



## Edith Baldwin Wonnell

May 14, 1931 - December 21, 2019

Edith "Edie" Wonnell (née Baldwin) died on December 21, 2019 in Saline, MI due to complications related to dementia and congestive heart failure. She was 88.

Edie was born on May 14, 1931 in New Haven, CT to Clarence F. Baldwin and Margaret W. Baldwin. She spent her childhood on the family farm in Woodbridge, CT. She graduated from the Skidmore College with a degree in nursing and from Columbia University with certification in midwifery. Edie initially worked as a nurse midwife at the Home Birth Service of Maternity Center Association in New York City. She married James F. Wonnell in 1961. The Wonnells moved to Pennsylvania and then to Delaware where Edie and Jim raised their four children and Edie worked as a nurse midwife. She retired in 1996.

Edie was a pioneer in her field. In the 1950s she founded the nurse midwifery service, Downstate Medical Center, in Brooklyn, NY for Maternity Center Association of New York. While beginning her family in the early 1960s, Edie answered the call to help establish the nurse midwifery service at Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore, MD and in Pennsylvania where she was recruited by mothers to teach childbirth education. This experience led to her being recruited by the Wilmington Medical Center to establish their groundbreaking childbirth education and family-centered maternity care services. In the 1970s Edie responded to childbearing families seeking a more natural childbirth experience by leaving the medical center to establish two of the first

freestanding birth centers successfully modeled as a place for the practicing midwifery in a collaborating system of health care by Maternity Center Association of New York: first in Bryn Mawr, PA in 1978, then in Wilmington, DE in 1982. Today, both birth centers continue to operate at full capacity. In recognition of her outstanding achievements in the field of midwifery, Edie was awarded an honorary doctorate degree in 2018 from the Frontier Nursing University in Lexington, Kentucky.

Edie is survived by her husband, Jim Wonnell; her children, Diane Shannon, Amy Young, Jonathan Wonnell, and Patricia Brink; their spouses Sam Dennis, Joel Young, Amy Wonnell, and Gary Brink; and her grandchildren Dean, Andrew, Kira, Alex, Niall, David, Sarah, and Zoe. She is preceded in death by her brother Malcolm Baldwin, and was followed in death a day later by her sister-in-law, Susan Baldwin.

A memorial will take place in the spring in Woodbridge, CT. All are welcome to attend and celebrate Edie's life. In lieu of flowers, please donate to American Association of Birth Centers Foundation.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Edie is living on through all those she has helped and inspired, and what all these many people get done. An example is her daughter, Diane shannon (Dennis) runs seminars on how women in the medical field can reduce burnout. It's at dianeshannon.com.*

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**Don Wonnell** - June 27, 2024 at 08:48 AM



“ *Edith Baldwin Wonnell*

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October 23, 2023 at 01:07 PM

“ It is with heavy heart that I send you my condolences for the death of your beloved Edie. To her family I offer my testimony of how she touched my family’s life in ways that can hardly be put in words that will do it justice. She delivered 3 of my 4 children at the birthing center of Delaware. As Edie did with so many families she gave of herself 150 percent to ensuring our birth experience were beautiful, kind, and spiritual . The 9 months leading up to the birth were filled with Edie quietly teaching us the beauty of the human body and spirit building confidence to make our experience of this miracle a true marvel. Her undivided attention to the process of birth allowed anyone who had the privilege of having her as the midwife with her vast nursing abilities to feel confident, safe and trusting of your body throughout the marathon of pregnancy, labor and delivery. She also taught many a family the sanctity of the human body and spirit. Being a nurse and childbirth educator in the community I had the privilege of also working with Edie professionally. Her intelligence , hard working spirit and sense of humor was infectious! I remember when she told the story of taken a road trip in the family camper and accidentally leaving one of her kids at a rest stop. For such a scary event she told it in such a funny way she had many hysterically laughing. My husband was privileged enough to help her get some legislation passed in the Delaware State Senate. Being a Senator and on the board of the birthing center he loved working with Edie to educate the political world about the birthing center, not always an easy task. Many of people use the word pioneer cavalry, but for Edie it was appropriate and well deserved.

One last fond memory I have is of Edie’s husband. He was always right there for her. I would see him working around the birthing center being the “mr fix it “ man. I remember on one of my visits thinking he was the maintenance guy and Edie said no that’s my husband.

Thanks for letting me share all my long thoughts. I guess you know by now that I thought Edie was one of a kind and was such a joy. She had touched my life in immeasurable ways that have lasted a lifetime. Why did I Google Edie’s name? Because this June 2021 my daughter informed me she wants to Bryn Mar to the birthing

*center for her first child. I know that's where Edie started her midwife career. In June, for me, Edie will live on when I hold my grandchild for the first time there. Lots of love to Edie's family,  
Xxxooo Barb Still*

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**barb Still** - February 05, 2021 at 02:02 AM

RI

“*Edith Wonell delivered my firstborn, Rachel Israel (at the time, Rachel Fry.) My daughter was the tenth baby born at the Bryn Mawr Birth Center in 1980. We loved Edie, as we called her. God bless her survivors.*

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**Rebekah Israel** - August 02, 2020 at 09:27 AM

MG

“ As is true for so many other comments here, some from my acquaintances, there is hardly a way to write about the generational impact that Edie had on so many. Back in 1979, totally unknowledgeable about pregnancy or delivery with my first child, the Lord blessed me and put me in Edie's path. Since it was not yet "legal" in Delaware, I had to go to Bryn Mawr to deliver at Booth. But it was the path to the delivery that has had all the impact in the world. Edie opened her home - thank you Jim - for all of our appointments here in Delaware, right up until delivery. I was receiving an advanced degree at the time, and the education and resources I received from Edie were far and away more important than any PhD. Her absolute care and monitoring created the healthiest time of my life, taught me about independence and community, and reverberates even today, as that first daughter went on to deliver with a midwife at home since there are no birth centers in Baltimore, and my second daughter delivered her own daughter in the same room in the Wilmington birth center where she herself was born. Generational attitudes toward how to best live are the testimony of what Edie accomplished for all of us, even in the face of the challenges she encountered in her projects. Your family was so kind to share her with us. Her memory lives on even in our kids, who know her name.

*Marilyn Green*

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**Marilyn Green** - February 18, 2020 at 01:27 PM

LH

“ To the Wonnell family:

*Fifty-four years ago Edie and Jim took me into their home when I was an unmarried pregnant teenager and needed a place to stay until I delivered my baby. During that time I learned so much from Edie, watching her, listening to her, and developing a new way of looking at the world and at myself. Her quiet guidance and gentle counsel helped me understand what was happening to my body and manage what until that time I viewed as a completely foreign and terrifying event. I was, and continue to be eternally grateful for everything I absorbed about family life while living in her household. I came away a more decisive person, with an understanding of my future goals and how to obtain them. Later, I was able to follow her career online, along with her many successes and the successes of her children. I will never forget her.*

*She cannot be replaced. I extend to her whole family my sincere condolences.*

*Linda Crowley Horger*

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**Linda Crowley Horger** - February 16, 2020 at 11:11 AM

CG

“ *I was a recipient of the Edith Wonnell scholarship in 2002. Her scholarship funds aided and inspired me in starting the first birth center in our Kansas City Metro area. The birth center is still operating in the same location. Not only did that seed money initiate a birth center, it changed the birth community also into one of family powered birth. The initiative blossomed and we started another birth center and a non-profit focused at giving back to the birth community. The legacy of giving has replicated here! Thank you to the Wonnells for believing in birth and the multiplying of birth centers.*

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**Cathy Gordon** - January 10, 2020 at 10:09 PM

JV

“*Edie was one the the very rare ones... we all know of her accomplishments in the childbirth and medical fields. As a women, a person, she was such an inspiration. She carved a path for many of us women and mothers who, without her knowledge, support and humor, would not have found our way in this world. She "grew" several generations of us who were given the knowledge and courage to know ourselves as women and our importance in this world. I was able to follow many dreams because of her wisdom and assurance and then pass on the attributes to young women in my path. You will be missed dear lady. My prayers are with Jim and her children.*

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**Janna Vandegrift** - January 09, 2020 at 06:59 PM

DD

“*I was blessed to be able to work with Edie for a year and a half before she retired, and the midwife I am today is a reflection of her guidance and wisdom. I never left- 25 years later, I think back on that time with tremendous gratitude. 6 hours ago, we posted a notice of her passing on our Facebook page and the beautiful tributes are piling up. Just wanted to let the family know that her legacy lives on in the lives of so many people she touched here.*

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**Dorinda Dove** - January 09, 2020 at 06:14 PM

VB

“ To Jim and all the Wonnells - As my employer and midwife at the Birth Center of Delaware, Edie was a mentor, master midwife, savvy business owner, and professional trailblazer who truly changed the trajectory of my midwifery career. How does one express the depth of appreciation for such a woman?

*I am so very sorry for your loss, thankful to know she passed in peace with Jim at her side, and deeply appreciate the legacy she has left us all. My sincerest condolences and prayer for peace as you journey the path of grief at her passing.*

*With love and sorrow, Vicki Burslem*



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**Vicki Burslem** - December 31, 2019 at 02:23 PM

SS

“ Edie was a powerful force and gentle mentor who guided me and gave me the courage to open my birth center. She was truly a remarkable woman and a gift. I am saddened by the loss but glad that she is at peace. Keeping her family and all those who loved her in my heart.

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**Susan Stapleton** - December 31, 2019 at 07:43 AM

SB

“ Patricia, I'm so very sorry to hear of your loss. Your Mom sounds like a truly amazing woman! I will keep your Mom, you, and your family in my prayers.

*Sally Rice Bernbeck*

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**sally bernbeck** - December 29, 2019 at 11:15 AM