

A Tribute to an extraordinary Woman—Lace Vitunac

-- Nathaniel P. Reed

I met Lace and Walter when I was on an inspection trip as Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish, Wildlife and National Parks probably in 1973. I stopped in Ft. Pierce to better understand the continuing urge to build the Ft. Pierce port into a major industrial feature. I was invited to meet the Vitunacs who had recently established the St. Lucie Conservation Alliance.

We thought, and I still think, that the Indian River Lagoon at Ft. Pierce is one of the wonders of the longest lagoon in the continental United States.

I am always amazed in our Journeys of Life when you meet previously unknown people and suddenly chemistry takes hold and an immediate friendship begins.

That was the case of the Vitunacs.

The two of them, Lace and Walter, expressed their deep concerns over the rapid, careless overdevelopment of not only the Ft. Pierce area, but Florida's east coast.

We became immediate friends devoted to careful continued development that took in account the natural wonders that surrounded us from north of Vero Beach to Jupiter Island.

We faced the fact that there were too many agricultural canals draining fertilizer, especially nitrogen into the lagoon.

We faced the fact that rampant development has encouraged the lack of proper sewage collection and treatment.

We did not fully understand the enormity of the problem of thousands and thousands of leaking septic tanks discharging nitrogen into the lagoon causing all too frequent algal blooms which destroyed thousands of acres of precious aquatic grasses.

We now know what must be accomplished. It will take energy, political will and a matching state grant program to eliminate the overabundance of septic tanks in order to preserve our precious Indian River Lagoon.

Lace was one of the first leaders who fully understood the enormity of the problem.

Undaunted by "nay sayers" she urged the governor, the legislature, our congressional delegation and the St. Lucie County Commissioners to use caution when approving new development, as there were many areas of environmental threats that had been conveniently ignored by the developers and their elected official's cohorts for too many years.

It was always a special joy to hear from both of them over many years as we devoted our energies to seemingly endless local environmental threats.

Following Walter's death, Lace continued her efforts encouraging more members to join the St. Lucie Conservation Alliance. The presentation of the Permelia Pryor Reed Award named for my equally feisty mother at the annual Alliance luncheon to the outstanding member for devotion to the cause of wise stewardship was an always a highlight day for me.

We jointly are so blessed by the Vitunics exceptional children and their offspring who have served our state with such distinction.

We are all honored to have known Lace, a determined lady of high ethics and a steel ramrod for a backbone.

We are all richer for our years of working together to spare the best of what's left of our beloved state.

We are joined with Lace and Walter and every member past and present of the St. Lucie Conservation Alliance in our continuing commitment to assure clean water, wise development and the maintenance of the quality of our joint lives and for those who will come after us.

No farewells - just boundless thanks, Lace, and may our future paths cross in green pastures: besides clean water.

Members of the Vitunac family: it has been an honor to be invited to speak about an extraordinary friend and a model of an Earth Steward. Let us all pledge to keep up the battle that she and Walter and the Alliance members so ardently believe in.

-Nathaniel P. Reed