

A Tribute to the Memory of Ed Radatz

Ed Radatz 1940-2018

Leader, Educator, Coach, Mentor and Inspiration for Youth and Educators Worldwide

The loss of Ed Radatz to our planet is a sad event for his Caretakers family, softened only by his genuine friendship and spirit. Ed's legacy will endure not only for those he left, but for future generations of Caretakers and those that they, in turn, will continue to inspire. Isabel Abrams has written his memorial, followed by comments by Caretakers. -DH



In Memoriam : Edward Radatz

Edward Radatz, co-founder of Caretakers of the Environment International, passed away on May 1, 2018. He was my mentor and a friend for many years, during which time we had a lot of fun and amazing international adventures. Ed and I met at the American Biology Teachers convention, I believe. He was a teacher at Oak Park and River Forest High school (near Chicago) and I later learned he was honored as the most outstanding Biology teacher of Illinois. I was a science journalist who invited him to be an educational consultant for the magazines I wrote for: Current Health 2, Current Energy and Ecology, Science Challenge and Biology Bulletin. That meant he was my editor, yet I never felt he was criticizing my writing. We were a team, making the articles better.

In 1986, Ed invited me to lunch so I could meet Arjen Wals, an intern in his biology class who was researching his master's thesis on American attitudes about the environment. When Ed said, "I think we can get something going." I didn't know what that meant, but I surely didn't dream it would be Caretakers of the Environment International. During lunch on that cold winter day, Ed, Arjen and I chatted about pollution, endangered species and other environmental problems. By the time dessert came, we agreed that young people – no matter where they lived, or what their career choice or lifestyle was – needed to understand that they were caretakers of the environment. (I said, "caretakers of the environment" because I thought Dr. Noel Brown, Director of the United Nations Environment Programs (UNEP) said that when I interviewed him. Later, I looked at my notes and learned Dr. Brown had said "shareholders of the environment.") Although Caretakers of the Environment was a misquote at the time, we kept the name because it described our mission: to provide youth with the skills and knowledge for environmental leadership; and to encourage them to think globally and act locally.

Caretakers of the Environment International (CEI) was born that day and Ed, Arjen and I decided it would involve high school students and teachers. We did not know of any environmental organization that involved teenagers in environmental work. And we had no funding and no network. But that did not discourage us at all.

That year, we flew to Amsterdam with several of Ed's students. Arjen's mother, Joke (who was a teacher) and his father Harry (Director of Parks, Gardens and environmental education for the Hague, Netherlands, took us out to dinner. We also met with a European environmental education group that was about to disband so we offered to take over their work and invited them to join us. And Harry Wals offered to host the first Caretakers of the Environment International conference in The Hague, Netherlands.

Ed introduced me to writing the Constitution and articles for CEI; and to the worlds of business and politics. In order to obtain support and funding for CEI, Ed and I met with heads of corporations and members of government. And he always took students to those meetings. The students often asked questions I never would have dared to ask. But their knowledge and passion for protecting nature convinced these leaders to support our cause. Dr. Noel Brown, director of UNEP and Senator John McCain of Arizona were among the leaders who became members of the CEI/USA Honorary Board.

When we hosted the 1989 CEI conference on Technology and the Environment, Ed gained the support of the Illinois government and guided a team of teachers who were in charge of the housing, food and program. I planned tours to sites where technology affected the environment. It was a lot of work but the reward was that we gained so many international partners.

Ed always seemed to have a group of students around him. They listened to what he said, and they laughed with him. At the CEI conference in Israel, Ed asked if I had met the Palestinian students. When I said that I had not, he accompanied me into the dining room, pointed to the table where the students were having lunch, and left. After I introduced myself, I asked the students what they wanted. One boy replied, "All I want to do is walk down the street with my Jewish friend." It was heartbreaking. So I tried to give them some hope about the future. I pointed to Alexander Ryzhenkov, a teacher from Russia who came to the CEI/Illinois conference in 1989 when Russia and the U.S were pointing nuclear missiles at one another.

A friend of Ed's, Barbara Rinnan arranged for the 2 Russian teachers and their students to come to the CEI/Illinois conference. In 1991, Barbara invited Ed and me to join her on a trip to meet with teachers in Moscow, then travel by train 36 hours to Murmansk, to honor teachers who had arranged a students' march in protest against having a nuclear plant built in Murmansk, and against a polluting nickel plant in the Arctic. That visit led to a CEI/Murmansk conference in 1995.

Ed's work brought honor to CEI –from Renew America, a United Nations Youth Forum, the United Nations Global Assembly of Women and the Environment, and the United Nations conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit).

When Ed became ill and could no longer travel to CEI conferences, he continued to support the outreach of our international environmental education network. Ed remained at the helm of CEI/USA branch until the end of 2015. For more than 30 years, he inspired CEI students and teachers from around the world to work together to protect nature. Ed Radatz will be missed by all his friends. But he will always be remembered as a smart and fun-loving teacher, and an extraordinary friend to Caretakers.

Isabel S. Abrams
(CEI Co-founder, USA)