

Remembering Edie

Edie Clark and I came to *Yankee* within a year of each other in the late 1970s. After working in publishing in Philadelphia, she and her then-husband had settled in New England, inspired to follow in the homesteading footsteps of Helen and Scott Nearing. Edie and I bonded over our love for writers like Lillian Ross, Tracy Kidder, and John McPhee, and we talked about writing as we walked the paths near *Yankee*'s offices that took us to the lake. I became Edie's first reader, and she became mine.

Her stories spanned everything from land development and water pollution to an exploration of the Connecticut River that took 20,000 words across five issues of *Yankee* to share all that she had discovered. Edie possessed the gift of finding people whose lives were virtually unknown but whose stories, she felt, needed to be told—for example, the oldest newspaper columnist in the country. “I listen to people’s stories and I never tire of it,” she once wrote. “I am constantly amazed at people’s lives, how the most ordinary people come alive with the most unusual stories.” For years, it was the rare issue of *Yankee* that did not feature an Edie Clark portrait of a person or a place, but also writing as tender as when she described caring for her mother in her final days.

In the fall of 1984, when Edie married her second husband, Paul Bolton, a shy and gifted carpenter, I offered as my gift a two-tiered wedding cake from a famous Maine bakery two hours distant. As I drove to Edie’s home, the cake rested on the seat beside me, its mocha-frosted top rising out of the box. At an intersection a few miles from my destination, a car abruptly turned in front of me. I slammed on the brakes. The cake tumbled from box to windshield. Forty years later, I still hear my shout of horror.



FROM TOP: The Harrisville, New Hampshire, home that Edie Clark bought in 1997 and immortalized in *Yankee* as “Mary’s Farm”; a 2009 photo of Edie in her dining room, a place she loved to fill with conversation and good food.

Edie knew a cake maker named Mary Walker, who lived in an 18th-century farmhouse on a knoll that looked out to a wide meadow and the shoulder of Mount Monadnock. Mary did emergency surgery on my smooshed offering, and wedding guests saw only a cake decorated with a startling bouquet of flowers. As it turned out, the house where Mary lived would become Edie’s some years later. In her writing, she called it simply “Mary’s Farm.”

I tell this here because it shows Edie’s gift for turning a devastating moment into



MARK FLEMING (MARY’S FARM); EWA BUTTOLPH (EDIE CLARK); JARROD MCCABE (MEL ALLEN)

something beautiful. In her poignant memoir *The Place He Made*, she wrote about her love story with Paul, who died at age 39 only few years after their marriage. The depth of her sorrow and her need to tell stories led to my urging Edie to write a monthly *Yankee* column about the renewal of hope and life and the restorative power of small, precious moments. “I hoped my readers would accept me simply as a lover of the miracles of the earth,” she wrote.

For three decades, she brought thousands of readers into the rhythm of a life bounded by sunrises, shifting seasons, the people she knew, the antics of her dogs, the comfort of a pot of beans roasting in her cookstove, the delight in hosting friends in a home she loved more than I have ever known anyone to love a house. The years Edie spent rehabbing her ancient home and barn and tending to the gardens flowed into her writing. She sat at a desk in a sun-filled room looking out to the meadow and mountain, and her life became entwined with those of her readers; to many she became friend, family, touchstone.

So when in 2017 a series of mini strokes forced Edie to leave Mary’s Farm and enter the care of nursing facilities, her readers let her know how much she meant to them, how deeply they missed her. Their cards and letters overflowed my mailbox at *Yankee*, and filled boxes in her tiny, crowded room.

I delivered dozens of these messages on my visits to Edie. Because her eyesight was failing, I read them aloud. Many came with hand-colored drawings, and she would hold them close to her face so she could see. She would smile and tear up at the same time. The love that strangers felt for her words reminded Edie of what had been lost and, no matter how much she wanted it, was likely not to be found again.

In many ways we can say that these years were the worst of Edie’s life—cut off from so much that she knew, her room so crowded that she slept in a reclining chair. Yet: She never lost belief that she would write again, even as she understood how unlikely that might be. She laughed easily when friends came. She was delighted when someone brought a delicious dish from a favorite restaurant, and when I’d wheel her outside to sit in the garden watching birds flit from tree to tree. One couple from Massachusetts who had discovered her writing would come visit and drive Edie to her

beloved homestead, where she looked out at the meadow and breathed the air she knew so well. She called outings with friends “my jailbreaks.”

On the Sunday before she died, two writer friends came to visit. “I have never seen her so happy, so radiant,” her friend Howard would later recall. Edie told them about her improbable friendship with a tall Korean man who had arrived at her care facility following a brain injury. He had found her sitting by the garden and had stood beside her and held her hand. (She told Howard how long it had been since she had felt that.) Week after week, they sat together outside, and he had coaxed her to join the others in the dining room. Recently he had asked Edie to marry him. “We are the talk of the nursing home,” she said.

Two days after her friends’ visit, Edie awoke having trouble breathing. She left a message on my phone. It was my birthday and she always remembered that, and when I called back she did not pick up. The care facility took her to the hospital, where her breathing grew more labored. The doctors suggested a ventilator, which she refused. Edie died the following morning, July 17, with a doctor holding the phone to her ear as her sister said good-bye.

Edie now rests beside her husband, Paul, in a lovely cemetery with a view of a lake. A writer leaves her life on the page, which we can visit whenever we wish, as often as we desire. Edie lives on through her words, and she has left us tens of thousands of them. To say that she will be missed is an understatement. To say her work will endure long into the future is not.

Mel Allen

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● **“Her Readers Remember, Too”**

From California to Massachusetts, Edie Clark’s fans share stories from the heart—just as she did. **p. 16**

● **“Orphan Holidays”**

Longtime readers of Edie Clark will recognize this essay as an old friend. New readers will find it a wonderful place to start. **p. 78**

Her Readers Remember, Too

My late husband Steve once remarked that if you care for someone you should never let the words go unspoken.

Over the years it was my intention to write to Edie at *Yankee* and let her know how much her books and her stories from Mary's Farm and the Garden at Chesham Depot touched my heart. Her stories transported this Pennsylvania girl to the beautiful mountains, roads, and towns of New England, and I became a part of the landscape, people, and animals she befriended.

Edie is now gone, and I never put my words and feelings to paper. However, I now have the opportunity to say:

Thank you, Edie. Your books and stories will be treasured by all who recognize the remarkable human spirit at work on this earth.

With gratitude,
Marilyn Hatherill Wright
Bath, Pennsylvania

Reading that Edie Clark had passed made me so sad, but grateful that she's found peace. Every Christmas, I re-read her column "Half Buried" (originally published in her column "The Garden at Chesham Depot"). In it, she finds an old Christmas ornament, faded and dirty but still intact. Its resilience inspires her to bring out holiday decorations she hasn't used since her husband's death, and she hangs the plain little ornament at the top of a freshly cut small fir. I loved all of her writing, but this column is my favorite, as a similarly tarnished and worn little thrift-shop ornament—"mysteries intact, stories untold"—helped me see past grief to the joyful light of Christmas. May you rest in peace, Edie. Thank you.

Katherine Lukasik
Chicago, Illinois

Some years ago, I ventured out of my comfort zone to attend a workshop given by Edie on "Writing the Personal Essay." She graciously hosted a

THE EDIE CLARK COLLECTION

Edie published a number of books in her lifetime, including collections of her *Yankee* columns and a memoir about her late husband, Paul, called *The Place He Made*. Often hard to find in bookstores, these titles are now available to order through *Yankee's* online store. Go to:

NewEngland.com/Edie



few writers as well as my scared little soul in a room off her kitchen, which she confessed would soon be cleared of all furniture and become her wood room—stacked high to the ceiling and stuffed tight to the walls with, mostly, all the wood she'd need to burn for the winter months.

As we'd read to her and the group, she'd smile and nod her head or gently remind us to *breathe* when we came to a spot where our words abandoned us before the cascade of tears. Someone would pass the tissue box.

I continued to write and attempt to publish. Edie became my mentor of sorts. I would write to her in long-hand on white lined paper—so old-fashioned. I know she got a kick out of

it, and she always wrote back encouraging me to *keep going*.

When she could no longer stay at Mary's Farm, her sister came to New Hampshire to organize an estate sale. Edie's grandfather's desk now sits in my home office, her published books lovingly displayed on her little tilted book holder on the top. I sit and write at this desk—not as often as I should—and fondly remember Edie. Her words echo in my ears. *Keep going*.

Doris (Dee) Matthews
Brookfield, Massachusetts

I was saddened to hear of Edie's passing and always enjoyed her work. I remember the *Yankee* article from January/February 2018 when her farm was put up for sale. One of the photos showed inside the front door: To the right was an old lantern, and above that was hanging a classic "Elmer Fudd" buffalo check cap. She probably clapped it on to gather wood or go out in winter.

I hang one in our mudroom for the same reason and think of Edie when I pass it.

James Kern
Lancaster, Ohio

When Edie went into the nursing home, I found myself writing notes to her every couple of months. Every time I read an article in *Yankee* or reread one of her books or essays, they sparked memories and connections to my living in Maine and New Hampshire in the '70s and '80s.

Edie and I were the same age. She was a young wife in rural New Hampshire learning to garden, split wood, and cook on an old wood cookstove. I was a young wife and mother of three toddlers living in a small town in Maine, learning to garden, split wood for a Jotul woodstove, and cook on a '1940s electric stove. While Edie was baking bread, chasing chickens for their eggs, and starting to write her

wonderful stories and essays, I was canning pickles, making blueberry jam, raising the little ones, and going to college at night.

I knew her people, places, and the weather she wrote about. Edie wrote so eloquently about them, from Paul and her family to Mary's Farm. They were my neighbors and family, too. I do like my recipe for baked beans a little better, and I still use my brown soup crocks when I make onion soup for Christmas Eve. There was so much more I wanted to tell her but we ran out of time.

Thank you, Edie. You are the best.

Jane Emerson
Parker, Colorado

My journey with *Yankee* started about 35 years ago while I was living in Europe. An American friend passed her copy on to me, a native New Englander, and I soon took out my own subscription. Moving back to the U.S., I made sure my subscription followed me, and even when money was very tight, I found something to do without so that I could keep *Yankee* coming.

Upon its arrival, I would turn to "Mary's Farm" immediately—sometimes while standing in the street on my walk back from the mailbox. Reading it seemed to connect me to my beloved New England roots like nothing else. Sometimes the essays would make me laugh, at times I would cry, and always I would hold the magazine to my heart after I read it and just smile.

When I heard the news of Edie's stroke, I cried and then I wrote her a card, and with the arrival of each issue I looked for an update on her health from Mel. Edie died on July 17, my birthday. In some strange way I find a bit of comfort in that. I know each year I will remember her and thank her for years of the pure pleasure her columns brought to me. She touched so, so many of us. She will be missed.

Elaine Macko
California

CONTRIBUTORS



JON MARCUS

As a native New Englander with family near Camden, Maine, Marcus kept hearing about the former intelligence agents who retired there ["Company Town," p. 88]. But over nearly 15 years of trying, he couldn't penetrate the wall of secrecy around them. Then he realized he had it all wrong: The real story was about how New Englanders keep each other's secrets. Marcus's other writing can be found in such publications as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Boston Globe*.



MARNI KATZ

A freelance writer whose work has appeared in *Dwell* and *House Beautiful*, among others, Katz was acquainted with Sean Litchfield long before coming to tour the Maine house he owns with his husband, Zach ["Yule's Gold," p. 28]. "Sean has photographed dozens (hundreds?) of homes I've written about, but we never actually met in real life until I pulled up in his driveway last winter," she says. "It was a treat to have that kind of time with a colleague outside the usual networking situation."



ROWAN JACOBSEN

Envisioning the future of the Maine scallop industry required some overseas travel ["The French Connection," p. 82], but fortunately Jacobsen is no stranger to globe-trotting: He's logged countless miles reporting such books as *Truffle Hound* and the just-released *Wild Chocolate: Across the Americas in Search of Cacao's Soul*, as well as writing for *The Atlantic*, *Scientific American*, and other publications. When not hitting the road for a story, he can be found at home in his native Vermont.



CATRINE KELTY

Styling this issue's food feature ["Thanksgiving in 7 Ingredients or Less," p. 40] was a great chance to show that "you can have a delicious holiday celebration on a budget," says Kelty. "We used what we had on hand to garnish and decorate the dishes in a simple and beautiful way—hoping this gives inspiration to readers!" In addition to bringing her talent to *Yankee's* pages, Kelty has worked on nearly 100 cookbooks, including Maggie Mulvena Pearson's brand-new *The Feast & Fettle Cookbook*.



ROSS MACDONALD

With his witty, Nancy Drew-style illustrations for "Company Town" [p. 88], MacDonald adds *Yankee* to a long and illustrious list of clients: *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Rolling Stone*, et al. He is also the author and illustrator of four children's books and has served as a prop designer and consultant for more than 120 movies and TV shows, including *Oppenheimer* and *The Gilded Age*. MacDonald lives in Connecticut with his wife, two kids, two dogs, and two cats.



SEAN LITCHFIELD

When photographing his own home for "Yule's Gold" [p. 28]—not to mention the cover—Litchfield found decking the halls for the shoot to be surprisingly low-pressure. "I don't take holiday decorating too seriously. It's temporary, so it's fun to just wing it and put up things that make you happy." Litchfield's architecture and interior photography has been published by both regional (*Cape Cod Home*, *Boston Home*, *New England Home*) and national outlets (*AD*, *Country Living*, *House Beautiful*).