ANN GALL DURBIN, OCEANOGRAPHER 1946–1995

THIS JULY I LOST a friend and colleague, and our field lost a scientist of tremendous range, depth and energy, Ann Gall Durbin. Although Ann received her undergraduate degree in geology she moved to oceanography at the University of Rhode Island and became a biological oceanographer who specialized in the field called "trophodynamics" or "bioenergetics" of coastal marine systems: the transfer of food energy through the oceanographic food chain and its importance for biogeochemical cycles in the ocean. I described it to the Provost of the University in my letter recommending Ann for promotion to Full Professor, as "who eats who, how often and why we care." Ann did much of her scientific work in partnership with her husband, Ted. They met as graduate students and developed a unique partnership certainly at the Graduate School of Oceanography but as far as I can tell it was unique in the University and in much of the scientific community. They were true collaborators, each contributing toward something that was greater than both of their individual contributions. In Ann and Ted's unique partnership he concentrated on the "fishier" side and she concentrated on the "plankton" side of joint work on the ecology of plankton and their role in food chains.

The absolutely unique aspect of Ann's work was her quantitative studies of vertical food chains, unparalleled by any other investigator. For example, for her study of a microorganism that is the primary food source of menhaden, she quantified the main food source, the seasonal feeding behavior, the feeding rate, and the metabolic efficiency of all seven metamorphic stages of the zooplankter. This kind of rigorous study had not even been done for a single small fish in the bay, no less seven microscopic interrelated organisms! It was a methodological tour de force and was accompanied by a statistically solid and creatively detailed interpretation of the data. These studies led to the first truly quantitative food energy "budgets" for important food resource fish and are the basis of much of the work that is being done to study the decline of fisheries on George's Bank.

Most scientists that are so talented and so well known in the scientific community are primarily scientific entrepreneurs, more devoted to their field than to their University or their faculty colleagues. But Ann was also a person who cared enormously about her immediate friends and colleagues. And this brings me to one of the parts of Ann's legacy that all of us at the Graduate School of Oceanography know very well, Ann the Gardener.

I think Ann had every gardener's dream situation. Not only did she have a wonderful home property that allowed her to develop individual gardens, but she had a 165 acre public garden, the Narragansett Bay Campus, complete with modern and historical buildings, formal and informal spaces and woods, that she planned and nurtured and enjoyed nearly every day of her life. Fortunately, she had a little help with the weeding, pruning, mowing and planting from the groundskeepers and from the landscape committee, most of whom are personally involved in the care of the campus landscape. I don't think that there is a person who has ever set foot on the Narragansett Bay Campus during the flowering season that hasn't been amazed by Ann's perennial gardens.

But the Ann Durbin I came to know who will remain longest in my memory is Ann Durbin the fighter, a winner, and a heroine to many of us. Ann NEVER gave up. I remember asking Ann what she was going to do to prepare for her second surgery and chemotherapy. She said, "This time I'm going to buy a really good wig!" The mental preparation was something she did naturally and phenomenally well. She instructed me regularly about the similarities between fighting her physical battles and fighting to retain optimism and emotional balance in my administrative job as I watched higher education slip away from its position of the 70s and 80s. This fighter, this heroine, has been one of my most valued instructors, and we will all miss her dearly.

This tribute to Ann Durbin was written by Margaret Leinen, Dean, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island. ❑