

Helga Guderley and John Himmelman: Active Guardians of the Land

by Andy Robinson

After successful careers teaching and doing research at Université Laval, Quebec City, John Himmelman and Helga Guderley are happy to tend their gardens and enjoy the views from their home in Boutilliers Point, overlooking the beautiful waters of St Margaret's Bay. But retirement for this couple does not simply mean sitting back and enjoying the fruits of a successful life – both are active in many ways with various conservation groups, including the Nature Trust. John and Helga also recently became Guardians of the Land, recognising the need to provide long-term funding for the sustainability of Nature Trust work.

It's fitting that Nova Scotia should become their retirement home. John is from Bridgewater, and the couple has kept a summer home near there since the early 90's. Helga is from Ohio – her family immigrated there from Germany after World War II. The couple met while doing their PhDs at the University of British Columbia. John had completed his BSc in Biology at Acadia and received an MSc in Marine Ecology from Memorial in Newfoundland. Helga received a BA in Chemistry from Earlham College in Richmond, IN. "I know it's unusual to do a BA in a science, but the liberal arts degree at Earlham provided a well-rounded education," she explains.



At UBC John was studying intertidal and marine organisms, employing his love for scuba diving to assist his research. "He would also collect specimens for me," Helga said, "I was studying the biochemistry of the moult cycle of Dungeness crabs and John assured a good supply at the different moult stages."

With a shared interest in the oceans and the life within, the couple explored BC together, particularly the coastline of Vancouver Island. "I think that's where I really fell in love with nature," recalls Helga.

After UBC, the couple both took teaching positions at Université Laval in Quebec. They kept in touch with John's Maritime roots, though, and it was in 1992 that they acquired their summer property at Molega Lake near Bridgewater. "We would come here every summer with the children," John said. "Nova Scotia may not be their home, but they got a taste for the Maritimes through those years."

In the late 1990's, Helga deepened her involvement with the Canadian Society of Zoologists where she reconnected with Dr. Tom Herman, a friend from her undergraduate years. It was Tom who introduced Helga to the Nature Trust and its work on habitat preservation. "As soon as I found out what they were doing, I started to donate to the cause," she said. That meeting became a catalyst for her current work with various conservation groups. Both Helga and John are very active in several nature-oriented organizations including the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, where they are members of the Property Committee.

"If we are to preserve our environment, we have to be active," said Helga. "We need to speak up, but we also need to take action. I started a petition against biomass power generation that led to the formation of the Healthy Forests Coalition. We are both on the board of the St Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association, support the Ecology Action Centre, and work with the Nature Trust."

"The Nature Trust does an amazing job working with so many diverse groups to bring their mission to fruition," Helga said. "If we are to maintain our biodiversity and conserve what we have for future generations, individuals and not-for-profit organizations have to step up, and Nova Scotia Nature Trust has created an excellent model for others to follow."