

In Memoriam— Katherine "Kay" Frizzell Blaisdell '49

She was a woman of many talents, and always ready to try something new

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In an era when most women were homemakers, Katherine “Kay” Blaisdell was a Renaissance woman with a PhD in veterinary parasitology. She wrote books, went hang gliding, hiked in South America, hunted caribou in the Yukon, and sat astride a camel to explore the Egyptian pyramids.

“Mom was game for anything,” says Blaisdell’s daughter Dotty Custance.

Kay was married to veterinarian Edward Blaisdell ’50, whom she met at UNH while working as a lab assistant in an anatomy class he was taking. They both earned doctoral degrees at Cornell University before settling in North Haverhill, N.H., where Ed established his veterinary practice with her help.

Kay was no stranger to hard work involving animals. Among her childhood chores on her family’s Charlestown, N.H. farm were chopping frozen silage in the dead of winter and helping her father castrate pigs. She assisted her husband with everything from giving anesthesia to removing porcupine quills from dogs. At the end of the day she took on a traditional housewife’s role, making sure her husband relaxed after his long hours at the clinic and making farm calls.

The Blaisdells kept in touch with veterinarians from all over the world who rotated through their clinic. When their interns moved on, the couple enjoyed visiting them, sometimes with unexpected results. One “vacation” with a former assistant found them in Africa helping him test warthogs for foot and mouth disease.

Married for 66 years, the Blaisdells raised six children, Carl ’75, Dorothy, Brian ’77, Roscoe ’79, Marilyn, and Kenneth. The children were born over a period of ten years, and if one complained about a sibling getting more than a fair share of attention, their mother had a ready answer: “Everything in life is not equal. You all have your different needs.” She found common ground with each child, says Custance.

In addition to raising her family and working in the clinic, Blaisdell was active in the North Haverhill community. She wrote a newspaper column, “Over the River and Through the Years,” based on stories her husband would bring home from work, which she eventually incorporated into a nine-book series with the same title. She also wrote a town history, Haverhill, New Hampshire in the Twentieth Century.

She belonged to several educational and benevolent groups and was choir director and violinist at her church for more than 50 years. When her declining health made standing difficult, choir members presented her with a personalized “Choir Director’s Chair.” Along with her daughter Marilyn, who shares her love of music, Blaisdell sang with the choir until shortly before her June 18 death from complications following back surgery. At her funeral, her urn rested on her special chair as choir members choked back tears to sing for her.

Blaisdell’s adventurous spirit and broadminded nature are reflected in her children who all work in different fields, none of them associated with veterinary science. “We were raised to be individuals and independent thinkers,” says Custance. “Mom always said, ‘Think for yourself. Don’t go along with what everyone else is doing unless you really agree with them.’ We all became good problem solvers because we were allowed to.”

Her sister Marilyn concurs. “I’ve been a free spirit all my life because of Mom,” she says. “Sometimes we played outside and she didn’t see us from dawn to dusk, but she always trusted our judgement.” There was, however, one unshakeable rule in the busy Blaisdell household: The six children had to be home on time for meals. “Mom had a big bell with

a heavy clapper that you could hear all over the neighborhood,” says Marilyn. “When she rang that dinner bell, dogs and kids knew we’d all better get home fast.”

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