



Elizabeth Terwilliger – Nature’s Passionate Advocate!

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Elizabeth Terwilliger was one of kind. She was an ardent naturalist and environmentalist who dedicated her life to protecting the environment and passing on her love and knowledge of the natural world to three generations of Marin children and adults. “Mrs. T” as she was known to all, led thousands of nature walks and educational field trips for over 50 years while fighting to establish or preserve the habitats of Angel Island, Muir Woods and Muir Beach, county-wide bike paths and animal sanctuaries and wetlands throughout Marin. Her methods were simple, straight-forward and very hands-on. Children were encouraged to get out into nature and observe, touch, smell and mimic the birds and beasts that they encountered. With her trademark straw hat and Pendleton shirt she would call attention to her groups by shouting out, “Something Special!” to gather them around some intriguing or beautiful lizard, bird, fish, nest, flower or plant. She also led countless canoeing and bicycling trips along with her popular hiking adventures.

Born Elizabeth Cooper in 1909 on the island of Oahu, she and her brothers would often accompany her mother, Florence, on nature hikes around the sugar plantation where they lived. She credits her mother for instilling in her the love of the natural world and the lifelong passion she had for sharing that love with others. As a young woman she attended the University of Hawaii, and would earn a master’s degree in nutrition from Columbia University. She also attended Stanford University eventually earning a nursing degree and meeting her future husband, Calvin Terwilliger, who was studying orthopedic medicine. The couple moved to Sausalito after World War II and started a family. “Mrs. T” carried on the family tradition of leading her children, John and Lynn Ellen, on frequent nature hikes. When her children were a little older and living in Mill Valley, she began taking their school and scout groups on the nature walks. Those excursions were the start of a lifelong dedication to teaching children, and their parents, the beauty and fragility of nature and the environment. In 1970 the Terwilliger Nature Guides were formed and in 1975 the Elizabeth Terwilliger Nature Education Foundation was established. That foundation merged with the California

Center for Wildlife in San Rafael to form the present-day WildCare, a wildlife hospital, nature education center and wildlife advocacy organization.

Mrs. Terwilliger continued her unique brand of environmental education well into her 80's. The photograph above is from a 1983 field trip to Muir Beach with Terra Linda elementary students. She has been described as "sweet", "commanding", "joyful" and "gruff". What nearly everyone who knew her remembers most, is her passion for the natural world. Before she died at the age of 97, she was asked by a *San Francisco Gate* reporter what she valued most in her daily life. Her answer: "Being outdoors—sharing the joy of discovering natural wonders with others. It is all 'something special!'"

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