



Helene Glidden, author of *the Light on the Island*

By: EDRIE AND TERRI VINSON

Born in 1900 at the New Dungeness Lighthouse on the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Helene Glidden was the child of Edward and Estelle Durgan. While just a toddler, Helene's family moved to Port Townsend where her father took a job at the U.S. Customs House. The Durgan family lived there until 1905 when they moved to Patos Fog Signal Station where he was assigned Keeper. From age five until age eleven Helene and her family lived on Patos. It was here, Helene later recalled, that Ella Higginson, the state's first poet laureate, encouraged her as a child to write.

The year following her father's death the 1920 census shows Helene living with her oldest sister Mary Clark Coutts, along with another younger sister Lulu. Mary's 2nd husband Billy Coutts, aka William Ulysses Grant Coutts of Sucia Island was a mechanical engineer for the Pacific Towboat Company, City Dock at Everett. After finishing high school Helene went to the Everett Community College, and then to the University of Washington where she fell in love and married Joseph Glidden. After moving to Portland, Oregon, she took a writing class from Alfred Powers, renowned teacher at Portland State University. Tracing her childhood path, she drafted the text of *The Light on the Island* as a fulfillment

for that class. The instructor encouraged her to publish the book, and she did so in 1951.

In December 1954, Bea Cook, noted author and supporter of the Orcas Island Library Association, engaged Helene to speak to that organization. When writing for school, Helene wanted to entertain children and help them understand their world by reading. She brought a number of children's books to donate to the Library. According to the Orcas Island newspaper, Helene told the group that her stories all combined the elements of comedy, tragedy, pathos and humor. "My granddaughter brags that I am the smartest woman in the world," said Mrs. Glidden. "This undeserved reputation has been won because through the reading of books I have been able to satisfactorily answer her questions about the great World around her."

In October of 1951 she penned the inscription on one of her books: "May that Light which warmed the hearts of the family at Patos Island Shine on you and Bless you. Sincerely, Helene Glidden."

It is not known whether she ever returned to Patos. As if to add to the magic she already attributed to the island, she asked that her ashes be scattered there. One of her relatives carried out that request.

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