



**T**ry **W**alking **A**cross



A Memoir by  
**Helen Parker Holden**

# ***T*ry *W*alking *A*cross**

A Memoir by  
**Helen Parker Holden**  
with  
**Donna Holden**

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For my family and friends  
who encouraged me to write it down.

# Contents

1. Childhood.....	1
2. Cross-Country Road Trip.....	31
3. Growing Up .....	44
4. Employment.....	53
5. TWA Hire.....	63
6. First Flights.....	78
7. Going International.....	84
8. Shannon .....	100
9. Cairo.....	109
10. West to Madrid.....	123
11. East to Bombay.....	139
12. Tel Aviv.....	147
13. Wilmington.....	163
14. Paris.....	166
15. Back Home Again.....	174
16. ALSSA.....	183
17. International Again & Special Assignments.....	189
18. Memorable Passengers.....	199
19. William Holden.....	210
20. Torino & Roma.....	228
21. Koblenz.....	243
22. Caregiving.....	257
23. The End.....	270
24. Epilogue.....	275
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	283
<i>Index</i> .....	286
<i>Pronunciation Guide</i> .....	303

Several airline names have had amusing  
acronyms associated with them.

For example:

BOAC

(British Overseas Airways Corporation) –  
“Better On A Camel”

BEA

(British European Airways) –  
“Better Eat Afterward”

SABENA

(Société Anonyme Belge d’Exploitation  
de la Navigation Aérienne) –  
“Such A Bad Experience, Never Again”

and

TWA

(Trans World Airlines) –  
“Try Walking Across”

Hence the name of this book.

## Chapter 1

### Childhood

**M**y ancestors were mostly pioneers of the United States. Many arrived in North America in the 1600s, mostly from England and some on the Mayflower. Some came later from Ireland, well before the famine, to farm here. Several were Patriots of the American Revolution, and through the generations, they migrated west. My mother was born in Kansas and my father in Colorado. I was born in California, the fourth child of Dorothy and Hervey M. Parker.

My father was the fifth of seven children from Amelia (Purdy) and George A.H. Parker. H.M., as he was called (the M was for Melage), had worked since he was 16 when his father died in a coal mine explosion while installing an electric pump. With a mother, three sisters (another sister died before he was born), and a younger brother, he needed to go to work to help support the family. His older brother didn't contribute much. Dad's work was as a traveling auditor in the coal mines for Colorado Fuel & Iron, and their home was in a small Colorado town called Trinidad.

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Dad (standing left) and Uncle Paul (far right) at their shop.



A repair bay at Dad's shop.



Our Vine Street house in Glendale.



Try Walking Across



~ The Parker Children ~  
Me, Norman, Shirley, Harriet, and Louise  
c. 1929

## Chapter 4

### Employment

When we kids learned how to drive, we got the job of driving the delivery trucks for Dad's business when a rush auto part needed to be delivered... all of us except Harriet, who stayed home to help Mother in the kitchen. Then Louise and I had jobs in the H.M. Parker Auto Parts office. I even started typing invoices and filing at 13 years old. My first salary was 10 cents an hour. I'd ride to work with H.M. (we didn't call him "Dad" at work); then often I'd take the bus back home after I finished my part-time job. When the dress design idea didn't work out, I was put to work in the office full time. (Louise was an illustrator first at a Sacramento newspaper then at Douglas Aircraft and married at this point. Harriet was also married by then.) Getting some bookkeeping experience has been very valuable all of my life. I can still see that yellow ledger paper.

Jobs, particularly in defense work, were easy to find while so many men were away at war in 1942. So I applied at Lockheed Aircraft and went to work in an office there. I

## Chapter 5

### TWA Hire

**M**y job as a bookkeeper at Dad's was not very exciting so I decided to apply for an airline hostess job at TWA (Transcontinental & Western Air). (All the other airlines called the girls "stewardesses," but at TWA we were "hostesses." Later when both men and women had the job, they were called "flight attendants.") Qualifications had been for nurses only, but this requirement was dropped when nurses were needed in the military. I didn't consider American or United Airlines because they required two years of college, and Pan American only had men working the cabin. TWA lowered the requirement to one year of college and some business experience, which I had.

Airline stewardess was considered a glamorous job then and, relative to the number of applicants, there weren't many hired. My timing must have been perfect because I mailed my application and got an interview appointment soon after at the downtown Los Angeles TWA personnel office. I guess the fellow who interviewed me was interested in my

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View from the Mena House hotel roof in Cairo, Egypt.



Lounging around the hotel roof deck in Cairo.

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Airport Terminal in Rome, Italy  
Notice the metal grating on the ground.

## Chapter 11

### East to Bombay

In 1947 I had about five assigned trips to Bombay. It was the time of Mahatma Gandhi. A man of peace, Gandhi had promoted non-violent campaigns to gain India's independence from the British Empire. Britain had just passed the Indian Independence Act, which also declared partition of the region. To avoid a civil war, the area was divided by religious demographics. The area with a majority of Hindus became India, and the area with a majority of Muslims became Pakistan. The division of some provinces caused riots across India and Pakistan and 14.5 million people migrated. Muslims from what would become India fled to Pakistan, and Hindus and Sikhs from what would become Pakistan fled to India.

We only flew DC-4s to Bombay because the runway was too short for a Connie. Eastbound from Cairo to Bombay, we usually landed in Dhahran and Karachi on the way. One of the reasons we landed in Karachi was because of the conflict between Pakistan and India. The Indians didn't want us flying over them without approval or at night, so we had to land in

## Index

\* Photo

- A-4 Skyhawk (airplane), 278  
A&W Root Beer Drive-In, 245  
Academy Awards®, 247  
Acropolis (Athens, Greece),  
124  
Adams Guertin, Elaine  
Hammar, 64, 69, 70, 71, 72,  
73\*, 77\*, 134\*, 163, 167,  
171\*, 174, 179, 190, 277  
Adams, Ross, 174, 179  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 110  
Agip Hotel (Italy), 229, 231,  
240\*  
Air Force, 168, 184, 214, 231,  
232, 276  
Air France (airline), 88  
Air India / Tata (airline), 88  
Air Lingus (airline), 88  
Airline History Museum, KC,  
82\*, 95\*, 284  
Albuquerque, New Mexico, 32,  
66, 68-69, 70, 78, 79, 175,  
179, 200, 208, 277  
Alden, Joe, 157\*  
Alex Theater, 3  
Alexandria, Egypt, 114  
Alfredo's Restaurant, 235-236,  
276  
Algiers, Algeria, 88, 124, 270  
Alitalia (airline), 88  
Alice (aunt), one of "The  
Aunties", 4, 11, 20\*, 31  
Allen, Gracie, 205  
ALPA (Airline Pilots  
Association), 182  
ALSSA (Air Line Stewards and  
Stewardesses Association),  
74\*, 183-186, 187\*, 216  
Alvarado Hotel, Albuquerque,  
69  
Alzheimer's Disease, 213, 277  
Amarillo, Texas, 66

## A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- Ambassador Hotel (Bombay), 141-142, 145\*
- American Airlines, 63, 78, 84, 176, 183, 184, 272, 273, 277
- American Express, 246, 247
- Ancestry.com, 213
- Amos & Andy, 4
- Amstel (beer), 112
- Amsterdam, Holland/  
Netherlands, 246
- Appian Way (Italy), 231, 242\*
- Aramco, 140
- Arizona, 200, 277
- Armed Forces Radio, 248
- Army, 85, 87, 152
- Army Air Corps (Air Force), 86
- Army Corps of Engineers, 11
- Aretta, Tony, 45
- Arlington Cemetery, 36
- Ashby Black, Eva  
(grandmother), 2, 5-6, 16\*, 18\*, 31-33, 37\*-43\*
- Ashby Sisters (grandmother's sisters), 33, 40\*
- Asian Sea, 142
- Astaire, Fred, 193
- Athens, Greece, 88, 102, 124, 270
- Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (train), 56, 64, 69
- Aunties, The (Lottie, Grace & Alice), 4, 11, 20\*, 31
- Austin (car), 81
- Austin, Fred, 164
- Avenue de l'Opera (Paris), 169
- Aviation Writers Awards, 192
- B-17 Flying Fortress (airplane), 276
- Bad Godesberg, Germany, 244
- Bad Homburg, Germany, 189
- Bain, Mary Kay, 185-186
- Baker, Hattie Ashby (great-aunt/grandmother's sister), 40\*
- Baker, Josephine, 167
- Balboa, California, 10, 27\*, 29\*, 46, 49\*, 50\*, 51\*, 52\*, 134\*, 213
- Balboa Bay Club, 178
- Balboa Island, California, 10, 30\*, 51\*
- Balboa Pavilion, 45
- Baldwin City, Kansas, 56, 62\*, 185
- Barbara (cousin), 34
- Barnett, JoAn Howland, 282\*
- Barone's Italian Restaurant, 211
- Bataan Death March, 47
- Baths of Caracalla (Rome), 233
- BEA (British European Airways), 228
- Beck, Shirley, 191
- Beirut, Lebanon, 270
- Belgium, 217, 246
- Bellanca, Guido, 229, 231, 232, (233), (235), 276



## Try Walking Across

- Bellanca, Sara Jane, 233, 235-236, 276
- Belshaw, Ernie, 86
- Berchtesgaden, Germany, 247
- Bergdahl, Marlene Schaefer, 282\*
- Bert (uncle), 4
- Bethlehem, Palestine/Israel, 148, 157\*
- Beverly Hills, California, 127, 208, 277, 278
- Bickett, Kenny, 157\*
- Bickett, Louise, 157\*
- Black Parker, Dorothy (mother), 1-2, 4, 6-10, 11, 12, 13\*, (18\*), 21\*, 23\*, 25\*, (26\*), 31-36, 37\*-43\*, 44, 46, 53, 56, (62\*), 108\*, 207, 221\*, 223\*, 256\*, 265\*
- Black, Eva Ashby (grandmother), 2, 6, 16\*, 18\*, 31-33, 37\*-43\*
- Black, Harry J. (grandfather), 2, 5-6, 16\*, 18\*, 19\*, 46
- Black, Loretto Harrison, 70, 71, 76\*, 77\*, 277
- Black, Paul (uncle), 2, 5, 17\*
- Bluhdorn, Charles, 57
- BOAC (airline), 88
- Bob's Big Boy<sup>®</sup>, 125
- Boeing (company), 185
- Boeing 307 (Stratoliner airplane), 85, 86
- Boeing 707 (airplane), 184, 228
- Boeing 727 (airplane), 270
- Boeing 747 (airplane), 272
- Bois de Boulogne Park (Paris), 170
- Bolger, Ray, 207
- Bombay (Mumbai), India, 67, 85, 88, 110, 111, 113, 123, 139-143, 145\*-146\*, 147, 190
- Bonet Cummings, Malou, 277
- Borsalino (hat), 228
- Boston, Massachusetts, 70, 88, 211
- Brando, Marlon, 202
- Braniff Airlines, 84
- Bremen, Ohio, 34
- Brice's Daughter, Fanny, 176
- British Embassy, 129
- Britain/British Empire, 139
- British European Airline (BEA), 228
- Buenos Aires, Argentina, 215
- Bullfight, 127-128, 136\*
- Bullock Weightman, Mary, 85, 89, 214
- Burbank, California, 54, 78, 80-81, 175, 217, 257
- Burbank Airport, 70, 210, 211, 218
- Burley, Terry, 263\*
- Bermuda, 202-203
- Burns, Robert, 246
- Burr's Stand-In, Raymond, 277

A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- C-47 (DC-3 airplane), 276  
C-54 (DC-4 airplane), 85  
C-75 (Stratoliner airplane), 85  
Caine, Ann, 174, 181\*  
Cairo, Egypt, 67, 88, 92, 102,  
109-115, 116\*-122\*, 123,  
124, 126, 139, 140, 147,  
151, 152-153, 237, 240\*  
Cakewalk, 34  
Campbell's Soup, 234  
Cañon City, Colorado, 2, 16\*  
Capitol Building, 36, 42\*  
Caracas, Venezuela, 214-215  
Carroll, Mrs., (KC boarding  
house), 65  
Carter, President Jimmy, 84  
Cascais, Portugal, 129, 130  
Catacombs (Rome, Italy), 231  
Cavaunaugh, Caryl, 73\*  
CBS Television, 57  
Cedars Sinai Hospital (Los  
Angeles), 277  
Cessna (airplane), 110  
Chaffers, Loi Sullivan, 64, 65,  
69, 134\*, 277, 280\*  
Chandu the Magician, 4  
Chaplin, Charlie, 4  
Charisse, Cyd, 203  
Chase & Sanborn (coffee), 92  
Chasen's Restaurant, 208  
Chasen, Dave, 208  
Cherbourg, France, 166, 247  
Chevrolet (dealership), 277  
Chicago, Illinois, 33, 55, (73\*),  
88, 175, 179-180, 184, 191  
Chiclets (gum), 101  
Christianson Brothers, 230  
Church of All Nations, 150,  
160\*  
Church of the Holy Sepulcher,  
149-150, 159\*  
Cicero, Illinois, 33  
Clipped Wings, 74\*, 104, 194,  
259, 265\*, 268\*, 277, 278,  
282\*, 285\*  
Clooney, Rosemary, 207  
Coal Creek, Colorado, 2  
Coast Guard Station (Long  
Island), 86  
Coates Collection, Ed, 93\*,  
188\*, 196\*, 219\*, 284  
Coffee, 47, 80, 92, 101, 111,  
113, 180, 185, 205, 234,  
235  
Colosseum (Rome, Italy), 124  
Colonial Airlines, 84  
Colorado Fuel & Iron, 1  
Collins, Dottie (Gordon), 189,  
248, 277, 281\*  
Collins, Ed, 248  
Cook's Travel Office, 232  
Conner, Shirley (roommate),  
70, 185, 191  
Connors, Chuck, 206  
Connelly, Bill, 129  
Considine, Bob, 192  
Constellation/Connie  
(airplane), 55, 68, 85, 86,  
87, 90, 91, 93\*-95\*, 102,  
103, 139, 165\*, 178, 179,

## Try Walking Across

- Constellation/Connie (airplane) (cont'd), 184, 185, 187\*-188\*, 190, 191, 194, 195\*-196\*, 198\*, 199, 204, 206, 213, 214, 215, 219\*, 270, 284  
 Contessa from Northern Italy, 231  
 Continental Airlines, 84  
 Cooper, Gary, 200  
 Cootie (game), 232  
 Copenhagen, Denmark, 247-248  
 Coterie Choisi High School Club, 46, 50\*  
 Cox, Janice, 73\*  
 Coyle, Norma Schultz, 202, 212, 259, 263\*, 265\*, 278  
 Crete, 124  
 Cricket Club (Bombay), 143  
 Crompton, Mary, 176, 212, 215, 277  
 Cummings, Malou Bonet, 277  
 Cunningham, Jackie, 73  
 Cunningham, Marion Enright, 51\*, 275  
 Curtis's Mother, Tony, 201  
 Damon, Ralph, 68  
 Damone, Vic, 203  
 Davis Reagan, Nancy, 208  
 DC-3 (airplane), 66, 78, 79, 80, 82\*-83\*, 86, 190, 200, 276, 284  
 DC-4 (airplane), 85, 86, 93\*, 111, 124, 139, 171\*, 190  
 DDT (pesticide), 147  
 Dead Sea, 111  
 Delta Airlines, 84  
 Denver, Colorado, 2  
 Depression (1929), 8-9, 31, 35, 167  
 Derickson, Uli, 271  
 Desilu Studios, 194  
 Detroit, Michigan, 88, 163, (165\*)  
 Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, 88, 139-140, 141  
 Diehl's Hotel (Koblenz), 243  
 Dietrich, Marlene, 201  
 Dior Look, 67, 126, 134\*  
 Disney Company, Walt, 10  
 Disneyworld, 276  
 Dodge (car), 32, 163  
 Dodge City, Kansas, 32  
 Dorsey, Jimmy, 46  
 Douglas Aircraft (company), 53, 212, 278  
 Douglas, Kirk, 176-177  
 DreamWorks, 10  
 Durfee, Verona "Mike" Ryan, 172\*-173\*, 174, 175-176, 183, 217, 277, 280\*  
 Dutton, Virginia, 50-51\*  
 Eastern Airlines, 84  
 Eagle's Nest (Hitler's), 247  
 Edinburgh, Scotland, 246  
 Edmond, Eleanor, 191

A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- Egbert, Jane, 50\*-51\*  
Eiffel Tower (Paris), 167, 170, 171\*  
El Al (airline), 88  
El Rancho Vegas (hotel), 71-72, 76\*  
Emerson, Lee, 73\*  
English Channel, 246  
Ennis, Ireland, 100-102, 106\*  
Enright Cunningham, Marion, 51\*, 275  
Enstad Little, Karol, 64, 69, 70, 71, 73\*, 75\* 277, 280\*  
Entrekin, Gladys, 87, 105, 164, 186, 190, 277  
Erickson London, Barbara, 214, 221\*, 275-276  
Ericeira, Spain, 129  
Estoril, Spain, 129-130, 138\*  
Ethiopian Airlines, 88, 110  
Ettie (great-aunt/grandmother's sister), 33, 40\*  
  
F-104 Starfighter (airplane), 228, 232, 239\*  
Fairbanks, Douglas, 235  
Fanny Farmer Cookbook, 275  
Faulkner, Philys Jochim, 282\*  
Fenner, Ann, 263\*  
Ferrer, José, 207  
Fettuccine Alfredo, 235-236, 276  
Fiat, 228, 229, 233, 276  
Filkens, Meriam, 183  
Florida, 87, 277  
Flying Tigers (airline), 213  
Flynn, Errol, 202  
Follies Bergere (Paris), 167  
Fontaine, Joan, 203  
Ford, Mary, 206  
Ford (car), 11, 28\*, 127  
Ford Tri-Motor (airplane), 9  
Forest Hills Inn, 189, 248  
Forrest, Cris, 263\*  
Franco, General Francisco, 124, 128  
Frankfurt, Germany, 189, 245  
Franov, Wanda Malott, 282\*  
French Line, The, 192, 196\*  
Fricke, Doris, 152  
*Funny Face* (film), 193  
  
Gable, Clark, 208  
Gabor, Zsa Zsa, 207  
Gander, Newfoundland, 88, 91, 99\*, 103, 104, 164, 194  
Gandhi, Mahatma, 139  
Garden of Gethsemane, 150, 161\*  
Gardner, Ava, 205-206  
Garland, Judy, 4, 201  
Generals Patton, Montgomery & Rommel, 124  
Geneva, Switzerland, 87, 88  
George V Hotel (Paris), 230  
Germany, 70, 237, 243-245, 246, 252\*-254\*, 259  
Giesler, Jerry, 176  
Giza, Egypt, 117\*  
Glasgow, Scotland, 246

## Try Walking Across

- Glendale, California, 3, 6, 8,  
10, 17\*, 37\*, 44-46, 81,  
163, 174, 213, 215
- Glendale College, 46
- Glendale High School, 45
- Golien, Swede, 110
- Good, Virginia Sims, 174
- Goose Bay, Greenland, 91
- Gordon Collins, Dottie, 189,  
248, 277, 281\*
- Grace (aunt), one of “The  
Aunties”, 4, 11, 20\*, 31
- Grady, Jan, 263\*
- Graf, Mary Ellen Sperle, 277,  
282\*
- Grand Central Airport, 9-10
- Grand Canyon, Colorado, 32,  
38\*, 79
- Granger, Gordon, 166
- Grant, Cary, 206, 208
- Great Pyramids, 110, 114-115,  
116\*, 122\*
- Greek Airline, 88
- Greeley Teachers College, 2
- Green Hotel (London), 246
- Greg (nephew), 258, 262\*,  
264\*, 268\*
- Gross, Robert, 205
- Grumman Aircraft, 178
- Guertin, Elaine Hammar  
Adams, 64, 69, 70, 71, 72,  
73\*, 77\*, 134\*, 163, 167,  
171\*, 174, 179, 190, 277
- Gulf+Western, 57
- Gulfstream Aerospace  
Corporation, 178-179
- Gumm Sisters, 4
- Guppy (airplane), 246
- Haley, Jack, 207
- Hammar Adams Guertin,  
Elaine, 64, 69, 70, 71, 72,  
73\*, 77\*, 134\*, 163, 167,  
171\*, 174, 179, 190, 277
- Harriet (aunt), 34-35, 36, 41\*-  
42\*
- Harrison Black, Loretto, 70,  
71, 76\*, 77\*, 277
- Hartmen, Elizabeth, 50\*
- Harvey House (hotel chain), 69
- Haskell, Florence, 49\*-50\*
- Haskell, John, 207-208
- Hatos, Shirley Parker, 6, 7, 11,  
22\*, 24\*-25\*, 26, 31, 108\*,  
175, 182\*, 194, 210, 211,  
213, 223\*, 257, 266\*
- Hatos, Stefan, 194
- Hattie (great-aunt/  
grandmother’s sister), 40\*
- Hawaii, 10, 210, 259, 267\*-  
269\*, 270, 278, 285\*
- Hearst Corporation, 208
- Hearst, Mrs., 207
- Heineken (beer), 112
- Heinemann, Ed, 212, 278
- Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt, 109
- Hepburn, Audrey, 169, 193
- Hezbollah, 270
- Hilker, Mary Lou Jibbes, 282\*

A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- Hillman Minx (car), 229, 232, 241\*
- Hilton Hotel, 246
- Hinton, Mrs. (Hollywood landlord), 70, 71
- Hitler's Eagle's Nest, 247
- Hofbräuhaus (Munich), 247, 256\*
- Holden, Donna (daughter), 170, 175, 213, 216, 217, 225\*-227\*, 228-237, 238\*, 241\*-242\*, 243-245, 247, 252\*-256\*, 257, 258, 259, 261\*-262\*, 264\*, 266\*-268\*, 276, 285\*
- Holden, William (husband), 210-218, 220\*-227\*, 228-237, 238\*-239\*, 241\*-242\*, 243-248, 252\*, 256\*, 257-258, 259, 261\*
- Holden's Mother, Bill (mother-in-law), 213, 214, 218, 221\*, 223\*, 226\*, 257
- Holden's Sister, Bill (sister-in-law), 213, 214, 218, 221\*, 223\*, 224\*, 226\*, 228-229, 257
- Hollywood, California, 47, 69-70, 75\*, 167, 174, 175, 176, 177, 192, 200, 207, 211, 278
- Hollywood Blvd. & Vine St., 70
- Hollywood Bowl, 45
- Hollywood Hills, California, 278
- Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, 69, 71, 184
- Holm, Warren, 157\*
- Hong Kong, China, 262\*, 270
- Hoover Dam, 32
- Hope Ranch (Santa Barbara), 175-176
- Hope, Bob, 201
- Hotel del Coronado, 72
- Hotel du Pont, 86, 96\*
- Hotel Rodney, 86, 88, 96\*
- Houston, Texas, 192, 193, 277
- Howell, Ken, 45
- H.M. Parker & Son (auto parts), 53, 57, 59\*-60\*, 258
- Hughes, Howard, 84, 175, 200, 201, 207, 271, 283
- Hummel Figurines, 189
- Hunt, Helen, 50\*-51\*
- I Love Lucy* (TV show), 194
- Icahn, Carl, 271-272
- ICD (Intercontinental Division), 85, 104
- Idlewild Airport (JFK), 189, 271, 272
- Ickesburg, Pennsylvania, 34
- India, 67, 88, 139-143, 145\*-146\*, 230
- Indian Independence Act, 139
- Indianapolis 500 (car race), 248
- Inman Richards, Ruth, 278

## Try Walking Across

- Ireland, 1, 88, 92, 100, 105,  
106\*, 230  
Israel (Palestine), 104, 150,  
151, 154\*-162\*, 270  
*It Could Be You* (TV show),  
194
- James (Helen's uncle), 34, 41\*  
James & Nan (Bill's aunt &  
uncle), 246, 255\*  
Japan, 46, 70, 270  
Jeannette (cousin), 6, 21\*  
Jeffers, Jean, 153  
Jerusalem, Palestine/Israel,  
148-150, 157\*-161\*  
Jesus Christ, 148, 150, 161\*  
Jeter, Debbie, 189, 248, 277  
Jetty Wooters, Jean, 191  
JFK Airport (Idlewild), 189,  
271, 272  
Job's Daughters, 45, 49\*  
Johnson, Don (TWA), 168  
Johnson, Van, 203  
Johnston, Don (Lockheed),  
213-214, 276  
Johnston, Shirley, 276  
Jones Selznick, Jennifer, 202  
Jones, Margie, 153
- Kansas City, Kansas, 56, 64,  
65, 66, 69, 73\*, 82\*, 95\*,  
175, 179, 183, 185, 186,  
191, 200, 284  
Kansas City Municipal Airport,  
65
- Karachi, Pakistan, 88, 139,  
140, 141, 144\*  
Kelly, Bev, 263\*  
Kennedy, Jack, 168  
Kennedy, President John F.,  
128, 243  
Kenton, Stan, 46  
Kew Gardens (New York), 174  
Kerkorian, Kirk, 210, 212  
Kilmaurs, Scotland, 246  
King Umberto II of Italy, 129  
King, Betty Warkentin, 51\*,  
275  
Kiwanis Club, 9  
KLM (airline), 88  
Koblenz, Germany, 237, 243-  
248, 277  
Kruger, Betty, 50\*  
KTTV, 194, 197\*
- L-1011 (airplane), 271, 284  
LAAS (Los Angeles Air  
Service), 210, 212, 213  
La Guardia (airport), 86  
La Jolla, California, 204  
Laguna Beach, California, 10,  
16\*, 213, 258, 261\*  
Las Vegas, Nevada, 72, 76\*-  
77\*, 167, 202, 217, 276  
Laurel & Hardy, 4  
Lawe, Anita Quast, 201, 202,  
230-231, 240\*, 277  
Lawe, Bob, 230, 240\*, 277  
Lawford, Peter, 200  
*Let's Make A Deal*, 194

A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- Lewis, Jerry, 206  
Liberace, 200-201  
Libyan Desert, 124  
Lido de Paris (France), 168  
Lido Peninsula, California, 10,  
30\*  
*Life* (magazine), 70  
Lind, Judy, 153  
Lion's Club, 45  
Lincoln Memorial, 35  
Lindbergh, Charles, 9  
Linde Products, 3  
Lisbon, Portugal, 88, 123, 129-  
130, 138\*  
Little, Karol Enstad, 64, 69, 70,  
71, 73\*, 75\* 277, 280\*  
Lloyd's of London, 201  
Lockheed Aircraft, 3, 53-55,  
58\*, 64, 85, 86, 93\*-95\*,  
165\*, 187\*, 196\*, 204, 205,  
212, 213, 215, 216, 217,  
228, 229, 232, 233, 234,  
239\*, 243, 245, 257, 270,  
271, 276, 284  
Loewy, Raymond, 68  
Lois (cousin), 33  
London, Barbara Erickson,  
214, 221\*, 275-276  
London, Jack, 214, 221\*  
London, England, 92, 228,  
229-230, 246, 255\*-256\*  
London Heathrow Airport, 230  
Long Beach, California, 10,  
218, 276  
Los Angeles, California, 3, 45,  
46, 47, 63-64, 65, 66, 69,  
71, 72, 73\*, 78, 85, 105,  
124, 142, 170, 174, 175,  
177, 179, 183, 191, 192,  
193, 194, 200, 202, 203,  
205, 208, 210, 212, 214,  
228, 234, 248, 259, 265\*  
Los Angeles Air Service  
(LAAS), 210, 212, 213  
Los Angeles General Hospital,  
11  
Los Angeles Municipal Airport  
(LAX), 78, 91, 175, 200,  
204, 205, 211  
Lottie (aunt), one of "The  
Aunties", 4, 11, 20\*, 31  
Louvre Museum (Paris), 167  
Luft, Sid, 201  
Lufthansa (airline), 88  
Lydda Airport (Tel Aviv), 110,  
157\*  
Lynch Miller, Maxine, 179, 277  
MacDonald, Mary Brady, 282\*  
Madame Tussauds Wax  
Museum, 167  
Madrid, Spain, 88, 110, 111,  
123-129, 133\*, (134\*),  
135\*-136\*, 147, 152, 164,  
205, 215  
Manners, Dorothy, 207  
Manolete (bullfighter), 128-129  
Marjorie (cousin), 34, 41\*  
Martin, Dean, 208



## Try Walking Across

- Martin, Tony, 203  
Marx, Groucho, 206  
Masonic Lodge, 4, 45  
Matador Hotel (Palm Springs),  
177  
Mather, Geri Bouer, 275  
McConnell School, 186  
Meal Service, 79-80, 90, 111,  
179, 191, 192-193  
Mecca, Saudi Arabia, 140  
Meckline, Madeline, 153  
Mediterranean Sea, 110, 124,  
232  
Mena House Hotel (Cairo),  
110, 112, 114, 116\*-119\*  
Meridian Hill Hotel, 87, 97\*  
Meteor Crater, 79  
Miller, Maxine Lynch, 179, 277  
Mines Field (LAX airport), 78  
Mirabell Gardens (Salzburg),  
247  
Mitchell, Katherine & Bob, 56,  
62\*, 185  
Monte Carlo, 170  
Moots, Genelle, 88  
Montgomery, General Bernard,  
124  
Mosel River, 245  
Mount of Olives, 150  
Mount Vernon, 36, 43\*  
Mount Vesuvius, Italy, 124,  
132\*  
Mr. Gilbert (KC café owner),  
65  
Mrs. Carroll (KC boarding  
house), 65  
Mrs. Hinton (Hollywood  
landlord), 70, 71  
Mülheim-Kärlich, Germany,  
243, 252\*-254\*  
Munich/München, Germany,  
247, 256\*  
Munson, Ginny, 176  
Murphy, Nan, 153  
National Airlines, 84  
National Airport (Reagan  
International), 86, 87  
National Gallery, 36  
National Guard (Deleware), 86,  
174  
National Transportation &  
Safety Board (NTSB), 272  
Navy, 10, 55, 270  
Needles, California, 32  
New Castle, Delaware, 86, 174  
New York, 67, 69, 86, 87, 88,  
91, 102, 104, 127, 147, 152,  
164, (171\*), 174, 190, 202,  
203, 204, 205, 211, 247,  
248, 270, 271, 277, 281\*  
New York City / Manhattan,  
47, 127, 186, 189, 190, 204,  
276, 277, 281\*  
Newark, Delaware, 163, 174  
Newport Beach, California, 10,  
178, 213, 258, 275  
Niece (Gary), 215  
Nightwine, Judy, 73\*

A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- Nile River, Egypt, 109, 147  
Norman, Oklahoma, 55  
Normandy Coast, France, 166  
Normandy Hotel (Paris), 166,  
169, 172\*  
North Africa, 87, 88, 124  
North Atlantic, 103-105, 167  
Northwest Airlines, 84  
Nürburgring, 244
- Oak Creek Canyon, 79  
Oakes, Irene Elliot, 282\*  
Oakland, California, 176, 213-  
214  
Oklahoma, 55, (73\*), 175  
Oklahoma City, (73\*), 175  
Old Maid (game), 232  
Olive Oil (car), 164, 174  
Olympia Airlines, 88  
*Ondine* (film & perfume), 169-  
170  
Operation Children (charity),  
259
- P-38 Lightning (airplane), 54,  
55, 58\*  
P-47 Thunderbolt (airplane),  
276  
P-51 Mustang (airplane), 276  
Painted Desert, 79  
Page Welton, Marge, 103  
Paige, Janis, 201  
Pakistan, 139-140, 141  
Palace Hotel (Madrid), 125,  
126, 133\*  
Palestine (Israel), 104, 150,  
151, 154\*-162\*, 270  
Palm Desert, California, 277  
Palm Springs, California, 79,  
177, 263\*  
Pan American Airlines, 63, 84,  
85, 88, 270  
Panorama City House, 217  
Paramount Studios, 57, 192  
Parents (Dorothy & H.M.  
Parker), 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10,  
13\*, (16\*), (30\*), 31, 46,  
54, (81), 92, (174), 175,  
185, 207, 213, 214, 221\*,  
223\*, 224\*, 247, 248, 256\*,  
258, (261\*), (262\*)  
Paris, France, 88, 102, 110,  
111, 164, 166-170, 171\*-  
173\*, 190, 207, 230-231,  
240\*, 277  
Park Hotel (Tel Aviv), 148,  
150-151, 156\*  
Parks, Annette, 153  
Parker, Amelia Purdy  
(grandmother), 1, 5, 20\*  
Parker, Dorothy Black  
(mother), 1, 2, 4, 6-10, 11,  
12, 13\*, (18\*), 21\*, 23\*,  
25\*, (26\*), 31-36, 37\*-  
43\*, 44, 46, 53, 56, (62\*),  
108\*, 207, 221\*, 223\*,  
256\*, 265\*  
Parker, George A.H.  
(grandfather), 1

## Try Walking Across

- Parker, George B. (uncle), 1, 32
- Parker, Harriet (sister), 2, 6, 7, 11, 13\*-14\*, 22\*-25\*, 27\*-29\*, 31, 32-33, 37\*-43\*, 45, 46, 52\*, 53, 108\*, 182\*, 258
- Parker, Hervey M. (father/Dad), 1, 2, (3), 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10-11, 13\*, 17\*, 20\*, 25\*, 27\*, 28\*, 31, 32, 44, 46, 53, 54, 57, 60\*, 61\*, (63), (81), 92, 108\*, 178, 258
- Parker, Louise (sister), 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13\*-14\*, 22\*-25\*, 27\*-28\*, 31, 32, 37\*-43\*, 53, 108\*, 182\*, 266\*
- Parker, Norman (brother), 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13\*-14\*, 22\*-25\*, 27\*-29\*, 31, 57, 61\*, 108\*, 182\*
- Parker, Shirley (sister), 6, 7, 11, 22\*, 24\*-25\*, 26, 31, 108\*, 175, 182\*, 194, 210, 211, 213, 223\*, 257, 266\*
- Parsons, Louella, 207
- Pasadena, California, 56, 64
- Pasapoga (night club), 127
- Patton, General George, 124
- Paul (uncle), 2, 5, 17\*
- Paul, Les, 206
- Paulson, Al, 178
- Pearl Harbor, 46
- Pena Palace (Portugal), 130, 138\*
- Pennsylvania, 34, 36, 277
- Pennsylvania Railroad, 87
- Pettersen, Ralph, 82\*, 83\*, 95\*, 284
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 204, 211
- Philippines, 89
- Phoenix, Arizona, 66, 79, 175, 191, 192, 200-201, 206
- Piazza Barberini (Rome), 232
- Pickford, Mary, 235
- Pie Crust Recipe, 244, 249
- Pierce, Patty, 153, 156\*
- Pisa, Italy, 231
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 70
- Poling, Ella (cousin), 34
- Pompeii, Italy, 124, 132\*
- Pope John XXIII, 236-237
- Powder Puff Derby, 276
- Power, Tyrone, 201
- Prado Art Museum, 126
- Pratica di Mare Air Base, 232
- Prince of Yemen, 205
- Princess Street Park (Edinburgh), 246
- Purdy Parker, Amelia (grandmother), 1, 4-5, 20\*
- Prohibition, 33, 36
- Pyramids, 110, 114, 115, 116\*, 122\*
- Quast Lawe, Anita, 201, 202, 230-231, 240\*, 277
- Queen For A Day* (TV show), 277
- Queen Mary (ship), 247

A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- Rainbow Room (Hollywood Roosevelt), 69  
Roosevelt, First Lady Eleanor, 200  
Roosevelt, President Franklin D., 36, 70  
Rotterdam, Holland/Netherlands, 246  
Route 66, 32  
Rubirosa, Porfirio, 207  
Russell, Jane, 259  
Ryan Durfee, Verona "Mike", 172\*-173\*, 174, 175-176, 183, 217, 277, 280\*  
Rye, New York, 277  
SABENA (airline), 88  
Sacramento, California, 53  
Salzburg, Austria, 247  
San Bernardino, California, 6  
San Diego, California, 72, 245, 277  
San Gorgonio Pass, 79  
San Fernando Valley, California, 6, 218  
San Francisco, California, 73\*, 78, 151, 176, 177, 184  
Sandusky, Indiana, 33  
Santa Barbara, California, 176  
Santa Fe, Atchison Topeka & (train), 56, 64, 69  
Santa Fe, New Mexico, 175  
Santa Maria, Azores Islands, 90, 91, 98\*  
Santa Monica, California, 10, 25\*, 211  
Sao Paulo, Brazil, 215  
Ramadan, 114  
Rathbone, Jr., Basil, 91  
Raub, Cliff, 104  
Reagan, Nancy Davis, 208  
Reagan, Ronald, 86, 208  
Red Line Street Car, 10  
Red Sea, 109  
Rendezvous Ballroom, Balboa, 46, 51\*  
Reykjavik, Iceland, 91  
Rhine/Rhein River, 243, 244-245, 246  
Rich, Marie, 280\*  
Richards, Ruth Inman, 278  
Rick (nephew), 258, 262\*, 264\*, 268\*  
*Rifleman, The* (TV show), 206  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 216  
Riverside, California, 5, 6, 18\*-19\*, 21\*  
Robertson, Mary, 263\*  
Rock of Agony, 150, 161\*  
Rodley, Muriel, 153  
Rodney (hotel), 86, 88, 96\*  
Rohr, Billie, 176, 189  
Roma/Rome, Italy, 88, 102, 103, 109, 110, 111, 123-124, 131\*-132\*, 147, 152, 229, 231-237, 240\*-242\*, 245, 246, 270, 276  
Romero, Cesar, 207  
Rommel, General Erwin, 124

## Try Walking Across

- Saratoga Trunk* (film), 200  
SAS (airline), 88, 89, 248  
Satterfield, Dottie, 153  
*Saturday Evening Post*  
(magazine), 193-194, 197\*  
Saudi Arabia, 111, 139, 206,  
230  
Saudi Arabia, Prince & Royal  
Family, 206  
Saudi Arabian Airlines, 88  
Sayre, Dorothy, 73\*  
Scandelli (accordion), 124  
Schneidman, Harriet, 263\*  
Schultz Coyle, Norma, 202,  
212, 259, 263\*, 265\*, 278  
Schuman, Fran, 267\*  
Scotland, 213, 246, 255\*  
Seaboard & Western Airlines,  
175, 176  
Sears Catalog, 34  
Sedona, Arizona, 79  
Segovia, Andrés, 168-169  
Selznick, Mrs. David O.  
(Jennifer Jones), 201-202  
Shamrock Hotel (Houston),  
193  
Shannon, Ireland, 88, 91, 100-  
105, 164, 166, 178  
Sharon, Ettie Ashby  
(grandmother's sister), 33,  
40\*  
Shepard, Hank, 111, 114,  
132\*, 144\*, 146\*, 154\*  
Shepherd Hotel, 113  
Sheridan, Ann, 142  
Sherman Oaks, California, 211  
Shia Prisoners, 270  
Sierra Bonita Apartment, 175,  
176, 181\*, 189, 212, 214,  
225\*  
Sims Good, Virginia, 174  
Sinatra, Frank, 208  
Sintra, Portugal, 130, 138\*  
Skouras, Spyros, 205  
Smith, Carlyle, 103  
Smith, Elaine, 89  
Smith, Estelle, 245, 276  
Smith, Craig, 276  
Smith, Octa Ashby  
(grandmother's sister), 40\*  
Smithsonian Institution, 36  
*Sound of Music, The* (film), 247  
South Africa, 230  
South America, 87, 203, 217  
South of France, 169  
Sperle Graf, Mary Ellen, 277,  
282\*  
Spielberg, Steven, 10  
Sphinx, 115, 122\*  
Spooner, Betty & Roy, 233  
Spry Shortening, 244, 249  
St. Louis, Missouri, 204  
St. Peter's Square (Rome), 233  
St. Peter's Basilica (Rome),  
236, 237  
Stanwyck, Barbara, 192  
Stark, Ray, 176-177  
Staggers, Ida, 66, 89, 186  
Stations of the Cross, 149

A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- Steelman Weatherhead, Gwen, 213, 275  
 Stratoliner (Boeing 307), 85, 86  
 Studio City, California, 218, 226\*, 227\*, 228, 258  
 Sue (great-aunt/grandmother's sister), 33, 40\*  
 Sullivan Chaffers, Loi, 64, 65, 69, 134\*, 277, 280\*  
 Sullivan, Ed (Mr. & Mrs.), 203  
*Sullivan Show, The Ed* (TV show), 229  
 Sumatra, Indonesia, 56  
 Sunset Strip (Los Angeles), 207  
 Swissair (airline), 88  
 Swiss Guard (Vatican), 236  
 Switzerland, 237  
  
 Tagus River, 129  
 TAT, 9  
 Tata Airlines (Air India), 88  
 Taylor, Elizabeth, 208  
 Tel Aviv, Palestine (Israel), 92, 104, 110, 147-153, 154\*-156\*, 162\*  
 Testrake, John, 271  
 Thierry, Suzanne, 169-170, 173\*  
 Thompson, Charles (fiancé), 30\*, 54, 55, 58\*, 105, 107\*-108\*, 163  
 Tijuana, Mexico, 72, 77\*  
 Times Square, 70  
 Tokyo, Japan, 213-214  
  
 Tonnesen, Ed, 176-178  
 Tonnesen's Daughters, Ed, 176, 177, 178, 182\*, 215, 258  
 Tonnesen's Mother, Ed, 176, 177, 178, 215, 258  
 Topo Gigio, 229  
 Torino/Turin, Italy, 228-229, 231  
 Trans Canada Airlines, 88  
 Transamerica Airlines, 213  
 Trinidad, Colorado, 1, 2, 32  
 Truman, First Lady Bess, 200  
 Truman, President Harry S., 151, 200, 206  
 Tunis, Tunisia, 88, 124, 140  
 Turkey (country), 237  
 Tuscany, Italy, 231  
 TWA (Trans World Airlines), 10, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, (70), (73\*), 74\*, 78, 80, 84-85, 86, 87, 88, 96\*, (100), 102, (109), (110), 111, 125, 132\*, (140), 151, 152, 164, 166, (167), 171\*, 174, 175, 176, 178, 180, 183, 184, 186, 188\*, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195\*, 198\*, 200, (202), 206, 207, 209\*, 214, 215, 216, 217, (230), 258, 259, 265\*, 268\*, 270-273, 277, 278, 282\*, 285\*  
 TWA (Transcontinental & Western Air), 63, 175  
 TWA (Airplane Fleet), 85, 86

## Try Walking Across

- TWA (Aiplaine Configuration & Interiors), 68, 78 , 83\*, 90, 184-185, 190-191
- TWA (Name Change), 175
- TWA (Routes Flown), 66, 78, 79, 80, 84-85, 86, 88, 91, 110, 124, 140
- TWA Uniforms, 65-68
- 20th Century-Fox Studios, 205, 206, 207
- Unfaithful, The* (film), 142
- Uniforms (TWA Hostess), 65-68
- United Airlines, 63, 84
- United Nations, 151, 206
- University of California, Berkeley, 46
- University of Southern California (USC), 9, 29\*
- U.S. Mail / Airmail, 84, 104
- Valente, Caterina, 229
- Van de Carr, Verita, 44
- Van Fleet, Betty, 153
- Vatican, 236-237
- VE Day, 70
- Venezuelan Airline, 214
- Via Bissolati (Rome), 232
- Via Dolorosa (Way of the Cross), 149
- Via Veneto (Rome), 232
- Viacom, 57
- VJ Day, 70
- WAIF (World Adoption International Fund), 259, 263\*
- Waikiki, Hawaii, 11, 259
- Wailing Wall / Western Wall / Kotel, 149, 158\*
- Walt Disney Company, 9
- Warkentin King, Betty, 51\*, 275
- Warner, Jack, 169-170
- Warner Brothers Studios (Burbank), 169-170
- Washington, D.C., 35-36, (42\*), 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 97\*, 105, 142\*, 193, (197\*), 205, 211
- Washington, President George, 36, (43\*)
- Washington Monument, 35, 97\*
- Washington National Airport (Ronald Reagan), 86, 87
- WASP (Woman Air Force Service Pilot), 276
- Way of the Cross (Via Dolorosa), 149
- Wayne, John, 203-204
- Weatherhead, Gwen Steelman, 213, 275
- Weatherhead, Lee, 213
- Weight Formula, 216
- Weightman, Mary Bullock, 85, 89, 214
- Welsh, Bill, 194, 197\*
- Welton, Marge Page, 104

A Memoir by Helen Parker Holden

- Westerly Dunford, Liz, 263\*  
Western Airlines, 84, 184  
Western Costume, 192  
Westinghouse, 205  
White House, 35, 200  
White, Susan Hines, 282\*  
Whorf, Tinx, 263\*  
Wiesbaden, Germany, 245  
Wiggans, Edie (roommate), 70,  
75\*, 85  
Wilmington, Delaware, 85, 86,  
87, 89, 96\*, 163-164, 165\*,  
174, 185  
Wirtz, Beatrix, 244, 253\*-254\*,  
277  
Wirtz, Gustav, 243-244, 254\*  
Wirtz, Maria, 243-244, (254\*),  
277  
Wirtz, Martina, 244, 253\*-254\*  
Wirtz, Silvia, 277  
Wichita, Kansas, 66  
Winslow, Arizona, 66, 200  
*Wizard of Oz* (film), 207  
Wolfe, Sue Ashby  
(grandmother's sister), 33,  
40\*  
Woolworth's (department  
store), 231  
Woodland Hills, California,  
257  
Wooters, Jean Jetty, 191  
World's Fair, Belgium, 217  
World's Fair, Chicago, 33  
World War II, 2, 10, 46, 47, 53,  
55, 57, 64, 67, 70, 78, 85,  
World War II (cont'd), 88, 92,  
102, 104, 123, 124, 169,  
178, 217, 276  
Wright, Ben, 247  
Wright, Frank Lloyd, 206  
Wyckoff, Billy, 3  
Wynn, Keenan, 200  
Wynn, ex Mrs. Keenan, 203  
Yemen, Prince of, 206  
YMCA, 9  
YWCA, 86  
Zamalik, Cairo, Egypt, 109  
Zanuck, Darryl F., 206-207
- Pronunciation Guide  
(by page #)  
1 – Hervey Melage  
[HER-vee MILL-idge]  
2 – Linde [LIHN-dee]  
34 – Ickesburg  
[IHK-ehss-berg]  
46 – Coterie Choisi  
[KOH-tehr-ee  
SCHWAH-zee]  
64 – Loi Sullivan  
[LOH-ee]  
68 – Raymond Loewy  
[LOH-ee]  
110 – Lydda Airport  
[LIH-duh]  
303 – Olathe, Kansas  
[oh-LAY-thuh]



# **T**ry **W**alking **A**cross

A Memoir by

**Helen Parker Holden**

with Donna Holden



Helen Parker Holden was born in Southern California. A descendant of America's pioneers, she was somewhat of a pioneer herself, crisscrossing the globe as an airline hostess from 1945-1958. At the age of 88, she shares stories of her life including her international experiences and impressions in the glamour days of air travel.

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