In Memory of Denece Sanford Ray

Friends of Alta Memorial Tree Planting

September 13, 2013 | Memorial Grove | Alta, UT
DENECE SANFORD RAY

1911 - 1998

This tree should grow as De grew: tough, with a body too strong to die in the confines of a normal life, and upright, with unflinching standards. It will shelter from avalanche, as she sheltered those she loved. It will be beautiful with an elegance of spirit that De embodied. It honors the life De lived.

Denece Sanford Ray, 1911-1998, was born in Richfield, Utah. She lived in northern California, but in Washington, D.C. as well, while her husband, Philip Alexander Ray, was undersecretary of commerce in the Eisenhower administration. She lived in Cuernavaca, Mexico, too, while he wrote his book about South American communism.

De was courageous beyond words. She was the first woman to cross the Rocky Mountains by airplane in the 30s, as co-pilot to Tommy Thompson of Utah aviation fame. She was intelligent, with a sharpness of mind that kept her studying languages into later life. She was a gossamer thing as she grew, with a waist in her wedding dress so small, no one else could wear it. She was generous past comprehension. As she had no children of her own, she lavished her love and attention on her sister, Sue Sanford, and her nieces, Sas Stark, Ellis Bigelow, and Denece Crozier. She helped to fund degrees, and trips: to California, every year; to Washington; to Mexico; to Europe.

De has left a legacy of love, for her family, and California. She introduced us to the tidal pools of Fanshell Beach near Cypress Point, and watched the fog creep across the San Francisco Bay. Redwoods towered at her home in Hillsborough, along with the smell of eucalyptus trees and lemon. You could see the Pacific from her living room in Pebble Beach, just beyond the cypress and the iceplant.

De wanted to be loved and cared for, the way that Phil cared for her. She wanted the family to be together. She loved the sea and the kelp forests of Monterey Bay. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote his own epitaph at the hill behind her home in Pebble Beach, but it could serve for her as well:

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig a grave and let me lie.
Gladly I lived, and gladly I die,
And I lay me down with a will.

And this be the verse you grave for me:
Home is the hunter, home from the hill,
And the sailor, home from the sea.

This tree grows for De.
Above: Marcus Dippo, Alta Lodge; Maura Olivos, Sustainability Coordinator, Alta Ski Area.

Left: from L-R: Chris Cawley, Friends of Alta; Jen Clancy, Executive Director, Friends of Alta; Amy Collins, Executive Director, Tree Utah; Jacqueline Knutson, Volunteer.
Memorial Tree For Denece Sanford Ray

Memorial Tree Locations 2013