



Stansje Plantenga et Robert Shepherd in their magic valley in 1983
Photo: © Noel Salmond

Stansje Plantenga and Robert Shepherd

Landowners Find a Way to Save their Magic Valley

In the 1960s, the wilderness of the Ruiters Valley drew Robert Shepherd, a Montréal psychiatrist who loved to camp, canoe and rough it in the woods. This father of three had bought an old farm in Mansonville, on the eastern slope of the valley. Robert later bought other properties in the valley and constructed log buildings to house a living community for healing schizophrenics.

One day, Stansje Plantenga, a Dutch-born woman who grew up in Montréal, visited the centre. Since her arrival in Quebec at the age of six, she had been fascinated by the province's wild and untamed nature. It is not surprising that a year after her first visit to the Ruiters Valley, she moved there and worked in the community as a therapist and art teacher.

After a few years, Stansje and Robert,

who had since married, made a big change in their lives. The region's once numerous farms had gradually been abandoned and forests had reclaimed the land in many areas. The couple hoped that these areas would one day be covered with old-growth forests. To them, the valley was magical. They wanted to save it from logging and development, but they didn't know how. They embarked on a long journey of research, meetings, fund-raising work and legal issues that led to the creation of the Ruiters Valley Land Trust in 1987.

Robert gave a core area of 400 acres of land to the land trust, whose goal was and still is, to protect the integrity of the valley located in an area of relatively unfragmented forest. Later on, he transferred a 10-acre parcel of land to each of his children. Robert succumbed to cancer in the fall of 1990; he

passed away convinced that helping to set up the Trust and save large tracts of forest was one of the best things he had ever done.



One of the valuable wetlands of the Ruiters Valley
Photo : © Stansje Plantenga

Since then, Stansje continued the work she and her husband had undertaken. In 2001, she decided to make another generous donation to the RVLT, this time through Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts program. She made an ecological gift of an 80-acre forest, consisting mostly of maple and poplar stands, on the eastern side of the valley. Among various species, the donated

land shelters Wild Leek, a vulnerable plant in Quebec. In 1992, she gave another 117 acres of lot 77, located on the western side of the valley.

scientists, administrators and planners concerned with wildlife preservation.



Part of the Ruitter Valley is core habitat for Black Bear and several other mammal species.
Photo : © Stansje Plantenga

Although Stansje knew the Ecological Gifts Program would provide her with tax benefits, she was agreeably surprised at the tax credit she got. “It was an unexpected gift that made life easier for me for a number of years”. Thanks to this woman’s unshakable faith in nature, another part of the magic valley is now protected forever and so are its diverse plant and animal species.

After 25 years in the area, this nature-lover has developed a new relationship with the land: she coordinates a volunteer-based animal tracking program that has already identified part of the Ruitter Valley as a core habitat for Black Bear, Fisher and Moose, and that will be a useful tool for