

Cathy Lowder, A Friend In Deed



(Nature's Value-Added Friend)

Have you ever met a person who is always there, always smiling and NEVER, ever asking anything for herself? Then chances are that you have met or heard of Catherine ("Cathy") Marie Lowder.

Cathy left the Hill country of Western North Carolina searching for ways to "Give Back" to the Natural World. Vista and dreams of a Great Society led her to social work and anything and everything to enhance the natural world. Model Cities and the Judiciary absorbed her professional life, including Foster homes, and State Guardianships, which she eventually headed for the State of Hawaii. But this remembrance is of Cathy, the protector of Natural Hawaii.

Lorin Gill snagged her for leadership in the Sierra Club's High School hikers' program, where we first met her, circa 1971. She accelerated quickly to Hawaii's Chapter's leadership, including later as the Chair. When her State duties transferred her to the Big Island, she decided that it was time to form a Sierra Club branch there of which she became its Chair.

Meanwhile, back in San Francisco, the Sierra Club National Office recognized Cathy's leadership and intellectual understanding of the "Moment" and placed her on national committees and advisory groups, in addition to her being Hawaii's Delegate to the governing conference.

Cathy and a merry band of similarly inclined hikers, calling themselves the "Mongoose", started joining in Sierra Club National Outings, then pioneered their own forays into nature around the World, which continued for half a century or so.

As a result of the great world recognized Flora and Fauna Study under the guidance of Mike Scott, with many others of Cathy's Friends of the trail, such as Jack Jeffrey, Sharon Scott, Ron Walker, Jim Jacobi, and Pete Stine, about 40 years ago the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge was authorized by Congress.

Not to be left out, Cathy and the Mongoose soon began volunteering at the new Refuge, planting and weeding, converting pasture of exotic grasses into reclaimed native forest designed to provide crucially important additional habitat for the native forest birds. (Hakalau Forest was the first NWR of its kind, a refuge dedicated to endangered forest birds).

As Hakalau Forest NWR recently reached its 40th anniversary, Cathy proudly reflected that the fruits of her tireless labor were coming of age. Native endangered and threatened birds are now nesting and colonizing the trees that she had, for years, helped propagate and plant. It was great to hear her say "My Keiki are now home to these beautiful birds."

In 2006, Cathy and other long-time volunteers formed the Friends Of Hakalau Forest NWR. Naturally, Cathy was sought out and elected to the first board. She reprised this role over and over, serving many terms, rolling off and on, as soon as she was eligible to return.

From my perspective, Cathy became the continuity of this volunteer organization. She not only experienced and knew what the Friends had accomplished, but also often single handedly, preserved and organized the Friends records until, with her help, the Friends created an e-repository for its important records, most of which came, naturally, from those old card board boxes that Cathy labored to preserve as sometimes Secretary and sometimes Treasurer and sometimes — just because that was the right thing to do.

Cathy also often hosted the warehouse for Friends assets and logo items, no mean feat in damp Hilo. She created systems for ready access to T-shirts by separate colors and sizes and, when needed, presented inventory numbers so that an appropriate supply was always obtainable “in Time” for signature events. And it was often Cathy who did the “Obtaining”, the retrieval of mail, the writing of checks and payments of accounts payable. She was often the only person who could verify whose terms were expiring and when. Short and simple, Cathy kept us on track and well-aimed.

Periodically Cathy would be among the Friends representatives at Regional Friends meetings sponsored by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Once this gathering was even hosted by the Friends at Hakalau Forest NWR on Mauna Kea, which meant providing on site in the Forest meals and programs. Cathy, having done this for innumerable volunteer weekends at the Refuge, never missed a beat.

Once, Patty and I were fortunate to attend one of these Regional Friends meetings with Cathy hosted by the Friends of Alaska’s Refuges at their home base in Homer. We divided up the programs so that, between us, we didn’t miss an offering and then we made sure that we reported the essence of the meeting to the Friends of Hakalau Forest Board so all could share in the experience and profit from the lessons imparted. That year, at the regional meeting, each Friends group developed a set of policies designed to strengthen their respective Friends groups. Ours was adopted on our return and may have served as part of the basic infrastructure that allowed Hakalau Forest’s Friends to grow exponentially.

Throughout her entire hands in and on participation with the Friends of Hakalau Forest and, before that, with the Sierra Club, Cathy NEVER, EVER asked for any recognition. In fact, she expressed the desire that her passing would not result in any falderal. “No Big Ting”, Hawaiian style— but I am sorry to displease her, she was just too much a part of everything the Friends have accomplished since its inception to ignore her contributions to our Culture. She helped by doing and NOT by talking. If something needed to be done, Cathy did it, often without being asked and frequently before anyone else realized that it needed doing.

If you feel moved to make some contributions, sort of a thank you to Cathy for all that she has done for Hakalau and Hawaii, she lists some charities that would probably appreciate your remembrance. These are listed below, including the Friends of Hakalau Forest NWR's JACK JEFFREY CONSERVATION EDUCATION FUND!

Cathy, you can be sure, will keep on hiking, while looking down on us to ensure that we make

the necessary and proper turns in the road ahead, until we should be so fortunate to again hike alongside her. We miss you Cathy Lowder— big shoes, but many people influenced by you are trying to fill them.

Cathy was an active advocate for many causes. Memorial contributions can be made to any of these organizations which were among her favorites:

- [Earth Justice](#), 50 California St., Suite 500, San Francisco, CA 94111
- [Sierra Club](#), Hawaii Chapter, P.O. Box 2577, Honolulu, HI 96803
- [Friends of the Hakalau Forest, Jack Jeffrey Fund](#), P.O. Box 6065, Hilo, HI 96720
- [Hawaii Community Foundation](#), 827 Fort Street Mall, Honolulu, HI 96813

