

Helen Suzman (d. 2009)

A tribute to Helen Suzman by Rita Easton

Helen's handicap and other memories

January 18, 2009 *Edition 1*

I WAS 18 years old when I first met Helen Suzman at the Houghton Golf Club in 1948.

At that time, it was arranged that I would play a round of golf with her. As a somewhat arrogant youngster, I thought nothing of her golf game, but noted that she took the whole thing very seriously.

Years later, I met Helen occasionally. We would sometimes play a round of golf together at the Royal Cape Golf Club when she had the time to escape from her parliamentary duties.

Or, on the other hand, I sometimes sat in the public gallery of parliament when I knew she would be speaking.

In 1977 my husband was persuaded to be the Progressive Federal Party candidate for the South Coast constituency for the general election.

Helen made it her business to address three public meetings to support my apprehensive husband during his campaign.

Each of those meetings was packed to capacity and Helen spoke without a note, always with concentration. She had every audience spellbound.

During the five-year stint when I ran the Black Sash advice office in Durban, I sometimes spoke to her secretary, or her personally, about the injustices which had occurred at the behest of the security establishment.

All this information was then analysed by the wonderful woman who, with remarkable memory, would then take on those detractors who always called her a pariah, and against whom she never stopped fighting.

Helen's death has been a great sorrow to me. To my mind, she was the bravest and most stoic woman I ever came to know.

I enjoyed her company, and will always remember her courage, good humour and amazing tenacity.

Hers was a life-long commitment to humanity; she is a huge loss for South Africa.

RITA EASTON