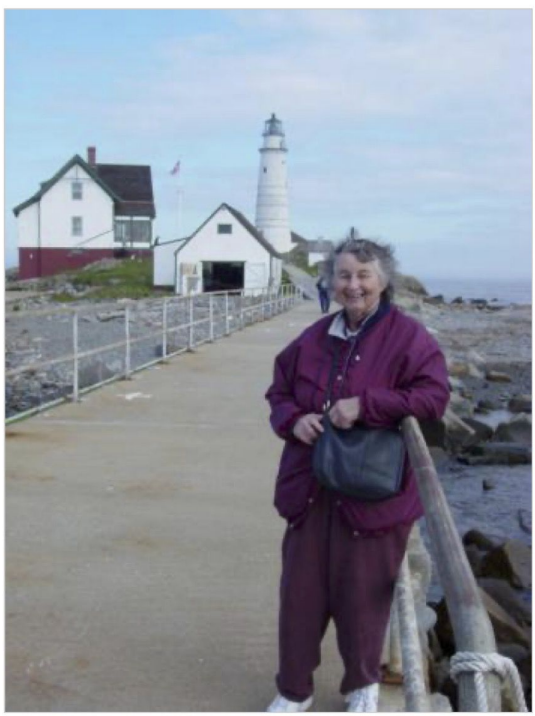
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Memories of Lila Fay Achor

By Elaine Jones | Posted: Monday, December 14, 2015 - 7:30am



Lila Fay Achor



At their annual holiday gathering, the staff of the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) plans on celebrating the life of Ms. Lila Fay Achor, their very special former co-worker and friend. Lila passed away on October 29, 2015 at 88 years of age. The daughter of Ram Island Lighthouse Keeper Ralph and Josephine (Emmons) Norwood, Lila was fourth in the line of nine children: Priscilla, Wanda, Bruce, Lila, Gail, Ralph Jr., Georgia, Bob and Dexter.

Employed at the DMR from 1984 to 2007, Lila served in many capacities. As receptionist, her signature greeting was always the slow, intonated words of “Marine Resources.” Her gentle kindness was conveyed to all callers, including those who passed through the research laboratory’s front doors. Lila’s wide smile, twinkling eyes, and endearing demeanor brightened the day of every visitor and every fellow employee.

Lila Achor touched the lives of her DMR family leaving indelible memories. A reminiscence shared by Kohl Kanwit and Diantha Robinson was the cultivation and loving care of the many plants that lined the window ledges throughout the building. The blooming geraniums were a subtle extension of Lila’s happiness and good will



to those around her. Jon Lewis recalled the Monday morning that Lila greeted him with her devilish grin saying that she had nearly gotten herself in trouble at the grocery when she was about to flirt with a man who looked like him. In honor of this loving lady, Jon named his research vessel the "Lila Fay." Former Bureau Director Linda Mercer remembered Lila as the lab's self-appointed photojournalist with camera ready to record every event. Her most memorable photos were those of the rescue. Baby ducks had fallen through the grate of a storm drain leaving only mama duck above ground. For these reasons and more, this sweet, caring lady was chosen as DMR's "Employee of the Year" in 2005.

Lila was a lighthouse enthusiast having come from a long line of lighthouse keepers. Her childhood homes included two Massachusetts stations - Nantucket's Great Point Light and Boston Light. Over the years, she returned to Boston Light for day-visits, but on October 6, 2005, an overnight stay was arranged. While crossing over to Little Brewster Island with DMR's Elaine Jones and Jean McKay, Lila's memories started flowing. She shared many interesting stories of personal and historic nature as she walked the grounds, visited the boathouse, and was coaxed up the 76 spiral stairs into the lantern-room. She said that making the climb with her father to "light-up" at night was a very special event. She loved seeing the beautiful beams of light exiting the lighthouse and was proud that her father was safeguarding the mariners from America's oldest lighthouse station.

There were two other lighthouse families on the three-acre island with the Norwoods, totaling six adults and 19 children. Their greatest hardships were homes that lacked electricity, bathrooms, and a good water supply. Lila and her eight siblings were squeezed into two bedrooms in the duplex house that no longer stands. However, the upside to island life was being surrounded by water, nature, and family. Each day, the children explored the intertidal zone, eager to discover what had washed ashore. One forbidden area to enter was a specific tide-pool with sea anemones that their father named "poison puddle." At a minus tide, a mussel bar allowed for passage to nearby Big Brewster Island, but they had to remain watchful of the incoming tide. Once, their dog Spunky went over to visit his girlfriend and got swept out to sea when attempting to swim home. Luckily, he was rescued by a fisherman and returned to them.

Some of Lila's favorite childhood memories were associated with holidays. On the Fourth of July, the family consumed an entire watermelon while watching numerous firework displays along the Boston shoreline. The other was the annual airdrop of presents from the Flying Santa. Each year, the children waved to Santa (aka Edward Rowe Snow) as he flew over hoping that his package would miss the island yet remain retrievable to them. A failed drop would mean a second attempt and double the Christmas "goodies." Another memory associated with gifts from the sea was when salvaged tea and coconut was brought home by her father from a shipwreck. She questioned him if it was honest to take these items and he assured her that the crew had deliberately thrown the cargo from their sinking ship.

The ocean that surrounded their island home caused concern during stormy weather because waves would wash over the entire island. The weather and seas generally restricted their movement on and off the island, but on the stormy night of April 11, 1932, a doctor from the mainland had to be transported because Lila's mother went into labor. Author Ruth Carmen liked the drama associated with the birth of Georgia so she wrote a novel entitled, "Storm Child."

The Norwood children went to school on the mainland, resulting in many different housing arrangements over the span of 16 years. At first, the older children boarded with families in Hull. When the younger ones became of school age, mama and all the children resided in a rented house on the mainland. Lila remembered some harrowing crossings during the winter months, but one that she chuckled about was when she and her three older siblings got lost in the fog while rowing to school. Their target of the Coast Guard Station was missed, an error that they didn't want their father to know about because he had taught them all to be good seamen. So instead of following the shoreline north, they went back into the fog until they were directly in front of the Coast Guard Station.

Lila Achor will be sorely missed by her friends at the Department of Marine Resources. Her sincere, kind, and uplifting ways were rare gifts that the staff looked forward to every time they saw her. She consistently brought so much more than anyone could have asked of her and was considered the "heart" of the DMR lab. In tribute to Lila, a memorial bench will be placed just outside of the main entrance along with a flower bed designated as "Lila's Garden" — a symbol of the joy, happiness, and love that she brought to every member of our organization.