



The Frank and Joanne Hicks Memorial Fund

The Frank and Joanne Hicks Memorial Fund has been established by their family to support the educational programs at Ding Darling, and to honor Frank and Joanne's life-long love of birds and the natural world. As children, Frank and Joanne were fortunate to have summer vacations on lakes in Ontario, Canada. Frank's parents had a cottage on a quiet lake on Manitoulin Island. Joanne learned to imitate the loon calls that she heard on Lake Joseph in the 1930s, a skill that impressed her grandchildren sixty years later.

As they were raising their three children, Sandra, Roger, and Scott, in western New York in the 1950s and 60s, they bought an old hillside farm and vineyard in the Finger Lakes region, and built the house where they would retire in 1981. They kept a pair of binoculars by the window to watch the many species of birds. Red tailed hawks and turkey vultures were favorites because they loved to soar in the thermal updrafts in the hilly terrain.

Joanne spent many hours teaching her young family about birds. Dozens of times they listened to a record called "An Evening in Sapsucker Woods," a recording from Cornell University's ornithology lab. Arthur Allen narrated a walk through the woods and a marsh, describing bird songs by phrases that helped the listener identify the birds by their songs. Joanne and the boys went for many bird walks together near their home in the Bristol Hills.

Joanne volunteered at the nearby Cummings Nature Center where she taught classes on birds and nature for the children who would visit.

Frank and Joanne moved to Punta Gorda, and Joanne volunteered at the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center. They loved Ding Darling so much that they brought Sandra, her husband Jim, and their two young daughters to the refuge on their first visit in 1994. That visit, and especially the beloved crocodile which lived at the Refuge, made a lifelong impression on the two girls.

After Joanne died in 1999, Frank lived the last 18 years of his life at Shell Point in Fort Myers. Practically every visit from Sandra and Jim, Roger and his wife Linda, Scott and his wife Carol, and their children included a trip to Ding Darling. Even in the final few years of his life when he was no longer able to drive, he always wanted to visit the refuge. The last visit was in July, 2018, when at age 95 Frank still enjoyed a drive through the refuge.

Frank and Joanne's family want to thank the staff and volunteers at Ding Darling for their excellent work through the years. The family hopes that children from southwest Florida who visit Ding Darling will take home happy memories and be inspired to learn more about birds, other wildlife, and their habitats.



Joanne and Frank Hicks, near Naples, New York in 1976