



Helen Chappell

April 1, 1947 - June 20, 2026

Easton, MD. Helen Chappell, writer and artist, died June 20, 2026, in Easton, MD. She was 79 years old. She was the daughter of Helen B. and Dr. Leslie E. Chappell and the stepdaughter of the late Blanche C. Chappell.

Over the course of a career that spanned several decades, Chappell produced more than 40 novels, collections and works of non-fiction. From 1989-1997, she wrote the award-winning column *Oysterback Tales* for the Opinion Commentary page of the *Baltimore Sun*, becoming one of the few journalists to produce a column of fiction for a major urban daily. She also wrote for the *Washington Post* and other newspapers. For many years, she wrote columns and articles for the *Easton, Maryland Tidewater Times*. Although she was best known as a regional writer who made the Eastern Shore of Maryland her territory in fiction and non-fiction, her work included the successful *Sam and Hollis* mystery series, *A Whole World of Trouble*. *Oysterback Tales*, *Oysterback Spoken Here*, *Chesapeake Bay Book of the Dead* and many others. She wrote a series of historical romances under the noms-de-plume *Rebecca Baldwin* and *Caroline Brooks*. Her output was recognized with a number of awards, grants and prizes. She also illustrated several of her own books and continued an interest in the visual arts throughout her life, producing drawings, paintings and sculpture. Her writing and art were often characterized by a strong sense of place, dialogue, magical realism and a biting sense of humor. She also worked as a teacher and editor,

as well as mentor to many aspiring writers.

Chappell was a collector of art and antiques, and was working on a sculptural project, *The Travelling Elvis Shrine*, at the time of her death.

Born May 1, 1947, in Kennett Square, PA, Chappell drew her inspiration from a childhood spent partially on her father's Hereford farm near Cambridge, as well as the family gunning club in Hooper's Island. "I grew up listening to watermen and farmers sitting around John Lewis' store in Cornersville telling bigger and better lies," she once remarked. "And I often think that's where it all started."

Chappell graduated from Franconia College and attended the School of Visual Arts. She began her writing career as an assistant to Phoebe Larmore Literary Agency in New York, where she published her first books.

After a peripatetic career in which she lived in Boston, New York, London and Los Angeles, she returned to the Eastern Shore in 1978 to work on a novel. She intended to stay for a year, but ended up spending most of her life in Talbot County. She considered the Shore the most interesting place she could live, and was passionately interested in the culture, history and social anthropology of the region, which she often used in her work.

"Oysterback is the pearl in the Oyster of the Eastern Shore," John Barth wrote of her work, a statement that Chappell frequently said validated her career parking ticket, since she considered Barth a seminal influence on her life.

Chappell is survived by a brother, Ed Chappell of Wilmington, DE; two nieces: Christy Hughes of Islamorada, FL; Kimberly Chappell of Wilmington, DE and seven godchildren: Kate Sager of York, PA; Eve Merriman of San Diego, CA;

Amelia Brown of Rising Sun, MD; Anna Basile White of Salisbury, MD; Matthew Basile of Nanticoke, MD; Andrew Sindermann of Rochester, NY; Laura Sindermann of Charlotte, NC; and a namesake, Helen Russell of Portland, OR. "Always a godmother, never a god," was her motto she often said.

She served on the boards of Friends of the Library, the Talbot County Arts Council and Stola Women Writers. She volunteered for the Talbot County Free Library, Talbot County Hospice and other local and national organizations.

Burial will be private; family and friends will be invited to attend a celebration of Helen's life at a later date. Donations may be made to the Talbot County Free Library, Talbot County Hospice and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation