

STANSJE PLANTENGA AND ANNE SHEPHERD

The ECOLOGICAL GIFTS PROGRAM

Landowners Find a Way to Save their Magic Valley

Thanks to Stansje Plantenga, another part of the Ruiter Valley is protected forever.

Photo: © Anne Shepherd



Photo: © Stansje Plantenga

**Anne Shepherd in the pine forest
planted by her family**

In the Sutton Mountains portion of the Appalachians, in the Eastern Townships, a narrow valley winds its way through mounts Echo, Singer, West and Clark, which range in height from 460 to 770 metres. The Ruiter Valley has a brook of the same name that flows from Fullerton Pond to the Missisquoi River. In the early 1960s, this lost paradise drew Robert Shepherd, a Montréal psychiatrist who loved to camp, canoe and rough it in the woods. This father of three bought an old farm in Mansonville, on the eastern slope of the valley. "My father had us planting trees at an early age as his initial plan was to develop a tree farm," his daughter Anne says. "I remember carrying heavy buckets of pine seedlings for the men to plant during black fly season. Now, that was a labour of

love!" Mr. Shepherd 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 community. A bank teller and artist who had graduated from the École des Beaux-arts de Montréal, she had long been interested in working with schizophrenics. And ever since she had arrived 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 valley, she moved there and worked in the community as a therapist and art teacher.

After a few years, Mr. Shepherd and Mrs. Plantenga, now 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 Ruiter Valley Land Trust (RVLT)¹, in 1987. Mr. Shepherd donated a core area of 400 acres of land to this new conservation group, whose goal was and still is to protect the integrity of this valley located in an area of relatively unfragmented forest, one of the last wilderness regions in southernmost Quebec. Later on, he transferred a 10-acre parcel of land to each of his children. Robert Shepherd 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.

Mrs. Plantenga continued the work they had started together. In 2001, she decided to make another generous donation to the RVLT, this time through



Photo: © Christiane Foley

**One of the valuable wetlands of
the Ruiter Valley**



Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program, established in 1995. She made an ecological gift of an 80-acre (32-hectare) 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. Although Mrs. Plantenga knew the

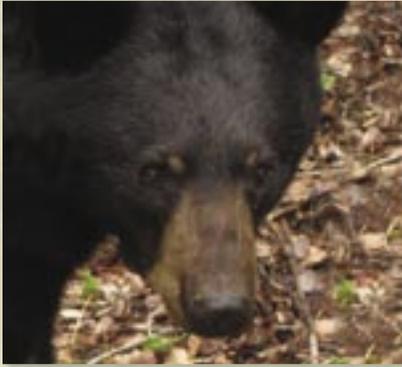


Photo: © Stansje Plantenga

Part of the Ruitter Valley is a core habitat for Black Bear and several other mammal species.

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 recently developed a new relationship with the land: she helps to coordinate 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 scientists, administrators and planners concerned with wildlife preservation.

Robert Shepherd's daughter, Anne, now lives in Toronto, where she works as a psychotherapist and psychoanalyst. In 2002, inspired by her father and by Stansje Plantenga, she decided to make the ecological donation of the 10-acre (4-hectare) forested piece of land her father had given her years earlier. The property is located close to Mrs. Plantenga's donated land in an area that is home to many species of wildlife such as the Northern Dusky Salamander, the Two-lined Salamander, the White-breasted Nuthatch, the Pileated Woodpecker, and the Winter Wren. Although the tax benefits offered by the Ecological Gifts Program certainly encouraged Ms. Shepherd to make this donation, her motivation ran much deeper than that. "Stansje has allowed me to understand the ecological value of the land

in the valley and communicated her profound interest in the survival and future of the animal life there. I love walking the trails with her and visiting the spot where my father's ashes are buried by his beloved trees on the mountainside. The pine seedlings are now a towering grove and represent our work as a family and our desire to replenish the Earth and conserve it for future generations. I hope my children and their children will be able to walk under these same trees. I know my father would be proud of my having given back in a meaningful way."



Photo: © Noel Salmond

Stansje Plantenga and Robert Shepherd in their magic valley in 1983.

For more information on ecological gifts, please contact:

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¹ www.valleeruitter.org

Ce document est également disponible en français

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