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Ginny Reusch and Sheep Pasture – My Memories by Lyn White

Ginny and I started our respective environmental careers by volunteering to help save Wheaton Farm in 1965. During that project, Ginny and I both made friends with Elise Ames Parker and her husband William. They had made a large donation to the Wheaton Farm project, but that wasn't all. They became our mentors. Whenever we got discouraged while raising funds for Wheaton Farm, we'd go and confide in them, and they would give us a pep talk, tell us we were doing something important, we were doing a great job, and we must not give up. So we'd go back home recharged. I think of those times with the Parkers with great appreciation and affection.

The Wheaton Farm project led to formation of the Natural Resources Trust of Easton, which was incorporated in 1967. That process is a different part of the story. Today, I want to tell you how Ginny helped get the Sheep Pasture Environmental Education Center going.

In the late 1960s when the NRT was young and just beginning to identify land that we felt should be protected, Ginny and I came to visit Sheep Pasture. We stood on the foundation of the mansion that was once here, and looked out at the view across the field. I remember it as a dramatic moment – I remember both of us deciding that this must be preserved by the NRT for the sheer beauty of the place.

We asked Mrs. Parker to give the NRT a conservation restriction along the brook that goes through the property. She agreed. It was one of the NRT's first CRs. Volunteers drilled holes in rocks and set cement boundaries for the restriction, measured it off, got the accompanying document written and registered it in the Taunton Registry of Deeds. That was the beginning of the NRT's work at Sheep Pasture.

When Ginny and I talked with the Parkers, we learned that Mrs. Parker had many happy memories of her childhood here. We also learned that she was a farmer at heart - she loved the farm animals that were here, the fields, the mowing, the whole process. A full time property manager lived in the house at the entrance to Sheep Pasture then, and he managed the property very well for her.

The Parkers lived in Unity Close, the large house on Main Street next to the Unity Church. Mrs. Parker drove down to Sheep Pasture in her Bentley several times a week to see what was going on. One day Ginny and I talked with her and suggested that Sheep Pasture become an environmental education center with farm animals as part of the programs. She liked that idea a lot. But she wanted to be sure the schools would be committed to the programs, so she stipulated that Sheep Pasture school programs must have financial support from the school department if we were to have programs here.

We decided to start with programs for children in the North Easton Grammar School and see how that worked. Students in those classes could walk to Sheep Pasture, so transportation was not a problem. Ginny and other volunteers proposed this to the Grammar School principal and the idea was received with enthusiasm.

The school programs started in the 1973-74 school year and they were a big success. The NRT hired its first teacher, Marjorie McBride, and Ginny, Althea Thornton and I worked under her direction as volunteers. By the late 1970s the Easton school superintendent said he wanted all school children to come to Sheep Pasture. Students from the Easton Grammar School and the Parkview School walked to Sheep Pasture (they still do) but the Center School students were too far away, so school busses had to be used for those students (they still are.)

Well, it worked very well indeed. Mrs. Parker still owned Sheep Pasture, and she would drive down now and then to see how things were going. She was delighted whenever she saw school children here, knowing they were learning about farm animals and the natural environment. In fact, I believe that the Sheep Pasture programs became the light of her life during her last years.

Eventually, we had to talk to Mrs. Parker about the NRT's long-term need for money. When we discussed the possibility of the NRT owning Sheep Pasture, I told her that we would need money for property maintenance and staff. She asked me how much money we'd need.

Remember – this was in the 1970s. I took a deep breath and said we'd need \$1million. She paused for a few seconds, deep in thought. Then she said something like "I can do that." I felt like jumping up and down in joy, but I managed to act dignified and proceed with the discussion.

I tell you this because I'm sure Ginny was there with me when this happened. She's not so sure, but I can't imagine doing that without her right beside me. The whole concept of Sheep Pasture as an environmental education center was part of both of us.

If I remember correctly, Mrs. Parker gave some money while she was alive for Sheep Pasture programs, and left the rest to the NRT in her will.

Well, as years went by, the number of programs at Sheep Pasture expanded. The Board of Directors oversaw it all, with help from an active group of volunteers. Ginny helped shape every aspect of the Sheep Pasture programs and events as they developed.

I tried to teach some school programs here and realized that I simply didn't know enough! I returned to studies at Wheaton College, and participated in Sheep Pasture programs as much as I could for the next several years. Ginny continued to work here – she must have been a full time volunteer! In 1978, Ginny became the first paid Executive Director of the Natural Resources Trust of Easton. I graduated from Wheaton that year and went to work for the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

I was away from the NRT for eight years, doing work I loved. When I returned, I found a much larger, well-run organization, an established environmental education center, an informed and active Board of Directors, a number of functioning committees, and an excellent staff. The Sheep Pasture property was well maintained. Ginny had been Executive Director all of that time, and had worked with everyone to guide the NRT from infancy to adulthood. No one could have done a better job! Ginny resigned in 1983, leaving a solid, well run organization behind. We're here today to thank her for her excellent work.