



R. LeRoy Creswell

Oct. 11, 1950 - Oct. 27, 2020

Have you ever had that feeling of excited anticipation of meeting, visiting, or working with a certain individual, a person whom you admire? An individual who would always engender personal feelings of comfort in his/her presence with a corresponding desire to engage? LeRoy Creswell was that person. He had those special personality traits that would 'beckon you'. Sadly, opportunities to personally engage with LeRoy will no longer be, but memories of him and the impact that he made will live on in us and through the legacy he established. LeRoy passed away on October 27, 2020, after a prolonged bout with cancer, ever stating that he was going to beat it, while also proclaiming that he was so proud of his family and thoroughly satisfied about what he was able to accomplish during his professional career.

So many of us in the fisheries and aquaculture communities have been significantly influenced and in some cases 'transformed' for the better through our interactions with LeRoy. He had a career that spanned 40 years, characterized by an array of accomplishments and contributions associated with activities that included research, administration, and outreach. He notably had the uncanny ability to effortlessly and effectively move in and

out of these sectors with ease. On one day he would be interacting with individuals representing state and governmental agencies, and on the next he would be answering questions about fisheries and aquaculture posed by wide-eyed children.

My relationship with LeRoy, described within this tribute, will undoubtedly typify those of countless others who knew him. Reading these words that I have written will undoubtedly engender memories of what he meant to each of us. He was an individual who welcomed challenges and the adventure and unknown that accompanied them. He was always motivated by a desire to make a difference, whether short term, long term, or both. He selflessly devoted his time to engage with others who sought his guidance, whether they were students thirsty for his experiential knowledge, commercial fishermen striving to make a transition from capture fisheries to culture fisheries (aquaculture), or colleagues like myself.

A partial examination of what he accomplished during his career aptly illustrates what a unique individual he was. After completion of graduate study at the University of Miami, LeRoy joined the professional staff at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. He began by being awarded grants from the Florida Department of Agriculture to develop management practices for the subtidal culture of oysters and clams. These efforts were soon complemented by educational activities that included manuals, workshops, and training programs. This work led to the successful introduction of commercial fishermen to shellfish culture and the development of a thriving industry that exists today, centered along the panhandle of Florida. This success was based on an uncanny ability to relate and effectively communicate with the clientele. In 2000, he began working at Florida Sea Grant as an Extension Agent in St. Lucie County and that same year received the Wallace Award, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the promotion and expansion of the shellfish aquaculture industry in Florida through the combined efforts of industry, federal funding, and the academic community. In 2011, he assumed the position of Extension Program Manager for Florida Sea Grant, serving in this capacity until his retirement in 2019. He epitomized what was potentially possible when academia effectively collaborated with industry. Always filled with boundless energy, and insatiable in his pursuit to learn, develop, and apply, he relished thinking out of the box. During his career, the dimension of his pursuits included investigations of potential of culture of other marine species such as the angel wing clam, ornamental shrimp species, spiny lobsters, queen conch, and green sea urchins as fisheries resources.

The respect and admiration that LeRoy gained and commanded ultimately led to service in elected positions of leadership in an array of scientific societies and associations. His most notable service positions include President of the National Shellfisheries Association (2011-2013), the World Aquaculture Society (1994-95), the Florida Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals, and a Director of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute. During his tenures in these positions, he was often involved in the planning and organization of annual scientific conferences. He was Executive Secretary and Senior Editor of the *Proceedings of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute* for the past 18 years. At his death, LeRoy was Editor of the *Quarterly Newsletter*. One of his sometimes unknown contributions was a book titled *The Aquaculture Desk Reference*, a practical source of diverse information used by research and industry sectors for the past 27 years.

LeRoy was always in your corner, always enthusiastically responding to requests for help, and excited about what might be the outcome. He once readily consented to my request to give a lecture on management practices associated with oyster culture to my aquaculture class at Mississippi State University. Not finding a flight that would work to meet the date of the class meeting did not stop him. He traveled by train to nearby Tuscaloosa, Alabama, from where he planned to drive the remainder of the trip by rental car. While waiting for him to arrive, I received a phone call asking that he be picked up at the train station. Curious, I asked why and he simply responded that he was unable to rent a car because his driver's license had expired. That was vintage LeRoy, giving his time to meet my request while obviously forgetting about renewing his license.

Continued on page 3...

...continued from page 2

I presume that not many know that LeRoy was an accomplished musician, a drummer in a band, and always enjoyed talking with fellow musicians. His musical talents came to my attention when we were at the 1996 World Aquaculture Society annual meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. Past and present US members of the WAS leadership at that time were asked by the hosts to perform something that was representative of the US. LeRoy rose to the occasion and took out his harmonica and played the folkloric song, Oh Susannah, as we sang the lyrics. Our efforts were accompanied by gracious smiles and laughter.

How are we to remember LeRoy within the array of communities in which he played such an integral part? By remembering his contributions as founded in his being a selfless, compassionate person, always thinking of, and genuinely interested in others. It seemed that he innately knew that his role was to help enhance all of the unique and special gifts that he saw in people. As a result, where he saw the need, he unpretentiously gave. Invariably, mutual benefits were realized from this approach. All of his diverse roles were dedicated to enforcing the role of science in protecting all fisheries through wise use and management while expanding their role as a contributor to food security.

LeRoy leaves his wife, Danita, and two daughters, Leala and Alonnah. With love of LeRoy the man and his personal effect on our lives, we move on, challenged and motivated by his legacy. To complement what I have written about LeRoy's life, testimonials that I personally solicited from individuals who shared in different aspects of his career follow.

Lou D'Abramo, Mississippi State University (retired)

"LeRoy encouraged and inspired every person he met using his wisdom, smile, connections, and compassion. We met as queen conch aquaculture pioneers 40 years ago; LeRoy was a mentor, a friend, and a colleague and we always shared a love for Caribbean aquaculture and communities."

Megan Davis, Florida Atlantic University

"LeRoy was a force of nature and one of my oldest and dearest friends - of about 40 years. He was passionate about his family, his four-legged adoptees, his friends, his science, and his desire to share information. He was a regular source of down-home wisdom, shellfish biology, humor, joy, and amusement. He was also a great confidante. His genuine enthusiasm for life and his willingness to give of his time and expertise will live on in all those he helped along the way. I talked to him just before his last surgery and he told me he had a great family, great friends, and no regrets. I believe he was happy and content. LeRoy was a highpoint in my life and won't be forgotten."

Sandra Shumway, University of Connecticut

"LeRoy Creswell was that vital repository of knowledge regarding the culture and utilization of marine shellfish in the Gulf and Caribbean ... that pool of corporate knowledge that will be so greatly missed by so many. His vast technical knowledge, however, was in fact exceeded by his kindness, his willingness to serve, and his enthusiasm for the science. We were fellow musicians and could talk forever about our musical 'careers' and experiences."

Chuck Adams, University of Florida (retired)

"LeRoy was one of those very special people who was liked by everyone, who treated others with respect, and who was always there if you needed him, whether it was a 2 AM water exchange, consulting on grow-out methods or leading field work in the Caribbean. I was LeRoy's Advisor at Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science for his Master's degree, but in fact he was always a valued colleague, friend, and advisor to me and many others through his work in aquaculture and the environment. His positive outlook on life remains a great model for us all, and he is sorely missed. Godspeed, LeRoy!"

Scott Siddall (retired)

"LeRoy served as the Executive Secretary and Senior Editor of the annual Gulf Caribbean Fisheries Institute Proceedings for the previous 18 years. He was an institutional pillar, not only through his official responsibilities, but also through the generosity and warmth he gave to all, especially to students and early-career professionals ready to become part of the GCFI family. In life, he was a charismatic presence, generous with his knowledge and wisdom, and a clarion voice for marine aquaculture and sustainable resource management in the U.S. and the Caribbean. His contributions to GCFI will remain with us forever."

Bob Glazer, Executive Director, Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute

"LeRoy, an invertebrate biologist and aquaculturist, was one of the founding fathers of shellfish aquaculture in Florida. Working with colleagues at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution in the 1980s, he developed alternative culture methods suitable for the state's subtidal, subtropical conditions (soft bottom bags for clams and flexible belt for oysters), wrote practical manuals on these methods, and introduced hundreds to the potential of shellfish farming. His pioneering efforts led to an industry valued today at USD \$20 million and supports over 350 small farms."

Leslie Sturmer, University of Florida, IFAS Extension

A remembrance video for LeRoy is available: <https://www.haisleyfuneralhome.com/obituaries/Roger-Creswell/>

