

## Ellen Peterson

December 5, 1923 - October 14, 2011



Ellen Peterson nee Salisbury 87, of Estero, Florida passed away on October 14th, 2011. She was born in Georgia on December 5, 1923. She is survived by a niece, Rhonda Romano (Thomas) of St. Petersburg, Florida, a nephew, James Davis (Barb) of Grand Rapids Michigan, and Grand nieces Megan and Michelle. She was predeceased by a sister Mary Alice Davis.

She graduated from the University of Georgia in 1945 with a degree in Chemistry and she received her Masters in counseling in 1963 from Appalachia State. She came to Southwest Florida shortly afterwards, and served as the Director of the Counseling Center at Edison College for many years. She also became a fierce advocate for our wildlife and wild places.

Ellen was a warrior when it came to the environment; she cared deeply and devoted her life to saving the planet and protecting Mother Earth. She served on many boards and advisory committees such as: the Agency for Bay Management, the Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida, Save Our Creeks, the Responsible Growth Management Coalition, The Everglades Committee, the Environmental Peace and Education Center and the Sierra Club's Calusa Group. Ellen founded the Calusa group over 30 years ago and remained the chairperson until her death.

The Agency for Bay Management was formed as a result of a lawsuit about where FGCU would be built; Ellen was the only member who refused to sign off on the settlement agreement.

Ellen spoke at countless county commission hearings, and her presence was powerful, always intelligently informed, and unrelenting. She was responsible for saving one of the most beautiful places in all of Southwest Florida, Fisheating Creek. At a Water Management District annual meeting, after a video about the creek and Ellen's speech, there was not a dry eye in the audience.

Ellen fought to save the Florida panther, heritage trees, and many other listed and endangered species. She succeeded in obtaining outstanding Florida waterways

designations for many of our local rivers and streams, providing them higher levels of protection. With the help of several environmental groups, Ellen fought and won the battle to stop a coal-fired power plant from going into Glades County.

She protested and picketed against nuclear plants and was arrested for civil disobedience. She created a presentation to save the Imperial River and was successful in preventing the Water Management District from eliminating the oxbows, an action which could have destroyed much of the river, such as killing off fish hatcheries during flood events.

Ellen fearlessly attended meetings to speak out against those who threatened the Big Cypress National Preserve, even when her opponents showed up on swamp buggies and carrying guns.

Ellen herself was threatened on many occasions, and at least one attempt was made on her life. Even so she pressed forward and continued her good works. She continually fought to protect several of our local beaches and islands. With the backing of several local environmental groups, Ellen filed suit against the developers who wanted to overbuild and destroy our density-reduction ground water resource area. She was responsible for involving a scientist whom Lee County would later hire to do water quality testing. This scientist discovered that our red tides were directly linked to the releases from the Caloosahatchee River and Lake Okeechobee.

Ellen led the efforts to investigate the minimum flows and levels for our ground water, and the research showed a sustained level of harm. She also sat on a Committee for the Route 951 Extension, because some of the proposed alignments invaded listed and endangered species habitat.

Ellen received the 2008 John Kaber award from the Everglades Coalition and the Florida Wildlife Federation named Ellen outstanding environmentalist of 2008, and she has received numerous other grateful recognitions. Ellen lived to see her biggest goal realized: the creation of the Happehatchee center in Estero. Ellen turned her beautiful property and home into an eco-spiritual center for all in the community to enjoy. The center offers many different types of classes and workshops. Happehatchee is a sacred place, a place where anyone in the community can come to find personal growth by attending some of the seminars featured there, or to just get in touch with nature while enjoying the beautiful natural setting. Anyone who enters through the gates immediately feels the peace and energy of this very special place.

Ellen Peterson was a fierce, protective voice for all living creatures on Earth: human, animal, and plant. She championed many social causes, such as equal rights for women and fair wages for farm workers. She advocated for those who could not speak for themselves. Her absence is profound. She will be grieved for and missed. While the environmental community has suffered a great loss with her passing, we are inspired by her courage, her bright sense of humor, her compassion and her absolute dedication to service. Ellen is our hero!

Ellen wanted two going-away celebrations to be held: one in Estero and one at Fisheating Creek. Public invitations to these celebrations will be announced as soon as all of the arrangements have been made.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Happehatchee Center, P.O. Box 345 Estero, Florida 33929-0345 or Save Our Creeks, P.O. Box 135, Palmdale, Florida 33944.