

## A Friend Indeed

BY MONIQUE J. MARINO



**T**he Cambridge English Dictionary defines a *friend* as “a person who you know well and who you like a lot, but who is usually not a member of your family.” So, yes, Lois Utterback, former CFO of the Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC), was a friend. But these words do a poor job of describing who Lois was as a friend and colleague. Many, many more words are needed: true-blue, dedicated, integrity, mentor, leader—and yet that is still insufficient. Lois was all these things and so much more.

When I lost my 39-year-old brother Jean-Paul to testicular cancer in 2009, Lois was a rock. Not only did she take care of work-related details like activating my

bereavement benefits so that I would get a paycheck at a time when money was my last concern, Lois somehow managed to track down the church in rural Georgia where my family held Jean-Paul’s memorial service, find a florist who would do same-day delivery, *and* ask that the arrangement be made with red, white, and blue flowers in recognition of my brother’s distinguished military service. That was Lois.

### Who Lois Was—and Was Not

*Outgoing* was not a word I would use to describe Lois. After working together for 20 years, I did not need Myers-Briggs to tell me that Lois was an introvert. In groups, Lois did not do a lot of talking, but she did a lot of listening—and she did it well. And that’s not as easy as it sounds. As an extrovert, I find listening more challenging than talking. Lois was an advocate for those with less-voluble speaking styles. She wanted to ensure that ACCC staff gave everyone a chance to be heard, even those most uncomfortable with speaking up.

Most people would not describe Lois as “the life of the party,” and yet she had a great sense of humor and—when comfortable with the people and the situation—she could really shine. (Exhibit A: the pictures of Lois I’ve shared in this article.)

Several “foodies” work at ACCC. Lois was the exact opposite of that. A colleague recently shared a story about Lois at an ACCC Board and Executive Committee dinner. After a wonderful meal, featuring a delectable assortment of canapés like foie gras and steak tartare, Lois exited the

restaurant and immediately asked for directions to the nearest McDonald’s. We all enjoyed that shared recollection.

Lois was an accomplished accountant and skillful leader. Still today, the percentage of women CPAs who arise to the role of CFO remains low. A 2021 survey of S&P 500 and Fortune 500 companies found that 15 percent of CFO positions were held by women.<sup>1</sup> Lois was supportive and always the first person to offer colleagues praise for an idea or a job well done. (In all fairness, Lois was also one to roll her eyes at a subpar idea.)

Lois adored huskies. All dogs, really. So much so that for many years ACCC’s headquarters office was “dog-friendly.” On any given day, visitors might be greeted by a well-trained huskie, miniature long-haired dachshund who was apt to forget his potty training, or another staff member’s beloved rescue dog. Over the years, staff bonded over a parade of well-behaved furry faces, and these occasional canine colleagues made our office a fun place to work.

Lois loved HEAs (Happily Ever Afters) on TV or in movies, books, and real-life. Yet thanks to her love of serial dramas and telenovelas, she also liked stories of evil twins, back-from-the-dead spouses, and killing sprees—as long as they weren’t overly gruesome.

Lois considered ACCC staff her “family” and was deeply invested in creating a work culture of inclusion. Lois talked the talk, and she also walked the walk. She was ahead of her time in terms of creating a workplace that encouraged staff engagement at every level. During her 30+ years with ACCC, Lois

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Lois Utterback, CPA, January 25, 1958 – September 19, 2022



With ACCC Executive Director Christian Downs at ribbon cutting of new ACCC headquarters



At an ACCC staff event



With Deb Lumpkins at Washington Nationals game



With Monique J. Marino (left) and Amanda Patton (center) at a General Hospital fan event



With the ACCC Administrative Team at a holiday party



With a pet therapy dog at the ACCC 34th National Oncology Conference

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was a mentor to so many—both personally and professionally.

### Missing Lois

If we are lucky, our friendships mature as life unfolds over the months and years. Lois and I had much in common—from our personal experiences with cancer to our love of books and a shared lifelong addiction to *General Hospital*. (An aside: Lois introduced me to the online Goodreads platform. If you are an avid reader, I highly recommend you check out goodreads.com. Lois would support me on this.)

Lois always called me a storyteller. And a storyteller's greatest superpower is that their words can live on after the storytellers, themselves, are gone. To try and tell the story of Lois in one page is impossible and would be a disservice to this complex, caring, careful, candid, curious, and courageous person. (That's just the "Cs", readers. There are 25 other letters—24 if we don't count "X.")

But my hope is that these 961 words offer a glimpse of Lois Utterback. For those who did not know her and for those whose only introduction is this column, know this: Lois was quite simply wonderful. For the 30+ years she worked for ACCC, Lois directly touched the lives of so many ACCC members and—by extension—the patients and families they served.

The last time I saw Lois, she told me, "One of the best things about retirement is that I don't have to be your boss anymore. Now I can just be your friend." A friend indeed.

*Monique J. Marino is the managing editor, Oncology Issues, and senior director of Content and Strategy at the Association of Community Cancer Centers.*

### Reference

1. Estrada S. Fortune. Women are increasingly being hired for CFO roles this year, says an executive search firm president. Published August 22, 2022. Accessed October 6, 2022. [fortune.com/2022/08/22/women-are-increasingly-being-hired-for-cfo-roles-this-year-says-an-executive-search-firm-president](https://fortune.com/2022/08/22/women-are-increasingly-being-hired-for-cfo-roles-this-year-says-an-executive-search-firm-president)



With Betsy Spruill at ACCC Board Event



With a member of her huskie family.