

NABB Cherishes The Memory Of Mary Natale

These excerpts from reflections expressed at Mary Natale's memorial service on May 17 echo the sentiments of the community. Visit www.nabbonline.com to read the full text of these comments.

FROM MARK YESSIAN:

I look to this service as a way of celebrating not only Mary's life, but also the values she held so dear, particularly justice, tolerance, and civic engagement. Mary loved the Back Bay and devoted a substantial portion of her energies to helping to preserve its beauty and livability. She was out there battling against the skyscrapers that would add shadows and congestion and compromise the historic qualities of the Back Bay and against city licensure practices that would advance private gain at the expense of community interests.

But Mary's advocacy went much deeper than preserving the physical character of the Back Bay. She decried the increasing gentrification she saw around her, the increasing compartmentalization and commodification of our culture, the increasing concentration of wealth, the extolling of market values at the expense of the communal ties that bind us together as a society. She loved cities—the museums, the libraries, the parks, the public transportation, the hustle/bustle, the mixing of different peoples. While she felt nowhere could match the mountainous splendor of her native Northwest, she came to love Boston—the city—with a passion.

FROM SHIRLEY KRESSEL:

Mary was a real buddy in the trenches of activism. She was a comrade, especially in the frustrating transportation struggles here that neighborhood people all know well. We spent a lot of time together in those endless meetings. She'd often watch what was going on, and add what was missing: if there was too much narrow detail, she'd broaden the perspective; too much philosophical rant, and she'd demand a quantitative inventory. She was a team player; she looked to see what was needed, and she did it.

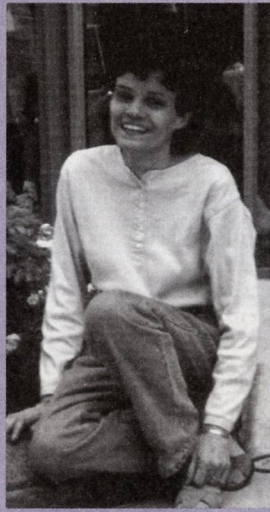


PHOTO BY MARIANNE CASTELLANI

She was passionate about issues of principle: she cared about justice, and she had a fine sense of the common weal. She understood public interest in its most fundamental meaning, and she never forgot that in the crush of specifics that tend to swamp civic activities....Mary "got it," in a big way.

She was a source of moral support for me, dependable when there was work to do, and sensitive about people and issues when it wasn't clear what to do. She had a sharp sense of humor, even in the toughest times, and good advice about frustrating work.

FROM PAUL DEMAKIS:

...I will always cherish the memory of Mary's devotion to my cause. But it was not a devotion to me personally. Rather, it was a devotion to an ideal—a value at Mary's core—that it's important to do whatever you can to make your community a better place to live.

Sometimes that might mean becoming directly involved with a specific issue. Other times it means working to elect a candidate for public office who shares your vision and your goals. Nowhere did this ideal manifest itself better than in the terrific work Mary did for the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay...

As a public official, it is easy to get frustrated with the many people who are apathetic about what's going on around them, or the many people who care about what's going on, but who only complain without ever transforming their concern into positive action, or those who may get involved in an issue, but seem more concerned about seeking glory or power. Mary was none of these...in her own

quiet but determined way, Mary made a vital contribution to our community. In short, Mary Natale understood and fulfilled the obligations of citizenship in a way too many of us do not. In doing so, she set an example the rest of us should always strive to follow.

FROM THOMAS M. KEANE, JR.:

I knew Mary as a citizen. Citizen: It's an interesting word. In one sense, all of us are citizens. But in another, it is a calling, a calling that few of us genuinely pursue. A citizen is enmeshed in the affairs of the community. A citizen is someone who is engaged, not alienated. A citizen is someone who is active, not passive. A citizen is someone who appreciates the good that is there but wants to do better. A citizen cares. Mary was such a citizen.

I first met Mary when I became involved in local politics. She worked on my campaigns, not just casually, but whole-heartedly. But more than that, she was one of those people you saw everywhere. Licensing board meetings, neighborhood social events, public hearings—Mary was there.

For Mary understood something very important about places like Boston. A city is not something

created out of whole cloth, a thing that, suddenly, one afternoon just appears. Rather, cities are built, street by street and block by block. They are almost living, breathing creatures that depend vitally on the work of truly engaged citizens. It's hard work, and it's the kind of work that Mary did.

But more than the fact of Mary's commitment was the reason for her commitment. She

didn't follow politics and become a community activist for fame or money or power. Her life as a citizen was one of selflessness. She worked tirelessly, even when she was ill, for the best of reasons: so that she might better the lives of her fellow men and women.

A LIVING MEMORIAL

In honor of Mary Natale's extraordinary service to the Back Bay, NABB is planting a tree on the Commonwealth Avenue Mall in front of the Vendome, where Mary lived with her husband, Mark Yessian. If you would like to make a donation to support the acquisition of this tree, please send your contribution to NABB, 337 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02115, and indicate on your check that the donation is for Mary's memorial tree. Please support a living memorial to our friend who tirelessly nurtured our community.