The Seed Remains: A Tribute to Linda King Aukett (1943–2013)

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Oh heart, if one should say to you that the soul perishes like the body, answer that the flower withers, but the seed remains. — Kahlil Gibran

Linda and Ken. The Auketts. The global champions for people living with an ostomy. Tireless crusaders on nearly every continent on the planet. Ken and Linda. The heart and soul of the United Ostomy Association (UOA), International Ostomy Association (IOA), and United Ostomy Association of America (UOAA). The intrepid duo has been tragically reduced by one. Linda, Ken’s beautiful, statuesque, raven-haired love, has been taken too quickly from us all. Her flower has withered, but the seeds she planted will take root and blossom once again.

Always modest, Linda listed her profession as independent, nonprofit organization management professional, but anyone lucky enough to know her immediately grasped she was so much more. After graduating from the State University of New York with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, Linda quickly became a champion for people facing ostomy surgery and living life with a stoma. She led quietly but with great vision. She gave voice to a cause and hope and inspiration to the thousands she encountered and scores more who will continue to benefit from her lifelong devotion and commitment. She and Ken found each other later in life, but their 25 years together left an indelible mark on all who knew her.

Linda has a long list of accomplishments. She examined every facet of the impact of an ostomy on people’s lives, regardless of their age. She was a staunch advocate in Washington and a voice for the underserved with national insurers. She addressed every aspect of what it means to live with an ostomy because she lived that life herself. She reached out to healthcare professionals, policymakers, industry, and governments, ever-visible and always offering powerful contributions with her intelligence, verbal and written skills, and empathy. She never stopped. She published, she spoke, she traveled, she emailed. She was a constant presence on blogs and in online support chat rooms. She made phone calls. She was Treasurer of the Digestive Disease National Coalition, President of the United Ostomy Association, and with Ken founded the UOA’s 20/40 Adult Support Group and the United Ostomy Associations of America, Inc, rescuing the collapsing UOA.

I was fortunate to have worked and traveled with Ken and Linda on several occasions. My husband and I have always considered them special friends. I watched Linda’s daily postings on Facebook: promoting a charity, a political position, a cause, a news event; remembering her honeymoon; or simply sharing pictures of cats. She always had something interesting to say. I was fascinated with her intelligence and breadth of knowledge. We were blessed by a visit from Ken and Linda only a few weeks before Linda passed away. It was a beautiful, sunny, breezy day at the beach — Linda was poised, conversant, modest, witty, intelligent. Our lunch with them was a gift we shall not soon forget.

Her passion and devotion extended beyond Ken to the UOA Youth Rally. During the period when the UOA was on shaky ground, Linda told me she could not let the Youth Rally become a thing of the past. She came to the group’s rescue, shouldering responsibility as its Treasurer and CFO.

Linda King Aukett was a beautiful woman in every way beauty can be described. She epitomized grace and empathy. Her legacy will be felt for many years to come. As Emerson said, “The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”

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