

Malta House of Care



Helyn Flanagan: Inspirational Dance Instructor

Helyn Flanagan, 98 years young, is a well-known and much-beloved fixture in the dance community – in Greater Hartford, in Connecticut, and indeed, across the country. For more than 87 years, she has been dancing her way into people’s hearts – and teaching others to do so, too.

Miss Helyn, as she is known to all, started taking dance lessons when she was 5 – and then began giving lessons in her Hartford home when she was 11, charging other kids 5 cents to learn to tap. During the Great Depression, it was her way of [contributing to her family](#).

From there, her career as a dancer, singer, choreographer, and entrepreneur blossomed, as she sang on WTIC Radio (performing with Louis Nye and Ed Begley) and performed with her sister and another girl in Hartford and New York City clubs – all while attending Weaver High School.

In 1952, Miss Helyn bought a mansion at 606 Farmington Avenue, converted it into a dance studio, and her career as an instructor took off. In its heyday, the Helyn Flanagan School of Dance welcomed 800 students per week in tap, ballet, jazz, and ballroom dancing. During these years, she held her recitals at The Bushnell – sold-out performances with standing-room-only crowds. Many of her students went on to perform with the Rockettes, on Broadway, and on television. Locally, during the 1960s, her students performed on the Brad Davis show, with Bob Steele, Frankie Laine, and Bobby Vinton, among others. What’s more, Miss Helyn became well-known as a teacher of teachers, crossing the country to give lessons at dance conventions to other instructors.

Miss Helyn’s life was not without heartache. She was widowed in 1959; lost her home to a fire in 1963; was treated for breast cancer when she was 79 and oral cancer when she was 94; and suffered a heart attack at 95. Although she sold her studio in 1985, she never stopped teaching, and still teaches adults once a week in West Hartford (one of her students is 85 years old)!

For sure, Miss Helyn has left an indelible impact on the dance community over the past nine decades; in fact, she is featured in an exhibit that opened in January 2017 at the CT Historical Society, called [“CT Dances: A Visual History.”](#)

But perhaps her most significant impact has been on the thousands of lives she has touched and inspired with her indomitable spirit; her uncanny sense of music, timing, and performance; and the utter joy she takes in sharing her great love of dance with other people – and encouraging them to love it, too.

