

Lois Ann Swenson

*Teacher * Peacemaker * Farmer * Neighbor * Seeker of
Justice*

Lois Ann Swenson's love for young people was palpable, and her entire career was devoted to teaching them, primarily in Robbinsdale, Minnesota. But her classroom extended far beyond Robbinsdale, and for her, it was always as much about learning as it was teaching. When she had leave-time from teaching, she would travel the world, enlarging her vision of the planet we inhabit, and increasingly identifying as a global citizen.

In the late 1960s and 70s, Lois traveled across Africa, including South Africa and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), where she lived in the midst of apartheid. She saw the famine and disease that resulted from the Biafran war. Lois also traveled extensively in Mexico, and a trip in the 1970s to Guatemala was a life-transforming experience for her. Her interest in peace and justice issues took on heightened significance at that time. In 2001, she joined Zapatista leaders and hundreds of international observers as they traveled in a caravan that covered 12 Mexican states in two weeks.

Having grown up on a farm near Arena, Wisconsin, Lois was especially aware of environmental issues and the value of living simply, but her travels exposed her to a much wider community and a host of injustices and travails. She became a peace activist and found herself in numerous animated conversations about how to make a

difference in the lives of neighbors near and far. Her smile seemed sufficient when language or culture was a barrier, and she was a consummate

advocate for better understanding of our world neighbors. She used her travels to inform not only her worldview, but her personal lifestyle as well. Even her organic garden was an example of how she lived—it filled her backyard, and its harvest was consistently shared with her neighbors.

Lois died at age 76 in June 2012, much too early for a woman with such a big heart and broad vision. Her legacy includes not only the remarkable examples she set, but a permanent endowment. In her will, Lois left her entire estate to Augsburg College for the purpose of education. She stated, "My experience living in Central America opened my eyes to the real world and changed my life. I would like to provide similar experiences to seminary students who will be in a position to further educate people." Though she was not a wealthy woman, the generosity of her final wishes provided funds to Augsburg that will be available in perpetuity.

A number of Lois's friends have raised funds to dedicate this bench in her memory. Built of white maple, the bench was lovingly created by Edward Wohl, a local family friend, artisan, and builder of museum-quality furniture. When you enjoy a moment or two of rest here, be mindful of the bench's beautifully simple lines, and the importance of living simply so that others may simply live.

Lois A. Swenson Scholarship

Words of Wisdom

Speak truth to power
Teach children to garden
Respect all people
Laugh often
Live your faith
Challenge injustice
Build community
Advocate for the poor
Stop by unannounced
Buy local
Engage youth
Live simply
Start a garden
Work for justice
Talk to your neighbors
Walk in another's shoes
Go organic
Learn about other cultures
Work tirelessly to end war
Love your neighbor

