



The American Association for Nude Recreation – Western Region

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The Pioneers:

Biographies of Nudists Leaders Who Made a Difference



Irene Shannon

(5/1/1922 – Present)

California Beach Advocate

IRENE SHANNON, is a lifelong nudist and naturist advocate. She made a unique contribution at a critical time in the 1970's and 80's when local activists were attempting to create legal nude beaches along the California coastline. Over the course of her life she formed several non-landed clubs in Southern California.

She joined Beachfront USA in 1973 while it was trying to legalize long-used clothing-optional Venice Beach, and she became a frequent contributor to Bare-in-Mind monthly publication, which focused on the national Free Beach Movement.

1974 formed a nudist travel club in Huntington Beach known as the Orange-Peelers and became active in WSA (now the Western Region for AANR) politics, chairing their Non-Park Nudist Activities Committee.

She acted as a go-between and key player in the 1979 bitter struggle to get the ASA (now AANR) to accept the Free Beach Movement as part of its larger mission. The attempt failed, due to the acrimony of many landed club owners, toward the “beachers,” whom they considered “hippies” who “wouldn't pay” to join the established landed clubs. So, Shannon joined Lee Baxandall and helped him form the Naturist Society as a separate organization in 1980.

A tireless volunteer, Shannon spent much of her spare time during the next decade attending legislative hearings whenever bills were introduced to support or restrict social nudity. She spoke at the 1979 hearing when then-Parks Director Russell Cahill decided to institute his now famous “Policy” protecting nude use of the state parks in traditional places except upon

complaint.

When a local Assemblyman from San Diego tried to put thru a bill that said the creation of any nude beach in California it had to go thru the legislature, Shannon convinced 11 of the bill's 13 co-authors to pull their names off the bill so that it died in committee.

Her only failure came in the late 70's when Ventura County. The Park Ranger of Rosarita Beach is the one who asked for the ordinance. Irene says to this day that it passed because nobody spoke against it. Ed Lange of Elysium didn't want to send anyone. Irene went but she arrived too late. After the hearing, Irene found out it was the ranger's wife who was the one sending letters of complaint. Irene never forgot that tactic and always demanded to see the complaint letters through Freedom of Information before any future hearings.

Shannon remained active in naturist issues until the very end. In 2007 she attended the Huntington Beach hearing to ban nudity in that city and she passionately spoke against it. She also travelled to San Diego in 2010 and spoke before the CA State Parks Commission to support establishing designated nude beaches.

She was a Lifetime member of SCNA and Hall of Fame recipient. A supporter of the Naturists in the OC club, she was a frequent visitor to the club's monthly swims in Huntington Beach until very recently. She also was a member of the Olympian club.

She had been in declining health for the past several years, suffering from chronic leukemia but she still sends out letters advocating or opposing various legislative bills.

A legal secretary by profession, Shannon was also a founder and leading figure in The Hemlock Society and the right-to-die movement. In 2015, at age 93, she led a successful letter-writing campaign that convinced Governor Jerry Brown to sign California's controversial Right to Die law.