

SOME FOND MEMORIES OF JANICE DELFINO

From Joelle Buffa and Clyde Morris

Janice and Frank, Frank and Janice; we never saw them apart in all the decades we have known them. They were like a peanut and jelly sandwich; they just went together so well! Frank was the peanut butter part (Skippy, of course) - technical and sticky; tough to get past the point he wanted to make. While Janice was the sweet part - so kind, gentle, and determined. Together they were a dynamic and knowledgeable duo to deal with.

One of our favorite times was dinner at I-HOP before the monthly Citizens Meeting. It was such a joy to spend the dinner hour getting their update on the latest crazy development schemes in the Hayward Area, and how the weeds and terns were doing at Alameda. Just listening to all they were doing wore us out, let alone actually trying to keep up with them. Of course, true to their kind nature of always thinking of others, they would bring us a 2 for 1 coupon for the dinner, along with a truck-load of lemons, rhubarb, and whatever else was growing in their carefully tended garden. They got so tired of us asking for more rhubarb, they finally made us a custom-designed planter with our own rhubarb to tend. Of course, growing our own just wasn't the same as getting it from them along with the latest stories which always came with the free vegetables.

Family and friends from other parts of the country often remark: "I think I'd miss the change of seasons living in California." Not if they had friends like Janice. The harbinger of spring was boxes of lemons that would magically appear on the Refuge kitchen table, my desk, even our doorstep. Summer meant tomatoes, rhubarb, and a cornucopia of other delicious veggies. In fall Janice would be pushing those persimmons. Now what are we going to do with all of those persimmon cookie, muffin, cake recipes we amassed? Christmas would be celebrated with homemade jam and Skippy carefully wrapped in a colorful towel.

Lemons. How long will it be before we can look at a lemon without thinking of Janice? When Joelle's mother visited from Chicago, Janice loaded her up with lemons for the trip home. She insisted that we take a box along on our cross-country move to Virginia. Janice served up the best fresh lemonade we've ever tasted the first time she had us over for dinner. The morning of the scheduled dinner Janice called, her voice full of concern. We thought that her or Frank were sick and wanted to cancel. No. Janice was worried that it was so hot, and since they didn't have air conditioning, we'd be uncomfortable. She had decided to serve us dinner in the cooler basement, and was concerned that we would be "offended".

That is so typical Janice. She is the most considerate, selfless person we've known. She was always doing so much for the Refuge, the wildlife, us, and others, that eventually I figured out a small way to repay her kindnesses. She loved Joelle's homemade bread. We'd give her a loaf whenever we could. Each time, she'd send a handwritten note or phone Joelle (sometimes both), to thank us. She was the most pleasant person to be around. Even when she was complaining about some environmental bad deed, or Cargill, she had the uncanny ability to sound so sweet about it.

Though we first met Janice in the mid 1980s, when we worked for the EPA (Clyde) and Corps (Joelle), she became indispensable when we came to work for the San Francisco Bay NWR in the mid 90s. Being new to the job and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Clyde wanted desperately to make people think he knew what he was doing. When someone asked him a question that he couldn't answer, he told them that he'd research the answer and get back to them. He'd quickly phone the Delfinos and Janice would just as quickly reach into her and Frank's extensive mental and paper files, and give him the answer. Folks were always amazed that such a new employee knew so much because he never let on that he was going to his ace in the hole, the Delfinos for his answers. Later, when he wasn't so afraid of looking dumb, and the press called with a tough question, he would just give them the Delfino's number so they could get the answer right from the source. Often, people would call him back thanking him for connecting them with such an amazing and delightful person.

There are so many ways in which our lives are richer having had Janice as a friend. But some of the most precious are these: That you can be sweet and tough at the same time. That compassion combined persistence is an unbeatable combination. That it is possible work tirelessly on the big issues, while still taking the time to make individuals feel special. And finally, even in this gadget-filled age, you really don't need to have e-mail or the internet to accomplish great things!

We will miss her and are grateful that Frank is still with us.