

LACE VITUNAC EULOGY

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-- R. Grant Gilmore, Jr., Ph.D.

It has been over forty-five years since I met Lace and Walter Vitunac for the first time. It was through the Conservation Alliance and a united citizen's effort to save the beauty and local natural resources of St. Lucie County. I was a young scientist at the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution trying to put some science into local conservation efforts.

Lace and Walter formed the Conservation Alliance through a coalition of people who wanted to save the Earth, particularly our local part of it, for future generations to enjoy. There were battles over the Port of Ft. Pierce, oil terminals, wetland and beach development. In the beginning there was no Ft. Pierce Inlet State Park, no Savannass State Park, nor the John Brooks, Stan Blum or Avalon parks. Lace helped produce these refugia for wildlife and humanity. The people, the coalition, the Alliance won these battles. There was no oil terminal and all the mentioned parks came to fruition. Ft. Pierce remains a major fishing center, and now, one of the only viable inshore fisheries along this coast of Florida from the Space Coast to the Treasure Coast.

Lace was gently, but efficiently, persuasive. She brought many people together to make things happen. There were many heroes fighting by her side, organizing demonstrations, attending commission and council meetings, writing politicians and editorials. John and Jane Brooks, Betty Lou Wells, Bill and Jeanne Hearn, Anne Wilder, John Holt, Brian Killday, Stan Blum, Bob Bangert, Grace Kedzidora, Mary Beth Herzog, Sally Scwartz, George Jones, Kevin and Marilyn Stinette, Marty Baum and many others formed a true active and outspoken Conservation Alliance. They won many battles through concerted coordinated efforts in educating and mobilizing people who supported their concerns.

I had thought those days were gone forever until, a couple of years ago I received a telephone call:

“Grant, This is Lace Vitunac.” “Could you do a favor for me?”

“Sure Lace” (before I knew what it was...who could turn down Lace with that sweet voice) “What is it?”

“I would like for you to consider serving on the board of the Conservation Alliance. They need your help.”

Well, I did, and yes, there were certainly more important battles to be fought. Unfortunately, today’s political climate and local population are not as supportive of conserving the living Earth that keeps us all alive. There is a genuine war on the living Earth and Lace was well aware of it. Lace’s most recent hero, Shari Anker, president of today’s Conservation Alliance, surely needed all the help she could get.

Shari’s, and Lace’s most important ally, the Earth, is one I spent my life studying. Mother Nature is going to take care of herself even if we can’t. Mother Nature will submerge south Florida, our barrier island, below the waves sooner, than later, and give it back to my favorite friends, the creatures of the sea and my beloved fish. Imagine sitting in a submarine watching grouper spawn on a coral reef 17 miles out in the Atlantic Ocean off Ft. Pierce at a water depth of 300 ft. It was the beach just a few thousand years ago. Where we are standing today may be the next Indian River Lagoon within the life time of my grandchildren.

The battle to educate humanity must continue. In this effort, Lace helped support my goal to save fourteen unique and endangered tropical fish that depend on our local freshwaters. This has been an effort that I spent decades fighting for in agency meetings and publications. Lace gave me seed money to start a popular book on these endangered species a couple of years ago that should be completed this year.

Lace we all love you for your heart and soul and enduring dedication to your family and your Earth family. Thank you for all you have done for all of us.