

Linda J. Gormezano was a valued student in the Department of Ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History and member of the Hudson Bay Project . After completing her Ph.D., she remained an active researcher in the Department, publishing more of her papers before moving to Montana. Once she completed her degree, her affiliation with the Hudson Bay Project changed from a student to a Principal Investigator. Until her untimely death, she oversaw our polar bear research program. Her leadership on that front will be sorely missed.

Having Linda as a graduate student was every professor's dream. She was highly motivated, worked incredible hours, strove for perfection and was happy to debate everything I threw her way. She intended to work on coyotes in Westchester County but when I offered the opportunity to shift to polar bears in the Canadian Arctic she jumped on board and became fascinated with the project, the Arctic and especially the people. She spent many hours collecting Traditional Knowledge from members of both the Inuit Community and especially the Cree First Nation.

Linda was an excellent listener and her discussions with Cree Elders were part of what ultimately set her on a course of using non-invasive techniques to study polar bears. The use of invasive techniques such as darting and tagging is anathema to the aboriginal world view. To meet this challenge, Linda acquired one of the loves of her life. Quinoa is a Dutch Shepherd that she trained from a 6-month-old pup to seek and find polar bear scat. Despite scientific "experts" who claimed she would find nothing (many of them still feel polar bears "fast"), she and Quinoa found more than 1200 piles of scat in 3 years. She brought the samples to the American Museum of Natural History and pains-takingly sorted each to identify and quantify the contents. Those data formed the core of her dissertation and allowed her to provide insights on several novel aspects of polar bear foraging and nutrition.

Publishing scientific work through the peer review system is always difficult but even more so when your findings are at odds with popularized views. There is an unfortunate overtone in the world of polar bears that is powered more by opinion than hard core science. Far too many that call themselves scientists and experts are actually advocates connected to not-for-profit organizations that fund themselves through public fears that iconic species such as the polar bear will soon go extinct. Linda's work focused on a simple theme – "What are the bears actually doing?" Tragically, her simple truth that the bears are "adapting" and trying to make the best of a changing situation struck a sour note with many of those who have influence over scientific journals.

Linda, being the exceptionally determined individual she was, never yielded but sought advice from our late colleague Robert L. Jefferies (Dr. Bob) who told her: "Stay your course. Good science, properly done, thoroughly documented and well written, will ultimately win the day". Fortunately for polar bears and the rest of us, Linda took his advice, stuck to it and her papers began to flow. It is rare indeed that a graduate student displays that level of perseverance (and grit) – but that was Linda.

It is rarer still that a graduate student and, later, a junior colleague can alter the trajectory of a long-term (38 year old) research program. When Linda first joined the Hudson Bay Project as a student she argued with Dr. Bob and me that we should expand our efforts from simply looking at the interplay of an herbivore (the snow goose) and its forage plants to a community level and incorporate research on polar bears that, because of climate change, were becoming an increasingly important player in the ecosystem. We listened, gave her a chance and the rest is history, well documented in this collection of her work.

Thanks to Linda's perseverance, the world view on the fate of polar bears is changing. Many scientists are duplicating her results and even more are challenging the fatalist attitude of the advocates of doom and gloom. Linda always ended her papers with admonitions that we do not know enough and that there is still more to learn. I am pleased to assure you that I along with the Hudson Bay Project team, especially its new members from the University of North Dakota including Susan Felege, Brian Darby and their students, have committed ourselves to continuing and building on her work. We shall keep her vision and dream alive and I know of no more fitting and well-deserved tribute.



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