

Hildebrandt & Davis Nature Park

By Gloria Hildebrandt

It's official. I have achieved one of the most important goals of my life. I have completed the process of placing a conservation easement on my family's property.

Now, the 14 acres of trails, pond, wetland, karst, hill, cedar and deciduous forests, which were given to me by my father in his will, are protected for perpetuity. That means that no matter who owns the property in future, it can't be subdivided, developed, clear cut, misused or have many other specific wrongs done to it. It will remain habitat for wildlife and plants, at least until evil politicians destroy land trusts, eliminate protective restrictions or expropriate the land, although that would be fought by the conservation agency I deal with.

I still own the land, and can sell or give it away as I like. The protections remain on the land regardless. It is still private property, and people are only allowed on it by invitation.

My father bequeathed the land to me because he knew that my love for it was similar to his. He registered the property with the provincial government as a Managed Forest and maintained it according to an approved plan, which I have also taken over. He was a naturalist, conservationist, gardener, hiker, wilderness explorer and excursion leader. He, Charles Hildebrandt, has a Bruce Trail Side Trail named after him. He used to talk of his property as a nature reserve, and to have it officially recognized as such, would have given him great pride.

The Process

It has required patience and quite a bit of time, years actually, to get to this point. COVID-19 delayed things somewhat. The first step was hammering out the specific conditions in the conservation agreement with Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC), a land conservation agency and a regular, long-time advertiser in this magazine. Bob Barnett of EBC, who regularly writes a column on land conservation for us, steered me through the process. Several reports were required after I was happy with the conservation agreement.

An ecological sensitivity report was prepared after experts came for a tour and exploration of the property. The report listed these at-risk species that have been observed on the land by various people: Western Chorus Frog, Eastern Milksnake, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Monarch Butterfly and the Butternut tree.

The report also gave the summary "The property contributes to Canada's environmental heritage due to the fact that the property contains forest, wetland and stream which provide habitat for a variety of flora and fauna such as those listed as at risk species and the numerous species identified in the species inventory. Additionally, having these multiple ecosystem features on the property contributes to the maintenance of ecosystem health and landscape biodiversity."

Another necessary report was the valuation of the conservation agreement on the property, or how much the restrictions on



▲ Part of one of the Escarpment outcroppings on the property, with Mayapples growing in spring. My father referred to this area as a natural rock garden. PHOTO BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT.

the property might lower its real estate value.

Environment Canada reviewed the appraisal of the property, and then sent me a notice of determination of fair market value of this ecological gift. I will benefit from an income tax receipt because of the agreement.

Finally, the lawyers registered the conservation agreement on the property title.

According to EBC, it is their 189th reserve, their first to be established in Halton Region and at the time of this writing, also their southernmost reserve.

What's in a Name

Hildebrandt & Davis Nature Park recognizes my birth family and the steadfast contributions of Mike Davis, whose relentless pursuit of invasive plant species on the land is matched by his appreciation and enjoyment of the land.

The word "park" is an acknowledgement of my mother who said that her

property was so pretty it seemed like a city park. This was a high compliment from someone who would have preferred to live in a downtown area, but who came to enjoy daily walks on her rural property, feeding chickadees from her hand, and sitting on a bench on the hill. A commemorative bench with her name on it now stands in that spot.

How We Got Here

It's worth noting that when my parents bought the property in 1963, it was a rocky piece of farmland used to graze beef cattle. Natural springs in one part of the land were a muddy watering hole. My father let the land regenerate naturally while planting some specimen trees. He had the muddy area enlarged, letting the spring water form a pond. Now, 57 years later, this land has become a plant and wildlife refuge forever.

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