

EULOGY
LACE'S MEMORIAL SERVICE
MAY 12, 2018
-- Shari Anker

"I LOVE LACE"

"I love Lace."

When I first became involved with the Conservation Alliance and was tasked to contact various people to further a project we were working on I would say to the person that Lace Vitunac had sent me.

And, over and over again I would hear, "I love Lace." Or, "I love that woman."

How so very fortunate I was to come to know why Lace was deeply revered and to become one of the many that prefaced conversations with "I love Lace."

I think Love is the key to understanding Lace as a devoted and wonderful wife to Walter, mother to Karen, Ann, and Charlie, aunt, and grandmother. Love is also key to understanding her as a leader that accomplished a great many things for the environmental quality of life in St. Lucie County.

Here I will paraphrase Jane Goodall's recent remarks: "Environmental leaders with passion and commitment are more likely to get people involved. We can never win an argument by appealing to people's heads. It's got to be in the heart."

Lace had an instinctive and intuitive love of the natural world. That deep emotional bond with the majesty of untouched wild – and healthy – nature was the source of her unwavering dedication to protecting it.

Lace's love and her passionate dedication inspired others to join her in an activism that endured for over 45 years.

But this is still not enough to fully account for the Lace effect. It was who Lace was, her very being that made her the force that she was.

Lace was always entirely present to the people she interacted with, with no artifice, and no ego. She easily conversed and worked with highly accomplished activists such as Nathaniel Reed, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Arthur Marshall, Dr. Grant Gilmore and others of similar stature. They took to her great wit and intellect.

Just as easily she conversed and worked with – and dare I say – converted friends, neighbors, and local regular folks who had something to gain by learning about and protecting their piece of paradise.

For those of us who worked with her these qualities made her irresistible and gave her the power to ask us just about anything in the name of conservation and environmental protection. None of us were able to say 'no' to Lace.

In return, even for seemingly small efforts, Lace always acknowledged us. With words, gifts, and awards. For example, Lace arranged for a tree to be planted in a National Forest in my honor. She instituted the Permelia Pryor Reed Award, to honor Nathaniel Reed's mother – who was an indomitable environmentalist of her own account (Hobe Sound National Refuge) - as a means to distinguish and reward local environmentalists achieving great things. There are a few people here today who earned that distinction.

Her generosity of spirit, her kindness seemed to arise from a pure reservoir reserved for those who would bestow it only with the best of motivations.

In a way it was inevitable that I would end up with the Conservation Alliance. I was a lover of the natural world from the time I could walk. After moving to St. Lucie County and discovering Savannas Preserve State Park I felt I could be at home here. At least some of the healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and awe-inspiring native Florida had been saved. Standing in the Savannas in 2004 I could only guess at who was responsible for the protection of what is now the largest contiguous fresh water marshes in the Southeast U.S.

Now in 2018 standing on the beach at Fort Pierce Inlet State Park I know what I'm looking at: this precious place exists as a result of a core group of people that formed the Conservation Alliance of St. Lucie County in 1972. This core group of seven dedicated environmentalists made alliances with other community groups to preserve what is irreplaceable and priceless. They were: Lace and Walter Vitunac, Marjorie Silver Alder, Betty Lou Wells, John and Jane Brooks, and Carol Herzog. Carol is here with us today.

Their first success was the creation of Fort Pierce Inlet State Park in 1972. Almost immediately after that they went to work on saving the Savannas. Again they worked with other groups including notably Maggy Hurchalla and Dr. Richard Stokes. By 1977 it was formerly designated as a Preserve State Park.

Today, all told, the Alliance can lay claim to over 6500 acres of land set aside in conservation status, including county parks named for John and Jane Brooks.

Over the years the Alliance led or participated in a wide variety of conservation and advocacy projects – many of them firsts in the county – too numerous to recount here. It remained faithful to its mission, as proposed by Walter Vituanc: “to protect the water, soil, air, native flora and fauna upon which all the Earth's creatures depend for survival.”

Along every step of the way stood Lace. The indefatigable Lace. The Lace with the unwavering commitment, the steely resolve to conservation and protection of the lands, waters, and species that she so loved. And to the organization that became the tool to accomplish that mission.

Lace was with us in spirit through to her last days. Her love and guidance for our efforts going forward is clear in her last message to me, transcribed by Karen:

*Dearest Shari,
Words fail me.
I trust you know what's in my heart.
I am bursting with wanting to share the love I
have for each of you.
'Grapple them with hooks of steel'
Apologies to Shakespeare,
Much Love,
Lace*

Lace gave us one last message on Earth Day. By choosing that day to leave us, forever more, Earth Day will be the Lace Vitunac day, too. She's reminding us every year that we must carry on the work.

As far as I know no other environmentalist has achieved that feat. That's Lace for you.