



MARILYN COLE

VISIONARY

1942-2017



When I contemplate the work ahead, I tend to cringe at my audacity to think that I could make a difference. And yet one can dare to dream. One must dare.

As you scroll through the pages, the yellow boxes contain edited quotes from a project paper Marilyn wrote towards her Master's in Environmental Studies in 1994. If interested in reading this paper, you can find it at

www.coterc.org/uploads/1/6/1/8/16182092/foundingcoterc.pdf

Numbers after Marilyn's quotes refer to the page where quote can be found.

Boxes in other colors contain memories of Marilyn from those who knew her.



Marilyn and
brother Carl

The Early Years

Ever since I can remember, I've felt an affinity with animals, as do many impressionable young girls. In my younger years, the household pets (dogs, cats, hamsters, rabbits and yes, even snakes) satisfied this yearning to "commune". In fact, it was easier to associate with animals than with humans. In my teen years, a passion for horses developed, culminating in the purchase of my very own horse at twenty-one. (2)

As the years went by and I found myself bored to tears pounding a typewriter in mundane secretarial work, I decided at the rather advanced age of 32 that a career change was in order. I applied for testing to see what I might be suited for. Zookeeper!!! What a novel idea. On October 8, 1973, I began work as a keeper and my life changed forever. Suddenly I found myself in an environment where everyone cared about animals. I was no longer thought to be a bit strange by my co-workers. In fact, some of them were even stranger than me. (2)

From Annette Simms -- Long-time volunteer at the Toronto Zoo

I first crossed paths with Marilyn when I became a rookie volunteer at the Metro Toronto Zoo. This was in the mid-1970s. Marilyn was one of the original zookeepers. She worked in several indoor and outdoor areas of the Zoo.

In contacting a few of her former co-workers to ask for their remembrances of her, I received a variety of memories quoted here:

I can remember she had worked at the racetrack with horses before the Zoo.

She went to Gibraltar to help with a study of Barbary Apes.

We worked in the Africa Pavilion together.

I know she had meerkats at home along with sheep.

She got her BSc at night while working days at the Zoo.

Marilyn initiated and carried thru the training of Josephine the gorilla.

She shared her knowledge and expertise with anyone who asked.

After retirement, she volunteered at Aspen Valley and raised beaver kits.

She was a good friend – always.

We shared some laughs and commitment to doing our best for the beasts.

I mostly recall her love of primates.

Marilyn spent time with Birute Galdikas, the authority on orangutans, in the jungles of Borneo learning about the repatriation of orangutans (kept as pets) back to their natural environment.

My own memories of Marilyn are of when she was a keeper in the Indomalayan Pavilion and very much involved with the care of the Zoo's Sumatran orangutans. Marilyn recognised the need for "enrichment" long before it became an expected part of providing care to animals in a captive environment. She would bring in cardboard boxes for the orangutans to open, play with and eventually rip apart. She was aware of both what should and could be done for the orangutans. She went the extra distance for them.

There is so much more to be remembered about Marilyn than her very dedicated work in establishing COTERC.

So many new things to learn at the Zoo and I was totally enthralled by the male and female orangutans Mingo and Puppe. I became obsessed to learn all I could about these fascinating creatures, which led to a 6-month sojourn in the Bornean jungle to observe their daily lives so that I, as a caregiver to their captive cousins, could do a better job. So much more transpired within me as a result of that experience. How can I ever convey my wonder of the natural world, the terror of being lost in it for three days, or the utter joy I felt when a wild mouse deer walked cautiously up to me, sniffed and then unconcernedly sauntered away? That trip guided and inspired me to dare to do more. From that event in 1975, my attitudes have been shaped to appreciate the natural world for itself rather than as a tool for humans. (2, 3)

Beginnings



The foundation for Caño Palma's main building starts to go up on "a tract of tropical rainforest".

In 1990, when we were offered an opportunity to purchase a tract of tropical rainforest, we unhesitatingly jumped in with both feet. I can still recall the enormity of the feeling when I first gazed upon the property and thought to myself that finally I was participating in active conservation. Here was my opportunity to make a difference. How naïve and simplistic it all appears in retrospect... I doubt if I would have had the courage to start if I had realized the obstacles needed to be overcome. (4)

During the summer of 1991, a 4-room dorm, 2 wells, a shower, privies and study area were built to accommodate future researchers. In Canada, it's a simple matter to go to a nearby lumber store and purchase all needed equipment. To construct the station, it was necessary to travel a great distance by boat and truck to obtain even the simplest thing such as nails. At that time, there was no generator to provide electricity for a saw or drill. All work had to be done by hand with the aid of a chain saw. (22)

Growing



The original home of the campesino was converted into a kitchen/dining facility... Bat droppings were combatted by inserting tin sheeting across the roof pillars... A simple shower system was built by placing a fiberglass drum on the roof of a tin-sided square 'room'. Solar energy was used to heat shower water... Necessities were begged from Canadian friends though it was a logistical problem to transport these items from Canada to Costa Rica in luggage. (22)

From June and Malcolm "Blue" Enright, friends and volunteers

Our memories of Marilyn go back several decades. Early encounters included Marilyn and her then-husband Ozzie discussing the possibility of Blue and I purchasing the surrounding lands running parallel to what is now Cano Palma. We decided not to make the leap, based on squatters' rights in Costa Rica. We have both been many times to the station, working at improving infrastructure or providing Directorship with managing staff. Here in Canada, we ended up doing a variety of jobs due to Marilyn's ability to convince you that this was one of the best things you could possibly do.

While she was our neighbour in Pickering, I was amazed at her self-sufficiency and independence while on her farm. I'm glad she wasn't aware of the proposal to put the new generating station for Seaton at the location where she once enjoyed a good part of her Canadian life.

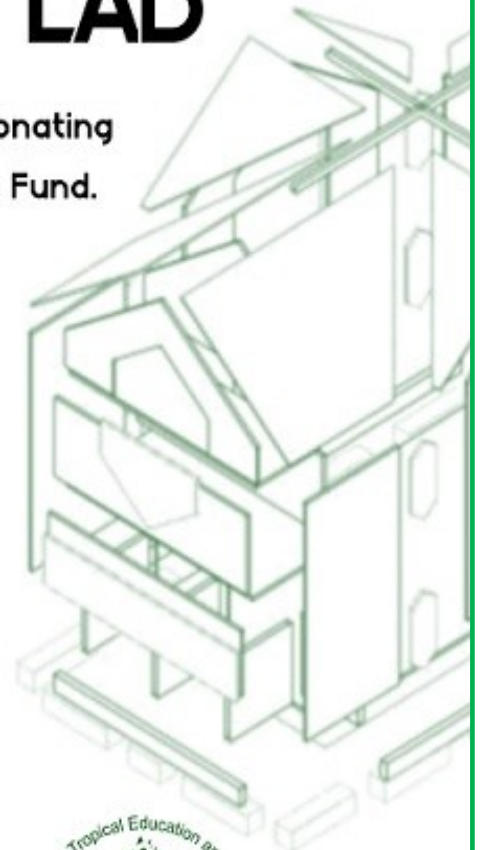
We were especially saddened to know that we had missed our opportunity to spend more time with Marilyn at her new digs in Muskoka. She had integrated into her new community, making many new friends and neighbours while finding new interests and activities. Never one to mince words and always focused on her hopes and dreams for COTERC, she will certainly be missed by a large and varied group of friends and supporters. Our sincere condolences go to all friends and family.

MARILYN COLE LEGACY LAB

**Help us remember Marilyn by donating
to the Marilyn Cole Legacy Lab Fund.**

**Funds will go to the creation
of a new lab facility at the
Caño Palma Biological Station
and efforts to help further
Marilyn's vision for tropical
research and conservation.**

**Donations can be made at
coterc.com**





Clockwise:
Marilyn
Pat Opay - Stn Mgr - 93
Science Officer - 94-97
Daryl Loth - Station
Manager - 94-6
Francis Faigal - Station
Manager - 96-97

***From Daryl Loth -- Early Station Mgr --
Owner Casa Marbella B&B -- Tortuguero***

It's a tragedy she left us so suddenly when I know she had so many good years left in her heart to help such a great cause and continue to promote education, research, conservation and community outreach.

She was a real pioneer and inspiration for many people including me. She easily convinced me to dedicate two years of my life to help build up the station in the early years. She took a chance on me even when I couldn't speak Spanish on our first meeting.

I think that even back then when there were so many unknowns (especially with regard to Costa Rican laws) that our confidence in each other would allow the station and the organization to make a notable and positive difference in the ecosystem and in people's lives. The local butterfly-garden project metamorphosed into a nursery school and daycare center that actually succeeded in empowering local

women (by allowing them to find work) more than we had ever expected.

The kind of person that Marilyn was can be measured by the company she kept. I've met many fine people through our association who I respect immensely and consider good friends.

Through Marilyn, I was able to enjoy a very fulfilling two years at the station. I didn't know it at the time, but this was an experience that allowed me to make the decisions that would affect the following 21 years (and counting) of my very happy life. I simply cannot imagine living a more fulfilling and happy existence.

Everyone involved in what I regard as Marilyn's project has enjoyed life experiences that for many can only be dreamed of. We owe it to her to carry on her work and her vision to continue to make positive differences in lives and ecosystems, and to learn more about those ecosystems so that we may continue to influence the policies that will ensure that this area may be enjoyed by generations to come.

From Todd Lewis -- Station Manager 2010-2012

Marilyn was a stalwart for COTERC and an example of true dedication and sacrifice to the rainforest-conservation movement. I only met her once during my time at Caño Palma, but she was always there, in the background. I thank her for the trust she gave freely to those of us working in the forest, to do what we thought was worthy. The legacy she made and left has afforded myself, a whole community, and so many others, such a privilege of learning through the years.



From Charlotte Foale -- Present Station Manager

Marilyn Cole touched my life well before I met her. Arriving at Caño Palma Biological Station in 2007, I fell in love with what she had created here. Station manager Jon Willans first told me the history of the station, and the founders' dream. As he related it to me, the possibilities of the place became part of my dream.

Meeting Marilyn for the first time was a jolt - the image in the mind's eye was of a younger and stronger woman. But, as we sat on the boat dock, hearing first-hand the dreams that were still very much alive for her, the younger, stronger woman I had imagined was clearly before me. She has continued over the past 10 years to

inspire me with her passion, commitment and drive. Our relationship has always been long distance, so day-to-day I'm not caught out, expecting to see her where she's not - but I can't not cry when I think about her not coming back, not seeing the changes, and sharing her advice and memories. It's hard to imagine where my life would have gone if Marilyn hadn't worked to make her dream reality.

Thank you Marilyn, for helping me find my family and the purpose I sought. Thank you for helping me to discover a job that day to day brings me joy. Thank you on behalf of all the volunteers and interns who have been touched by the magic of Caño Palma. You'll continue to change lives with your dream.

From Mario Garcia -- Station Manager from 2004-2007

Don't remember the year. What I do remember is that Marilyn and I had been doing basic walks through the forest. She always liked to come along when I did plant collecting, not that she was looking for plants. Instead she would be looking for monkeys and other creatures. She was a good companion. One night she asked if we could go on a caiman-watching boat ride. Of course I said yes. Carlos Gómez, a friend who is Mario Tortugo's nephew, joined us.

We decided to go all the way up to Laguna 4. The night was windy and not very clear. Soon the caimans started showing up and Marilyn was happy. At Laguna 4, we saw great potoos, agami herons, annulated boas, sleeping basilisks, pygmy kingfishers and of course caimans.

When we decided to head back, the rain started. It was a heavy storm with lots of rain and wind - but no lightning.

Marilyn quietly pulled out her poncho and stayed still. I was steering and bailing water at the same time. Carlos lit the way with a flashlight. We were wet but having fun. Suddenly the unexpected happened...the motor stopped!!! Despite Carlos'



knowledge of motors, with no tools in the boat there was little we could do.

We just stayed floating for 20 minutes or more trying to solve the problem. We checked everything, even Marilyn gave suggestions but nothing worked!

Finally we decided Carlos and I would take turns paddling (we only had one paddle) back to the station. While Carlos paddled, Marilyn lit the way and I bailed water. It took us about 1.5 hours, until about 2:30 a.m., to reach the station, soaking wet but



Jana, Mario and Marilyn

happy to be back. We made some hot tea, laughed and talked for a while and then we all went to rest. Marilyn was thrilled to have seen some caimans.

Costa Rican jungles will miss you Marilyn, but we're sure we'll meet again.

May your spirit run free throughout the jungles of the world.

See you amiga!

Marilyn's Vision -- From Dr. Kym Snarr -- COTERC board member

In the winter of 1992, some U of T students and I were part of the first university group to travel to CPBS, accompanied by the then Chair of the COTERC board, Peter Silverman (a former CITY-TV show host), his wife Dr. Frances Burton (a professor of anthropology at U of T), and Marilyn. For the two weeks of field time, some of us slept in tents we brought in and had food prepared by the wife of the former property owner. The first station manager, Greg Mayne, showed us the various trails and potential

for projects, along with giving us basic information on the complex ecosystem and taxa present there. During the day in that primatology field course, we followed groups of howler and spider monkeys along pathways where possible. Or we piled into the old dugout canoe, and tracked the groups along the



Greg Mayne, Marilyn, Art Shannon, Dr Kym Snarr

canal edge as best as we could, recording group size, path of travel, and food sources. While there was plenty of research going on in more easily accessible areas in Costa Rica, this area had next to nothing published on it as the very humid lowland, palm-dominated forest is difficult to access and work in!

During evening chats as darkness fell, crowded around the cook's fire in the small kitchen hut with a few beers and reverse martinis, Marilyn expressed her hope that the station would be a breeding ground for researchers to train, and that long-term projects would be set up and carried out with analysis of data to help inform the local government, scientific world, and the public at large of what could be found in this rich area of biodiversity. While I did not decide to research that area, but rather did work in southern China and Honduras, Marilyn's ideas, desires and hopes for the site stuck with me through the years. It was in 2007, well after that early 1992 visit, that I reconnected with the earliest station manager and came onto the COTERC Board. In seeing Marilyn at the 2007 fundraiser, it struck me deeply that she continued to have the same persistent vision with equal passion for the station. I have continued to work towards helping fulfil Marilyn's original vision and passion over the last decade I have been with Board.

Marilyn had to fundraise; learn Spanish and accounting; recruit members; formalize affiliations with universities; deal with new permit regulations for researchers; and get a butterfly farming project going. And she had to work hard to get noticed:

A great deal of time-consuming correspondence took place in our first year of operation. I sent letters to 60 universities, submitted research proposals to many, contacted conservation organizations and naturalist groups, spoke to national zoo organizations, had notices printed in professional journals, and published articles. It was rather rewarding to receive a phone call from someone who was referred to us by the World Wildlife Fund. Soon the Royal Ontario Museum, the Ontario Science Center and the Montreal Biodome contacted us regarding doing fieldwork. Slowly the network spread until I started receiving letters from Europe and all over North America. (15)

Fundraising is extremely difficult, sometimes discouraging and very time-consuming. We weren't too proud to hold garage sales, BBQs and slide programs. To this day, I have never dared to tally the total outlay of personal funds, which continues to occur when the COTERC bank account gets low. (19, 14)

There have been many moments in the past three years when I have felt utter despair, wondering what I have got myself into. How can this project possibly work? There have been painful personal events, but just when I think that everything is hopeless, another membership will arrive in the mail; a cheque will arrive; a phone call will inform me of someone's wonderful experience at Caño Palma, and how it has affected his or her attitude. These interludes give me the strength to continue. (37)



From COTERC Board Members

Marilyn Cole was a doer. She was a 't' crossing, 'l' dotting doer. She worked so hard to make COTERC and Caño Palma a reality as did so many others.

I only knew her for about a year, but we spoke on the phone quite regularly. We would bounce ideas off each other and I enjoyed hearing the COTERC story. We'd both go off on great tangents and end up talking about all sorts of things. She confided in me, and we talked a lot about how she came across to others, especially younger people, who were like a different species to her. I know she wanted to do better at thanking all the people who had worked so hard to make the organization a success - she just didn't always know how. She told me how truly grateful she was that so many had helped so much, and I know she would want everyone to know that. I will always miss our little chats, and hope that the project Marilyn started will have a bright and fruitful future.

Patrick Traynor

I have mixed feelings about Marilyn: Amazed and in awe that she had the vision and took the chance to create COTERC, something few of us would actually do. Appreciative of her kindness and generosity. Wanting to shake her when she said thoughtless things to people. She could be difficult to work with and often said exactly what she was thinking, both positive and negative. But no matter what, you always knew her heart was in the right place and that she was passionate about the protection of the natural world. She was a special person who has left both a void and a wonderful legacy behind her. I'm glad I knew her.

Susan Kunanec

Marilyn could be impatient. When she passed Raphia off to me, I had trouble getting the publishing software properly installed. I could tell she was becoming impatient as the days stretched on and on. But she never said a word. Once I started, she would anxiously ask when the next issue was coming out. Once the timetable and reasons for it were explained, she let me be.

As well, Marilyn must have been concerned that I'd make a hash of her treasured Raphia. If it were me in her position, I'd be giving the new editor constant suggestions. But Marilyn never once tried to tell me what to publish or how to organize the newsletter. However, she did seem to have a thing about grammar, once emailing to suggest that I insert a comma and another time to say I shouldn't be using the American spelling of 'honour'.

At our Board meetings, though she'd try to keep us on track, we'd often go off on tangents. Patiently, or impatiently, she'd let us go on despite the fact the hour was getting late and she had to drive back to Parry Sound, usually getting home well past midnight. A couple of times, she had to drive through blizzards. Highway 400 is bad at the best of times. Who knows how stressful those drives must have been for her. But she never mentioned it.

Occasionally, she'd send a link to an article in *Tico Times* that she thought might be worth summarizing in Raphia as it involved some advance in science taking place in Costa Rica. That was Marilyn - I'm sure she read the *Times* every day. She was always curious and involved.

Doug Durno

And from *Our Acting Chairwoman*

It was 2011 and the first time I attended a COTERC card night. Surrounded by unfamiliar faces, I leaned over to the player next to me and asked, "So where is Marilyn?" A white-bearded man with glasses who had a great sense of humour pointed to a petite, older woman at the door. In a witty voice, he said, "Why, she's right there, counting the money. That's why we're here - to raise money for the station. Have you not met her?" No, I shook my head. "Well don't let her personality throw you off. She might be like a porcupine but we have a lot of respect for her."

I had only known her by name and heard of the 'stories' from Caño Palma station as to how it all started...but who was this Marilyn Cole? You can envision all sorts of things of what a person might look like and their personality. Without doubt this woman was extraordinary: a woman who trailblazed a career that in the seventies was predominately held by males; a woman who had persevered and created a biological station in a tropical jungle and had maintained its operation for over twenty years.

Over the past six years, I've come to know Marilyn and concluded that the description of a "porcupine" disposition was misplaced. Marilyn was not the warm and fuzzy type, nor was she quick with praise. What she was however was focused and passionate about her mission, which was to educate people and promote a threatened ecosystem that teemed with biodiversity. I believe that it was these qualities that were confused with her being impatient, dismissive and indifferent.

In many of our conversations that were dry and detached but always to the point, I recall her telling me why they bought the land at Caño Palma. Without hesitation she stated, "We have to learn about biodiversity, and how can we learn about it if we don't study it." The statement was much like Marilyn, straightforward, discerning and profound. As a woman, I revere her pioneer spirit; as an ecologist, she inspires me; and as a friend, I am honoured to have known her.

Shelley Hutchinson

Quotes from Marilyn

The Caribbean Conservation Corporation has been carrying on sea-turtle research in the Tortuguero region since 1960, but the great wealth of other biological diversity there has remained virtually unstudied to this day. There is a great need to increase the depth of knowledge of the inhabitants of this vital ecosystem while there is still time to do so. (11)

International groups have purchased large tracts of rainforest throughout Costa Rica. Often they've had difficulty in keeping squatters out and preventing illegal logging due to a lack of local staff. The objective for us starting out at Caño Palma, then, is to hold tropical rainforest independent of the government and have it protected by individuals who live on the property and have an interest in its protection. (11)

The uses to which the station has been put have been many. However the underlying intent of all these various uses has been the same. In order to protect and preserve this fragile ecosystem, it is essential to understand its integral parts and how interdependent they are, and then to educate others to care, through hands-on experience. (28)

As an outsider, I hope to retain sufficient humility to be aware of a responsibility to the local community, and to work towards fulfilling a commitment to work with them to continue my goal of wildlife protection. The majority of schoolchildren in this region of Costa Rica have been surrounded by the forest and its inhabitants all their lives, but view them as a resource to be exploited. They have not been provided with a framework to understand the far-reaching effects of such actions. It is not our intention to condemn a traditional way of life, but rather to point the way to alternatives. (27)

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any nonprofit organization. We couldn't exist if it weren't for the many dedicated volunteers who have served on COTERC's board over the years or assisted at fundraisers and done so much behind the scenes. I'm truly grateful for everyone who has contributed to our success. Quite simply it would be impossible to continue with COTERC without these very valued people.



In order to accomplish the little, it is essential to look at the big picture, and to take into account the impact we humans have and will continue to have on our planet as a whole - Marilyn

You'll continue to change lives with your dream - Charlotte Foale



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COTERC receives no government funding and depends on your generosity to continue our work. Please consider making a donation. You can make a one-time donation or arrange for a monthly withdrawal easily through Canada Helps. Just go to their website

<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/donate/>

Click on "Find a Charity"

Type in COTERC and then follow the instructions.

Whether the amount is \$5 or whatever, your donation is greatly appreciated - and Canada Helps issues a tax receipt directly to you.

COTERC would like to thank the following individuals for their generous donations that will assist in furthering the research we do at Caño Palma.

Pennie Mason

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Susan Kunanec

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Vanessa Phelan

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Marilyn Cole

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Membership Application Form (membership is free)

Surname: _____ First Name: _____

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As a member of COTERC, a copy of our quarterly newsletter *Raphia* will be sent to your primary email address unless you check the following option.

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