



Grace Sparkes: Blazing a Trail to Independence

Marie-Beth Wright

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Grace Margaret Patten Sparkes (1908–2003) was born in Grand Bank, the youngest of ten children born to Elizabeth Hickman and John B. Patten. A lover of music, curling, and politics, this fierce anti-Confederate made a name for herself in the political arena under the auspices of the Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador. Just as notable are her lifelong contributions to academics through scholarship and award initiatives, her setting of high standards of excellence for her students during her years as a schoolteacher, her brightening of living rooms across the province as Grandma Walcott on CBC Television's Tales from Pigeon Inlet, her work as a reporter for the Daily News, and her efforts in her latter years to better the lives of seniors through social programs.

“Gracie” was a pioneer for women in the workplace, an advocate for seniors’ rights, and an activist in every sense of the word, and her name lives on in the MV Grace Sparkes, a ferry that today plies the waters of this province. Here, for the first time, is the biography of this remarkable woman.

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