

Tribute to Francine Murphy, January 8, 2017 by Greg Lais

We are saddened that our dear friend Francine Murphy passed away on Thursday, January 5th, in Tampa, Florida, surrounded by her family. Francine's story is a deep part of our heritage, helping to shape what Wilderness Inquiry has become over the last 30-years. We will miss her deeply.

Our relationship began in 1987 when Francine's son, Andrew, went on a canoe trip in NW Ontario lead by Patti Thurber and Ann Bancroft. Andrew, who had cerebral palsy, made quite a splash even though he communicated using a symbol board. Patti, with her background as an Occupational Therapist, and Sue Fishman, a Speech Pathologist, were able to help facilitate communication, making it fun and accessible to everyone on the trip. People quickly grew to love Andrew for his quick wit, his intelligence, and for his ability to navigate through the maze of lakes and islands they canoed through. It was a turning point in Andrew's life, and, though we did not realize it at the time, in the course of Wilderness Inquiry.

We met Francine when she came to pick Andrew up after the trip. Watching their re-union—it was Andrew's first time away from home—was really something. We all clearly remember this 30-years later. Andrew went on more trips, meeting many trip leaders like Sue Fishman. As time went on, his parents, Mark and Francine, became more involved. Mark worked for Johnson & Johnson, and they helped promote Wilderness Inquiry among many friends and associates. Sadly, in 1994, Andrew passed away from pneumonia while attending college. The family established the Andrew Murphy Endowment to help others enjoy the types of experiences Andrew had.

But that was not the end. Mark joined the Wilderness Inquiry Board of Directors a few years later, and he helped us grow. He was instrumental in the campaign that led to us purchasing our current headquarters. There were numerous trips and meetings in Florida, New York, and Minneapolis, and our relationship grew. Francine was always super-supportive and very helpful, especially after Mark passed away in 2008.

In 2011, Francine and her friend Kristina Arena joined me on a trip to Kenya, with my daughter, Rosie, and 15 college students. One of our goals was to climb 14,500 ft Mt. Kenya—a goal Francine accomplished! It was quite a feat, and a highlight for her and for all of us. We went on to do a great safari, seeing many animals and meeting many, many people. Francine came alive, greeting and engaging with everyone we met, including many who did not speak English, nor even Swahili.

One evening from that trip stands out. While on Mt. Kenya, we had an especially long day to get to what is called "Shipman's Camp" at about 14,000 ft. While hiking there, several of us were affected by the altitude and became sick. Francine, the steady hiker who just kept going, reached Shipton's Camp without any apparent ill effects, though she was certainly tired. It was cold up there, yet, throughout the night, Francine checked in on those who were not feeling well, getting them water or whatever they needed. They instantly trusted her for her compassion, competence, and attitude of support and belief. It was pure Francine, and why she was loved by so many people.

This is but a small tribute to a woman and a family that has done so much to make the world a better place. Francine, Mark, Andrew and all of the Murphy's have a special place in the hearts of everyone at Wilderness Inquiry.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.