

Before It's Too Late!

by Ruth Maher

My most cherished childhood memories are of Sunday afternoons. Immediately after our midday dinner my parents, two brothers and I would go for a long walk in the woods or fields or along the brook. The kids would run off in all directions, searching for surprises to show off to the rest of the family. It was exciting to be the first to locate a bird's nest, a woodchuck burrow, a wild pink honeysuckle in bloom, a bush heavy with ripe blueberries, a cocoon, a mother quail trying to distract our attention from her brood of chicks, a wood turtle, a sassafras bush with its mitten-shaped leaves, a lady's slipper, or a rotting log we could lift to expose a world of frantic insect activity. We learned early that it was a major mistake to touch poison ivy or stinging nettles, or to sit down on an anthill.

Along the brook in early spring our attention was drawn to clumps of the shiny green leaves and bright yellow buttercup-like blossoms of cowslips, also known as marsh marigolds. We learned that in colonial days, after a long cold winter without fresh greens of any kind, people were hungry for the nutrients in the glistening leaves of these plants. Although they were poisonous to people and animals if eaten raw, when boiled they tasted much like spinach and satisfied a craving for fresh greens.

Our parents admired each new discovery, and because of their interest and enthusiasm we developed a wonderful feeling of kinship with all of nature, along with some understanding of the natural cycles of life and death and regeneration. Not for anything would I trade the precious memories of those unhurried Sunday walks. In today's terminology that was "quality time" for both children and adults. And it was a time when we kids were too busy and too contented to squabble or fight.

Things are different now. Where we used to find low-bush blueberries and wild-strawberry beds, we now find the neat homes and driveways of Willow Way and Hemlock Avenue. Today Roberta Road and Margo Circle occupy the places that were once carpeted with pink lady's slippers or crowded with wild honeysuckle. What's left of the brook flows into a man-made pond that's surrounded by backyards and lawn chairs, a place where forget-me-nots and cowslips no longer grow.

The children who live where our house once stood are not free to explore the yards and gardens of Elliott Court and Goodwill Road, where we were at home among the birds and animals, the trailing arbutus and running pine. The neighborhood is attractive and well kept, but gone forever are the wonderful wild woods and spaces we loved.

Most towns are experiencing the same relentless loss of wilderness areas. Before it's too late, we must do our best to protect some of Avon's still-available, still-natural lands from the bulldozers and chainsaws that are waiting to shatter their beauty and stillness. Everyone can help the Avon Land Trust in its mission, and future generations will surely be grateful. **Please join us!**

Kudos

Linda, of Olender Design in Canton, is one of the most important contributors to the ALT Newsletter. She is the talented graphic artist who wraps our words in stunning layouts that make each edition attractive and readable. We sincerely appreciate her invaluable assistance.

Thanks

We are grateful to the owners of Avon's Lightning Press for their longstanding support. Their generosity helps make it possible for ALT to produce our newsletter and keep Avon citizens informed of our goals and activities.

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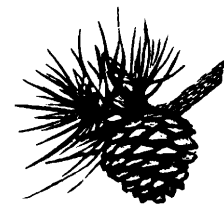
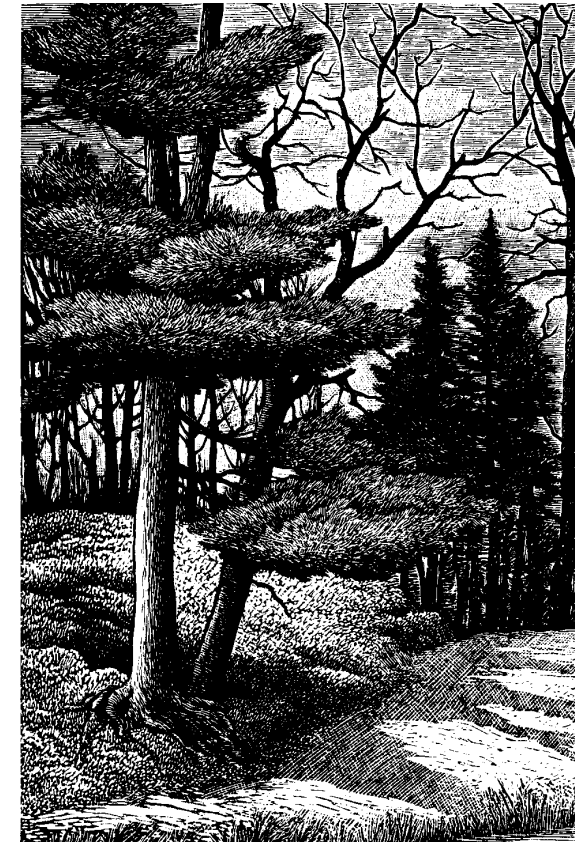
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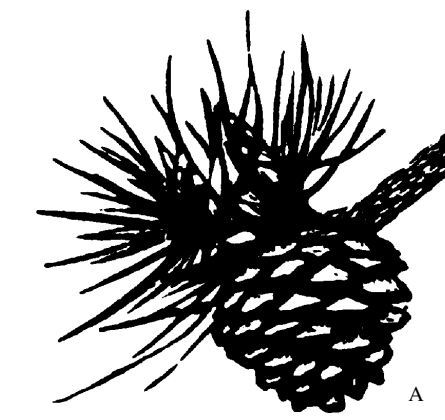


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THE *Avon* LAND TRUST

Future generations may not remember our names, but they will certainly be glad that we were here.

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May 2001

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WELCOME TO THE AVON LAND TRUST

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

COMING IN 2001

At the last director's meeting in February, the Land Trust was approached by Rudy Fromm, director of Avon Public Works, with a proposal. Mr. Fromm presented the board with plans for a system of trails to be developed at Hazen Park on town-owned land. The northern limit of this trail would lie within striking distance of the ALT's largest holding, Hunter's Run. Gaining this entrance to the 75+ acres of Hunter's Run would quadruple the size of the prospective trail and open up one of the most spectacular areas on the Talcott Ridge. The directors agreed that such "passive use" of the property (hiking) was in keeping with the Trust's philosophy and the go-ahead was given.

Hunter's Run is a natural amphitheater of second growth forest that is home to many of our newly returned species including turkey, birds of prey, coyote and deer. Any trail cut through this area would be non-intrusive by design and would be open to the public year-round. In the past, access to the property has been nearly impossible due to the dense undergrowth of briars at the mountain's base. The Trust will be working with the town on this project and we would like to see the opening of the Bob and Sally Garvin Memorial Trail at Hunter's Run sometime this fall.

Tom Morganti,
President ALT

And The Winner Is...

The Avon Land Trust!

At the 18th Annual Convocation of Land Trusts, held on March 31, the CT Land Trust Service Bureau presented the Avon Land Trust with its annual Stewardship Award.

ALT received this year's Stewardship Award in recognition of the habitat improvement and community involvement/education performed during Project Osprey last year.

As you may recall, ALT directors Rick Dubiel and Dr. Robert Breckinridge, in coordination with the Avon Parks and Recreation Dept., erected an osprey nesting platform at Fisher Meadow. The Avon Public Works Dept. erected a second ALT-built osprey platform along the Farmington River, below New Road.

ALT hopes that the example of constructing osprey nesting platforms will be followed by other land trusts, in an effort to promote the geographic diversity of CT's osprey population. Inland riverine osprey nesting populations are currently found only in Canterbury CT.



People of Avon

by Ruth Maher

Charles and Nina Kilgore

In the days before 1963 Charles and Lynn Kilgore were across-the-street neighbors of Al and Nina Newton, and all were close friends. There were three Newton children and four Kilgores. John, the youngest of the Kilgore children, was born severely handicapped, and in spite of boundless family love and the best efforts science could offer, his condition did not improve. Lynn Kilgore became one of the founders, and first president, of Farmington Valley Association for the Retarded and Handicapped, later known as FAVARH.

Al Newton was the well known Chief Test Pilot for Kaman Aerospace in Bloomfield. He is widely remembered as the heroic helicopter pilot who rescued many people when their lives and homes were threatened by the hurricane and floods of 1955. In 1963 Al died in a tragic helicopter crash. He left his devastated wife, Nina, and three children between the ages of six and sixteen. The family was strengthened by the abiding friendship and support of Lynn and Charlie Kilgore and their children.

Only three years later Lynn Kilgore died, and the two families once again drew strength from one another as they faced the loss of a loved one. In due time the two families became one when Charles and Nina were married. At that time three of the children were at home, and three were in college. The home addresses of those children now include Chicago, Reno, California and Hawaii as well as less remote places. Mark Newton lives in Granby and pursues the career interest he shared with his father. He is Senior Flight Test Coordinator for Kaman. One grandson, Robert, works for the Alaska Fish and Game Department. In his early years Charlie taught him to fish and hunt and to enjoy the wilderness. During my visit with the Kil-

gores it was obvious that members of this family share a close bond, though they're scattered in all directions. When I asked whose daughter is the teacher in Hawaii, the answer came quickly and quietly, "They're all ours."

Family members have enjoyed some exciting reunions. Coming from all points of the compass, they met in Seattle, twenty strong, and traveled together to Alaska. For another celebration of family, all met in Fort Lauderdale and embarked on a Caribbean cruise. Even in ordinary times, distance doesn't keep family members from maintaining close contact with one another.

Charlie grew up in a small Pennsylvania town, where he attended a one-room school. The school had a pump organ but, like so many others of the time, no electricity and no running water. There were no grade levels. A "reader," which included spelling and geography, was the instrument by which a child's progress was measured to determine his advancement toward high school placement. Charlie recalls some interesting teachers. One kept a supply of different-sized switches designed to administer appropriate punishment for offenses of varying magnitude. Another teacher was "so nice that everyone wanted to cooperate with her and do whatever she asked."

With feigned pride, Charlie confided that he had graduated fifth in his high school class. Properly impressed, I congratulated him. Then with a sly smile, he quickly confessed that his entire class contained only twelve members.

Charlie came to Avon in 1948. Almost immediately he joined the Avon Volunteer Fire Department and the VFW. For forty years he continued active service with the Fire Department. During World

from left to right: free-wheeling platforms, special apparatus for special child, push-pull wagons, Kilgore family reunion in Alaska wearing T-shirts designed to show the 8 home states represented.



War II he had served in Italy and earned the rank of Captain. Among other mementos, he has a small cigarette lighter he made from the propeller of a downed enemy plane. The lighter still works. During the Korean War Charlie was called back into service but was not assigned to overseas duty.

Recently the VFW honored him as "A Veteran's Veteran." When Avon's beautiful Veterans' Memorial was in the planning stages, it was Charlie who created a scale model of the proposed structure. He took charge of the physical aspects of constructing the monument. He says Art Neriani effectively handled administrative responsibilities and did endless research to make certain that names of all qualified veterans were included. Art even made a phone call to Russia to verify some of his information. Charlie gives credit to Don Studley, "who can get blood out of a turnip," for doing a magnificent job of raising funds to pay for the memorial. Charlie later built a display case to hold the shovel that first broke ground for what is now a very impressive reminder of the service and sacrifice of Avon's war veterans.

For 32 years Charles Kilgore was a highly regarded builder in the local area. Twelve of those years were in partnership with Jack Klapprodt. Charlie served eight or nine years as a Home Inspector. During three of those years he inspected more than 300 houses each year and even typed his own inspection reports.

His service to the town has been extensive. During his term as Selectman, Avon began developing Sycamore Hills and bought the property for Roaring Brook School. As a member of the Recreation Committee he was involved in establishing Countryside Park. He was Clerk of the Works for the first addition to Avon High School and for the Avon Free Public Library on Country Club Road. For twelve years he lent his expertise to the Avon Board of Tax Review.

In the cozy Kilgore dining room there are three beautifully finished examples of Charlie's craftsmanship... a captain's chair he made more than fifty years ago, a lovely corner sideboard so perfectly designed and fitted that it looks as if it grew there, and a smooth, sturdy TV table. His basement workshop con-

tains an imposing array of tools and machines. When guided by his imagination and skill, they produce exquisite pieces of furniture or anything else that can be made of wood.

Charlie has a special dedication to designing custom-made furniture for handicapped children. He has worked with several therapists in creating pieces to meet the individual needs of children in Avon, Winsted, Newington, New Preston, East Haddam and even California. A therapist describes a problem need, and Charlie puts his mind and tools to work. Soon one more child is thrilled to stand, or sit at a table, or move himself safely from one place to another. Imagine the joy this brings to a youngster who has previously had to stay where he was put until someone moved him!

Charlie has built chairs for children who needed special spinal support. He made a walker with tray, which allowed one child to leave his wheelchair and walk in the cafeteria line to select his own food. Many children's lives have been brightened by his ingenious exercise and play equipment, including wagons and carts and low platforms on free-wheeling casters. Such a platform provides cherished freedom for a child who can't walk or sit. He can lie face down across the surface, with arms extended, and push against the floor to move himself easily in any direction. On one edge there's a fixture for attaching a pull-cord that allows the platform to be "towed." Among his creations that encourage and facilitate the mobility and independence of so many children are balance boards and one-legged stools that help develop balance, a low rocking bench, and a cradle that becomes a bench when inverted. For a blind student who sometimes had difficulty locating the toilet-paper dispenser, he created a portable pedestal holder that neatly solved the problem.

Recalling John Kilgore's place in this story, and the work of his mother and father for the benefit of the handicapped, I am struck by one thought... what compelling testimony to the powerful purpose and meaning of John's life!

Charlie built a podium for Avon Senior Center and, for Avon High School, a podium and the school's first trophy case. Each

year he donates a piece of hand-made furniture for the annual FAVARH auction. One year his gift was a cedar chest that sold for two hundred dollars. On the front lawn of the Avon Congregational Church stands the case that displays the names of the church and its pastor. The first one Charlie made lasted 30 years, and he recently made its replacement. Inside the church, his work appears in the bell-ringers' stands and the standards from which the seasonal banners are hung. He accepts no payment from any of the non-profit organizations for whom his gifts often fill urgent needs.

Not surprisingly, he also receives requests from friends and acquaintances. The most unusual request came from a couple whose ideas are obviously practical and unpretentious. For them he built two pine coffins, simple, elegant, but perhaps not particularly comfortable. The coffins are kept readily available for the time when these foresighted people may put them to use, a time when physical comfort may not be a primary consideration.

Nina's years have also been filled with work and service to others, but her most important and most rewarding responsibilities have been as mother of all the children. She worked for many years as an Employment Counselor for the State Department of Labor. She has long been an active participant in various functions of the Avon Congregational Church, where she served four or five years as an assistant in the church nursery school.

An accomplished seamstress and knitting expert, she is co-chairman of the Tuesday Crafters. A fellow member describes her as "one of the key people" in this group. Service projects undertaken by the Tuesday Crafters include making mittens, caps and slippers for the women and children sheltered at My Sister's Place in Hartford, lap robes for residents of nursing homes, hospital teddy bears, hats for



cancer patients, book bags filled with essential school supplies for distribution among needy children overseas, and thousands of hours of volunteer time.

Nina enjoys the Paperback Book Club, which meets once a month for informal discussion of the current book choice. She also belongs to two 8-member Bridge Clubs that meet biweekly. Their games do not place them in serious competition with Foxwood Casino, but the winner becomes wealthier by \$1.25, and second place nets an asset gain of 75 cents. It's fun, and everyone knows the theory that people who laugh a lot live longer and spread more smiles along the way.

Charlie Kilgore has received innumerable awards in recognition of his caring and generosity that have added so much to the quality of so many lives...and to his own as well. He has been named "Citizen of the Year" twice by the Avon Jaycees and once by the Lions Club. His office walls display plaques, certificates and letters of appreciation received from Avon Education Association, Avon Historical Society, and two from Avon Chamber of Commerce, dated 1954 and 1971. One highly treasured certificate, from Wendy Zaccchera's second-grade class at Roaring Brook School, was created by the children to express their appreciation for all Mr. Kilgore had done to help a member of their class.

It would be difficult to find many aspects of Avon life in which Charlie and Nina have not left a mark of caring concern. Each has a great sense of humor, a wonderful community spirit and a keen sensitivity to the needs of others. They are a real inspiration.