

ESSENCE OF WING HAVEN IS IN JOURNALS

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Something wonderful has been rescued from the musty obscurity of a bedroom drawer.

Wanny Hogewood and Mildred Harris, who head the house committee of Wing Haven, the nationally renowned, privately owned garden sanctuary on Ridgewood Avenue, have found, stuck away, 10 of Elizabeth Clarkson's gardening and bird journals.

If the import of that find is lost on you, listen to this: When Elizabeth, who died in 1988, lay sick in bed, birds flitted into her room and lit on her shoulders. They pecked at her cheek, skittered up and down her arms. No doubt they were watching over her, as she'd watched over them for six decades.

Elizabeth arrived from Texas in 1927 as the bride of the late Eddie Clarkson. She immediately set about creating from the mud field of their yard a haven for winged creatures.

The extensive gardens are free to the public Tuesday afternoons, Wednesday mornings and Sunday afternoons.

As you wander, think of this remarkable woman whose particular warmth and intelligence melded into a lifelong passion for creating beauty and nurturing wild creatures.

Elizabeth started her journals on Feb. 6, 1933, when she was 28. They stop abruptly on April 23, 1951, a

day she had her mother-in-law to lunch with another Ridgewood Avenue gardener, Elizabeth Lawrence, and her mother.

"Five large frogs on pool at lunch," she writes. "Saw bat flying this evening."

"Tragedies" fill the journals. "Bob White flew up from the back of our lot, and in the high wind he flew full force into the side of the house," she wrote on Feb. 25, 1933. "He died in my hands and it nearly broke my heart."

Elizabeth was often bedridden with what some believe to have been undulant fever. Her devoted Eddie knew how to cheer her.

On her 29th birthday she noted the Eddie had sent flowers, presented her a three-year subscription to *House Beautiful* and half a dozen custard cups. But what excited her most was his gift of a "perfectly marvelous 3 3/4 gallon compressed air sprayer for my garden."

Heard a mourning dove

For their 15th wedding anniversary, Eddie gave her a pint of French crème de menthe and an antique snuffbox to hold cheese for the birds.

Elizabeth imbued her birds with human characteristics. The mockingbird – "a finished musician" – who sang all one April night. The mother wren who "was really an example of wonderful courage because she was so desperately

afraid, and in spite of it she carried food to her last baby."

One bluebird, Tommy, lived for years in the house. "If I speak to him," she writes in 1940, "he answers me and sometimes waves his wing at me like he does in greeting a female Blue Bird."

She set birds' legs with quills and put babies in a wastebasket so they could safely strengthen their wings. She made juice of mealworms, which she fed sick birds with an eyedropper.

More than one bird died in her hands wrapped in a heating pad.

I hope these journals will be published in book form. I'll even be so bold as to suggest a title from a March 1, 1936 entry: "I heard a Mourning Dove singing today."

You don't know Charlotte until you've visited Wing Haven. The Wing Haven Garden Shop opens Tuesday for members. Wednesday through Saturday for non-members. Enjoy.



Dia Steiger, Executive Director of Wing Haven Gardens, with journals kept by Elizabeth Clarkson