

## Whispers from a Giant, my 12 months with Lisa Ketcham

By: Kevin Sniecinski

I have known Lisa by reputation for over a decade, her tireless work on the coast side and her finessed presentations' which almost always included a level of detail and explanation that was hard to touch.

She talked with me a several times prior to me accepting a nomination by the Midcoast Community Council (MCC) and got me to the place where I finally felt ready to act and join the council. Sharing with me countless stories of her efforts and achievements on the MCC from over the past decade and beyond. In her way doing what she could to ensure that the MCC, for which she was so integral, could grow and continue to be of service to the unincorporated coastsides. I shared my concerns with her, telling her about my twice fought battle with Stage-1 Lung Cancer and the fall out from that. Even then, she knew exactly what to say to convince me that I would be able to contribute to my community as a member of the MCC.

I never got the impression that Lisa was truly an extrovert, at least she never seemed to cross the line of sharing her personal experiences. I came to rely on her as a mentor and an expert on all things coastsides. She always seemed to have the answer or knew exactly where to direct me.

So, it would surprise me to get a call from her, sometime in the Fall of 2024. She asked me if I had time to discuss a personal matter, which threw me for a loop, but of course I said yes. She began to tell me about her own battle with Cancer. She told me she wanted to reach out to me personally and before she made a public announcement, since I had my own connection to the disease. She talked about her specific illness and as she stated, what she understood the inevitable outcome for her would be. I will offer that her sharing of this took my breath away. I think anyone who has been told they have this horrible disease, even those who have watched loved ones with the same news will understand... a level of despair and humility immediately washes over you.

Even in this moment, Lisa was not emotional, but rather stoic and almost as a matter of fact about it. So, I did what I thought was appropriate, as I talked with this warrior who seemed to prefer that we not descend into despair but rather keep our faces forward and move along with the things that needed tending to. I remember telling her that I wanted to be of service to her, picking up groceries and medications if she needed. She responded softly by saying, "That is very kind, but we'll see." I think anyone who really knew Lisa would understand that this was a very predictable response, even in the face of such awful circumstances. She remained fiercely independent and strong-willed. Private even. She did, however, relent on a few occasions and would let me run some errands for her. I did this with little fanfare as I thought she may slap me or tell me to snap out of it if I were to get too emotional. We may have chuckled about it even.

But then, one afternoon in February, she called me again. Out of the blue and asked if she could ask me something of a personal nature. And of course, I said yes. She asked me, "What was it like when you were told you had cancer for a second time, how did it make you feel?" I thought for only a minute and told her, "I feel like cancer is the biggest, meanest and scariest bully I'd ever met. A beast who seemingly won all the battles, but one that I stayed mindful of, to not win

the war. Something so scary that at times I could barely say its name, for the fear it conjured inside of me.

This was the singular moment when Lisa Ketcham was silenced, and I could tell that she had to catch her breath. When she responded, she said to me... "I'm afraid I have lost this war, and I have looked at this bully straight on and resolved myself to this fact."

When you interact with someone who is in the midst of this, you learn it is best to meet them where they are. I really wanted to honor her strength and not take away from the words and feelings she shared with me. It was indeed a rare occurrence and something I think was very hard for her. But then I responded, "Lisa, while the result of our battle may end in different ways, YOU... will indeed win this war." "You are unrelenting and calling the shots until the end, and YOU... also have a legacy that will indeed go on." I reminded her that she had many who have grown to respect, love and cherish her and all of her contributions.

The only time I ever heard Lisa Ketcham speak with emotion in her voice was at this moment. She said, "Perhaps you can help with that, so please remind our community that I have loved this land, I was proud to be of service to it and want everyone to remember that." She added that the best legacy for her would be through our continued calls to action.

You see, cancer may be the biggest, meanest and most scary bully that Lisa ever met, but SHE WAS THE GIANT. Cancer may have muddled her voice, but her whispers pierced through, and her voice was and will always be heard.

My final thoughts. I asked Lisa what she thought about memorials and what she may want after. This was not easy, but essential. She said, as you may have expected, "I don't care what people do when I am gone, I will be dead." and "Just make sure my work goes on and no one screws up my website."

Those were her exact words; I did not alter them to make them sound or feel better. It was what she had to say about this matter. I hope our community finds ways to ensure her work lives on.