



Born and raised in New York, Mary Higgins Clark is of Irish descent. The Irish are, by nature, storytellers, says Clark, who considers her Irish heritage an important influence on her writing. Mary's father died when she was ten. Her mother struggled to bring up Mary and her two brothers. After graduating from high school, Mary went to secretarial school, so she could get a job and help her mother with the family finances. After working for three years in an advertising agency, travel fever seized her. For the year 1949, she was a stewardess on Pan American Airlines' international flights, to see the world. My run was Europe, Africa and Asia, Mary recalls. I was in a revolution in Syria and on the last flight into Czechoslovakia before the Iron Curtain went down. I flew for a year and then got married.

She married a neighbor, Warren Clark. Nine years her senior, she had known him since she was 16. Soon after her marriage, she started writing short stories. She sold her first short story to Extension Magazine in 1956 for \$100, after six years and forty rejection slips. I framed that first letter of acceptance, she recalls.

Mary was left a young widow with five children by the death of her husband, Warren Clark, from a heart attack in 1964. She went to work writing radio scripts and, in addition, decided to write books.

Every morning, she got up at 5 and wrote until 7, when she had to get the kids ready for school. Her first book was a biographical novel about the life of George Washington, *Aspire to the Heavens*. It was remaindered as it came off the press, she says of her first try. Next, she decided to write a suspense novel, *Where Are the Children?*, which became a bestseller and marked a turning point in her life and career.

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Speech Topics

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