

## Edith Blakeslee Phelps

MS. FORD: Edith Augusta Blakeslee, to become Edith Blakeslee Phelps, was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1917 and died in Wellesley, Massachusetts, in April 2009. Edie attended Bancroft School and Smith College. She taught history at Riverdale Country Day School, where she met her future husband, Bill Phelps. Subsequently she lived, raised three daughters, and taught in Idaho, Needham, Massachusetts; and Old Bennington, Vermont.

In 1958, with her appointment at Concord Academy as teacher of history and assistant head, her professional career took off. In 1963 Edie was named headmistress of Dana Hall School, where she served until 1973. From 1974 to 1982, she was executive director of Girls Clubs of America, and then from 1983 to 1988, administrative director and director of school studies at the Study Center for Gender, Education, and Human Development at Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Following her years at Harvard, where she had worked with Carol Gilligan, she served as an independent educational consultant with particular interest in the education and development of girls and women, gender issues in adolescent development, and issues of single-sex, coed, and coordinate school structure. In 1995 Edie wrote *No Turning Back: Milestones for Girls in the Twentieth Century*, published by Girls Incorporated.

Edie was a woman of great intellect and great heart, and she was unflappable. She had the capacity for extravagant hospitality and grace, as well as an irrepressible sense of humor. She won adversaries over first with her charm and dignity, and then overwhelmed them with her intellect and fierce defense of the principles of equity and justice. And she always looked just great doing it.

One of the stories Edie loved to tell during the last five years of her life, when so much was slipping away from her, was about an incident that occurred when she and I were invited to conduct a workshop at a fine Southern boarding school for boys to help the faculty implement the school's decision to go coed. We had concluded our workshop and were sure that we would be invited to the headmaster's house for a cocktail and a reprise of the day. However, no such invitation was forthcoming, so we trudged back to our car, feeling somewhat deflated. Our route took us by the headmaster's house and he suddenly appeared on his doorstep. He greeted us and then, quite sheepishly, said he would really like to invite us in, but his wife was gone, and that would not look right, would it. Edie loved it -- that we, who had come to help them better educate their new female students, were indeed seductresses in disguise.

At the memorial service for Edie this past spring, one of her daughters read from the Baccalaureate Speech which Edie, as headmistress, delivered to the Class of 1966 at Dana Hall School. Here is an excerpt from that speech, which is pure Edie, the deeply joyful visionary who lived a principled life of action: "In these moments I do want to share my parting wish and prayer for all of you. May you ever possess a talent for joy! Perhaps the most important commitment you can ever make in cultivating a talent for joy is to regard your life as a sacred responsibility, to believe that what you do is important, increasingly important in a world where lives and not authority speak so strongly. I wish for you, ladies, a talent for joy, that your lives may be abundantly whole and happy, and that this complex world may be the better for your presence."

And in closing, I'd like to ask once again that we also remember David Mallory, who had an impact on all of our lives. I'm sure many of you attended one of his many seminars for heads and for administrators and for members of the school community. I'd like, once again, to ask that we could have a moment of silence in remembrance of all those that we have remembered in the course of this conference.

Thank you.