

Appalachia

Volume 71
Number 1 *Winter/Spring 2020: Farewell, Mary
Oliver: Tributes and Stories*

Article 22

2020

In Memoriam

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia>



Part of the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2020) "In Memoriam," *Appalachia*: Vol. 71 : No. 1 , Article 22.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia/vol71/iss1/22>

This In Every Issue is brought to you for free and open access by Dartmouth Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Appalachia by an authorized editor of Dartmouth Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dartmouthdigitalcommons@groups.dartmouth.edu.

In Memoriam



Barbara Hull Richardson, one of the Appalachian Mountain Club's first woman hut crew members, on February 8, 2018, in Keene, New Hampshire.

PAULA CHAMPAGNE

Barbara Hull Richardson

On February 19, 2019, I traveled to Keene, New Hampshire, where I gave a program on Mount Washington at an assisted living center where Barbara Hull Richardson lived. Barbara played a central role in my book, *The White Mountain* (Hobblebush Books, 2018). She worked as one of the first Appalachian Mountain Club “hut girls.” She had survived gun violence and was a feminist, a social worker, a legislator, and a protector of children.

Before the program, Barbara and a group of residents were doing calisthenics, using the event space tables and chairs to stretch, squat, and push off. Most of the seniors there simply sat in their chairs to do the program. Not Barbara. When she did squats, she went all the way to the floor.

She was 95 years old.

A little over a month later, on Saturday morning, March 23, 2019, Barbara died. A couple weeks after my last visit with her, she had fallen and suffered an injury that resulted in painful surgery.

She decided that was enough. She summoned her family. For nearly a century, she had lived life on her terms. She would die on her terms.

We had plans. I had the good fortune to film an interview with her last year, and some of those segments became part of a documentary on Mount Washington personalities by filmmaker Bill Millios. The film premiered in June. There had been talk of Barbara attending.

But I can't begrudge her timing or her decision. She was a woman of extraordinary authority and empathy. Alas, my time with her was short—only

two of 95 years—but I learned more about strength of character in that short time than I would have thought possible.

She never failed to invite me to lunch. And when we talked, I struggled to spin the conversation toward her life, her accomplishments. When you spoke to her, she wanted only to know about you. How is your family? What are your goals?

Barbara was tiny in stature but her grace and yearning for connection was enormous. In my 30 years as a reporter, I've interviewed presidents, Nobel Prize winners, and hall of fame athletes. Only a handful of humans have affected how I see the world, made me want to write better and tell their story with extra care and attention, with an eye on posterity. I wanted to make Barbara proud when I told her story.

She told me once, “Nothing that we do is inconsequential.” Her life was a reminder that she lived by that sentiment, spending nearly a century reaching out, lifting up, building bridges, and smashing glass ceilings.

—Dan Szczeny

Editor's note: Read Dan Szczeny's 2018 profile of Barbara Hull Richardson for AMC Outdoors magazine at outdoors.org/richardson.