Writer

