

LOIS PERRY Memorial
Delivered by Alan Hostrup
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All of us are here tonight with full hearts, out of respect, admiration, and affection for Lois Perry, a truly great spirit whom we loved. All of us were her friends and many of us considered her like family. We knew her well and were fully aware of the personal qualities that made her the woman she was – a woman of cultured dignity, a friend to all, highly principled, full of Christian love, a good person through and through.

I met Lois for the first time on September 17, 2001, when I was introduced to the Long Beach YMCA as the new CEO. She and Paul were together, and so impressed were Margaret and I with them - little did we know how far her reach would be as a mission driven YMCA volunteer.

Lois supported, attended, and contributed to anything and everything the YMCA did – she never missed a major meeting. I don't think I have ever known a person who gave so freely of herself, no personal agenda or self glorification. She could care less about who knew what she was giving; she just wanted to make a difference.

The year was 1958, and a neighbor and good friend of the Perry's, Bob Williams, had a son who was attending a weekend camping trip to YMCA Camp Oakes. They were short on counselors and Bob asked Lois and Paul if they would attend as volunteers. Of course, Paul already had a YMCA Camp background, having attended YMCA Kamp Kole when he was a young teenager. But many decades had passed and Paul was about to be reintroduced to the power of Y-Camp, but for Lois, it was to be her first experience, an experience that would shape and motivate the rest of her adult life. To say that Lois "liked" Y-Camp that weekend would be a gross understatement. She absolutely loved it, and understood it, and was hooked.

Now, those of you who know the Y best, know that when you see a person fall for the mission of the Y as Lois did, you don't just stand around and let them fade into distant memories. Smart and savvy Y- staff directors like Pat Vest and Carl Du Bois of the Los Altos YMCA went right to recruiting Lois and Paul and before they knew it, they were directing caravan Y-camps all over the state and even to places like Sedona, New York, Munich (site of the 1972 Olympics), Hawaii, Mexico, and countless other locations. And Lois became a camp counselor and part of the directing staff for the Los Altos YMCA girls' camps during the 1960's.

It was a YMCA caravan camping trip to Sedona, Arizona where Lois was challenged to become a blue ragger. The rag program was founded at a YMCA Camp in Oakland, California, in 1929, and handkerchiefs, called rags, were awarded to boys - and later to girls and adults - for "serving others" and living life with a strong Christian faith and the highest Christian purpose. Lois became a wearer of the blue rag by accepting a challenge to become a better person. Paul, who had received his blue rag some twenty five years earlier, tied Lois's blue rag in a square knot (symbolic of a four square life) around her neck in the red clay dirt of a makeshift ragger's point in beautiful Sedona. Lois would go on to accept the next six steps of ragger challenges, including the final white rag challenge just five years ago in 2003 at YMCA Camp Oakes. Her White Rag challenge? Devoting the rest of her life to serving children and building a Christian community in every walk of life she encountered. Seems to me that Lois had been fulfilling this challenge well before 2003.

Those who best understand the mission of the Y proudly and affectionately refer to themselves as "triangle heads" – out of our fascination and understanding of the Y symbol, the triangle, which represents the best way for a person to live – to live a balanced life, with equal parts of spirit, mind, and body. Lois' love of the symbolism of the triangle had no peer, and she mentored and influenced thousands of young people all over the world, to become the best person they could be.

Lois' commitment to the Y was not fully devoted to just Y-camp – she became a Wilson High School girl's club leader, a club sponsored by the Los Altos Y. Later, she became an advisor of a YMCA Youth and Government delegation, a program that attracted boys and girls from YMCA's all over the state. Lois was so respected and loved by the young members of her clubs and groups - she knew how to let young people have fun while learning many of life's simple and more complex lessons. She was the positive role model for countless teenagers, a position she held with total humility, with ease, no ego.

It was 1973, and Paul's childhood friend, Ken Walker, and his wife Nancy, invited Lois and Paul to help them begin the YMCA of Long Beach Christian Leadership Conference, a movement to strengthen the Christian emphasis in the YMCA – these conferences would be held at YMCA Camp Oakes. Lois and Paul took to this new program like everything else meaningful in their lives; they gave it everything they had. Later, the Christian leadership Conference movement would spread to all corners of the nation. In 2005, Lois attended the John 17:21 Conference in Charlotte, N. C. Lois' good friend Terra Lynn Dearth was the trip organizer and remembers Lois counseling conference attendees for their blue rag challenge. Lois later built a Ragger's Point right in one of the hotel rooms (she used tape and candles I'm told to outline the YMCA ragger symbols) and ran blue rag ceremonies well into the night. Talk about passion for a mission – this lady so wanted people to understand the Christian mission of the Y. Without question, Lois had helped to bring the Christian mission of the Y back into focus here in Long Beach and all over the nation.

Somewhere along the way, Lois was elected to join the camping services board of managers of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach. She quickly became one of the top fund raisers in the entire Association of YMCAs – so good was she at asking for money, that people actually requested that they be called on by Lois Perry during the annual drive held every February. She was so good at telling the YMCA story. So strong was Lois' leadership skills, she helped develop YMCA Camp Oakes into

one of the premiere youth and family camping programs in all of Southern California.

Lois was a recipient of the Clair Johnson Inspiration Award. Clair Johnson was one of the most popular and successful chief executive officers in the history of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach and a strong advocate for camp. This is the highest recognition that Camp Oakes bestows annually.

She and Paul also had the Los Altos YMCA lobby and a Camp Oakes leader's cabin named for them recently. The YMCA Camp Oakes leader cabin was affectionately named..." Perry's Palace". We dedicated Perry's Palace last September and although Lois was unable to attend, the photo which hangs in the cabin fills the room with Lois' beauty, laughter, and grace.

I've talked much about the YMCA ragger program, and the ragger society that Lois and so many of us are members. Ragger members live by a creed, the Ragger's Creed. It's also in many church hymnals – called I would be true. The hymn was written by Walter Davis and is based on the 119th Psalm, verse 30. "I have chosen the way of the truth, thy judgments have I laid before me". He wrote the poem as a Christmas message to his mother when he was away. Harper's Magazine came across the poem – and it was later set to music. The creed goes something like this -

I would be true, for there are those who trust me (thank you Lois for always being someone we could count on)

I would be pure, for there are those who care (thank you Lois, for giving us every thing you had)

I would be strong; for there is much to suffer (thank you Lois for your personal sacrifices)

I would be brave; for there is much to dare (thank you Lois for taking risks to make our lives better)

I would be friend to all the foe the friendless (Lois was so good at hugging the un-huggable)

I would be giving and forget the gift (Lois loved her neighbor's children just as much as her own)

I would be humble, for I know my weakness (Lois – never a boast or brag)

I would look up and laugh and love and lift (Lois - a dedicated servant of God).

Lois, I thank you so much for always being your best self, for always standing so firmly for the hard right against the easy wrong. I know we will all be together someday in the future, and I know you will be so easy to recognize when we get there – you'll be the Great Spirit with the golden YMCA triangle emblazoned across your chest, arms reaching out, beautiful smile, welcoming us home. We will truly miss you, but your love of us has made us so strong, and our love for you will carry us for all time. God bless you Lois Perry! I would be true!