

# laJoie

*laJoie* is a quarterly publication dedicated to promoting appreciation for all beings through education, adoption/sponsorship and inter-support programs.

## Ann Cottrell Free

A Tribute, by Rita M. Reynolds

Not long after *laJoie* began as a fledgling journal in 1990, a small package arrived in the mail containing a book, *No Room, Save in the Heart*, and a letter from the book's author, Ann Cottrell Free. In the letter, Mrs. Free introduced herself simply as one person who loved animals and fought hard for their well-being. She had been given a copy of *laJoie*, she wrote, and liked its message of reverence for all life. Would we be interested in reprinting from her book and possibly reviewing it as well? As the first one here to read through the book, my immediate reaction was an overwhelming YES! to both her requests. At the time of this, my first introduction to Ann Cottrell Free, I had no idea of who she was, other than a very kind soul, an outstanding writer, and one who shared my deep love for all life. And thus began our friendship.

Over the next twelve years we corresponded often by letter, spoke occasionally over the phone, but never actually met. Still, there was always a sense of close friendship as we exchanged ideas and thoughts regarding animals (especially those needing rescue) morality, and consciousness, and our shared love for Dr. Albert Schweitzer, whom I have personally worshipped since I was eight years old. Once Ann learned of my adoration for Dr. Schweitzer, she sent me her earlier book, *Animals, Nature & Albert Schweitzer*, first printed in 1982. A profound tribute to Dr. Schweitzer and beautifully illustrated with photographs by Erica Anderson (among others), this small book became a treasure on my bookshelf, the pages quickly worn and bent from repeated readings.

Throughout the years of our friendship, we also shared aspects of our personal lives, the wonderful events: a new award (among many) bestowed on Ann for outstanding achievement; the birth of her granddaughter, Amanda Blake Nooter, the successful rescue and re-homing of various dogs, cats, and other animals, and successfully won battles in animal cruelty cases. And the sad times: the death of her husband, James, in 1996; her own battle with spinal problems; the death of my mother in 1998; the animals who we were not able to help.

During the past three years we often lost contact with each other, but only briefly, reconnecting with letters that invariably began, “Oh, what a time I’ve had! I am so sorry to have not written....” And then we would catch up, always knowing we were in each other’s thoughts.

We had, once again, lapsed in our communication when in December of this past year, Ann’s daughter, Elissa Blake Free, phoned to tell me the sad news that her mother had died on October 30<sup>th</sup>, (2004) of pneumonia, at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, DC. She was 88. I found it hard to believe. Somehow, Ann was one of those individuals who would live forever, she was such a shining spirit, always blazing new trails with enormous courage, determination, all tempered with a delightful sense of humor. I, for one, needed her presence in my life!

I knew some of Ann’s personal history – her years as a journalist, her friendship with Rachel Carson, and in 1963, her receiving of the prestigious Albert Schweitzer Medal, one of the highest honors in animal welfare. But when Elissa sent several memorials written for Ann, I was astounded by the vast range of accomplishments that spanned her entire lifetime. Already the author of three books, she was in the process of writing a fourth, a memoir of her time in China, when she died. Her career in journalism alone was astounding, working for Newsweek, the Chicago Sun, the New York Herald Tribune, being a member of the Washington press corps and traveling as a journalist throughout Post World-War II Europe, Asia, India, and Egypt. As a supporter of the critical environmental work of Rachel Carson, Ann was instrumental in establishing the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Maine. She was also a member of the Society of Woman Geographers and co-founder of the Vieques Humane Society and Animal Rescue on the Caribbean island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, according to Patricia Sullivan of the Washington Post. And there is so much more that was accomplished by this remarkable woman.

I knew Ann Cottrell Free as a determined, loyal individual whose soul embraced all animals, a woman who was not afraid to fight for them, to speak her mind, to stand up to anyone who neglected, abused, or denounced them. Had I known of her famous career, I would most likely have been in such awe of her, I would have felt inferior and inadequate in my own efforts, next to hers. After all, I have a small, private sanctuary for animals, and produce a simple quarterly journal regarding reverence for all life. Nothing outstandingly glorious or award-winning here!

But in fact, Ann, having never visited my small sanctuary, having never even as much as shared a luncheon with me, *trusted* my work, trusted my dedication to animals, appreciated this humble publication. She was, above all, a good friend who did see me as someone worthy. In the front page of *No Room, Save in the Heart*, Ann wrote: “For Rita M. Reynolds – Who has found room in her heart. With admiration, Ann Cottrell Free.” I couldn’t ask for anything better.

Ann- wherever you are, thank you for our friendship, for your trust in me – both of which I will honor the rest of my life as I continue my work in reverence for all life.

God speed. ~

## Question?

Dr. Schweitzer,  
Mrs. R.,\*  
Rachel Carson,  
I wonder where you are?  
Together talking,  
Fighting hate?  
Doing your best  
To set  
Your new world  
Straight?

(\*Eleanor Roosevelt)

-Ann Cottrell Free  
from *No Room, Save in the Heart*