
NEIGHBORHOOD

FALMOUTH
Meeting Seniors' Needs

Newsletter

May 2015

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www.neighborhoodfalmouth.org



Happy Mother's Day!

NF Spring Flowers Gala: May 8

The NF Spring Flowers Gala is Friday, May 8, at Highfield Hall & Gardens from 6:00–8:00 p.m. There may still be tickets available (\$75.00) for this fun, flower-filled gathering—which will be even better with you there! Give us a call, and let us know if we can arrange a ride.

Meet for Breakfast: May 11

Our last Meet for Breakfast before we break for summer is Monday, May 11, at 9:00 a.m. at Friendly's. We are a small and spirited group, and we'd love to have you join us! Please call the office if you need a ride or to reserve a place.

Meet for Lunch: May 20

We're heading to the Silver Lounge on Wednesday, May 20, at 11:45 a.m. and would love to have any members, volunteers, or friends join us. In June, we're planning to gather at the Flying Bridge. Please call the office if you need a ride or to reserve a place.

NF Book Club

Our book for May is *Americanah* by C.N. Adichie. Newcomers are welcome. Please call the office for meeting time and location.

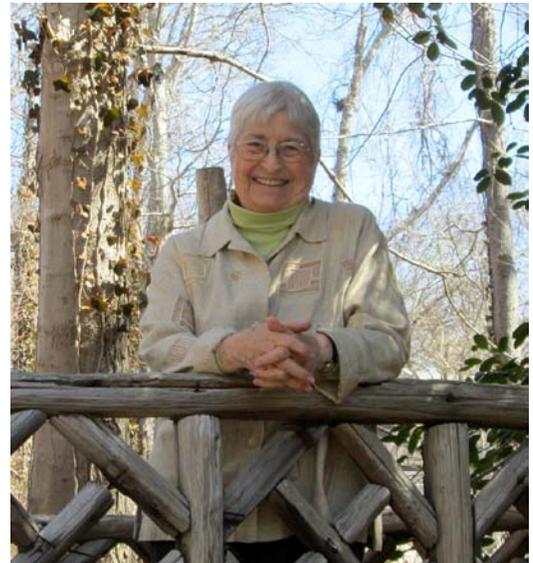
Don't Forget!

NF can provide more than rides to appointments. We can help you clean a closet, find a friendly visitor, sort through your mail, and take things down from the attic.

Let us know what you need and we'll do our best!



DATES TO REMEMBER



Denise Backus in her garden gazebo.

A Profile of NF Member and Volunteer
Denise Backus
By Pamela Nelson

Denise Backus was four years old when the United States entered WWII and her father, then a reporter with Associated Press, went off to become a war correspondent. Her mother packed up her two little daughters and left New York to join her best friend in the village of Salmon Falls, on Maine's Saco River. With their husbands away at war, the two women raised their four children together and carved out a life. They collaborated on two books, authored by Denise's mother and illustrated by her friend. One was about raising city kids out in the country in wartime and the other about the little restaurant that they opened and ran during the summers.

Their children attended the local one-room schoolhouse, its potbellied stove stoked and tended by an eighth-grade boy. The school had a double-attached outhouse and a woodshed where the older boys sometimes "got lickings when the superintendent made his monthly visit." Some teachers saved up their disciplinary problems, but Denise recalls one creative
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Denise Backus – continued from page 1

teacher, who would set a pair of squabbling kids to washing a window together, one indoors and one outside.

Salmon Falls had one public building, its library. Denise describes the library's ledger, where her name was recorded with a quill pen dipped in ink when she checked out a book, and crossed out on its return. Her mother read to her daughters every night and instilled in them a love of poetry as well as narrative writing.

Denise's parents did not reunite after the war. The little family moved to Camden, a comparative metropolis, with its population of 2,500. There her mother continued writing and then became the founding editor of the new *Down East Magazine*. Denise attended the Camden schools for three years before being sent to Northfield School in Massachusetts for her junior and senior years of high school. She relished the relative freedom of the boarding school, in spite of its reputation for strict rules. To her mind it was not so strict as her mother had been. (For instance, at the end of the war, while their friends and neighbors were outdoors celebrating, banging on pots and carrying on, Denise recalls being sent to bed at her usual bedtime of 6:30!) At Northfield she was able to stay up late, and she enjoyed the experience of living with a new group of friends. She found choral singing a particularly exciting part of her life at Northfield, recalling with pleasure Christmas and spring concerts performed with brother school Mt. Hermon, 1,000 voices raised in song.

Denise did not want to return to Maine for college, yet she felt she lacked the academic credentials to attend her mother's alma mater, Smith College. She applied to a number of schools, including the University of North Carolina, where she was accepted to its Women's College in Greensboro. The poet Randall Jarrell was on the faculty, and Denise was familiar with his poetry and prose. Classes with him, one in narrative in her freshman year and another on Robert Frost in her senior year, were highlights of her college experience. Named Poet Laureate for a couple of years, Jarrell did not teach during her sophomore and junior years.

Her education actually extended beyond the college confines. Greensboro was active in the emerging civil rights movement of the late 1950's. Denise recalls the tension that arose on a city bus one day when she offered her seat to a young, very pregnant black woman holding a baby and how quiet it got when the woman finally accepted the seat, which was situated in the middle of the bus. The college was desegregated in the fall of 1957, and two young black women were assigned, by themselves, to one wing in a freshman dorm with otherwise empty rooms. Some parents pulled their daughters out of the school. Coming from Maine, with its almost exclusively white population, Denise up to that time had had no experience with racial prejudice or integration.

We remember Phylisanne Simpson
NF's first Volunteer Coordinator



NF Volunteer and Member Phylisanne Simpson died peacefully in her home last week after a brief illness. Former Neighborhood Falmouth co-Executive Directors Karin and Ken Bohr offer their remembrance of their friend and colleague:

Phylisanne was a consummate volunteer in the town of Falmouth. We met her around 1990 when she began volunteering for another non-profit organization in town. In 2009 when we began looking for an NF volunteer coordinator, she came to mind immediately. NF members and volunteers quickly learned of her optimistic nature, wonderful sense of humor, and love of people.

"P.A." enjoyed cooking and she shared that delicious talent with many friends and neighbors throughout her life. One of her occasional volunteer activities for NF members was making pots of soup or small meals for someone who wasn't able to cook for him- or herself. P.A.'s apricot squares were delicious and disappeared quickly at the NF luncheons or meetings.

Phylisanne continued to volunteer for both organizations until the last few days of her illness. She was a very special and giving lady who will be missed by all who knew and worked with her over the years.



MAY EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Enjoy the cultural life of Falmouth with help from NF! If you'd like to go, we'd love to get you a ride and give you a friendly person to sit with.

"How to Succeed in Business..." by Falmouth Theatre Guild. Weekends May 1-17

The Falmouth Theatre Guild presents "How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying" at Highfield Theater, Fridays at 7:30 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$16 for children under 18, and \$18 for seniors 62 and over. Purchase tickets at the door or at falmouththeatreguild.org. For more information, call (508) 548-0400.

SEA Faculty Lecture Series: "Around the World In 80 Days" Sunday, May 3, 2:00 P.M. Sea Education Association, 171 Woods Hole Road James L. Madden Center Lecture Hall

SEA Professor Mary Malloy recounts her voyage inspired by Jules Verne's famed 1873 novel, *Around the World in Eighty Days*. During this lecture and slideshow, she will offer a glimpse of her far-flung adventures to New Zealand seaports, remote Pacific islands and cosmopolitan European locales.

Lecture: "The Battle of Gallipoli, 1915" Tuesday, May 19, 7:00 P.M.

Falmouth Museums on the Green

A lecture with Michael McNaught. Tickets are \$5 for members, \$8 for non-members

Falmouth Eats Together

Thursday, May 14, 4:00–6:00 P.M.

Falmouth Museums on the Green

Take part in this Falmouth-wide community get-together. This will be a free delicious meal at the John Wesley Church on Gifford St. in Falmouth.

Falmouth Farmers' Market

Thursdays, starting May 21, 12:00–6:00 P.M.

Falmouth Marine Park

Shop for Cape Cod and Southeastern MA-grown and artisanally crafted vegetables, fruits, cheeses, lobsters, breads, pies, pastas, smoked fish, herbs, vegetable starts and ornamentals.

Denise Backus – continued from page 2

With her father's help, during her college years she held summer jobs in New York City at *LIFE* magazine and also at *Time*, where he worked. In general, young ladies in the South did not work during summer break. After graduation she worked in the production department at *McCall's* magazine until she married. Her most memorable experience at *McCall's* was hearing a man, who worked in the advertising department, run down the hall shouting, "I can quit this ***** job!" She found out later that it was Joseph Heller, who had just gotten word that his *Catch-22* had been accepted for publication!

Denise's first marriage was short-lived, and she emerged from it a single parent with two children to support. In 1969, a friend in Truro suggested that she interview for a job at WHOI. Armed with the ability to type and take shorthand, Denise landed a job in WHOI's Biology Department, working as a secretary and lab assistant in two different labs. She enjoyed working for Bill Schevill, the leading whale expert at the time. She recalls that he was a master of the odd turn of phrase, although he could never remember her name. Instead he called her ma'am. "Ma'am," he would say, "Can you lick this stamp for me? I've gotten so old, I don't have any spit left." Down the hall was Dick Backus's lab, where gardeners gathered to talk during coffee breaks, sharing their enthusiasm for plants and birds.

Denise had the opportunity to join the entire lab on one three-week oceanographic research cruise from Portugal to Ireland aboard the RV *Chain*. After marrying Dick Backus in 1974, she transferred to WHOI's education office. Her son and daughter acquired three stepsiblings, and the couple bought their house on Woods Hole Road to accommodate the expanded family.

In 1977 Denise was hired as office manager at the New Alchemy Institute in Hatchville. There she enthusiastically joined a team committed to the idea of sustainability, long before its importance was widely recognized. Furthermore, the rich interpersonal connections she and Dick built there persist to this day. Denise found it deeply satisfying to serve as the front person for the institute, answering questions, and helping when problems arose, but after 10 years "the best parts were becoming computerized."

It was time for a change. From childhood Denise had watched her mother earn a living and support a family, maintaining her independence. Becoming dependent held no attractions for Denise. Securing and holding down a job to provide support and enable her to meet her responsibilities were crucial to her inner comfort and sense of well-being.

(Next month: A new direction for Denise.)

We gratefully acknowledge support from:
Bank of Cape Cod
Beatrice A. Bunker Architecture
Falmouth Fund at the Cape Cod Foundation
Falmouth Podiatry
Janney Montgomery Scott
John's Liquor Store
Lawrence Lynch Corporation
Locust Street Sign Company
Recovery Without Walls
Royal Health Group/ Megansett
Stop & Shop Companies, Inc.
Waterbury & Olson Optometry
Willett Foundation Fund at the Cape Cod
Foundation
Windfall Market & Windfall Florals
Wood Lumber Company
Woods Hole Foundation

Members, would you like to help at
Mullen-Hall Elementary School?

STUDENT LEARNING EXPEDITION

Friday, May 22

Morning group 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Afternoon group 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Volunteers are needed to sit with students as they share with you an accomplishment from their school year. Afterwards you can write a postcard of thanks to students to be delivered to their homes

For information, call Mullen-Hall at (508) 548-0220.



Thank you!

Thanks to everyone who participated in the NF Paper Shredding event last month: those who baked, lifted boxes, greeted "customers" and sold cookies.

And thanks, **especially** to our friends at Janney Montgomery Scott for donating paper shredding services.

The day was a wonderful success!

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6:00–8:00 p.m.
Highfield Hall & Gardens

Hope to see you there!