

JOAN ETHELWYN HERIOT (1911 – 2012)

Long time NONC member and tireless volunteer



Joan was born on January 7th 1911 in Vernon's new hospital. Her parents Allen and Jessie lived along Coldstream Creek Road in Coldstream where Allen made several attempts at agriculture, made a moderate living at carpentry and then later in life became an expert in entomological research and illustrating. Jesse, to help make ends meet, gathered together local children in her home and became an unofficial schoolmarm, adored by the children. Peter Tassie was one of these students and he continues to live on Coldstream Creek Road. Joan's "book learnin" began when she was 3 years old. When Joan was 6, a family friend, Peter Venables showed her an insect collection. He immediately gained Joan's attention and she vowed to become an entomologist.

She established her own little museum on the banks of Coldstream Creek, now had the freedom to explore those fascinating acres, and so began the life of Joan Heriot the scientist, who never lost her curiosity and sense of wonder.

She graduated from St. Michael's School for Girls in Vernon having done well academically. It should also be noted that under the tutelage of Jesse Topham Brown, her artistic talent flourished.

Joan moved on to the University of Victoria and then UBC where she was discouraged from studying science as she was a female! Showing much determination she worked at many jobs - babysitting, mowing lawns, picking fruit, weeding gardens and to save money for two years for her passage to Liverpool. She enrolled at the University of Liverpool in 1931. Her university years, according to her memoir "there – and back again" seemed charmed. Although she was devoted to her studies and never lost focus of her goal, Joan's life was filled with field trips to the seaside, friendships which lasted a lifetime and fascinating travels to the continent with Aunt B. - all on a tight budget. She graduated with a bachelor of science, then a diploma in education and finally a master's degree in zoology. In 1936, Joan Heriot, B.Sc. (Hons), D.Ed., M.Sc. took employment at Brighton College teaching in University in London's external program in zoology. Joan taught in Brighton for the next 30 years, then left England in 1966, and returned home. On the long way home, she visited her Maori relatives in New Zealand, and arrived in the Okanagan to begin the next chapter of her life. She revisited art with Topham Brown, with the express purpose of capturing the essence of the Okanagan. Her paintings became very desirable and people waited for years to climb to the top of her "list." Her works adorn homes in Canada, the USA, U.K. Australia and New Zealand. Her other passion was, of course the natural world. She became a pillar of the North

Okanagan Naturalists Club. She threw herself into their projects and causes, protested loudly against environmental degradation, led an almost one-woman band opposing dumping sewage into Okanagan Lake, championed the creation of Valhalla Park, then Monashee Park, and actively collected signatures to create Kalamalka Provincial Park. Along with Jim Grant and Malcolm Martin, Joan wrote the definitive guide to Kal Park.

She was a close friend of Lydia Bishop and served on the board of the Bishop Bird Sanctuary from its inception in 1980.

Her education and teaching experience with emphasis in marine biology evolved into her becoming a local expert on wetlands and pond life.

When Avril Pearson hatched the Allan Brooks Nature Centre idea, Joan leapt on board. She donated much of her library to the cause, offered advice and expertise and donated a painting each year to the annual fundraiser and, in so doing, contributed many thousands of dollars to ABNC.

Her last project involved mentoring a nature program at Mackie Lake House. Her sense of awe and wonder and her curiosity made "Professor Heriot" the ideal proponent of Children's education at the Joan Heriot Centre for Environmental Studies, which was created in 2008 in Fulton Forest at Mackie Lake House.

Joan was a true naturalist whose life and loves left a gentle and profound foot print on the earth. She spent her remaining years in Polson Extended Care at Vernon Jubilee Hospital and died on July 29, 2012.

Message to Joan, on her 100th birthday:

How do we love her, Let me count the ways
A teacher, a mentor, and a statesman indeed
Always encouraging others to lead
To lead over hills noting minute details
To gather all children with dip-nets and pails
Joan was happiest when inspecting such creatures
As Hemiptera, Zygoptera with all their weird features
She hiked up the hills and waded in ponds
Discovering new orchids and quillwort fronds
And how could we forget those sardine cans
Holding pastels to paint with her dexterous hands
The most beautiful pictures you ever did see
Of grasslands, of mountains, of rivulets and tree
And now with a wee drap o the very best sherry
We wish you a birthday that's Happy and Merry
- Hylida Mayfield