

Memories of Nancy Gerow (b: March 1928 – d: February 2018)

Many of us remember Nancy Gerow as that remarkable elderly woman who tirelessly pulled weeds along the Montclair Railroad Trail. Every early weekday morning until noon - she rarely missed a day - you would find her in a field alongside the trail, filling large bags with thistles and other invasive plants. On those rare days that she wasn't on the trail, many would express concern for her. Even now, people will often ask us about that nice woman "who used to constantly work on the trail."

Nancy knew the early morning trail walkers and their dogs, and they her. Nancy loved dogs. She and her dog used to walk the trail. She once explained that she needed a project to get herself out of the house after her dog died. The trail, with its many dogs and its vast areas of thistles and other weeds, beckoned.

Nancy was a true example of determination, discipline and volunteerism. Even in her 80's, and despite a pronounced limp due to a bad hip, she'd regularly hit the trail. To get her tools to the trail, Nancy built a custom cart out of scavenged parts. She wheeled her cart from her home on Banning Drive, across Shepherd Canyon Road and down the trail. And then she'd begin attacking the thistles, which she believed (and rightly so) were a scourge that needed removal before they entirely took over. Nancy single-handedly cleared the thistles and weeds from the East Meadow of the trail before we planted new natives there in 2010. She also entirely removed the thistles from the Melin Cut. Evidence of her work was often bags of greens left near the trail's garbage cans. She was unnecessarily apologetic about having to leave them for City pick-up because they were too heavy to take home in her cart.

Much like her thistles, Nancy could be prickly. When the City installed new metal traffic barriers along Shepherd Canyon Rd, they had no gaps. This prohibited Nancy from being able to cross the street from Banning, forcing her to walk up the edge of Shepherd Canyon Rd to Saroni to cross, then all the way back to the trail. She made her complaints clear and widely known. It wasn't long before Public Works returned and modified the barriers.

Though she said she "wasn't good with groups and preferred to work on her own," Nancy eventually relented to reporting her volunteer hours to Friends of Montclair Trail (FOMRRT). Over time, she warmed to the regulars she'd meet on the trail, eventually engaging many of us in discussions about plants and her times residing and working as a bank officer in Montclair.

Nancy was truly a force, logging an astonishing 700 hours during the 2+ years she reported her time to FOMRRT. On every count, she'll be sorely missed.

- Board members, Friends of Montclair Railroad Trail -