

On May 17, 2017, the Liff Spirit Award was presented to Whitney Hatch at the 14th Anniversary Party in the Park. Here are his remarks.

What an incredible and humbling honor –not just to receive this great award but merely to be mentioned in the same sentence as Justine Liff! I am as astounded as I am grateful. Wow! If you are willing I would like to make 5 points.

FIRST – Not only is it thrilling to be recognized by the Conservancy and by Justine’s family, but it is such a privilege to be also connected through the Liff Spirit Award to that great pantheon of one-of-a kind park advocates, including Governor and Kitty Dukakis, Mayor and Angela Menino, Norman Leventhal, Genie Beal, Henry Lee and Valerie Burns, to name the ones I have known personally. These people have been truly amazing advocates for our park systems.

SECOND – While I’m not sure about the previous honorees, I know most of the credit for this award truly belongs to those with whom I have had the good fortune to collaborate at The Trust for Public Land, Trust for Public Land Action Fund, DCR and its Stewardship Council, and Conservation Law Foundation to name a few organizations. It is their efforts which have and which continue to make such a difference to people and to their parks.

THIRD – We are extremely lucky in Massachusetts to have a deep base of committed organizations and individuals devoted to protecting and stewarding our natural resources. For a compelling example one need look no farther than the Emerald Necklace Conservancy and the great work it does day in and day out with the state, two cities, advocacy groups and our citizens to reinvigorate, restore and maintain that great park vision that is the Emerald Necklace. I particularly want to thank every one of you for digging deep today to honor and support the Conservancy.

And while I am on the subject of you....FOURTH....Every one if you is vital to the Conservancy and the other public and private organizations in the city and state that support our land, our parks. The magnitude of the challenge involved in protecting and caring for our land here and across the country is a difficult one—and you are essential to that effort.

The Trust for Public Land’s CEO Will Rogers recently quoted from Bill Cronin, my fellow board member’s remarks to the 2005 Land Trust Alliance Rally – and I am taking poetic license here.....

Land Trusts and indeed the Emerald Necklace Conservancy is in the business of not just protecting ecosystems and natural areas for human enjoyment –but of conserving the HUMAN VALUES these lands embody. To quote Bill, “History and the land are the core of our patriotism as a nation, and sustain our vision of what the United States is and should be as a nation; our best dream of what we aspire to become.”

Day in and day out, despite the polarity that has emerged in our political system, Americans love their land. This is no better exemplified than by over 500 successful ballot initiatives that The Trust for Public Land has helped pass over the past 20 years. An 81% success rate! These initiatives passed in blue states and red states resulting in self-imposed tax increases generating almost \$70 billion in new funding for land protection and increasingly for park maintenance. Included in this is the tremendous success of the Community Preservation Coalition here in Massachusetts. Almost 50% of our cities and towns have passed CPA. None of the 172 have repealed it. \$1.75 billion has been generated in new funding for open space, historic preservation and affordable housing. And now Boston is included as a result of a 74% vote in favor, due in large part to your hard work and Mayor Walsh’s leadership.

I mention these statistics to illustrate that the electorate cares about our land even if our elected officials don’t appear to. And further to show that you and every other citizen can make a difference when you give voice to your concerns.

Despite this widespread ethic and support, our land and its stewardship is under attack. At the Federal level we are seeing proposals to transfer our federal land to states, to revise the Antiquities Act and roll-back national monuments, to zero out the engine of federal and state land protection – the Land and Water Conservation Fund – and to open federal lands to extraction industries.

In our state the actions are more subtle but no less insidious through regular and unrelenting twists of the budgetary tourniquet on our park funding arteries. We all complain to DCR – our agency – but these hard working and talented professionals just don't have the funding to respond.

I am the first to admit that we need to work with DCR to develop a simple, direct and credible way to show what resources are needed where and what result the public would see from that investment. We at the Stewardship Council are working on that and so is the agency.

So, I say again, the real solution is you all in this room and your family, colleagues, friends and acquaintances. You need to let your elected officials know that you want adequate funding to maintain and steward OUR land. From your Senators to your Congressman. From the Governor to your select boards and City Councils. Write letters, make phone calls, post photos of what you see and what is unacceptable. If there isn't enough money in existing revenue sources, demand that they find other sources. But remember this isn't a partisan action. Nearby, safe and well-maintained parks are valued by everyone.

FIFTH and last, I want to remind you – which I don't need to do I'm sure – of the importance of Place. These public spaces - such as the one we are in today, are places where we can connect with nature, with ourselves and with each other. In them we connect with our childhood. And it is on this note I want to finish.

Tizzy and I had the great fortune of growing up in families which for generations valued our natural resources and our great outdoors. There are no better examples than my father who authored and passed the first wetlands protection act in the country here in Massachusetts and my mother who to this day tries to keep Tani and The Esplanade Association on its toes. And I'm quite sure this ethic that Tizzy and I have inherited has rubbed off on all of our kids – three of whom are here today.

The Trust for Public Land is laying the foundation for a nation-wide effort to ensure that no person – and especially no child – is more than a 10 minute walk from a safe and well-maintained park. For it is to these places we will return time and again – if only vicariously – to relive our childhood experience and reconnect with the natural world. My grandfather described this power of place best in the last stanza of his 1960s song about the swan boats in our Boston Public Garden:

Swan Boats

Dear little boat in a park
You took me for a lark.
When I was dangling in my hand
My little straw hat
By an elastic band.

Swan boats carry me back to child - hood.
Swan boats back to the wistful days.
Wearing ankle ties, ribbon in my hair
Floating along with wonder in my eyes,
Never an earthly care.

Swan boats, through the lagoon we're glid - ing.
High hopes you bring alive once more, for

In your feathered boat
Once more we'll float
Back again to childhood's happy shore.

Francis W Hatch
1960-ish

Thank you for coming to celebrate the Spirit of Justine Liff, for backing the Emerald Necklace Conservancy,
and for the great honor of this award.

—*Whitney Hatch*