



A Tribute to Andrea Mead Lawrence

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It's an honor to be speaking here today. I have both a story and some thoughts to share about Andrea Mead Lawrence. In my nearly 20 years with the Mono Lake Committee, now as Executive Director, I had the good fortune to work with Andrea, most closely as a Mono Lake Committee Board member for the last decade, including our last Board meeting just 6 weeks ago. And we had a nice swapping of duties: When she founded ALIMAR in 2002, I was honored when she asked me to join her Board. For me personally, Andrea has been a friend, a mentor, and an inspiration.

There are many serious things to be said, but I do have share a remembrance that still makes me smile. You know, Andrea was the only person I know who used her telephone answering machine as a forum for broadcasting how great things are in the Eastern Sierra. You'd call and get these great vignettes: I'm not here, which means I might be out for a walk in our wonderful Snowcreek meadow, enjoying the birds. Or: it's a glorious day, we have fresh snow on the mountains and if I'm not here I must be out and about doing some chores in town. . . . I'm sure many of you called and heard messages like these over the years.

We've heard some great stories of how Andrea influenced so many people in so many different ways. Her reach was so broad that I think one more story is in order.

There was a time, maybe 8 years ago, when the Mono Lake Committee's role as advocate for the protection of the lake and its wildlife was generating a great deal of pressure for the Committee's dozen or so staff, myself included, who all live in the small town of Lee Vining. The details aren't needed today, but suffice to say that we were taking a lot of heat from a small group of local folks who opposed important regulations that protect Mono Lake.

After two or three months of this, staff morale was sagging, and we were searching for a way to reenergize ourselves. Maybe a staff retreat? A field trip? And then we realized the answer was right in front of us: let's go visit Andrea.

So we trooped down to Snowcreek, and after she had offered us tea and shared some snacks, we got to talking. Various staff members described the situation, the stresses it created, and their feelings about it. Andrea listened knowingly; after her Board of Supervisors service, this was hardly new terrain for her.

And then, after an hour or so, she looked around at the group and asked each of us: Do you have any doubts about the Committee's position? It didn't matter what your title was, or how much you were

personally working on this particular issue, Andrea wanted to simply know if each of us felt we were right.

Around the circle we went, and each person weighed in, and everyone pretty much said the same thing: No, no doubts, there's no question that protection is what Mono Lake needs and it's what we're here to do.

And right there, with each answer, you could see the burdens and concerns lifting from people's shoulders. There was a new energy, an energy that came from within each individual, the energy to get back out there and make the right thing happen. And we did.

This was Andrea's magic. She asked us to reach down inside ourselves, to look at our own core values, to make an honest assessment of our goals, to find that inner strength—the inner flame—that flows from who you are and what you value as a person.

And she showed us that when you tap into this inner flame, you can accomplish anything.

Which of course she did, again and again. And by doing so, she changed the landscape of Mono County and the entire state of California for the better.

ALIMAR is working on a book about Andrea, so maybe there will be room there for all of her achievements. I'll give just three examples.

The California Environmental Quality Act. Tony Rossman has explained the significance of the Friends of Mammoth case. I'll just recap: when you find yourself participating in almost any public comment process in California, stop for a moment to thank Andrea. Her victory won a seat at the project planning table for you, me, and the public, so that we can share our values and our concerns and build community as a community.

Saving Mono Lake. In 1976, Andrea stopped by the campfire circle of the research team that was just discovering the tremendous ecological impacts on Mono Lake of excessive water diversions to Los Angeles. She already knew with clarity where she stood: destroying one place for the sake of another was simply wrong—particularly a place as spectacular as Mono Lake. She spoke firmly of the need to save Mono Lake. She carried that conviction through her 16 years as a Mono County Supervisor, testifying in favor of numerous protections, such as the National Forest Scenic Area. She told the State Water Board of its obligations as Los Angeles' water rights were being evaluated. She celebrated the success of the 1994 water rights victory, and she delivered a message of needing to maintain constant vigilance as a member of the Mono Lake Committee Board of Directors for the past decade.

Modern Mono County. If one person can lay claim to shaping the modern landscape of Mono County, I think it is Andrea Lawrence. From Snowcreek meadow to Mono Lake to the wilderness in the High Sierra, Andrea has been instrumental in landmark environmental protections. But I think it is her vision of how community, economy, and ecological integrity should be integrated that is the most pervasive. Not unlike the story from our staff visit, Andrea in her years of service lead Mono County to take a hard look at itself, and its goals, to decide what its strengths are, and bring them to the forefront. That has set a positive county vision—of clustered communities, of open spaces, of natural beauty and wealth, of recreational tourism—that is now broadly established and will guide us for decades to come.

Many of us who worked with Andrea on Eastern Sierra issues had only glimpses of the skiing side of her life. In the last few months I've had the honor of spending more time with her family, and I've learned a

little bit more. Like, for example, that it is apparently routine business in the Lawrence household to take phone calls from the International Olympic Committee.

More seriously, I've learned that in a global sense, Andrea taught us in the environmental community—and in her community of friends—to use the same approach she did to achieve her unmatched skiing success. This really hit home for me watching the film of her racing in 1952. So let me conclude, with that Olympic race in mind, by attempting to distill four Andrea Lawrence lessons for all of us.

- First, find your inner flame. Know your values. When you walk up to compete, know your goal clearly
- Second, identify the challenges you must navigate to achieve your goal, whether they be slalom gates, government agencies, or matters of law. Then figure out the fastest possible path around, through, over, or past them to get to your goal. It may be a path of mere seconds, as in Oslo; or 33 years, as at Mono Lake.
- Third, point your skis straight down the hill, commit fully, lean into it hard, and go. Go fast. Really fast.
- And fourth of course, there is Andrea's most famous lesson: if, on that journey, you catch a ski tip on the gate—if your legislation doesn't pass the first time, if your water rights negotiation collapses for a fifth—and you get spun around and off balance—you never walk away. You don't give up. You pull yourself together, climb right back up to the problem spot, and get back on course.

That's how Andrea won gold medals, and that's how she taught so many of us here to succeed.

Because you have a goal to get to. You have strong reasons why. The clock is ticking.

And why would you walk away from doing your personal best at what you love?

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