

Guardians from Afar: Pat Robertson-Corner & Byron Corner

By Andy Robinson

For Pat Robertson-Corner and Byron Corner, a figurative flip of a coin led to half a lifetime spent in Nova Scotia, and a dedication to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust.

“My husband, Byron, had finished his actuarial exams and he was looking for his first professional position,” she explains. “He had offers from Edmonton and Halifax. We’d never been to the East Coast, so we chose the Halifax job, anticipating a stay of a few years. We actually stayed for 27!”

“I’m an Air Force brat, so it was really nice for me to establish strong roots in a place,” said Pat. “Byron is Ontario born and bred, so the Atlantic was quite the change for him, but we both fell in love with the natural beauty of the province. That’s really what led to our Nature Trust connection – we had been supporters of the Nature Conservancy, but when we came to Nova Scotia and learned about the Nature Trust, we decided to donate locally. That way, we knew our donations would stay in the province to protect the lands we loved, and provide safe habitat for the wildlife.”

Pat and Byron learned of the Nature Trust when they attended what was only the second Annual Dinner. “We came to hear Stuart McLean,” she recalls, “And we left so enthralled by the vision of this young organisation that we started to make annual donations.”

The couple supported the Troop Island and 100 Wild Islands campaigns before electing to become Guardians of the Land. Byron also served on the Board of Directors, finishing his term earlier this year. A fantastic commitment for a couple who left the province over a decade ago.

“I was very sad to leave,” Pat recalls, “Just a couple of years earlier, we had bought land near Deadman’s Island overlooking the Arm, and we had our dream home. And then due to a restructure, Byron’s job disappeared and we relocated to London, Ontario. That was 12 years ago. We’ve returned several times, most memorably for a trip to the 100 Wild Islands.”

Like many of her generation, Pat grew up in the outdoors. “It was often the case that mum would shoo us outside after breakfast, so she could do her chores. I was the oldest sibling, so I guess I was probably the leader as we explored woods and fields wherever the Air Force had taken us. I was maybe 10 when we were in France and I have fond memories of pond-dipping for frogs, catching fireflies in a jar, and exploring the magnificent woods. I never lived in a city until I after I had graduated university.”



Byron and Pat on a visit to the 100 Wild Islands

"I love all creatures – I was a horse crazy little girl and I never grew out of it!" Pat laughs, "But it was really Byron who was the outdoorsman. He was a keen backcountry canoer and I would go along with him in places like Kejimkujik, but I was just as happy to sit on the rocks and watch the ocean. I had a favoured spot out past York Redoubt."

Today Pat still has horses, and she and Byron enjoy visiting family in Ontario who have a beautiful property with lakes and woodlands planted with Carolinian trees. "It's not Nova Scotia," she says, "But it is beautiful, nevertheless."

Pat talks about their decision to become Guardians of the Land. "We have contributed annually and to specific campaigns, and we have included the Nature Trust in our wills, but when we heard about the Guardians of the Land program, we knew this was the right thing to do. As Guardians, we give a multi-year commitment of unencumbered funds. We entrust the leadership team to use our donations as needed by the organisation."

"I implore everyone to consider supporting the work of the Nature Trust, in whatever way they can," she says. "The window of opportunity is closing. Wild places are shrinking all the time, and with it, the essential habitats for wildlife. If we don't act now, we lose these lands for ever. When they are gone, they are gone."