

Adirondack Legends Remembered By Betsy Lowe

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Sometimes you meet people who have a profound effect on you. I am fortunate to have known two Adirondack icons who had such an effect on me.

Clarence Petty and Nellie Staves were Adirondack legends. Their passion for life and the causes they supported endeared them to many. While both passed away in 2009, during their long lives they achieved tremendous success, whether fighting for a cause, or simply enjoying a meal with friends.

I met Clarence in his later years and was instantly drawn in by his passion for the Adirondacks, and for life. A true Adirondacker, he was an ardent conservationist, activist, woodsman and pilot. Over his long life, he hiked, snowshoed, canoed, or flew over just about every acre of the Adirondack Park. He devoted his life to protecting this wilderness, and wanted others to carry on this appreciation and protection of the region. His regular column “Questions for Clarence” in the *Adirondack Explorer*, and well-known ongoing letter campaigns to government officials, written on his antique typewriter, made him a voice to be heard,

and a point of view to be reckoned with.

Clarence worked hard and lived modestly, saving his money to help support special causes. As the Conservation Department liaison to the New York State Legislature, which led to the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency, he helped shape the Adirondack Park we know today.

Clarence supported a variety of not-for-profits concerned about the future of the park. He also supported development of The Wild Center in Tupper Lake which I initiated in the fall of 1998. I regularly met with Clarence at his home to keep him up-to-date on the museum’s progress. At age 99 he made a wonderful homemade lunch for Diana Fortune and me, and on his 100th birthday we shared another delightful lunch at his home in Coreys. He was always very kind, with a twinkle in his eye, a lovely disposition, and a good sense of humor. Though he received many awards and recognitions from a variety of organizations throughout his life, Clarence remained humble. He was grateful for every day he had.

Nellie Staves was a close friend of mine and a sportswoman, conservationist, artist,

community activist, mother, grandmother, great grandmother and guardian angel. Like Clarence, she received numerous recognitions during her life for her conservation and civic work, as well as her artistry.

Nellie would check in regularly at DEC, The Wild Center, and many other organizations, to be supportive and to get the latest on what was going on. She was active with local sportsmen’s groups, and served on a number of government committees where she dedicated countless hours and travel time to support important issues. She lent a diplomatic voice on many of these issues to a wide variety of groups and organizations around the park.

An artist, Nellie had a great talent for carving images of native plants and animals onto fungi that she collected in the woods. She was passionate about her art and enjoyed giving her pieces away to various causes.

On a personal note, she did so much to help encourage me and to support the launch of The Wild Center. She attended my introductory meeting on the idea, helped host the first public meeting, and attended nearly every public meeting and board meeting thereafter to support the project.

A friend to everyone, she was nourished by her connection to nature in the Adirondacks and radiated this in being such a kind and caring person. She was wonderful to me and I miss her “checking-in” calls.

I consider myself lucky to have had two such dedicated and caring friends. Their passion for their work exemplifies the type of life I hope to lead, and while they are greatly missed, their memories will live on.

Betsy Lowe is director of DEC’s Region 5.

For further reading on Nellie and Clarence, see the December 2000 and February 2009 issues, respectively, of *Conservationist*.