

MEMORIES *of*
ALICE
MAYHEW





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Alice Mayhew

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PHOTO BY DAVID JACOBS

Alice Mayhew

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This collection of memories celebrates the life of Alice Mayhew, with contributions from more than sixty friends, colleagues, and authors.

Her career, which spanned more than fifty years, was extraordinary for both the books she published—many of which became cultural touchstones—and her broader influence on the publishing industry through the many individuals whose lives and careers were shaped by having known and worked with her.

Contributors

Jill Abramson	Frances FitzGerald
Jonathan Alter	Linda Bird Francke
John Avlon	Janice Fryer
Bob Barnett	Doris Kearns Goodwin
Bob Bender	Sandy McCormick Hill
Sidney Blumenthal	Harold Holzer
Taylor Branch	Walter Isaacson
Steven Brill	Jonathan Jao
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C. J. Chivers	Michael Korda
Jennet Conant	Roz Lippel
Amar Deol	Ben Loehnen
Christopher Dickey	David Maraniss
Richard Engel	Kati Marton
Jason Epstein	David Masello

Diane McWhorter	Carolyn Reidy
Robert W. Merry	Stuart Roberts, with remarks from David Shipley, Ann Godoff, Jonathan Jao, Henry Ferris, Serena Jones
David Michaelis	
Judith Miller	
John Muse	William Shawcross
Andrew Nagorski	David Shipley
Lynn Nesbit	Elizabeth Stein
Esther Newberg	James B. Stewart
Patricia O'Toole	Trish Todd
Peter Pringle and Eleanor Randolph	Binky Urban
Julia Prosser	Mark Whitaker
Jane Bryant Quinn	Ted Widmer
Sally Quinn	Amy Wilentz
	Bob Woodward

Jill Abramson

For most authors, waiting for an editor's reaction to a first draft of a new book is akin to torture. So imagine the delight of a young writer when he heard his editor's assessment of his latest work: "I think the novel is a wonder."

Such a moment came in the fall of 1924, when a letter arrived for F. Scott Fitzgerald from the legendary editor, Max Perkins, of the venerable publishing house Charles Scribner's Sons. The manuscript was what became *The Great Gatsby*, one of many classics Perkins edited from a roster including, besides Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Their books won Pulitzer Prizes and sold millions of copies. Though hardly known outside the insular New York publishing world, Perkins has long been celebrated as "an editor of genius" (also the title of his biography), the unseen hand behind a literary canon.

There have not been many modern versions of Perkins. Editors these days jump from publishing house to publishing house, and some don't even really edit. Authors, often chasing the biggest cash advances, rarely stay loyal to one editor over the course of a career, as Perkins's retinue did.

Alice Mayhew was very much an editor in the Perkins mold. Her métier was political, historical, and biographical nonfiction, but she was an absolute believer in the power of the nonfiction narrative to be every bit as gripping as the best fiction. At eighty-seven, she was still editing manuscripts and

churning out best-sellers from her perch as editorial director at Simon & Schuster, the publishing house she helped lead for almost fifty years. Mayhew was a veritable best-seller machine, from an early success with the feminist tract *Our Bodies, Our Selves* to 2018's *Fear*, Bob Woodward's account of the tumult inside the Trump White House, which was S&S's best-selling title ever. Like many of her authors, Woodward worked with Mayhew for many years—over nine presidencies—and he produced nineteen books with her. David Maraniss, another *Washington Post* writer and Mayhew devotee, was working on his thirteenth book with her when he learned of her death.

She was a tiny dynamo, with true knowledge, and an opinion on nearly everything, and she enjoyed a grand finale, with some of her better-known authors—Woodward, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Walter Isaacson—each hitting the top of the nonfiction list almost simultaneously. But she was fiercely loyal to her lesser known authors, too, often showing up at readings or inviting them to lunch at her well-placed, reserved spot at Michael's. She gave her many assistants over the years a heavy dose of mentoring and experience. Some became successful editors and writers themselves.

Mayhew was perhaps best known for editing *All the President's Men*, the book that made celebrities of Woodward and Carl Bernstein, the two *Washington Post* reporters who doggedly covered Watergate and whose journalism was instrumental in the resignation of President Richard Nixon. The book, which made the practice of investigative journalism in Washington, D.C., look more exciting than a detective story, was a huge success, as was a sequel, *The Final Days*.

Civil rights was a passion, as was Abraham Lincoln. Mayhew worked with Taylor Branch on his multivolume biogra-

phy of Martin Luther King Jr. and with Diane McWhorter on her portrait of Birmingham, Alabama, *Carry Me Home*. Both won Pulitzer Prizes. With her guidance, Goodwin wrote masterful and popular tomes about the presidency, including the Pulitzer winner *No Ordinary Time* and *Team of Rivals*, which won the Lincoln Prize. Mayhew also championed and planned the five-volume biography of Lincoln by Sidney Blumenthal as well as a book about Lincoln and the press by Harold Holzer.

Like Perkins, Mayhew befriended her authors but remained a somewhat mysterious figure. In a fond tribute, Maraniss, who worked with her for decades, said he never knew exactly how old she was. She once famously refused to be interviewed for a favorable profile in *The New York Times*.

When I started my career, I was constantly hearing about the brilliance of a woman everyone simply called Alice, especially from colleagues at a start-up magazine, *The American Lawyer*. There she was often the topic of conversation among Steven Brill, James B. Stewart, and Connie Bruck, who each produced successful debut books with Alice. I always wanted to work with her and finally did.

Reading her obituary in the *Times*, I was struck by the sentence “She left no survivors.” Of course she did—shelves of wonderful books that can take readers from the glories of Leonardo to the foibles of Trump.

Jonathan Alter

Here's how devoted Alice was to authors: In 1986, I signed to write a book for her and never did. After I returned the advance, I figured that would be the end of my relationship with her. Instead, for the next *fourteen years*, she asked me out to lunch (usually at the Chalet Suisse, a sixty-year-old restaurant at 45 West 52nd Street, far from the publishing scene) once a year to see if we could settle on a topic. I was busy with other things but she kept tossing out ideas. Finally, in 2001, we agreed on what became my first book (*The Defining Moment: FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope*). Then the kindly conversationalist of our leisurely lunches became the tough, even merciless editor of lore. She made me cut sixty pages out of my manuscript and briskly dismissed any objections. She was right, of course. After that, I trusted her completely and we worked together in complete harmony on my two books about Barack Obama (*The Promise: President Obama, Year One* and *The Center Holds: Obama and His Enemies*). By this time, Chalet Suisse had closed and she was eating at Michael's or the Sea Grill, where her peerless insights into American presidents and advice on structure proved indispensable.

Alice was sometimes criticized for not editing her authors enough. I'm at work on my fourth book for her and I never found that to be the case. Three weeks ago, I was on my way home from Pennsylvania. It was Saturday night and my cell

phone rang. Alice had recently fallen and been hospitalized and I did not expect to hear from her. She had several brilliant insights into Jimmy Carter (the subject of my upcoming biography) and pressed me to send her several early chapters she wanted to read again. I will carry on and finish the book, but it won't be easy. The dedication will be to Alice.

John Avlon

If you love American history, getting your book picked up by Alice Mayhew was like getting drafted by Branch Rickey. Her roster of authors was littered with Hall of Fame names, with books you grew up knowing and loving. When you got a taste of the Alice Mayhew experience, doors were opened and mysteries revealed. She kept her curiosity intact and her love of America was undimmed, despite disgust for our current circumstances (though, to be fair, she also considered Thomas Jefferson overrated and treacherous).

She had the killer insights that came from experience, and the process of crafting a book was enlivened by lunchtime conversations at her favorite haunts. Her advice cut through the clutter of the mind with disarming clarity: An introduction should tell the reader how to read the book; stories should be told as life is lived, beginning to end. She did not hesitate to disagree and respected reasoned pushback. When she was pleased with good work that was well received, the pride shined through her eyes.

Regrets don't matter much at the end, but I am sorry for future authors that I could not convince her to write down her rules for great biography when I was editor of *The Daily Beast*. Now, when I walk by her house in Sag Harbor, down the street where I am finishing the second book we were to work on together, I feel her absence. But then I go home, consult the notes from our conversations, and as I write I can hear her voice, guiding the process forward, one last gift from Alice.

Robert Barnett

My mother had wonderful ways of describing people. Some people were a piece of work. Other people were a force of nature. (I won't mention what I was called.)

Alice Mayhew was a force of nature *and* a piece of work—all in the best sense.

We worked on dozens of books together—from the unparalleled Bob Woodward to the first-time author with a really good idea.

Alice could take an idea, hone it, and make it spectacular. Alice was a woman of ideas. Alice could help “shape” a book to make it compelling, exciting, and readable. Alice was a sculptor. Alice knew the best way to describe a book so as to make you want to read it. Alice was a promoter.

But, Lord help you if you didn't see the wisdom of her politics. Or if she was completely convinced, and you weren't so sure. Or if you dared say anything even slightly negative about someone she respected.

Although she is gone, she will live forever in the hundreds and hundreds of books she pushed forward to the finish line. And, I am quite sure, at lunchtime, her spirit will be at that table at Michael's forever. I was fortunate to have known, learned from, and laughed with the incomparable Alice Mayhew. What a force of nature. What a piece of work. We shall not see her likes again.

Bob Bender

Some years ago—I don't recall exactly when—Simon & Schuster hosted an event at the Four Seasons restaurant honoring Michael Korda. I believe the reason was an anniversary of Michael's, perhaps his fortieth anniversary at S&S.

There were several speakers at the event. One of them was Henry Kissinger, the former secretary of state, whom Michael had published. Kissinger, speaking in that famous gravelly deep voice, made the sort of complimentary remarks about Michael that speakers usually make at occasions like this. He was followed by Alice Mayhew, who was Michael's longest-serving and most distinguished colleague.

Alice had published, among many other books, *Sideshow* by William Shawcross. That book was a ferocious denunciation of the U.S. bombing campaign in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. It essentially accused President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger of being war criminals. Alice shared that opinion and Kissinger knew that Alice was Shawcross's editor at S&S. So the idea of Alice following Kissinger as a speaker was either utterly dim-witted or provocatively brilliant.

As I recall, Alice, standing only a few feet away from Kissinger, began her remarks by saying, "I find myself in agreement with Dr. Kissinger tonight, something I never imagined I would ever say." Not the usual opening comment on such an occasion. I had admired Alice for quite some time,

but my admiration for her increased that evening. She was a person of strong opinions, particularly about politics, and she never hesitated to express them, no matter who was listening.

Alice Mayhew defined the standard of excellence for book editors. She was fiercely competitive, utterly devoted to her authors, and a brilliant judge of talent. I worked alongside her at Simon & Schuster for thirty-eight years. It was an incredible privilege.

Sidney Blumenthal

Alice in her dimly lit hospital room sat in a wheelchair next to her bed covered with pages of a manuscript. At her Sag Harbor house, a few months earlier, she had been overseeing drinks orders of her guests crammed on her back porch. Near the screen door was a small table where she positioned bobblehead figurines and embroidered pillows of her household gods, Washington and Lincoln. She complained that the Franklin D. Roosevelt bobblehead was long out of stock. To fill the gap, I bought her an old large clock of FDR steering a ship's wheel framing the dial as the "Man of the Hour." She wanted her guests to hear about incidents of Lincoln, and she prompted me about this or that aspect. She insisted that everyone pay attention to the details. She was a lioness around her writers. Her greatest gift was not the corrected line, the more apt word, or the better organization of a chapter. Alice believed wholly, completely, and devotedly in the work—and the writer. She was profoundly knowledgeable, a historian in her own right, and after conversation about people we knew—and she had the keenest and most pungent perceptions—and the inside dope about the latest events (and she was astute and discerning in her observations) she went where she wanted to go: to history. She loved living in the present, but she knew her way around the past. Alice constantly wanted to talk about Lincoln. He was more than an object of endless fascination that drew her to edit so many

books about him, making her the greatest editor of Lincoln books ever. Lincoln related to her sense of herself, her American self, her idea of democracy, what leadership meant, how to conduct politics, and his genius provided profound insight to our current tribulations. Being wrapped in her confidence was the ultimate encouragement. Her commitment was unstinting. She always showed up, at every launch, every ceremony, no matter how exalted or predictable, demonstrating her belief in her writer and the work. Alice was mysterious to many people, even close friends, who weren't sure about all sorts of things about her, including her age and first name, but she would share without reservation her most intimate thoughts if they could help. When my mother died, she consoled me by telling me that she spoke with her mother every day. The best and only thing to do, she said, was to work, and work harder. And, then, Alice liked the company of her friends, of parties, theater, and dinners. Her deep-throated laugh evoked ironic intelligence better than most spoken words. So, when my wife, Jackie, and I went to have dinner with Alice at the hospital, our mutual friends Peter Pringle and Eleanor Randolph brought the food she had selected. The crab cakes and coleslaw reminded her of Sag Harbor. We went up to a large empty room on the top floor where, she explained, we could drink wine without being monitored. Peter uncorked the bottles. She preferred the chardonnay. Once again, we talked about people, events, books she was editing, and of course Lincoln. We wheeled Alice back to her room. She waved and said she had work to do. We spoke a few times after that. At the end of our last conversation, she said, "Send me pages. *Ciao*." I'm still writing for Alice.

Taylor Branch

Alice is a flood of memories for me, all bursting with her sharp opinions grounded in love. The strength of opinion probably came from her mother. She talked rarely of her father, and even less about herself, but she nicknamed her mother “Headquarters” in tribute to a commanding presence. Alice recalled several times how Headquarters once caught her in a lie about skipping school one frigid day, letting her fib at length before she described how young Alice made TV news in the ticket line outside the old Met, receiving hot chocolate from an opera star before a matinee.

Alice was private, passionate, and political. To me, her undying civic faith seemed to have evolved from an early knowledge of religious thinkers, but we were always too busy to reminisce. Her editorial injunction for my perpetual tardiness was, “Keep it coming,” but she once gave me three weeks to cut seven hundred pages from a bloated manuscript. More than books, or ideas, what strikes me decades later are images uniquely hers: holding her pen between the forefinger and middle finger, hunching upward above the desktop, waiting alone at her reserved table, waving one topic aside for another, scolding her brother, Leonard, with unshakable affection.

She lived to work. At our last meeting, Alice said my tentative title for a work in progress was accurate enough but

needed tension and elegance. As we swapped alternatives, she kept shooing away the rehab nurses who brought medicines or reminders to elevate her edema-swelled legs.

Alice is rightly a legend in publishing. May we also cherish her spirit.

Steven Brill

I still have the massively — almost grotesquely so — marked-up manuscript that Alice returned to me when I submitted the draft for my first book, *The Teamsters*. I sometimes show it to the students I teach at Yale as an example of how, though none of us like to admit it, an editor can save you from yourself. She was fierce, tough — and also a wonderful, loyal friend.

David Brooks

Alice gave me my first book title: *Bobos in Paradise*. I never won an argument with her and never deserved to. She was smart, strong, wise, and humane.

Jimmy Carter

Rosalynn and I are deeply saddened by Alice Mayhew's death. Through the many years we worked together, she has been my skilled editor, trusted advisor, and friend. I am grateful for her remarkable work to ensure my success as an author. We send our condolences to the many whose lives she has touched.

C. J. Chivers

I remember Alice for her willingness to work with a writer new to the world of book publishing. For all of her stature, and no matter her extraordinary record, she was an eager mentor and sponsor, and ready to champion new voices and new work. Her enthusiasm ultimately latched on to stories themselves. When I was researching and writing my second book, *The Fighters*, Alice followed along with each new chapter submission, and became deeply invested, editorially and emotionally, in the characters. These characters were not from high-flying political circles, the sort of people at the center of many books Alice shepherded to print. They were rank-and-file American service members, caught in wars gone adrift, and in many ways abandoned to their violence and their fates by our political class. Alice invested in their stories with humanity and passion, and helped bring them to the page. I will be forever grateful for her attention to their experiences, and the lack of pretense with which she valued the accounts of their lives and deaths, often far from the view of the country they set out to serve.

Jennet Conant

Lunch, always at Michael's, always started the same way. Alice would begin by venting: about Trump, and before that about Hillary, and for as long as I can remember about what the Democrats were doing wrong and should be doing better. She was anxious and excited and eager to know what I thought. We never looked at the menu, food being beside the point of lunch. Alice treated ordering and eating as minor inconveniences to be gotten over as soon as possible so she could get down to the serious business of talking. Since we generally agreed on politics, I mostly nodded and made snarky observations, as I, the youngest, am wont to do at family meals. Alice would tee off animatedly on this or that comment and make fond allusions to FDR, quote something TR said, explain how Lincoln might have handled events, or Wilson—though she had her doubts about him—or even Madison. Never Jefferson—he was permanently in her presidential doghouse. Then she would lower her voice and confide conspiratorially, “Well, Woodward says . . .” It was always Woodward, never Bob. Then she would tell me what Walter said. It was never Isaacson, always Walter. And Doris, of course. If they disagreed, she would report this gleefully. She never picked favorites. She was equally proud of them all. One by one I would hear about what they thought, how they were doing, what they were working on—all my brilliant, illustrious, industrious aunts and uncles in the Alice family of authors. Over coffee

and biscotti—which she would order, not eat, and insist I take home to my son—she would listen to my brief summary of where I was in my book and where I thought I was going. She would agree enthusiastically, tell me it was going to be great, and how she was just telling Walter it was going to be great. We would part on the windy corner of 55th and Sixth, me stooping to kiss her goodbye and watching her marching briskly back to the office. Exhausted, I would flag down a cab, collapse in the back, and wonder how I would ever meet her high expectations. My doubts were beside the point. By our next lunch, just three or four months away, I would have to figure it out. There was no disappointing Alice.

Amar Deol

I was Alice's last assistant. The year on her desk yielded many benefits. I got to meet and work with the likes of Taylor Branch, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Sidney Blumenthal. I edited books written by authors who've forgotten more than I'll ever know. However, the real gift was just being in Alice's orbit.

I'll remember the quiet moments most. Walking with her down Sixth Avenue, random discussions about Adlai Stevenson and the Kennedys as the afternoon sunlight poured into her office, and her making fun of me for taking so long to finish *The Power Broker* (almost there!).

Alice was a five-foot titan. She was as forceful a champion as any writer can dream of. Alice's conviction, passion, and sense of humor will stay with me. Man, could she give it to people—but she also respected confidence and straight talk. I believe that's what our relationship was built upon.

As my own list grows, Alice's lessons about tone and pace remain firmly in mind. She was a singular woman, and it was a singular experience. I'll always be grateful.

Christopher Dickey

I will always think of Alice as my savior.

One of the worst moments of my writing life came in August 1985, when I had finished the manuscript for my first book, about the covert wars that Reagan was waging in Central America. The principal figure was a Contra commander known as Suicida, which was the working title for the book. The editor who commissioned it, John Herman, had collaborated closely with me, and it looked like everything was moving along smoothly.

I was by then on assignment for *The Washington Post* in the Middle East, and found myself in Morocco, where John tracked me down and left a message for me at a hotel in Casablanca—which I got when I returned from a couple of days reporting in the former Spanish Sahara. It was a Friday. I called S&S and asked for John. “He no longer works here,” I was told. Even as I write this, many years later, I can feel the blood draining out of me. Suicida indeed.

What followed were several panicked calls trying to find out what might happen to my book, with no clear answer, and a long weekend of extremely high anxiety and a fair amount of Scotch whisky.

On Monday, Alice got in touch and said she was taking on the book. I had never met her, but had known about her for years, from my earliest days as a columnist for *The Washington Post Book World*, and I could not believe that the edi-

tor who had done so much for Woodward and Bernstein and so many other journalists I admired had taken me under her wing as well. An angel's wing. My salvation.

In the years that followed the publication of what eventually was titled *With the Contras*, as we worked together on four more of the seven books I've published, Alice rarely made a suggestion I did not embrace immediately, and the others, I embraced later. Even after I left S&S, we stayed in close touch, getting together whenever I was in New York, and at least once a year when she would come to Paris.

I will miss her always.

Richard Engel

Not too many people make me nervous. I've met plenty of armed men, some with their fingers on triggers as we spoke. Some wore ski masks. Some were drunk or stoned or otherwise emotional and unpredictable. Perhaps that's why it surprised me how nervous I was around Alice. I wanted to please her. The first time I arrived for one of our early lunches at Michael's in New York City, I asked the waiter which seat she preferred so I wouldn't accidentally take it. I had already been ushered to her favorite table. I asked what kind of water she liked (sparkling) and made sure it was on the table when she arrived. I rearranged the silverware. I stared at the basket of bread and didn't dare eat a crumb until she arrived. I made sure I sat to the left of her empty chair. I think people prefer looking at things—notes, books, whatever—on their left, although I have no scientific evidence whatsoever to prove it. Perhaps *nervous* isn't the best word to describe how Alice made me feel, for I continued to feel this way in all of our subsequent meetings. She likely would have corrected me with her speedy red pencil. Maybe the correct word is *respect*. She certainly had, and deserved, my respect. We wrote two books together. While I never felt pressured, she had a very easy style, she helped me wrangle the ideas together into a narrative. She was quick to see structure, while I at times got lost in the weeds or distracted by whatever story I was working on at the moment. From all my travels and reporting trips

to far-flung places I had plenty of ingredients, plenty of raw material, but it was Alice who helped me craft what I had into meals. It wasn't always easy. At one stage I was so frustrated, I offered to give up the book I was working on, give back the advance, and even pay a penalty for having wasted her time. She refused and after a few conversations—really just two or three, I think—we came up with a nice menu from the basket of anecdotes, observations, and adventures I had been more than happy to grind up in a disposal. I'm sorry for other authors and would-be authors who won't get to work with Alice. I'll miss our lunches and conversations. I'll miss watching the door at the restaurant for her arrival, rearranging the glasses so they'd be in easy reach. But mostly, I'll miss her guidance because I'm still out there hunting and gathering, still out collecting ingredients, but now I'm not as confident I'll know how to combine them into a meal anyone will want to eat.

Jason Epstein

I first met Alice Mayhew when we were both young, at a party at “21,” then a sophisticated hangout for publishers. Alice was there because her colleagues were celebrating a book they had just published. We talked for a while and decided it would be better if we left the party and talked some more. So we found ourselves walking down Fifth Avenue to Alice’s apartment, talking all the way. When I found myself in Alice’s apartment we were still talking. And though we were destined to work for competing publishing houses, we decided to be friends, and remained so until Alice died. Alice was one of the greats of her generation. Her loss leaves a space that nothing will ever fill.

Frances FitzGerald

One just couldn't have done better than her. Alice edited every book of mine, except for my first. She became a friend as well—I would see her even though I had no business with her, just because she was full of stories and amusing things to say. As an editor, I appreciated her a lot because first, before anything else happened, she would talk about your ideas, what you were thinking about, and she would always have some advice—and she didn't always like your ideas! I respected her judgment. And she was really good about structure—that's often the hardest part of a book.

She was so many things. She was one of those charming people who makes you feel, when you're with them, as though there was no one else in the world but you.

I'm working on something now that was spurred on by her. When she said, "Yes, that sounds terrific," you know that it's a good idea, that she wasn't faking it.

I'm still in mourning.

Linda Bird Francke

Memories of Alice:

From the early pages of my photo albums, there has always been Alice. Forty-two years of Alice barking her signature laugh with her mouth wide open; Alice and her brother, Leonard, in their tennis whites (we had killer doubles matches); Alice with my young children, then older children, then grandchildren at Alvin Ailey for a Christmas treat and at the Riverhead Aquarium, where she got bitten by a penguin.

There has always been Alice. In my years as a writer, we worked together on the memoirs of Jehan Sadat, Benazir Bhutto, two by Diane von Furstenberg, and on my own book about women in the military. Though her editorial mantra was a “clear, unflinching point of view,” she resisted mine supporting women in combat roles. “If there’s a fire, I want a big, strong man to rescue me,” she said ad nauseam.

Visions persist of Alice quoting members of Abraham Lincoln’s cabinet at her dinner parties in Sag Harbor; Alice at her Christmas party, belting out carols; Alice presiding over her favorite table at the American Hotel. There has always been Alice. The joy remains.

Janice Fryer

Back in the late 1990s when I was selling the S&S imprint to B&N, Alice called me to let me know that she was very unhappy with my number on one of her books, and that surely both my buyer and I must not understand its importance. (I'm being nice here.) In my memory, after promising to do better, I hung up the phone and put my head down on my desk and cried. Shortly thereafter, we had a sales conference in NYC, and back in those days, we used to have a "dining around the city" dinner, where names were picked out of a hat (probably not, but you get the idea) to cross-pollinate the departments. We were dispatched to various restaurants in the city to get to know each other better. Yup, Alice was in my group, and she was the last to arrive. The only empty seat at the table was next to me. I was a little nervous about how the evening would go, knowing how she felt about my intelligence. When she arrived, she greeted the table warmly, sat down next to me, asked me how I was doing and ordered a drink. Needless to say, it was one of the best times I've ever had at an S&S dinner. Alice regaled the table with tales the likes of which only Alice could tell. She was quite the raconteur, and I hung on every word. Over the next twenty-plus years, we always greeted each other in the hallways and elevators with whatever small conversation we could squeeze into that time. I long ago realized that that phone call about the book wasn't personal. It was about her endless passion for her projects. I miss those elevator chats most of all.

Doris Kearns Goodwin

Alice was a giant! She will be remembered for decades to come. For me and for generations of writers and readers, she was our champion—indefatigable, brilliant, loyal, constantly curious about every chapter of every book. She loved what she did and we loved her as if she were a member of our families. She has been an integral part of my life for nearly four decades. I will miss her every day.

Sandy McCormick Hill

I was working at *Reader's Digest* magazine before coming to S&S. In 2003 the then editor-in-chief, Jackie Leo, invited Alice Mayhew to speak to our editorial group at a super-special Guest House lunch. Such lunches were often held for visiting dignitaries, celebrities, and famous writers. New York City publishing folk were rare at these lunches, so having the legendary S&S editor Alice Mayhew as our lunch speaker promised to be an exceptional event.

When Alice began to speak, the room fell silent. She dazzled the group with amazing stories about Bob Woodward and President Jimmy Carter and their important books, but she ended up speaking at length about Sylvia Nasar's first book, *A Beautiful Mind* (1998). I had just seen the movie, starring Russell Crowe and Jennifer Connelly, which won the Oscar for Best Picture in 2002. Hearing the background of how this story got produced was fascinating. This petite woman described the dedicated nurturing of Nasar's book and how it was eventually made into a juggernaut Hollywood picture, directed by Ron Howard. We were enthralled with Alice's telling of the background, and how it resulted in much fame for a great story.

When I later joined S&S and met Alice again, it was thrilling to see her continue to nurture writers.

Harold Holzer

I knew Alice socially before she became my editor: We had mutual friends, John O’Keefe and Tom Mulligan, and often got together for dinner or the opera. But John, a born match-maker, constantly lobbied me to take the relationship further and propose a book, and I suspect they both badgered Alice about me as well. I will forever be grateful they did so; all I needed was an idea.

One November, Alice and our friends all attended the Lincoln Forum in Gettysburg (yes, Alice went to Gettysburg)—a group I cofounded and help lead—to see two of her stars in action: David Donald (who won our achievement award), and Doris Kearns Goodwin, who lectured on *Team of Rivals*. We were all to be at the same table, but O’Keefe uninhibitedly switched place cards so I could sit right next to Alice. Over salad, she turned to me and suddenly declared: “You know, I have another book on Lincoln’s greatest speeches. Now I’ve got Garry Wills on the Gettysburg Address, Ron White on the Second Inaugural, and I just signed Allen Guelzo to do the Emancipation Proclamation.” Surprised, maybe a tad envious, I had to make a split-second decision on how to reply, knowing this was it. I could have pointed out: “The Emancipation Proclamation wasn’t a speech.” Fortunately, I instead shot back—and the idea came to me out of nowhere—“What about the Cooper Union address?” Alice let her jaw drop dramatically, as she was wont to do, and growled (I imag-

ine she was quickly making a choice on how to reply, too): “Send me a proposal!” I did so, and the rest is history: three books, three unforgettable professional experiences, many great lunches at Michael’s, and the privilege of dwelling for fourteen years in Alice’s exalted stable of writers. And when she eventually produced a beautiful boxed set of six of her Lincoln trade paperbacks, it was Wills, Donald, Goodwin, White, Guelzo, and Holzer. Thank you, Alice.

Walter Isaacson

With salty passion that could be abrupt but endearing (most of the time), book editor Alice Mayhew, who died on February 4 at eighty-seven, helped create the nonfiction genre of the blockbuster Washington insider tale. For almost fifty years, she shepherded waves of writers whom she prodded to combine journalistic reporting with literary storytelling.

She had a theological belief in chronological narrative, and would slash from a manuscript any self-indulgent diversions and scribble in the margins “all things in good time” when an author tried to flash forward or circle back when telling a tale. Her faith in narrative came partly from her religious training. She would always invoke the fact that most of the Bible is a narrative, starting with “In the beginning . . .”

When Evan Thomas and I were very young *Time* magazine pups thirty-five years ago, we pitched Binky Urban, who had just become an agent, about doing a group biography about six obscure statesmen of the Cold War era. She immediately called Alice and arranged for us to go visit her. Nobody else but Alice would have considered such a book. But she immediately said, “I get it. We will make it a prequel to Halberstam’s *The Best and the Brightest*, and we will call it *The Wise Men*.” So we did. She had a laserlike ability to find a theme. Throughout our first draft, she relentlessly disciplined us to stay with a chronological narrative.

Books were her life, and with her raspy laugh and in-

tense stare she helped her writers turn half-baked notions into sharply themed stories. Those who benefited from her skill were legion, beginning with Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, whose Watergate reporting saga she shaped into *All the President's Men*. But her greatest joy, I believe, came not from her famous writers but from the fledgling ones she helped launch, year after year, into her charmed realm of Alice Authors.

Jonathan Jao

Alice hired me in the fall of 2000 and I worked for her until the end of 2002. It was my first job out of college. I've had many wonderful mentors in this business, but I've always felt that almost everything I learned came from Alice—how to edit, how to talk to authors, how to assess projects, how and what to focus on in the publication process, and much more. She could be devilishly charming to writers and friends, but, as many can attest, she was not an easy person to work for. “Alice stories” are legion in this industry and for good reason. She had zero tolerance for incompetence, bullshit, pretension, or indecisiveness and she could be ruthless in her treatment of those who did not measure up to her exacting, and at times idiosyncratic, standards. But it was hard to argue with the results. She made the people around her better, and there is a staggering legacy of writers whose careers she nurtured and prize-winning and best-selling classics that she published. Several years ago, after a long period of infrequent contact, we began getting together more regularly, owing to our shared love of the opera. I got to spend many memorable evenings with her, relishing dinners that were full of her wisdom, gossip, husky cackle, and the inevitable full-volume denunciations

of assorted Republicans. I loved her and I will miss her terribly. As one agent wrote to me following her death: There was no one like her in publishing, and there will be no one like her ever again.

Fred Kaplan

I wrote my first book for Alice—which was my first book, period—in the early 1980s, when I was in my late twenties, and I especially remember one incident from that project. Alice was going over one of the final few chapters (these were the days of typewritten manuscripts and red-penciled edits), and, at one point, she feverishly scrawled a giant X over the entirety of a page.

“If this stays in,” she rasped (in those days, she smoked all the time), “everybody will stop reading.”

“But this is three-quarters of the way into the book,” I said with a puzzled innocence. “Won’t they have committed to finishing it by this point?”

She looked at me like I was an idiot. Of course she was right. The full lesson took a while for me to absorb, but it was instructive and clear: Everything in a book has to fit in the form of a narrative; every sentence has to flow into the next sentence; a single disruption in this flow can prompt a reader to set down the book, do something else, and never come back. It’s a lesson that I’ve tried to put in practice ever since, and when I forget or fail, I’m vividly reminded of Alice Mayhew’s harsh glare.

Jonathan Karp

When I joined Simon & Schuster in 2010, my first priority was to meet individually with each of my new colleagues. In the interest of projecting fairness, I decided to schedule meetings alphabetically by first name, which allowed me to begin where I wanted to—with Alice. So many of Alice’s authors were already on my personal bookshelves that coming to Simon & Schuster felt like a relatively easy decision. I knew I’d be working with editors who aspired to publish books that command serious attention and help to explain the world—and no one at S&S personified those ideals more than Alice Mayhew.

During one of our first conversations, Alice explained that she never wanted to be the publisher of Simon & Schuster. She said she could publish her own books quite happily and that she’d seen too many of my predecessors come and go to want the group publisher job herself. After that conversation, I began to see myself as an ephemeral elected official to Alice’s impregnable J. Edgar Hoover.

Although I was technically Alice’s supervisor, we both understood that great editors require little supervision, so most of our conversations concerned scheduling, what we’d read, and the events of the day. A few times, I did attempt to persuade Alice to shorten the length of her presentations to the sales force. Alice delivered these presentations extemporaneously, often interrupting her own points with digressive commentary about the historical context of the book at hand.

One sales executive believed that the longer Alice talked, the more likely it was that the manuscript hadn't been delivered and that Alice was merely describing the book she hoped to be publishing. Another colleague told me that the only way to shorten these presentations was for me to quickly interject when Alice paused to take a breath. I would listen closely for such a pause, but I could never find one.

I was required to submit an annual appraisal of Alice's performance. My only criticism of her was the same every year: She wouldn't complete her part of the self-appraisal form until I hounded her for it. When she finally turned it in, she dutifully answered questions that no editor of her stature or tenure should be bothered with answering. Here's what she wrote in 2018:

State the core responsibilities of your position.

“Edit with care and insight, bring experience with, especially American history, contemporary politics, biography and cooperate with the Publicity and Marketing efforts. I am very fortunate in that respect to have superb help. Be helpful to my editorial colleagues and especially those who are less experienced. Be open to new ideas.”

What elements of your job do you find most rewarding and most challenging and why?

“Working with authors. That's why I am in Publishing and I am fortunate to have a roster of really smart ones whose brains I regularly pick.”

My last conversation with Alice was on the phone, five days before she died. She'd been out of the office for about

four months after having fallen on the sidewalk one night while trying to hail a cab. She told me she was feeling better and then turned the conversation to two books she wanted to acquire (one on presidential power and the other on climate change). I don't know whether Alice was intending to edit those books herself or whether she just wanted to take care of her authors to the very end. On the day she died, she had scheduled a lunch date with another one of her authors, and she was also editing several manuscripts.

I had once asked Alice whether she had any plans for retirement and her response was a succinct and immediate "No." To the very end, Alice was enthusiastically engaged in her work. If it all had to end, that was the way she wanted to go.

Michael Korda

I don't think I've ever known an editor who bonded as tightly, protectively, and creatively with authors as Alice did, or had a clearer sense of how to fix what was wrong with a book, and just as important, when to leave it alone. I don't believe Alice ever published a book in which she didn't believe completely. She had all the qualities that an editor needs most: enthusiasm, curiosity, commitment to the book, and a deep respect for the craft of writing, coupled with a love of history and politics that made her, over the years, the foremost editor of nonfiction, and brought Simon & Schuster some of its biggest and most headline-making books, including *All the President's Men* and *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, books that not only changed the world we lived in, but even the way we saw ourselves. Alice was a deeply private person, but those of us who were privileged to know her well understood the intensity of her feelings, and her ability to keep going despite tragedies in her personal life like the death of her brother, Leonard, and to appreciate her quick wit, her impatience with anything second-rate, her ability to explain in just a few words why a book mattered to her, and just as important, why it would matter to readers. Her capacity for work was awesome, even by the standards of Simon & Schuster, but despite that she was the best of colleagues to her fellow editors, always helpful, always willing to listen, to take home in her bulging briefcase yet another manuscript or set of galleys and bring it back

the next morning with a suggestion for how to fix whatever the problem was, or with suggestions for a better title. Editors are supposed to be rivals, but with Alice we were always “a team of rivals,” to borrow the title from one of her most impressive best-sellers, among so many, and we worked together from time to time as we did on Ronald Reagan’s *An American Life*, on which her knowledge of American politics was invaluable. Alice’s advice was always as wise, calm, and clear as her enthusiasm was fiery and contagious—nobody was better at presenting a book at a sales conference than Alice, whose reputation for shyness vanished when she was telling the reps why a book she had edited was important, and would sell. Above all, she was more responsible than anyone for bringing book publishing into the mainstream “media world,” by publishing books that not only were about news, but *made* news, in many ways helping to change what had been a “cottage industry” into a major industry and a force for change, in which the book sometimes preceded or *caused* the headlines. I miss her very much.

Roz Lippel

I met Alice in 1979, when she was in her mid-forties. She wore suits from Burberry and Brooks Brothers with Ralph Lauren sweaters or button-down shirts—always the same style in a few different colors. Alice went out to lunch and dinner every day with famous authors and agents, budding journalists, and a select group of young people she cultivated.

I was a research assistant for Alice's author Jane Howard, who was writing a biography of Margaret Mead. The book took several years to write. What started as monthly meetings with a glass or two of wine in Alice's S&S office—the same office where she worked for the next forty years—became weekly dinners in restaurants on the Upper West Side, weekend editorial sessions at Jane's house in Sag Harbor, and memorable meals at Alice's home with her illustrious group of friends. Over time Alice welcomed me into her circle. She shared her opinions and advice, was sometimes dictatorial, but most often correct. Alice was a generous friend and wonderful teacher. I learned more from her about publishing, history, politics, opera, and France than I could learn from any class I took or book I read. I will miss her very much.

Ben Loehnen

I sat in the office next to Alice Mayhew for close to a decade, from my start at Simon & Schuster in July 2010. A wall—thin enough to hear her voice, but thick enough to muffle the actual content of her speech—separated us, and we became friends. Before I knew her, I had long admired Alice—not only for the books that came across her desk and the all-star roster of historians and journalists she published—but for the legend of her pride and modesty, the insistence on her part that her writers belonged on the stage and not her. I also marveled at her career-spanning allegiance to a single house. To and fro, to the editorial salt mines at Rockefeller Center each day.

When my husband died in 2017, Alice insisted on taking me out to dinner, seemingly every other week for several months. I had become an opera friend of hers, and shared meals at her table at the Grand Tier Restaurant, but we had never just gone to dinner. So I would meet her at her table in the corner of the backroom at Il Cantinori, and we would talk. She always insisted on paying. Alice would tell me that she knew my pain—that she knew grief and its mysteries and complications—but she would never give any details to the narrative around that grief. Publishing’s a gossip-driven trade, and I had a rough idea of the source of Alice’s broken heart. I remember saying to her, “At least I don’t have children. That would make Peter’s death so much harder.” And she turned on me, with that famous Mayhewian furor and barked, “No,

it wouldn't. It'd be easier. Children pull you through. You're figuring it all out on your own." That's how Alice showed love: with passion, with opinion, with conviction.

Like so many of us at Simon & Schuster, I miss Alice. I miss walking by her as she peers with consternation at her daily schedule, affixed outside her office; I miss the wicked and withering way she would read bad proposals and the worshipful way she would read tremendous ones; I miss her chaotic email style and her notorious habit of "replying all" to all manner of emails; I miss the way she rhapsodized about her beloved authors; I miss her pestering me for my opera schedule so we could line up our dates; but most of all, I miss yelling to her, as she walked by my office door at the end of every day, "Thanks for coming in today, Alice." Thanks, indeed.

David Maraniss

I had no idea how old Alice Mayhew was until the day she died. Most of her writers, if not all of them, were equally clueless about her age. It was something we'd often talk about when we were together. *She's got to be in her eighties by now, don't you think?* She even kept that secret from Bob Woodward, one of her most illustrious authors, which is not easy to do and serves as a testament to her privacy. She reveled in the details and nuances of history in everything but her own life.

The thing about Alice—and that first name was enough, what her authors called her, never Mayhew—was that her reputation gave her legendary status as one of the great book editors of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century America, yet she despised superficial legends and anything to do with celebrity. In an age of style, she was a spitfire of substance. Her life largely comprised reading and talking and reading some more. There was always ample room for debate with her, but no room for alternative facts. She devoted her career to a search for truth and nurtured writers who believed in that as much as she did.

Her personality was too blunt, raucous, and in some ways unrefined for one to think of her as any sort of grande dame, but even in her final days, up to her death at—as we now finally know—eighty-seven, she was a dominant force in the

world of nonfiction publishing. Day after day, year after year, she sat at her desk on the fourteenth floor of Simon & Schuster in midtown Manhattan, this little dynamo with her feet barely touching the ground, her desk a chaotic mess of books and papers, perhaps a food stain on her clothes, her glasses misplaced, often three conversations going at once—one with an assistant, one with an author on the other end of the phone, and a third with herself about God knows what. Sometimes the conversations would merge and blur in a Mayhewesque confluence where the person on the other end of the phone had no idea what she was saying, until—*click*—out would come a moment of clarity and brilliance.

Those few critics who asserted that she was consumed with acquiring too many books and spitting them out to the public were more wrong than right. She did lend her editing imprimatur to a mind-boggling number of books, as my wife can attest from the almost daily arrival of a new Alice-edited book at our front door with her business card tucked inside. But she was all about the work, from beginning to end, with a vast assortment of subjects in her repertoire. She became justifiably famous for having been the editor behind Woodward and Bernstein during Watergate, and she published many chroniclers of the Washington political scene, but that was just one part of her vast portfolio. She was obsessed with history and sociology. She nourished feminists and theologians and iconoclasts, scholars of Lincoln and FDR, of Martin Luther King Jr. and Jimmy Carter. A library stocked only with books edited by Alice Mayhew would go a long way toward explaining American history.

She also loved ballet and opera, played a cutthroat game

of bocce and croquet, was a baseball and tennis nut, and had no room for football, but took to my biography of Vince Lombardi with the eagerness of a cheesehead. One of Lombardi's players once complained that "he treats us all alike, like dogs." It wasn't true—he was a master psychologist and knew precisely who needed pushing and who needed stroking. That was Alice, too, and like Lombardi (they both graduated from Fordham, by the way) she was fiercely and unfailingly loyal to her team, her writers—all of them, not just the noted ones; she cared less about how the books sold than how they read.

In an early telephone conversation with Alice when she was editing my first book, a biography of President Bill Clinton, we got into a mild disagreement about something and she blurted out, "Don't yell at me, David!" This took me by surprise. I'm a mild-mannered guy. "I'm not yelling, you're yelling!" I responded. Maybe I was yelling by then, upset by her false accusation, but not before. But a few seconds later I realized what she was doing, how she was testing me, and we quickly reached an understanding and an equanimity that was sustained for more than a quarter-century.

A few weeks ago, upon learning that she had badly injured herself tripping over a low iron-grillwork fence between the sidewalk and a Manhattan street, I went to visit her at her cluttered apartment near Washington Square. She was a life force, but hers seemed to be draining. She was always short and stooped, but now even more so. She had a cough that she couldn't shake. A young woman made us lunch, and Alice had her usual glass of red wine. When I kissed her on the top of her head and then looked back from the door as I was leav-

ing, I could see her taking another sip and digging into the manuscript she had lifted from the pile on the table next to her chair—at work to the end. The world was a better place with Alice reading manuscripts.

Kati Marton

I hear that great roar of Alice's laugh—and always will. She had a young person's appetite for the new and the unexpected. When we walked the streets of my hometown, Budapest, she peppered me with more questions about the city's and my family's history than I could answer. Only later when I sat down to write *Enemies of the People* and heard her voice in my head did I realize that she had all along been focusing me on my narrative while pretending to be a curious tourist in a strange city.

I learned pretty much everything I know about American politics and history from Alice. We would begin our long lunches at Michael's discussing my current book. With dispatch, we moved on to Washington's current outrages and how they measure up against prior scandals in American history. Alice always connected the present to the past in a way that made history seem like the morning news.

Alice trusted her authors and always reminded us that the book was our book. This faith kept us on our toes more than any micromanaging, as God forbid we should betray that trust, and lose that most privileged place in publishing: My editor is Alice Mayhew.

You are not quite there, she would say to an early draft. Boy did I want to get there in time for our next lunch at Michael's, in time for my next American history lesson.

I still hear the great roar of her laugh, and I still don't want to disappoint her.

David Masello

In the early 1980s I worked for nearly four years as a junior editor at Simon & Schuster. During that time, Alice Mayhew was the company's executive editor.

She taught me to read the newspaper every day, particularly the editorials and obituaries. "Learn the layout of the paper so that you can always find what you need to know," she told me.

When I read that she died at her Manhattan home on Tuesday, I happened to be walking past her apartment building that very afternoon. I had felt the impulse to look through the door and into the lobby, hoping for a glimpse of her.

Whenever I ran into her, walking south along Fifth Avenue or on her way to the Lion's Head Bar on Christopher Street, she would ask what I was doing. She was doing serious work—editing books about presidents and world wars, covert spy operations and biographies of Nobel Peace Prize recipients.

My career took me to consumer magazines like *Travel + Leisure* and *Town & Country*, where I wrote about the best Caribbean beaches or luffa spa treatments. I have made my living as a writer and editor in New York since I arrived here in 1980, and yet the one decision I continue to regret is having left working for her.

On the day I was leaving, she hosted a bountiful, office-wide breakfast party for me. I was twenty-seven years old and

impatient; I wanted to be on the other side of my desk, the writer rather than the editor.

One habit she taught me was the art of the personal note. The bottom drawer of her desk at Simon & Schuster was filled with postcards that she acquired from art museums and from her annual summer trips to France.

The moment she needed to thank an author for a revision or encourage a first-time novelist to keep going, she opened the drawer, pulled out a card and wrote with a pen she'd sometimes have tucked behind an ear. She paid no attention to whether the postcard image had any relation to its recipient. She could write while talking to me or another staff member.

She trusted her young employees. When she was editing Jane Howard's biography of Margaret Mead, she handed me the keys to her weekend home in Sag Harbor, instructing me to go out there and spend a week helping Ms. Howard finish her research.

Every morning, I walked down the quiet Sag Harbor street to meet Ms. Howard in her office, a converted garage. I drove to the local library to confirm facts and collate the finished pages. I listened to Ms. Howard as she read completed passages to me in her yard. In the evening, she hosted cocktail gatherings where Wilfrid Sheed and Richard Reeves and James Salter gathered to clink and sip until dinner.

When Ms. Howard died, I sent Alice a condolence note, acknowledging the loss of a close friend. Alice thanked me with a postcard.

To my bewilderment, Alice also entrusted me at age twenty-four to work regularly with Cyrus Vance, the former secretary of state, on his memoirs. She knew the days I would go to his office to go over the manuscript.

“You’re wearing your Vance pants,” she would say to me with humor, referring to the one blue suit I owned at the time. When he neglected to include me in the printed acknowledgments, I heard her phone him to demand he send me a signed edition with a personal thank-you, which he did.

One afternoon in 1983, walking along Park Avenue after we met one of her writers at the Four Seasons, I asked Alice if she had ever considered writing an autobiography.

She grinned, looked at me in silence, then assumed a middle-distance gaze, assessing the idea. But she remained more interested in the work done by her writers than she was in any kind of self-adulation.

Her reticence in talking about her own life was indicative, in many ways, of her genius as an editor. She knew that her writers’ voices needed to prevail, not her own.

Alice Mayhew was a star—not only to her writers, but also to her employees. She was a teacher of editing and writing and publishing and decorum (in and out of the office). Like all great teachers, she offered lessons that continue to resonate.

Alice would often say to me and other staffers, chopping the air with emphasis, that “the purpose of an introduction to a book should be to tell the reader how to read the book.”

My introduction to New York began with her lessons on how to live a life here.

Diane McWhorter

I worried that when my young daughters finally met her they would say, “Oh, Alice Mayhew. You’re the only person in the world my mommy’s afraid of!” They had heard my cries of “Why me, Lord?” during the final stages of editing *Carry Me Home*, as Alice and I struggled to maneuver my battleship of a manuscript between hard covers. It was also about fifteen years behind schedule.

A bookshelf in the corridor along the exterior wall of Alice’s office held the manuscripts she had in play, and mine was by far the bulkiest—a writer friend (male) had asked me how tall it was when it was printed out, and at 3,400 pages, it was about the height of a toddler. (Frances FitzGerald’s manuscript on Star Wars—Reagan version—was a respectable second place, as I recall.) My initial orders had been to reduce the page count to 1,500 in order for Alice to start grappling with it. But because in my mind I had rounded the total pages down to 3,000, I still had 2,000 left after pretending I had whacked it by half. It’s understandable that Alice’s bedside manner had gotten a bit direct.

Editors have their individual styles, techniques, and specialties, but my consistent experience has been that they usually can’t tell you how to fix a problem in the manuscript. (Like, one suggestion Alice threw out was that I dispose of “the history”—by which I think she meant everything

before 1960, since the whole book was history—in a *New York Review of Books*-style introductory essay. “Alice,” I said, notwithstanding my admiration for that journal, “I’ve already fallen asleep by the time you got to the end of that sentence.”) The gift of good editors is that their intelligence will toss up something that enables the writer herself to see the fix. Alice’s offhanded comment during one of our page-purge sessions was that editorial coup de grâce for me, cutting straight to the dynamics of our relationship and by association my shaky place in the Big Book World she epitomized.

I had been cowering in her office when she got that sage, pleased-with-herself twinkle signaling that she could also be the sweetest person in the world. “You know,” she said, “it’s not necessary to show the reader how smart you are. You just have to tell enough for him to be able to understand the story.”

Probably my long-ago heritage as a blond debutante from the South explains why I am a writer who overthinks, over-researches, and over-nuances—and why I could feel like a ditzy ingenue around Alice while in full-blown middle age. Though no one will ever pick up *Carry Me Home* and say, “Here is a model of brevity and keep-it-simple,” Alice did give me permission—not direct orders, for once—to part with some of my sweat-stained learnedness and shrink the manuscript to a thousand pages (rounded down).

When I was at Simon & Schuster signing advance copies months later, Alice’s deputy Roger Labrie, who had been my exquisite handler, brought another of her authors by the conference room to say hello. It was David Gergen, the man

pictured in the dictionary next to “grown-up”—and tall to boot. Definitely not someone I expected to blurt to in the course of our shoptalk: “Oh, I deal with Roger whenever I need anything—I’m scared to death of Alice.”

Robert W. Merry

Back in 1980, when I was covering tax policy in Congress for a national newspaper, I hit upon the idea of writing a book about how the looming 1981 tax bill would come together, based on my forthcoming coverage of the congressional drama. I knew nothing about putting together a proposal, and my agent didn't provide much guidance. The result was a subpar document, and I was turned down by house after house. Then I was told that Alice Mayhew of S&S wished to talk with me by phone. She manifested a genuine interest in what I wished to accomplish, but then brought down the hammer. "I must tell you," she said, "that your proposal lacks rigor."

Fast-forward twenty-four years, when I decided to write a book about the underlying contradictions in America's post-Cold War foreign policy thinking. Though a published author by this time, I encountered skepticism from numerous editors based on my lack of a strong foreign policy background. Then Alice invited me to New York for a chat about my concept. I fervently hoped my five manuscript chapters would demonstrate sufficient rigor to impress her. Apparently they did; she pronounced my analytical framework "smart" and promptly bought the project. We went on to collaborate on four books.

With Alice it was all about rigor and discipline and keeping the reader foremost in mind. I never knew why she wished to talk with me in 1980, merely to chastise me for my lack of

rigor. But she did me a great favor that day in setting me upon a better course of literary effort, and for that I have cherished all the more the memories of my later wonderful experiences with her.

David Michaelis

For years, when my untitled biography of Eleanor Roosevelt was overdue, my first thought at dawn was not Eleanor but *Alice!*

She herself had promised at the start, “I’m going to drive you crazy.”

I had long since been forewarned. Eighteen years earlier, as a newcomer to the year-round community of Sag Harbor, New York, and an early riser, I began to notice that a few of my neighbors—writers older than I—were burning midnight oil. Every morning that winter, the desk lamp in Richard Reeves’s study window was already gleaming yellow when I awakened, and if I happened to cross paths with Dick in the village later that day, he never failed to boast that he had been up since four-thirty, working flat out to turn in his new book. But it wasn’t President Kennedy, or even Catherine O’Neill, Dick’s yet more tireless spouse, who was putting the jump in his pulse. “You don’t sleep,” crowed Dick, “when Alice is waiting for your manuscript.”

Soon after moving into my John Street rental, I met the legendary editor at one of the regular dinners at which Dick and Catherine would gather the community of magazine and book writers expatriated from the city. Alice came accompanied by her older brother, Leonard—they were such a matched pair, I took them for a married couple—but she was clearly the adult in the room, and not just because she had

edited the work of more than half the adults in the room. The United States had just gone to war in the Persian Gulf.

This was mid-January 1991. Laser-guided smart bombs and Nighthawk sorties were all the rage on CNN. Wolf Blitzer was overnight a household name. Kids on Further Lane were having Scud parties to watch Iraqi missile launches, and every media masher in the Hamptons claimed to have the inside track to General Schwarzkopf or Joint Chiefs chairman Colin Powell.

Alice was having none of it. Tough and confrontational with a certain kind of beta-male pretender, she was merciless with Desert Storm joyriders and jock-sniffers. The looser the war talk, the harder the steel in Alice's precise, fact-based contributions to a gassy panel discussion about the Gulf War at a Hampton Day School fundraiser. President George H. W. Bush's leadership was wrong, she argued, because the president and the rest of official Washington opened democratic debate on the war only after it began rather than before. After she'd demolished *U.S. News* columnist John Leo's "my country right or wrong" polemic, and real estate developer Mort Zuckerman's assessment (brilliant) of Bush's handling of what would be a forty-two-day war, I went home and scribbled my boyishly alliterative admiration in a journal: "Gutsy, gruff Alice Mayhew showed great courage and a good mind—fiercely alive to history and social structure and meaning."

Twenty-eight years later, waking up with a little touch of Alice in the night, I was now adult enough to be overdue with a book myself. At every step of our work together, Alice had been tenacious, skeptical, prodding—true to her word. Of course, it wasn't Alice driving me crazy; it was Eleanor: A single Eleanor Roosevelt file at the State Department comprises

198 archival cartons. Her papers in Hyde Park number more than a million documents. Even Alice's well-known loyalty was sorely tested by my tendency to overcomplicate and Eleanor's to leave things unresolved.

But Alice understood writers all too well and managed delays by being fiercely realistic. Nothing was more intolerable than a false promise or smooth talk. Once the deadline was set again on both our calendars and the contract, too, Alice's faithfulness kicked in—instantive, almost canine, a force like the energy in her blood. Again and again, she stuck by the book, chapter by chapter, year upon year; too many in the end.

Last October, I knew something was up when Alice arrived for lunch bent at the waist from a recent injury. Michael's, the book-biz hangout of choice in the 1980s and 1990s, had maintained an authentic sincerity by guaranteeing midtown media and publishing legends hyper-seasonal cuisine and the kind of small-town worldliness that in the 1970s had reached apotheosis with William Shawn's bowls of cornflakes at the Algonquin. For Alice, being a regular at Michael's implied a certain freedom of thought and movement among friends and colleagues; she was also one of its winning women, receiving bicoastal homage from owner Michael McCarty, fond deference from staff and waiters, and camaraderie from friends across the restaurant's bright, airy field of play.

Bravely, she crossed to her table, paying no attention whatsoever to being forced to hold herself as rigid as a carpenter's square. Taking her accustomed place along the wall, she gamely lifted her head to the menu. Her hair, uncut, flopped forward. When she spoke, the fine and cool intricacies of mind that Alice had always brought to the game—ultimately

bringing down a crooked president—now made her sound like a vanishing species, the more so because she never spoke about herself, nor cooperated in the slightest with the fraud of a “Twitter presidency.”

The most I ever heard Alice say about her civilian life emerged at that lunch, and only because Melanie Jackson, my literary agent—a kind of publishing Sonia Sotomayor to Alice’s Notorious RBG—was part of our October fest. By the time the salads arrived, Alice and Melanie, both subscribers to Met Opera, were off to the races on tenors and *Turandot*. Then, after we’d covered questions about the manuscript and preliminary details of publication, and had ordered coffee, Alice said something about a childhood dog, a German Shepherd named Beauty.

The remark slid quickly past. Neither Melanie nor I could later recall how it had come up, and Alice let it go so matter-of-factly, signaling for the check and returning to questions about the production schedule for fall 2020, that I wasn’t at all sure that she had summoned up the beloved dog of her early days, as my New England grandmother had once done during her final illness, dreamily evoking a mutt named Prince.

Alice’s German Shepherd had to have been smart, strong, loyal, and brave—a working dog with an undoubtedly powerful bite. But I didn’t give it another thought until Christmas Eve, when Alice—laid up in bed for most of the previous month and now seriously frail—was nonetheless still at it: intensely prodding, correcting, exchanging drafts of catalogue copy, marshaling selling points for the marketing team, impatiently texting and emailing until finally I had to go to my family. When I returned, there was a final message in our thread, one of the last I had from Alice: “This is an import-

ant book,” she had written after midnight. “I love this book. Cheers.”

I closed my laptop. I went to sleep. The next morning, in the dark of Christmas dawn, for the first time in a long time, my first thought was not Alice, but *Beauty!*

Judith Miller

Her small fist would descend firmly on her table at Il Cantinori's. How could any historian lionize Woodrow Wilson—that “arrogant, delusional fool.” Thomas Jefferson? A self-absorbed “hypocrite—hugely overrated.”

Alice wore her passions on her sleeve—a cliché she instantly would have stricken from my tribute. Her hatreds were few but unyielding: Wilson, the war in Iraq, Donald Trump, “amuse-bouches.” “They kill your appetite,” she would complain, dismissing the crestfallen waiter. What she loathed was far outnumbered by what she loved—Franklin Roosevelt, Jimmy Carter, Joan Southerland, Renée Fleming, and other talented women, the Met, New York City Ballet and its artistic soul, George Balanchine, and principal dancer Damian Woetzel—“my Damian,” she would sigh. Above all, she loved her writers, whose flaws she overlooked and unconscious biases her ruthless pen remedied. She loved spring flowers in Sag Harbor; she avoided the beach. Each “season” began with a dinner for her authors and other friends and ended with off-key caroling at her Christmas parties. She loved red wine.

What do I miss most? Coffee on her porch, manuscripts piled high on the table, concerts together, our dinners at Cantinori. She preferred the back room, neither needing nor wanting to be noticed. It was quieter, she would say. We could gossip undisturbed, plot cultural outings, and review gaps in

my overdue chapters. I would always finish her entrée. I miss her tirades and her laughter. She knew everything that mattered. My friend and lifelong editor is buried in Sag Harbor's Oakland Cemetery, next to Leonard, the brother she so loved, and near one of her heroes, Balanchine.

John Muse

When we first instituted the practice of having editorial presentations for sales conferences available on CD, as a field account rep I knew it would be a fantastic way to prepare for an exciting new list of titles. The ones that were done by Alice were absolute classics, since her discussion—and it was often a discussion and not directly a pitch for the book—would often go onto tangents that were endlessly fascinating, and would often lay bare to all listeners the breadth of her knowledge. I'd only had a chance to meet Alice in person a handful of times over the years, but I think I came to know her just a little bit better from these thoughtful ruminations on history, politics—and life.

Andrew Nagorski

My first real talk with Alice took place at a crowded reception in late 2001. I had written a couple of nonfiction books based on my experiences as a foreign correspondent, and then decided to write a part–historical novel, part–what-if fantasy about the early days of Hitler. It wasn't an easy sell and several publishers had already passed on it. When I told Alice about it, she said she'd like to take a look—and that she'd be in touch with my agent to get a copy. I left the reception thinking there was at most a five percent chance she'd remember to do so. I was wrong: She called my agent the next day, and in about a week called me to say she was about to make an offer on the book.

That was pure Alice, someone who always meant what she said and was willing to take a risk based on her instincts. My novel about Hitler's early days, *Last Stop Vienna*, not only brought us together, it also triggered our discussions about Hitler's rise to power, the war, and the Holocaust—the subjects that I further explored in my subsequent nonfiction books, all edited by Alice. Our most intense conversations, usually over the legendary lunches at Michael's, were the ones about what the next project should be. Right up until our final meeting at her apartment four days before she died, Alice left no doubt whether she felt the ideas I floated were worth pursuing. We disagreed at times, but I always valued her judgment and, above all, her honesty. No writer could ask for more.

Lynn Nesbit

Alice, a nonfiction editor par excellence, whose commitment and passion for her writers was unflagging. Her laser beam could spot the weaknesses of structure and home in on the problems in a manuscript in a way that the writer could welcome and understand.

But I will also remember Alice as a warm and cozy friend. She was often intense, but that intensity was coupled with unfaltering generosity. She deeply cared about her friends and was always available for those who were having challenges in their lives. When her brother, Leonard, was alive, they would often drop in on the Christmas afternoons when my daughters were small and my sister and parents would be in town. In those days, they were part of our extended family. That is, before Sag Harbor became such an important part of their lives and before we spent Christmas in Connecticut. She never over the years failed to check in to inquire how my daughters were doing as they grew into young women and had families of their own. When my sister visited, we continued to have dinners with Alice.

I will miss Alice's hearty laugh! It is not that I didn't also experience her famous bark when in the midst of some negotiation she would start yelling at me and I would have to hold the phone away from my ear. I would suggest that it might be easier if she stopped yelling, which would give her pause. Her response would be "I am not yelling" as her voice still

was in the higher decibels. Nevertheless, we would complete a negotiation on a friendly note with each of us satisfied that we had struck a good deal. I always enjoyed her small happy chuckle when a book had sold well or one of her writers had received a good review.

I certainly will miss Alice's trenchant observations in this election year. Like the rest of us I think she would have been gob-smacked by this pandemic but I don't think it would have deterred her from keeping her pulse on every bit of news concerning the political ramifications involving the presidential race.

Alice was an original, an original who lent her skills and her friendship to so many of us. Thank you, dear Alice!

Esther Newberg

Alice was the second editor I met when I became an ICM agent forty-three years ago. She was way too important to accept submissions from a novice agent, but Lynn Nesbit, who ran ICM at the time, felt I should meet Alice because I had come from politics to agenting. She was responsive, decisive, political, opinionated, and a force of nature. We did business right away and our last book was by Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The word *legend* is bandied about but we are talking about a legend here.

Patricia O'Toole

Mutual friends introduced me to Alice in 1985. She expressed an interest in what I said about my work, but she wasn't taken with my subject matter until I wrote a biography. In 1998 I hit on an idea she liked, and we collaborated on a book about Theodore Roosevelt's years after the White House (*When Trumpets Call*) and a life of Woodrow Wilson (*The Moralist*).

Alice's reactions to early drafts of chapters were unnervingly incisive: "Roosevelt made a huge mistake in anointing Taft to succeed him," she told me. "How did he screw up?" I knew the answer, but I hadn't planned to dwell on it. Alice's question made me appreciate the richness of the drama inside TR's bad decision, and her insight gave the book a dimension that proved critical to the narrative.

I also benefited from Alice's uncanny sense of pacing. After reading a few chapters of the Wilson book, she advised cutting one of them by about ten percent. Two years later, when I got around to pruning, I ran a test: I cut all the excess I could see and then checked my result against Alice's recommendation. Eleven percent. Wow. There were more tests, and she was always right.

Alice was a gifted publisher as well as a preternaturally good editor. When one of my books was moving through production, we often discussed design, but I had no idea how much more she was doing until the day I emailed the cartographer about a detail on one of the maps. The phone rang

about thirty seconds after I hit “send.” It was Alice, who reminded me that the buck should always stop at her desk first. I noted that I had cc’d her on the email. Not enough, she said.

That was Alice. Whatever you were doing, and however complimentary she was, she was out in front of you, thinking about how it could be done better. It was humbling. And invaluable.

Peter Pringle and Eleanor Randolph

Often, when we think about Alice, she is sitting at a corner table at Il Cantinori, an Italian restaurant near her apartment in Manhattan. The staff knew to add an extra cushion so that their tiny customer could take command of the table, and, of course, her guests. Soon, in that voice that any drill sergeant could envy, she was off, talking about the characters in her histories as if she had just left them still reeling from her praise or advice or scorching criticism. Franklin Roosevelt could do so little wrong that she often called him by his first name. Thomas Jefferson—she would seethe about the founding father who sired the political divisions we see today. And when asked about a favorite, she would say that her heart belonged to Aristotle.

Alice was a great editor and a great friend. We count ourselves fortunate to have known her so well.

Julia Prosser

I think I won Alice over about seventeen years ago after doing door duty, ticking off names at a book party in a building where there was already a doorman. After standing in the lobby for what felt like hours, I was eager to join the party and catch a moment with the legendary editor with whom I hoped to work more closely. The host offered to have her chef whip me up a late dinner, and I politely declined, saying something to the effect of, “No thanks, I’m self-sufficient.” Alice gave a hearty laugh at my brush-off and repeated to several people, “Oh, don’t worry about Julia, *she’s* self-sufficient.” Though a bit embarrassed, I like to think I gained her trust as someone who wouldn’t take flattery—or a free meal—to be easily swayed from my convictions, and so I mark this as the start of a work relationship that I cherished the last two decades. To the end, Alice was the best date to accompany to a book party—she introduced us PR reps to the VIPs who stopped to pay homage, shared great gossip, and after the toast, would loud-whisper, “Let’s go!” as if we were part of her secret club and had somewhere else more important to be.

Alice had a reputation for being tough, but she was also a fiercely supportive colleague. She allowed us—the lucky publicists and marketers who had the privilege to work with her—to chart the plans for many of her most illustrious writers without meddling. And the work was exciting and news-making. Her support extended beyond the office, too.

When I was sick with cancer, I found out how generous she was, paying for housekeepers and checking on me through colleagues, while letting me work through illness in my independent way. I started grieving my loss of Alice after she had been out of the office for a few weeks but not yet gone. Anyone who understood her combination of pride and privacy would know she would have hated having the burden of her colleagues' concern, as she, too, was quite self-sufficient. She loathed sentimentality, but I can't write something about Alice without saying that the job hasn't felt the same without her.

Jane Bryant Quinn

Alice's table at Michael's should have been draped in black for a designated period of mourning. "Lunch at 12.30?" was her last email to me. There was never a question of where. She was usually late—not by much, but even knowing her lateness I was always there, so glad to see her coming in the door. We talked about opera, politics, the economy, other books she was working on, plus a bit of gossip (she was terrific on gossip) until lunch was almost over. Only when we ordered coffee did she want to talk business. For my last book, the question was how to handle the political aspects of the changes to health insurance. As usual, she was positive, concise, and wise. And as usual, I took her advice. I will probably never eat at Michael's again. It would be too sad. Thank you, Alice, for everything.

Sally Quinn

When Alice agreed to publish my first book, *We're Going to Make You a Star*, about my disastrous experience at CBS as the first network anchorwoman in America, it was a departure. Alice was known as an intellectual who only edited the most serious writers, journalists, and scholars. I was thrilled and she and I immediately bonded. She loved working on the book, which did in fact involve the story of a major screwup on every level by a major network. The book did well. But when Alice suggested I write a Washington novel next I was stunned. Alice didn't edit novels. However, she threw herself into it with the same gusto as she did with Woodward and Bernstein, who were good friends of mine, so I knew. This was not *War and Peace* but she read and reread every page, which she covered with notes on the most minute details. I did two novels, *Regrets Only* and the sequel, *Happy Endings*. During this time Alice and I became the closest of friends. I adored her. Though baffled at why she wanted to edit my novels while at the same time working on books about terrorism, nuclear weapons, racism, and presidential politics, I began to realize something. For Alice my books were an escape. Though she loved what she did, my books were a bit like a palate cleanser between multiple courses of a heavy meal. They were fun for her to work on. If you have any doubt about how closely she was editing me you should know this. I'm a comfort freak and both of my female char-

acters were too. In my books everything was cozy and all pillows and cushions were filled with down. At one point, when she returned her edited pages, in bright red pencil (which she didn't often use) scrawled in large letters underlined and with many exclamation points was this: "If I hear the word *cozy* or read about one more down-filled pillow I'm going to scream!!!!!!!!!" My fourth book for Alice started out being a book about my take on feminism, which was that some of the feminists (Alice and I and my female agent were, of course, feminists) had gone too far. Though I was reluctant, Alice and my agent talked me into it over a long lunch. I knew I was setting myself up to take endless grief. I worked on it halfheartedly for almost three years and finally gave up. She was clearly not excited about it either. So one day, without saying anything to her, I sat down and wrote another book in six weeks about entertaining called *The Party*. I asked if she would accept this instead of the horrible feminism book. She loved it and immediately agreed to publish it. Another Alice first. She was thrilled when the *New York Times* review compared it to Edith Wharton. I'm sure some of Alice's more erudite authors had questioned her about editing my books. But now, with this *New York Times* review she was vindicated. Alice believed in me as a writer, and I will be forever grateful. She was without equal, and I will miss her terribly.

Carolyn Reidy

In her nearly fifty years at Simon & Schuster, Alice established herself as a true mainstay of our publishing, editing a distinguished list of writers in history, biography, journalism, politics, contemporary affairs, and popular culture. Of course she will always be remembered as the editor of *All the President's Men* (and as the editor of every one of Bob Woodward's works since), but her long and illustrious list of authors reads like a who's who of the best and the best-selling in nonfiction over the past five decades. The vast range of authors whose works she shepherded to publication is simply breathtaking, a testament to her skill and versatility.

Alice always believed that the editor should be the invisible partner of the author. She would refuse any interview request, insisting the attention belonged to the author and his/her book. At every significant anniversary of her career at Simon & Schuster I would beg her to let me create an event to commemorate her contribution, promising her it would be a discreet celebration. Despite every attempt over the years, I could never persuade her to accept public recognition. I'm sure even now she's appreciative that the coronavirus crisis has kept us from having a public memorial to honor her.

Alice might have demurred in public, but she was anything but reserved when behind the scenes. When I came to Simon & Schuster Alice was already a legend, which made it rather frightening to arrive as her new boss. But she was sup-

portive from the first day and quickly became a colleague. I had the pleasure of working with Alice for nearly thirty years, and like so many others knew her to be sharp, direct, and astute; she could be tough, but her passion, enthusiasm, and wisdom were usually expressed in the service of her authors' works and their ideas, which she collected like valuable assets. I knew if I wanted to find the best book to read on, say, World War I or any other event of history, Alice would give me a recommendation that would be ideal. Name a topic and Alice would know the latest thinking on it. Needless to say she was highly opinionated, and we were the beneficiaries of her pointed and unique insights, which served to make all of us better at what we do. Not least, her office was also a training ground for innumerable assistants who went on to great accomplishments and careers in book publishing and related fields.

Whether she was sharing some good news about one of her books, or her always fascinating observations about the political events of the day—and there was nobody with whom it was more fun to talk politics than Alice—she remained until the very end an exemplar of what an editor could and should be. It is difficult to imagine life at Simon & Schuster without Alice and her unrelenting energy: Her contribution to our company has been immense, but her contribution to the world of letters, our culture at large, and to our understanding of the world past and present will be lasting and immeasurable.

Stuart Roberts, with remarks from
David Shipley, Ann Godoff,
Jonathan Jao, Henry Ferris, Serena Jones

Alice offered me the job in 2014: “I’d like you to come work with me, be my partner.” For the next four years, I was her partner. Morning, afternoon, evening, night. Every call. Every meeting. Every email. Every draft of every manuscript. Her third arm. Part of the job is anticipation—think like your boss. I will forever be the beneficiary of that requirement.

But there were legions of assistants before me. Her desk was a training ground—one that launched careers. Former assistants became chief players in publishing and media. Once you pass the Alice test, you acquire a certain confidence. If you’re lucky, you absorb 25 percent of what made her great—that’s enough to take you pretty far.

“I owe everything to her,” says David Shipley, senior executive editor of Bloomberg Opinion, who is now on leave to the Bloomberg presidential campaign. “If you were as interested as she was, then you had a master class in how to be an editor.”

Alice would hate this piece. I’m sorry, Alice. But part of her lives on through the assistants she cultivated. Ann Godoff, president and editor-in-chief of Penguin Press, worked with Alice for seven years. “There are things I do every day that I

learned from her,” Godoff says. “The kind of publishing I do today was invented by Alice.”

“Almost everything I learned came from Alice,” says Jonathan Jao, executive editor at Harper. Her mentorship wasn’t overt. It was about witness and participation.

“You saw the manuscripts when they went into her office and you saw them when they came out, transformed,” Shipley says.

“She put you in this pool and said, ‘Go swimming,’” Godoff says.

Henry Ferris, an editor who has held roles at Houghton Mifflin, Times Books, and William Morrow, remembers, “Each morning my job for Alice was to copy her pages of editing and send them to the authors. I secretly started making an extra copy so I could take it home and study her work. People have asked if Alice taught me. Maybe not, but she let me learn.”

It was clear that being Alice’s assistant was an opportunity. “You know, he used to have your job,” Alice would remind me about this or that influential journalist or editor. It was a privileged perch, and I was along for the ride. Lunch at the Peninsula with President Carter, parties on Central Park West, wide-ranging conversations with Walter, Woodward, and Doris. It was rarefied air.

As Alice’s assistant, I represented her. That’s a big responsibility. Every day was an adventure. She brought me into the fold, into her universe, gave me a voice. Alice never once introduced me as her assistant, always colleague. Life was exhilarating with Alice.

But Alice could be tough. “She had zero tolerance for incompetence, bullshit, pretension, or indecisiveness,” Jao says.

“And she could be ruthless in her treatment of those who did not measure up to her exacting standards. But it was hard to argue with the results.”

Alice was unable to not speak truth—the kind of abrasive truth that disrupts professional niceties to reveal the center of an idea, a book, an author’s mission. “She was cut to the chase,” Godoff says, “on the page and in life.”

I learned to be an Alice whisperer, translating her more explosive reactions into results. She did not suffer fools gladly. Her petite frame was misleading. She could yell. I miss her yelling.

Alice’s relentless enthusiasm never really stopped. “She was doing exactly what she was meant to do on this earth,” Shipley says. She was acquiring books until her last week.

“The love of the work is what she transmitted,” Godoff says. “She gave me that forever.”

The best bosses become models; their example constructs your reality of how the job is done. The most rewarding assistant jobs are profoundly formative. “There’s no one I’ve worked with before or since who has as much to do with the person I am today,” says Serena Jones, executive editor at Henry Holt. “I proved myself to her; I also proved myself to me.”

As the months pile up, after observing and taking notes, one starts to mimic, to emulate, to try on for size the best parts of a boss’s mastery. Without really trying, they raise you.

Eventually, you outgrow the job. You’re never really ready to leave the nest, you just kind of jump. We joked that being promoted off of Alice’s desk was more of a demotion. Out in the wilderness, no longer under her aegis, you figure out who you are as an editor. You quickly realize it’s a fool’s errand to

compare yourself. She's incomparable. But some of the muscle memory is in place. You've seen her do it a thousand times.

I frequently ask myself, "What would Alice do?" I expect the refrain to stay with me the rest of my life.

William Shawcross

I met Alice at a friend's house in L.A. in the mid-1970s. That was one of the luckiest days of my life. She became not just my wonderful editor but one of my greatest friends ever after—as well as godmother to my daughter, Eleanor. (Of course, being Alice, she flew to England just for the christening.)

It is impossible to exaggerate the love she gave and the love she inspired. Her total commitment, her loyalty, and her everlasting kindness to her friends were astonishing. She loved being with people and she had the biggest heart in the smallest frame that I have ever known. Nothing was too much for her.

Decade after decade, she conceived, encouraged, and published books for her beloved authors. She gave us all so much attention and care—I remember the hours and hours—days, probably—she devoted to searching for the perfect title or re-writing particularly difficult paragraphs.

She was a wonderful and unpredictable mix—she loved fiercely debating politics on a deep level. I think a sense of the divine rooted in an abiding religious faith was always with her—it showed in conversations about humanity, visiting great medieval cathedrals in Europe, and in her love for the two churches opposite her New York apartment.

Weekends with her and Leonard in Sag Harbor were always a joy—from the moment she met you off the jitney. Breakfast to dinner were filled with high-spirited discussions,

unexpected encounters, walks, jokes, and friendship, and glasses of wine.

We are all blessed to have had the joy of her enthusiasms, her laughter, her often unpredictable but always strong views, and her love expressed in her generosity at every level—such generosity, generosity, generosity. She transformed my life and many others.

David Shipley

There are lots of momentous things about Alice that will be inscribed in memory. I want to mention one that runs the risk of being lost but shouldn't be: The meal. This is a bit of a paradox because I'm not sure she liked to eat all that much. The meal aside from the food, though—that was something she loved. Conversation over the clatter of silverware. Ideas. Gossip. Pronouncements. Lincoln. FDR. Nixon. Wine and sometimes too much of it. The human connection we miss so much in the Age of COVID. I'll remember the meals for those reasons. Also because for a couple of years I made all her reservations.

Three observations.

First: The restaurants. From my era, there was Palio (murals), the China Grill (crispy spinach), the American Festival Café (breakfast), and the Sea Grill, but only in an emergency.

The one I remember best is the Chalet Suisse, in the shadow of Saks, where Alice was known to do a little clandestine shopping afterward. The restaurant looked exactly as it sounded, all alpine and knotty pine with giant waitresses in dirndls who would heap creamed spinach and rosti on her plate and gently tease her when the food went largely untouched. Alice and they had a routine. We had our holiday lunches there.

People reading this will know that it was hard to get Alice to do something she didn't want to do. This included lunch at

the Four Seasons, which she visited only under duress. Dick Snyder once insisted they go to Isle of Capri, and she didn't like that, either. (I went years later and learned she was right to complain.)

Second: The entrance. Whether she was coming down those Art Deco front steps at Michael's or appearing from behind the big floral arrangement at Il Cantinori, Alice made an entrance, as emphatic as it was authentic. Head forward, as if fighting the wind. A flash of tweed. A swing of the handbag. A smile and a gravelly hello. And then she was seated, and it was game on.

Third: The exit. Dessert was always ordered, but she'd only have a cookie. She'd always grab the check and then sign it in her loopy way with pen between the middle and index fingers and not the customary thumb and forefinger. When it was over, and you were outside the restaurant, she'd make you promise to schedule another meal and then refuse to let you walk her home or back to the office. She'd just turn, shoulders hunched, and head into the wind.

Elizabeth Stein

I am one of the “minions” who worked for Alice, as some scribe derisively put it, and proud of it. I’m in extraordinary company—Ann Godoff, the late great George Hodgman (whom I replaced in 1993 when he went off to *Vanity Fair*), David Shipley, Tina Jordan, Eric Steel, Vanessa Mobley, Jonathan Jao, Sarah Baker, Lisa Weisman Cope, Serena Jones, Brenda Copeland, to name just a handful.

Alice wasn’t the kind of mentor who sat you down to gently explain how publishing worked. From the first day, it was like being thrown into the deep end of a wave pool with no water wings—it was exhilarating and terrifying all at once. She brooked no fools—and we were all fools at one time or another. Woe unto the person she deemed a mere “clerk.” She had no problem pulling a phone out of your hand and hanging up on your call if she needed you, no matter if the caller was a former president, Tom Brokaw, the Israeli foreign minister, or your mom. She once ripped a manuscript out of my hand with such force I had paper cuts across my palm. And yet, she would also invite you to her house in Sag Harbor for the weekend, and she kept up with many of us after we left, extending generous invitations to dinners or the ballet or the opera, for which she always paid.

Thanks to Alice, I got to work with Stephen Ambrose, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Ben Bradlee, Lesley Stahl, J. Anthony Lukas, Richard Reeves, Samuel G. Freedman, John

Barry, and on and on and on. There was such a cavalcade of luminaries of journalism and history coming through her office every week, it could make your head spin, but to Alice each one was simply an author with a book that needed tending to. That said, even she was tickled when Sam Donaldson dropped by one day because he wanted to meet the woman who was putting all his friends on the best-seller list.

No editor has ever treated authors with more respect for their work. She refused voicemail in the 1990s because she wanted her authors' calls answered by a person. As soon as a manuscript came in, one of her team was assigned to be its shepherd. Production schedules, marketing plans, publicity updates were delivered to authors and agents promptly and without fail. No author had to wonder what came next, or if the publisher cared. It was not at all surprising to learn that she was still delivering incisive editorial notes to her authors in her final weeks.

She frequently scared the shit out of me, but I still use the skills I learned from her in my work, and I'll be forever grateful and honored to have known her.

James B. Stewart

Alice was a friend, mentor, and editor from the day I met her in 1981, now nearly forty years ago. Fresh from the astonishing success of *All the President's Men* and *The Final Days*, she was the biggest name in publishing, so far as I was concerned. I was a fledgling journalist from the small-town Midwest. It seemed a miracle that I'd been ushered into the inner sanctum of Simon & Schuster.

There have only been a handful of meetings like this one during my life, in which we bonded almost immediately and conversation soared. An hour later, she told me I needed to get an agent so we could negotiate for the book by me she wanted to publish! This was beyond anything I had hoped for.

That book was *The Partners*, which, in another seeming miracle, crept onto the lower rungs of the *New York Times* best-seller list. But our real breakthrough came eight years later, with the publication of *Den of Thieves*, which bore all the classic Mayhew elements: a strong, character-driven chronological narrative informed by deep reporting.

Not to mention ruthless editing: Alice summarily cut a hundred pages from the last section of my manuscript, rightly pointing out that there was no place for bloat once the reader could see the outcome and the suspense was gone.

I never heard Alice's oft-quoted "chronology is my religion," but I might as well have. Alice believed that nonfiction

could be every bit as ambitious and literary as fiction, and I wholeheartedly agreed. I've made it one of my life's missions to prove her point. And every step of the way Alice confirmed by word and deed that she believed I would.

That's not to say Alice wasn't tough. She insisted I keep rewriting the opening chapter of *DisneyWar* until it met her standards. She didn't suffer fools. But I always knew she had my best interests at heart.

Much of our work took place over food and drink. Over the years we had countless lunches at Michael's, seated at Alice's usual table along the wall. Sometimes we had dinner at Il Cantinori, near her apartment in her beloved Greenwich Village. We discussed my work in progress, of course, but also other books, movies, opera, music, and politics—and then more politics!

I heard Alice was on the phone doing a book deal the week she died. I hope so. She loved her work and the word “retirement” was never uttered in my presence. She was passionate about many things, but nothing more than books and her authors. I was so lucky to have been one of them.

Trish Todd

When I started at S&S in 1995, I was the editor-in-chief of the Trade Paperback Group. We published the conversions of all the hardcovers in the building. We also participated in all the acquisition decisions, with the ability to say no to a project if we didn't think there would be a paperback market. As you can imagine, I interacted with Alice a lot in this role, and I was terrified of her.

Many a morning, I would be taking my coat off, groggily transitioning to work when Alice would appear in my door in a swivet about something we'd done wrong—catalog copy she hadn't seen, back cover copy she hadn't approved. It was during one of these episodes that she said something that still rings in my ears.

I'm sure I'd said we weren't going in on a project with her, and maybe I'd tried to explain by saying it was too risky. She was furious. "You're paid to take risks!" she said. Of course she was right. All publishing is a gamble, and it's the editor's job to throw the dice. Since then, her admonition has inspired me to push myself countless times.

My role at S&S changed a few times. Once I was out of the paperback conversion business, Alice and I became better friends, and when I went to S&S as an editor, she was my colleague two doors down. On my first day at the imprint, she stopped in my door and said, "Thank God you're here. Someone to talk to." I was enormously flattered. Being in

an editorial meeting with Alice was like attending a master class in anything she was talking about—Lincoln, economics, women’s rights, and of course politics. What a privilege it was to be able to watch her work.

Alice and I were locker room buddies at the health club. She was famous for kicking people off of “her” machine, and more than once, after she left the gym, someone would come up to me and say, “You *know* her?” For a while, there was a woman who would stand in front of the TV, stark naked, making a long, languorous performance of smoothing lotion over her entire body. Alice and I talked about how awful it was, and the next time it happened, Alice stood right next to the woman and shouted at me, “This has been going on for twenty minutes!” That’s the last we ever saw of the woman.

We shared a love of ballet, and Alice converted me from ABT to the New York City Ballet. I subscribed on the same night as Alice and Roz Lippel, and I loved hearing what she had to say. She was as smart and passionate about ballet as she was everything else. I grew to love Alice for her kindness and generosity to me and to others, her sense of humor, and her wisdom and intelligence.

Of course I can’t tell you my best Alice story because she swore me to secrecy. “I have resisted dining out on this. So far,” she said.

Binky Urban

One summer weekend in 1982, Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas called to say they had a book idea. They were staying a few doors away from Alice in Sag Harbor in a group house so small it was famously called the Mouse House. They drove over to see me in Bridgehampton and we sat out on my back deck, where they explained they wanted to write a book about American foreign policy post-World War II. Walter and Evan were both working at *Time*, and I had been an agent at ICM for about five minutes. I knew enough to respond that a wonky book about foreign policy would be read by three people (us) and it would be good if they could put some faces on the story. Walter and Evan said they'd think about that, and on Monday morning, I rang Alice. "Hello, Alice. What if I told you that Walter and Evan are thinking of writing a book about American foreign policy post-World War II?" Before I could utter another word, Alice chirped, "Oh, goody! I've always wanted to publish a book about the Wise Men!" Problem solved.

More than once, Alice led this horse to water. And, boy (to use an Alice-ism), was it fun trying to keep up with her over the forty-plus years that followed. I owe her so much.

Mark Whitaker

In my humble opinion as someone who spent two decades as a magazine editor before I started writing books, Alice Mayhew possessed the three greatest qualities an editor can have. First, of course, she was an incredibly skillful editor of prose, structure, and ideas. Second, she was a master psychologist: enthusiastic at the right moments, but also blunt and stubborn when necessary, and most of all so seductively conspiratorial that you wanted to do your best for her. Third—and this doesn't often come with the other two, in my experience—she was scrupulously evenhanded, and treated all her writers the same. It was a remarkable testament that when Alice died, the mid-list writers who wrote tributes described having the exact same relationship with her as her most famous and best-selling authors.

Along with our political discussions over lunch at Michael's and our delightful encounters at dinner parties and the opera, what I will remember most about my own writing experience with Alice was how, with one sentence, she could give me the key to making a book dramatically better. With my first, a family memoir, it was: "I want to hear more about your mother." With my book about the legacy of the black Pittsburgh, it was: "The introduction should be grander." And at my last lunch with Alice in October, a year into my latest project on the birth of Black Power, it was: "When was the last time you read Barbara Tuchman?" I thought to my-

self: “Huh? Barbara Tuchman? What does *she* have to do with Black Power?” Plus, I had already sent Alice several chapters, and she said she liked them. But when I went back to *The Guns of August*—which, as it happened, I had bought on a whim during a two-for-one sale on Audible—it gave me a whole new take on how to make the book work. A week later, Alice fell and we never met again, but I still feel her last pearl of wisdom guiding me even as I grieve terribly for her loss.

Ted Widmer

I was visiting Alice often in the final months—of course we did not know they were final. We had memorable meals in the small hospital where she was recovering from a fall; she organized the plastic chairs in the cafeteria as carefully as if she were presiding over her table at Michael's. Talk often turned to her childhood; we both had relatives from the same obscure Massachusetts town. One night she remembered how much she loved to read as a very young girl. Even at five, she was taking on big topics. One of her favorites was the story of Lady Godiva, the noblewoman who rode naked through the streets of Coventry, to protest her husband's oppressive tax measures. But the language of her antiquated children's book was difficult—it failed to convey its story clearly, and used long words that concealed more than they revealed. In the crucial sentence, describing Godiva as “clad in naught but long tresses,” three out of six words were inscrutable. More than eighty years later, Alice still sputtered with frustration over this writer who failed to get to the point. In that early encounter, an editor was born.

Amy Wilentz

Alice had many best-selling authors, and I was not one of them. She basically picked me up, not out of a slush pile but from a trash bin of writers another editor at Simon & Schuster had decided to torment and reject. She liked my manuscript—my first book on Haiti—she loved it, I would have to say; that’s how Alice reacted to writing before she began to pick it apart and shift your chapters around, and lay them on the floor of her apartment and put the book back together piece by piece, and then call you, crowing, about how she’d solved the one big problem. She was not a line editor, to put it mildly. She was a loyal editor and I published four books with her. None of them about American presidents although I once jokingly asked her if she’d publish a presidential history, even by *me*. And she said “Of course.” Even, I asked, if it were about Millard Fillmore? “Absolutely.” Well, I did not write that, of course.

She always treated me like a princess. She took me to lunch at her table against the wall, smack in the middle of Michael’s on 55th Street, where she took all her writers after the restaurant she preferred, an idiosyncratic place with waitresses wearing Swiss garb, shut; I happily cannot remember its name. Of course she always paid: I teased her because in the thirty-plus years I knew her it seemed that she never bought a new wallet. “I like this one,” she said defensively. She invited me and my husband to lunches and dinners at her

house in Sag Harbor: I have to say I was grateful, because her social generosity seemed to me so reflexive, so democratic, so not-Manhattany.

She had a braying and appreciative laugh which I always tried to provoke, often successfully because she liked to laugh. Her obsessions, which were not mine, were Washington, D.C., presidential politics, and Catholicism, and I was just lucky that Haiti in the late 1980s touched on two of these. She was a gossip and we were always searching for mutual friends and acquaintances to discuss, mostly appreciatively. She loved ballet and would fly around the world to see something good. Mostly, she loved the human pantheon, knew everyone, and wanted to know everything they knew and more. She was voraciously curious, madly energetic, and devoted to writing and books. And at the top of Rockefeller Center in Simon & Schuster's offices, sitting behind a big executive desk (decorated with a crowd of colorful little plastic windup toys), Alice used all that intellectual vigor and interest to fuel a generation and more of American publishing.

Bob Woodward

I first met Alice in 1972, when Dick Snyder took Carl Bernstein, Alice, and me to dinner at the Jockey Club in Washington and he told us, “She’s your editor on your Watergate book.” We debated over the next eighteen months or so how to do it. Because the story was exploding, we decided we should follow that old journalism rule, write about what you know best, so we wrote a reporting book.

Alice’s genius was that she understood you’re writing for a reader, so she had a great sense of pacing—not including things that are unnecessary or that were sidetracks—and a sense for tone and presentation.

In December 1973, Carl and I were at the St. Regis. Alice would come over during the day and we’d write at night. The book was coming out in April and at that time, it was normally a year or eighteen months before a book was released, so we were thinking, “My God, it’s coming out in April, that’s going to be so fast.” I remember vividly: She came over with this ninety-page section, an account of our reporting efforts that led nowhere, leads that didn’t pan out, and she said, “You need to cut it.” I said, “Okay, by how much?” And she said, “Cut it to two pages.” She was right.

She had that sense of how to keep the story moving. She would write in the margins, “not necessary”—it was her trademark. It could be a page, a section, an adverb, an adjective. She was serving the reader, not us, in a way. Carl and

I quickly learned that's exactly what we need, and that's exactly what editing is about. The hymnal she sang from was: Be straightforward, be direct.

I did nineteen books with her. The last one was *Fear*, about President Trump. I'm working on the second Trump book now. I talked to her ten days ago and she was very anxious to read some material. I reminded her of her rule: She didn't want a manuscript until it was half-done. But she said, "No, I'm so anxious to see this." I didn't end up sending her anything.

From 1972 to 2020, that's forty-eight years—it may not be an all-time record, but that's a long time.

