

Thumb Land Conservancy NEWS

October 28, 2017

Kay Collins



My mother, Kay, passed away one month ago on September 28, one day after her 76th birthday. She had been in a nursing home for about 5 years and apparently her many health issues finally were too much. I spoke about my mother briefly at her funeral, and as I said, words are really inadequate to describe someone's life and their influence. But in thinking back about her, one major theme came to mind. She was always an encouragement to me, my sister, and my brother. Whatever we wanted to do, within reason, she supported us. When we were down, she lifted us with her words and her light-hearted spirit. So many times, she reminded me not to compare myself to others and just keep doing my best.

In early 1980, I was debating whether to teach nature for another summer at Silver Trails Scout Reservation. One day I came home from school, and there were two new books my mother bought for me; "Michigan Trees" by Burton Barnes and Warren Wagner and "Peterson Field Guides, Wildflowers, Northeastern and Northcentral North America" by Roger Tory Peterson and Margaret McKenny. These are two of the most useful guides for any naturalist in the Great Lakes region. In fact, they were so useful, I continued using them as a professional ecologist and wore both out. I'm looking at my new copies right now. The moment I saw these books she bought for me, I took it as a sign that I was destined to teach another summer at Silver Trails, and I continued to teach there another four summers.

My mother was very kind, probably the kindest person I've ever known. She was a friend to anyone. She made friends so easily that sometimes we worried she would be taken advantage of, and unfortunately, it happened a few times. As a kid I mostly kept to myself, but later as a young adult, and even now, I have often felt it is my mother's spirit that gets me out into the world.

Of course, it wasn't always perfect, but I'm not complaining. I think I had one of the best childhoods anyone could ever expect, and I'm forever grateful to both my mother and my father. But, on rare occasion, my mother and I argued, and that's when I ran into her stubborn streak,

the same one in me. It apparently comes from the Scottish blood of the Johnston's on my grandmother's side. Thankfully, we also have the jolly Allen blood from my grandfather, not to say that my grandmother wasn't prone to some good laughs. And as for laughter, my mother was renowned. It was so easy to get her laughing, especially when we shouldn't, and near impossible to get her to stop. My sister, brother, and I loved to get her going, to my father's consternation, but even he would start to break up after a while.

One thing I got from both my mother and father, and from my grandparents on both sides, was my love for nature. Some of my earliest memories are of planting trees, playing in the woods, and helping in the garden. Our whole family loved the outdoors and took an interest in the natural world. On my father's side, we are hunters, organic gardeners, horticulturalists, and foresters. On my mother's side we are wild gatherers, artists, swimmers, and naturalists. My mother particularly loved animals and fed all the birds and squirrels. Our backyard became a wildlife haven. She kept a bird guide and binoculars by the window so we could identify all of the species that came to visit. Our best times as a family were on vacations up north, often with both sets of grandparents and my aunt and uncle and all of my cousins. I have so many great memories of us wandering the forest, exploring trails by foot, bike, or car, gathered around the campfire, canoeing rivers and lakes, fishing, swimming at the beach, and so much more. I'll never forget how my mother always laughed when someone's canoe got caught on a "whirligig" in the river, and likewise, how her father, my grandfather, would break out in a yodel while paddling his canoe, or the wonderfully tasty puffballs my grandmother would gather on our fall trips.

My parents' love of nature encouraged my own, which led to curiosity and eventually, formal study. There were other influences on my path, but it all started with my parents. As a kid, I spent my days wandering through the woods around my neighborhood. I was drawn to forest plants and fascinated by the great variety of aquatic insects that inhabited the swamp, even the microscopic protozoans. I was frequently lectured about wearing my new shoes in the swamp, but somehow I always ended up in the stinky water and my parents finally gave up. Many years later, as though by divine intervention, I was able to protect that stinky swamp through State wetland permitting and mitigation requirements. Thus became the TLC Dead End Woods Sanctuary.

As hard as it is to choose from so many memories, and so many descriptions of my mother's influence, it is much harder to know where to end. I've been writing this on and off for about a week and let it set for a while. But it's time to send this out and move on to other work as I know my mother would want. I'll say that she was not afraid of death. She was a Christian and had technically died at least twice in one day back in 1999 when her heart stopped, likely from diabetic shock. I asked her if she had any memories of that episode. She said she just saw white. That was as much detail as I could get, but she added that she had a feeling of total peace and didn't fear death. At one point, we thought she was gone at the hospital, but she came back and held on. Looking at her face, I can't explain, but I suddenly felt so proud to be her son.

<http://hosting-23138.tributes.com/obituary/show/Kay-Ann-Collins-105252542>

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/name/kay-collins-obituary?pid=186806238&view=guestbook>

Algonquin Power Company, 12.35-Acre Deerfield Wind Energy Preserve, Huron Township, Huron County, Michigan

The most immediate stewardship concern on the Deerfield Preserve is invasive Japanese Barberry, which dominates much of the eastern edge of the preserve. From mid-July, I have been cutting the barberry to ground-level with a gasoline-powered weed whacker fitted with a 4-point steel brush blade. This works fairly well, but it is still a lot of work to trim away the outer branches in order to cut the main stems. I have roughly 20% of the barberry cut in this area, beginning from the southeast and working my way north.



I debated whether to have the barberry sprayed with herbicide to minimize potential exposure to deer ticks, which often concentrate in barberry, much of it head-high on the Deerfield Preserve. But, I decided spraying would be too destructive to sensitive native forest vegetation like Red Trillium scattered throughout. After reviewing barberry control by other groups and discussion with our TLC board member Dan Rhein who does a lot of weed control work on county drains,

we decided to try weed whacking first. It was a good decision because as I was cutting away barberry, I found other uncommon native species like Foamflower and Turtlehead that would likely have been eliminated by herbicide. However, the irony is that as barberry is cleared, these native plants between and under the shrubs will be more exposed to deer grazing, and there are a lot of deer on this site. With so many destructive forces impacting our native plant communities, land managers sometimes need to sort out some real conundrums. Left unchecked, the barberry would eventually eliminate most of the native plants, even hindering regeneration of trees, and continue to spread throughout the forest. The barberry would also remain as a seed source to invade other woodlands with the help of birds. Eliminating barberry opens the native plants to more deer grazing, but at least allows them to continue growing and reproducing.

After we cut all of the barberry down to ground-level, the next step is fire. Possibly later this fall, but more likely in early spring, I will see if the fuel load will support a low-intensity ground fire. Probably not as it is difficult to support fire in a wet and relatively young forest like this. But a ground fire would help to burn barberry stems and kill some of the seeds dropped this year. We will also use a large propane torch to spot-burn the barberry stems this winter and next spring. A single burn will not kill most of the barberry, but repeated for multiple years, eventually, most stems are killed. If that fails, we will revert to hand-pulling and digging each barberry clump.

If you are interested in helping with barberry control on the Deerfield Preserve, we are planning work days on Saturday, November 25 (Thanksgiving weekend), and the first three Saturdays in December (2, 9, and 16) from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm. You will want to wear boots and bring leather gloves, drinking water, and dress for the weather. The TLC will provide lunch and some gas money. We can coordinate rides. We will send out e-mail notices later in November.

On the administrative front, we are still waiting for the MDEQ to approve an endowment fund agreement, but the Huron County Community Foundation has proposed establishing a special fund just for TLC, for the Deerfield Preserve work and any future projects that may come up. I would like to thank Algonquin Power Company for the opportunity to provide stewardship of the Deerfield Preserve.

North Street Station, Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

Work has been on-hold from late July but will resume soon. We still need to finish the roof and then will move to siding repair.

Clyde Historical Society 2017 Fundraiser, August 20, Bill Bearss Park, Clyde Township, Saint Clair County

The TLC and Clyde Historical Society have worked together on a few events this year and I hope we can soon concentrate more on the historic North Street general store, post office, and rail station. Cheryl and I participated in the CHS annual fundraiser in August. Following is a message from Connie Bates of CHS:

“Happy Fall from the Clyde Historical Society. This year we made major changes in our Annual Fund Raiser, the Ox Roast. We decided to try a family affordable pulled pork sandwich with side dishes. This of course was a less expensive dinner, so our dinner price was reduced by half the price of last year. We also had new activities for kids to draw more families and young people. Pony rides and a pulled train ride was a big hit but was a big expense for us to provide it. On the

up side, our goal was to draw in more people. We accomplished it, with 72 more people than the year before. The lower dinner price and fun activities brought in more young parents with children. Hopefully they will return next year and spread the word on the good time they had.



We will be having our last meeting for the year on November 16th. Some plans for next year.... a cemetery walk in May, focusing on veterans, highlighting those that served. Plans are still coming together on that, but hopefully we will firm them up at November's meeting.

Our family friendly Pulled Pork Event will also be on the calendar for next year.

We are also making plans to have our historical Clyde Township Hall building painted next year. This will be a big and costly undertaking. Estimates have been received and now decisions have to be made about it.

The Clyde Historical Society takes a break during the winter and will resume meetings in March. So hopefully 2018, brings more opportunities and prosperity to both of our groups.”

TLC fundraising

We need help from anyone on writing grant applications and producing membership materials. Please contact us if interested.

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