



Edna Jean Barker

April 24, 2019

Edna Jean Barker 1952-2019

(posted to the Facebook page of Wendy Thomas on April 24, 2019)

Some of my editor friends will know this name and some will also know that she was diagnosed with posterior cortical atrophy (PCA), the same type of rare dementia that killed Terry Pratchett. As with Pratchett, so it was with Edna -- word people, one a writer, one an editor, who lost the ability to read, write, and spell. Not only does PCA affect language abilities but it also affects vision. In the last months, she has found enjoyment and entertainment in talking books, as well as making colorful postcards that an Alzheimer's worker took to Sick Children's Hospital to give to young patients so they could write on them and send them to their parents.

I met Edna in the late 70s when I worked at McGraw-Hill Ryerson and she was one of our freelancers. She lived in the same part of Toronto -- the east end -- so it was easy to drop work off to her and pick it up. Our friendship sprang from that. Edna was also a very early member of the Freelance Editors' Association of Canada and I think was thrilled to find like-minded people!

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Edna was eccentric and maddening but her humour, creative abilities, and kindnesses more than made up for it. Friendships could end over disagreements about commas -- sometimes the friendships were repaired, but sadly not always. But wherever

she went she gathered new and dedicated friends, as has been evident in the last few months.

She was artistic and as I said above creative. She sewed, knitted, and quilted; she was a bookbinder; she made whimsical greeting cards and boxes covered in collages. She loved music and played the flute and recorder -- possibly other instruments. She was a great gardener -- and she had many gardens in which to experiment! She said she'd had 12 houses -- I tried the other night to count them and I think I came up with 10 but there were other abodes so perhaps she was including them. Edna would move into her new house and within 24 hours, carpets would be torn up and cabinet doors removed. She made each house she lived in uniquely her own.

She was a wonderful copyeditor and as a single, gay, self-employed woman lived life on her own terms for all of her adult life, buying and selling houses and managing to finance them on a fairly limited income. The highlight of her career was the time she spent working on the Peter Gzowski Morningside books. She volunteered at Casey House for several years, as well.

Before anyone realized she had PCA she had a series of accidents -- she had several falls from her beloved bike, at least once tangling with a TTC bus as I recall. She phoned me once to ask indignantly, "Did you know you could get a ticket for crossing the street?" Of course, it wasn't quite that simple and looking back, it's apparent that her sight was diminishing even then, and her depth perception was compromised, especially when a glass door was involved. Eventually she had to give up her bike and motor scooter. She still talked bitterly as recently as last week about having to give up her bike.

After Edna's diagnosis, several years ago (2012, I believe), she began to talk about ways of ending her life. Her favorite was to walk into Lake Ontario with rocks in her pocket à la Virginia Woolf. In 2017 Edna had the great good luck to meet Timmie Schramm and her partner Fran, who live a short distance away from Edna. They have dogs so a friendship was established instantly.

Timmie became an important person in Edna's life and has been a tremendous help to her in these past few years: taking her on vacations,

making innumerable medical appointments and taking her to them, and researching her disease as well as ways of ending her life. It was Timmie who would remind Edna that if she jumped off her balcony or dug a hole in a ravine to fall into, some poor person would find her and be traumatized for life! The choice finally came down to medical assistance in dying (MAID) but Edna was rejected on her first application. More research and persistence by Timmie paid off and Edna was accepted for MAID this winter. Today the procedure was carried out at Michael Garron Hospital (formerly Toronto East General). It was peaceful and three of us -- Timmie, me, and another friend, Paul Harris -- were with her, as well as the wonderful staff at the hospital. Dr. Edward Weiss was instrumental in recommending Edna for MAID and guiding us through the process, and I would like to thank him for his kindness and generosity. Edna's lungs are now safely in a recipient patient, and her corneas will also find a use.

Edna leaves her brothers David and Daniel; a niece, Laura; a nephew, Kevin; and her parents, Jean and Harold -- not to mention the many friends she has made over her lifetime.

Tribute Wall

PJ

“ Ed was a student at St. Thomas in Fredericton in the early 70s. We were part of an intimate circle. Visiting from Boston she struck an interesting chord among first generation university students out of small rural villages and conservative Catholic backgrounds. She made a lot of friends but was ready to move on to bigger turf by the time we last met on a visit to moncton where I was working with Acadia inshore fishermen in the mid 70s.. I always wondered where she ended up. Being a writer I should have noticed her credit in the gzowski book. Sad to see her go before her time. Glad to know what happened. Splendid postings. She was always a special one. Patrick Jamieson Victoria B.C.

Patrick Jamieson - January 12, 2020 at 10:33 PM

EM

“ While I did not know Edna Barker, after reading her obituary in today's Globe, I came to two other understandings: Debby Seed made me wish I had met her- and made me wish Debby Seed would write my obit. Hers of Edna was a rare honest “warts and all” loving description of a person I could only hope to emulate. Elsie McMurphy

Elsie McMurphy - May 18, 2019 at 08:13 PM

CB

“ Dear Edna: Wish you hadn't gone. We'll look for you in the blue sky, green grass, birds in the air, buds on the trees, the bark of a dog, the purr of a cat. All the things you loved and took care of . Cecilia and Jim x

Cecilia Bousfield - May 02, 2019 at 01:49 PM

GI

“ I met Edna in the late 1970s, when we both joined the Freelance Editors' Association of Canada at the same time. I enjoyed doing FEAC stuff with her -- meetings and committees and even an occasional party. And we started working together outside of the association -- me editing and her proofreading. Over the years, we drifted apart, and the friendship fades to less and less frequent phone calls.

But I fondly remember her smile, her honesty and frankness, her warmth and intelligence. I hadn't heard that she was ill, and I'm stricken to hear that she's gone. My condolences to everyone else who was lucky enough to know her.

Greg Ioannou

Greg Ioannou - May 01, 2019 at 05:01 PM

SA

“ Dear family and friends of Edna - I was for a long time Peter Gzowski's EA and a producer on Morningside. I first met Edna in 1986 and then worked with her on many books and letters. I do not have to tell you that Edna was unique - she knew her own mind and liked her own company. She had an absolutely delightful and quirky sense of humour, was very curious and engaged in the world, made gorgeous little books and note cards and drawings for people. She loved little things - small jars, mini cheese. She had no time for blowhards or divas. She loved the radio and she was a good listener - unless you were trying to tell her what to do which was, largely, a waste of your own time. She loved great music and plants and being outside. She loved tea and shortbread. Not chocolate. So many other things. I will stop here for now. She will be missed and spending time with her in her final days was one of the greatest privileges of my life. Thank you to Wendy and Timmie for doing so much for Edna and for all of us.

Truly, Shelley Ambrose

Shelley Ambrose - May 01, 2019 at 12:04 PM

 Martin
Frank

“ I have fond memories of Edna at Musical gatherings with her flute. . she loved playing and singing Beatles songs and often danced around while she waled away on her flute solos. She did love gardening and was proud of all that she created and was eager to show you every plant that she had in her garden -- and she had a story about how the plant or the creation came to be. She loved to bake and was always willing to share. I got to know Edna and visited her at her home on BARKER Ave. in Toronto several times and got to taste her home made desserts. I enjoyed our little conversations when we would see each other on the street or in the grocery store -- I had not seen her in a year or so. she will be missed.

Frank Caruso
Toronto, ON

Martin Frank - April 29, 2019 at 04:03 PM

DM

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Don McLeod - April 29, 2019 at 02:05 PM