

Remarks at Sylvia's Memorial

Feb. 2, 2016

Sylvia McLaughlin Memorial Service

Remarks by Doris Sloan,

Board Member, Citizens for East Shore Parks

Today we are honoring a most remarkable woman, I think the most remarkable I have known.

You have heard of her activism, how different the Bay Area would look today without her, Kay and Esther, and their determination to stop the desecration of the Bay.

I am grateful that I had a front row seat through Save the Bay to the remarkable accomplishments of those three women at a time when women, especially not faculty wives, didn't agitate - and didn't climb trees in protest – as Sylvia did just a few years ago.

I have been awed by her strength, courage, and that boundless energy. And by her great concern for the natural world - for its beauty and its wildlife.

She also had a deep caring for its people. When protecting wildlife was the rallying cry and focus for the East Shore park that we were working so hard for, Sylvia reminded us again and again that people too need a park and that there must be spaces for them.

For years she was a welcoming hostess for meetings beyond counting in her living room. How many envelopes we stuffed around her dining room table, how many fund appeals were planned and then thank yous handwritten in that dining room.

That was Sylvia the activist.

But let me speak of Sylvia as my dear friend. Let me share with you a few of the qualities that endeared her to me.

How to describe Sylvia without stringing together adjectives such as genuine, kind, sweet. At a small birthday party for Sylvia a few years ago, I said that to one of her environmental colleagues. He took offense at that and practically roared – No, Sylvia was not sweet, she was **fierce!**

My friend Sylvia **was** fierce but also kind and fair and gentle. I **never** heard her say an unkind word about anyone, not even her adversaries in the fight to save the Bay who wanted to fill the Bay or put hotels and shopping centers on its shores.

She had an uncommon generosity of spirit that contributed so much to her success. She encouraged those around her to share their thoughts as equals. As a result, you always wanted to get involved with her projects and stuff more envelopes or attend yet one more of those endless long public meetings.

Another quality I cherished in Sylvia was her positive attitude to everything. She **never** complained. I was fortunate to be her traveling companion on a long trip to South America when she was 81. She never said a word of complaint about all the discomforts and inconveniences that go with travel to out of the way places like the Galapagos, Machu Picchu, and Patagonia.

She didn't complain when we were on a boat in the Galapagos and shared the tiniest compartment, hardly a room –and certainly not a stateroom, a space so small that only one of us could stand up at a time. It was next to the noisy and smelly engine room. I was grouching but Sylvia never said a negative word.

Nor did she complain a year later on a 2-week trip down the Grand Canyon when she was 82. I wasn't on that trip but her companions told me that it rained day after day. One day it sleeted. And the water splashing over the rafts was 46°. They were cold! Can you just see Sylvia, climbing on and off the rafts, sleeping on the ground in a tent,- and she never asked for help in putting hers up - rafting Lava and Crystal rapids – at 82! I've rafted down the Grand Canyon. Those rapids are scary! But Sylvia never complained.

Another quality that endeared her to me was her quiet sense of humor. I wish you could have seen her at the penguin colony in Patagonia. We all were enchanted by the delightful small Magellanic penguins, with their comical waddle. Sylvia really enjoyed them and on the way back to our bus, I was walking behind her when she put her arms out and waddled like this. Sylvia as penguin. It's a vision I'll never forget.

My dear friend Sylvia had an inner glow all her life that lit up the world around her. A portrait of the young Sylvia hangs in her front hall – of a beautiful vivacious woman perhaps in 20s. Smiling, eyes wide – in a red vest. - her signature color. If I could have, I would have asked you all to wear red today in remembrance.

I didn't meet Sylvia until she was in her 60s but that aliveness in her eyes, her love of life, the joy in the portrait, the inner glow, were always there.

Sylvia has been my role model – for environmental activism, for caring for all peoples and creatures, for kindness, strength of conviction, and for moving among us with such grace and charm.

We celebrate this vibrant, beautiful woman who helped save San Francisco Bay and so enriched all our lives.

Dear Sylvia, we will miss you and never forget you.