



My Own Gladys Taber

by Kim M. Baker

I am a friend of Gladys Taber.

No, Gladys and I have never exchanged birthday presents. Nor have we sat together over tea and hashed out a problem.

But I have been to her homes: a beach cottage called *Still Cove* in Orleans and a lovely, old farm called *Stillmeadow* in Southbury, Connecticut. I travel to both of these magical places through the writing of Gladys Taber. They have been the settings for My Own Cape Cod and the Stillmeadow book series.

I met my friend Gladys while roaming the dusty shelves of my local public library in 1985. I was searching for something soft and sweet to read when Gladys appeared in **Stillmeadow Daybook**.

As I introduced myself to the lovely, and often funny, words of this everyday woman, I knew Gladys and I were beginning a life-long friendship even though Gladys had passed away six years before.

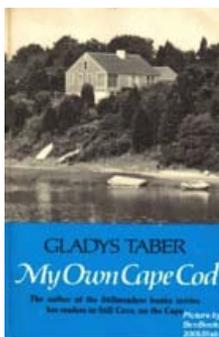
When I went to graduate school, I wrote my masters' thesis about Gladys Taber's place in American literature for her domestic nature writing.

Through Gladys's delightful descriptions, I have seen her collection of milk glass and tried many of her country cooking recipes. I have watched her children grow and dogs win ribbons. She has spoken to me many times about her love of Keats and Shakespeare, about her frustration with appliances and the growing tensions in the world.

I have walked through the Quiet Garden and known the peace that grows there. And, just once, out of the corner of my eye, I believe I glimpsed Gladys's unicorn...

At *Still Cove*, which Gladys describes as "exactly my piece of Heaven,"¹ I have looked out over Mill Pond, "the inlet that leads to the ocean where Nauset lies jeweled against the vastness of sky."² I can see the circle of beach Gladys describes around the pond alive with fishermen, dogs, children, and gulls.

My Own Cape Cod tells the stories of the Cape from Nantucket whaling to the Blessing of the Fleet in Provincetown, as well as the charm of everyday Cape living in a small town.



Gladys (Bagg) Taber was born on April 12, 1899 in Colorado Springs, Colorado and died on March 11, 1980 in Hyannis, Massachusetts. She was the daughter of Rufus Mather Bagg, a geologist who often moved his family around the country to be near his work, and Grace Sibyl (Raybold) Bagg, who was a homemaker.

There does not seem to have been any question in Gladys's mind about a career. It is clear from her education and early jobs that she loved literature. She received a B.A. from Wellesley College in 1920 and an M.A. from Lawrence College in 1921. She began doctoral studies at Columbia University in 1931. She taught English at Randolph Macon Woman's College, 1925 to 1926, and at Columbia University, 1936 to 1943.

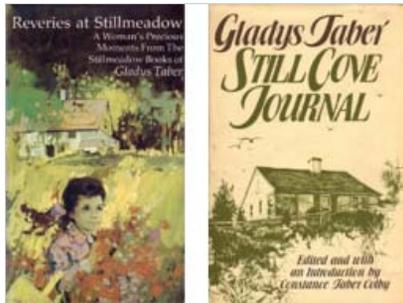
Gladys worked as an assistant editor at the Ladies' Home Journal from 1936 to 1958; however, the bulk of her writing career was spent as a freelance writer from 1932 to 1980.

To see photographs of Gladys Taber's
Stillmeadow Home visit:
www.gladystaber.org

In her literary life, which spanned over half a century, she composed in a variety of genres, including four cookbooks, two books on flower arranging, three children's books, several volumes devoted specifically to her animals, 12 novels, three collections of short stories, a book of poetry, two dramatic plays, and an autobiographical work chronicling her life before *Stillmeadow*.

Her most popular success, though, results from the 21 Stillmeadow/Still Cove books. These books developed from her monthly column, "Diary of Domesticity" in the *Ladies Home Journal* magazine, 1937 to 1958, and "Butternut Wisdom", published in *Family Circle*, 1959 to 1967.

The columns were simultaneously being molded into her best-selling books, which are collections of essays about country life.



Gladys created a comfortable, lyrical voice of country living, a persona her readers would come to identify with, respect, trust, and love.

Gladys appears in **Who's Who in America**, **Who's Who in American Women**, **Through a Woman's I: An Annotated Bibliography of American Women's Autobiographical Writing, 1946-1976**, and **Contemporary Authors**. She was also interviewed numerous times by radio, print, and television journalists. Cape Cod's own Marion Vuilleumier videotaped an interview with Gladys Taber for her *Books on the World* television series.

Even now, Taber fans continue to comb used bookstores, flea markets, yard sales, and online booksellers to complete their collection of Taber. Both Titcomb's Bookstore in Sandwich and Buckley's Cape Cod Books in Orleans carry a few pre-owned Taber texts. You might get lucky and find one there that's signed!

Gladys loved nature and chose the seasons around which to organize many of her books. Gladys writes: "Every season has its own glory in New England, for every month has its separate identity, different personality."³

She revels in the beauty of her beloved New England in wintertime, writing, "Now in our New England valley we begin the year with the big snow. We have an appointment with winter, and we are ready. The woodshed is stacked with seasoned applewood and maple, the snow shovel leans at the back door, the shelves are jammed with supplies."⁴

And as the snow melts, Gladys delights in the renewal of spring: "April in New England is like first love. There is the tender excitement of gathering the first snowdrops, the only symbol of life in the deserted garden. They are the lyric expression of music to come – as the symphony of lilacs will surely come – because I am picking the cool delicate bells of this first flower."⁵

Many of us around the country feel a kinship to Gladys, like a good friend with whom you can sit down and instantly feel comfortable. In September of 1980, the year Gladys Taber died, a devoted fan began having meetings in her Maryland home with others interested in Gladys's writing.

From that humble beginning, the "Friends of Gladys Taber" developed into an organization which numbers approximately 400 from all over the U.S, Canada, and Australia and which produces a quarterly journal. Regional groups of Taber lovers meet around the country. And once a year, the "Friends" gather in a place of importance to Gladys's life, including *Stillmeadow* and *Still Cove*.

The Friends of Gladys Taber

Do you love the works of the late author, Gladys Taber, who wrote about her life at Stillmeadow?



For Information and
to join us, please visit:

www.FriendsOfGladysTaber.org

Gladys Taber wrote a folksy, charming, friend's view of country life in Connecticut and seaside living on Cape Cod. Her themes of nature, history, conservation, books, recipes, gardening, dogs, and friends, to name only a few, touch her readers in the warmest places of the heart.

While her writing may be considered by some as dated from an earlier time, Taber wrote for an audience that continues to discover the simplicity and sincerity of her language and message in a world that can be complex and threatening.

If you aren't familiar with this beloved author, treat yourself to one of Gladys's books. Put on the kettle. Find a cozy spot in the sun. And let yourself drift away to two very special places called Stillmeadow and Still Cove.

After a "visit" to Stillmeadow and Still Cove, you'll be a friend of Gladys Taber too.

- 1 Taber, Gladys. *My Own Cape Cod*. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1971. Print. P. 21
- 2 ---. *My Own Cape Cod*. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1971. Print. P. 16.
- 3---. *Stillmeadow Daybook*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1955. Print. P. 144.
- 4 ---. *The Stillmeadow Road*. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1959. Print. P. 27.
- 5 ---. *Stillmeadow Sampler*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1959. Print. P. 2.



When she isn't teaching the abundant virtues of the comma, writing about big hair and Elvis, and doing the Cha Cha, Kim Baker works to end violence against women. Kim performs in the annual Until the Violence Stops Festival Providence.

Her poems have been published online and in print. Her most recent reasons to cha cha cha include fourth place in the Poetry Society of New Hampshire National Poetry Contest, This I Believe essays broadcast on NPR of Rhode Island, and first play stage-reading at the Culture*Park Play Marathon in New Bedford, Massachusetts about a middle-aged female survivor of childhood sexual assault. Kim is currently writing a book of ekphrastic poems about Cape Cod art. kbaker@rwu.edu