

The “Gift of Lightness”

Natalie Jacobson McCracken, former Bostonia editor in chief, celebrated the good things | BY TAYLOR MCNEIL

NATALIE JACOBSON MCCRACKEN, former editor in chief of *Bostonia* magazine, died on November 25, 2018. She was 83. Former editor Taylor McNeil worked for McCracken for many years and wrote the following tribute.

SHORTLY AFTER I started working for Natalie Jacobson McCracken, in 1994, she became editor in chief of Boston University’s alumni and development publications, including *Bostonia*. She not only elevated the alumni magazine, then a quarterly, and directed the transformation of school and college newsletters into quality magazines, she also saw her role as ambassador to the hundreds

ONLINE: of thousands of alumni. And for those of us who worked for her, she wasn’t just our boss, she was our friend.

“I have been so sad these last couple of days,” Bari Walsh, editor of *Bostonia* in 2007–2008, wrote to a group of Natalie’s friends shortly after she died. “But what I know is that Natalie would have not had much patience with that. The biggest gift she left for me is the gift of lightness. You celebrate good things, and you don’t linger in bad things. You always make time for sweets, conversations, and people you love. You look for the

good things. It doesn’t mean that you are some kind of a Pollyanna with blinders on. You’re actually more courageous when you do that.”

Natalie was born on February 22, 1935, the elder (by three minutes) of twin girls, and grew up in Valley Junction, part of West Des Moines, Iowa. She attended Northwestern University and Drake University, where she met her future husband, Samuel McCracken. They moved east as Natalie earned an MA in theater at Columbia, while Sam got his in English at the University of Connecticut. They married in 1959.

Natalie came to BU along with Sam in 1974, when he became an assistant to President John Silber (Hon.’95). She taught speech and theater at Boston State College—later part of UMass Boston—reveling in coaching students in public speaking, before taking on editorial roles at BU for internal and alumni audiences. She was named editor at large of *Bostonia* in 2006, and retired from the University in 2011.

I worked with Natalie for a dozen years, and appreciated her skills as an exacting editor. When copy ran long and needed to be trimmed to fit on a page, she would surgically eliminate a word here, a phrase there—and somehow made the piece better. More than that, she taught me and all those who worked with her lessons about life, not in word but in deeds.



An exacting editor, Natalie Jacobson McCracken elevated *Bostonia* and directed the transformation of BU school and college newsletters into quality magazines.

She was unflappable. “When presented with a problem, Natalie wasted no emotion on the injustice or unreasonableness of it,” says Jean Keith, who worked with her for 16 years. “She had a keen ability to assess a predicament and figure out the most practical way to handle it.”

After I left BU in 2007, I kept in touch with Natalie. Over the next 11 years, we

had lunch or dinner every couple of months. On October 20, 2018, Natalie and I met at Toraya, a small Japanese restaurant in Arlington, Mass. We lingered, talking of her plans to go to Austin to see her daughter and grandkids, and about the books we were both reading. It was dark as we left. I gave her a hug goodbye, and we agreed we’d try a new Italian restaurant for our next outing. Less than two weeks later, she had a cerebral hemorrhage, slipped into a coma, and died peacefully at home. She leaves a son, Harry McCracken (CAS’86), and a daughter, Elizabeth McCracken (CAS’88, GRS’88).