

## FOREWORD

“THROUGH HER WRITING AND LECTURES SHE LED THE WAY TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THE NATURAL WORLD.”

## ANNE LABASTILLE

ELIZABETH THORNDIKE



ANNE LABASTILLE AT COVEWOOD LODGE,  
BIG MOOSE LAKE, APRIL 2000

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*Women and leadership is a theme of this edition of AJES. Anne LaBastille was a leader among Adirondack women in a manner not usually thought of as leadership. She didn't head up a major organization, become a professional politician, or engage in widespread research. She led by inspiring generations of women (and men also) to engage in the unique pleasures of the Adirondack Park in particular and the natural world in general through her writing and her illustrated talks. She fascinated her readers and her followers with her tales about living in a woodland cabin, accessible only by water, and experiencing nature in all seasons, mostly accompanied only by her beloved German shepherds, Condor, Chekika, Xandor, and others.*

*I first met Anne in the fall of 1979 in Ray Brook. I had been nominated by then Governor Carey to become a commissioner of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA). The APA is the New York State agency responsible for planning and regulatory matters governing the public and private lands of the six-million-acre Park which is as large or larger than each of seven states. Anne had already been serving as a commissioner for three years.*

*I last saw Anne the year before she passed away in 2011, when she was living in a sheltering*

*environment in Plattsburg still eager to be outdoors as much as possible. Following are some remembrances from that 31-year period when we became good friends and shared both the joys and the frustrations of trying to “save” the Park, bequeathed to all of us by the citizens of the state of New York.*

*During a break in my first Agency meeting that October 1979, Anne eagerly urged me to take a short hike with her up the start of the trail to McKenzie Mountain, where we encountered a very large tree and she demonstrated to me how she loved to hug trees. We had instant rapport.*

*Then I recall the “one dog night” I spent with Anne in her small tent in a grassy field overlooking Lake Champlain. I'm told that Eskimos judge how cold the nights are by the number of dogs needed to sleep with them to keep warm. Chekika faithfully joined the two of us, sleeping between us in the tent. I had never slept in a tent with a dog before but it worked out just fine.*

*Anne always brought her dogs to Cornell for any medical treatment and stayed with us on Cayuga Lake several times. We used those occasions to discuss Park issues and commiserate over the difficulties of getting everyone to agree about the need to protect Park resources.*

*And Anne did walk barefoot in the woods. I can attest to that on at least one occasion when I wore hiking boots and she just plunged ahead barefoot.*

*Anne was especially concerned about acid rain's effect on natural resources and wrote and lectured on that topic extensively. Much of the work of an APA commissioner is political and social science in nature and that was not her strong suit. We spent regular time before monthly Agency meetings reviewing the agenda as she, ever the scientist, tried to understand the political and legal complexities of the issues being debated.*

*The darkest moment of our relationship occurred early one morning in 1990 when my phone rang at about 6 a.m. the day before an Agency meeting. It was Anne in emotional turmoil having just experienced her barn being burned down during the night – across the road from the house where she now lived near Westport. Luckily, there was not much of value inside. The perpetrators of the arson were never identified.*

*The state police that night had urged her not to go to any Agency meetings for the time being. She asked me what she should do, and I said to do what the police recommend. In fact, Anne never attended another Agency meeting, though she did not actually resign until about three years later.*

*Anne made her living from royalties from book sales, especially the original Woodswoman, which has become an Adirondack classic – and from lecture fees. She spoke frequently at colleges, schools, and to community groups. Initially, her books were published by commercial publishers, and her later books and essays were self-published. The content was always deeply personal; her writing was lyrical and showed her indelible caring about all creatures in the natural world.*

*Anne paved a path for women in the conservation arena. Through her writing and lectures she led the way to a better understanding and appreciation of the natural world. She has in turn enriched the Adirondacks and the resource conservation field with the contributions from her family estate that have made possible the Adirondack Museum display of her cabin, the writer's association workshops, and her scholarship aid to Cornell students. Anne occupies a unique position among those who stand as pillars of the Adirondack environment.*

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Dr. Elizabeth Thorndike was founder, executive director, president, and member of the board of the Center for Environmental Information in Rochester, NY from 1973 to 2007 and has held appointments as adjunct faculty at Cornell University since 1996. She served as a commissioner of the Adirondack Park Agency, member of Governor Mario Cuomo's Environmental Advisory Board, and member of NYSERDA's Board of Directors between 1979 and 2017.