

A Lasting Love

There is a very special place up on the hill overlooking Bibbins Lake, above the expanse of native forest that dominates John and Nancy Hand's 86-acre farm, outside of Hanover, Michigan. Cranes, deer and turkey gather there, sharing the pasture with the Hand's three horses. The original barn, built by Frederick Kennedy—who homesteaded the farm during Van Buren's presidency and became one of Michigan's first state legislators—graces the landscape. The Kennedys would have appreciated Nancy's painstaking restoration of their circa 1840 home.

Soon, Nancy's ashes will become part of this landscape that was so much a part of her life.

For 25 years, Nancy and John shared a singular life in this unique place. Nancy dedicated herself to raising their children, renovating the structures listed on the Historic Register, and stewarding the property that the family shared with the dozens of dogs and cats that she rescued. It was here that she taught her children about nature and passed along her commitment to the environment.

Over the years, she surrounded the house with formal gardens, filled with "every plant you can imagine," recalls John. A phenomenally skilled, creative, strong and determined woman, Nancy dug a koi pond, hauled boulders with her treasured tractor, planted a four-acre collection of rare trees, fed her family from the garden and orchard, yet still made time to walk through the woods and fields every night with John.

Theirs is a story of eternal love. Since Nancy's

sudden death in 2005, John has dedicated all his hours away from his work (with two part-time helpers) to sustain the expanses of perennials, shrubs and trees that Nancy nurtured during her life. "Nancy worried about what would happen to her gardens, the house, our beloved farm, and all of her animals if something happened to her," John says. So together, they decided to donate a conservation easement to the Washtenaw Land Trust, located in Ann Arbor, to ensure that their land, together with the historic structures, would be protected in perpetuity.

After working with the land trust for about a year, the final draft of the easement document arrived the day after Nancy died. In honor of her memory and lifelong commitment to the wellbeing of the Earth, John worked through the maze of estate issues and the easement was finalized in 2007. It would never have occurred to him



Courtesy of John Hand

to do otherwise. "It is incredible that we could keep this place as it is, forever. This pristine beautiful land won't ever be desecrated. I want to preserve her legacy, her garden, her work. It was our shared dream to preserve our farm for future people," John explains.

"Nancy and I both felt incredibly lucky to be the temporary stewards of this beautiful place," he says. "Trees will grow, trees will fall, other things will grow. There could be fires or other calamities, but nature will have the opportunity for renewal."

For the Hands, the conservation easement is a gift both to generations to come—including their children and grandchildren, one of whom was not yet born when Nancy died—and to those who came before them. John reflects,

"Perpetuity is about what has been and what will be. Our lives, our individual existences, don't compare on the scale of time."

Forever encompasses the native peoples whose arrowheads Nancy would periodically unearth in her gardens along with artifacts from long-ago owners, and extends forward to those who will live on the farm years from now. John plans for his ashes to be united with Nancy's in order to continue the story of two people whose lives are forever entwined and grounded at their place on Earth.

NANCY'S LEGACY lives on in her beautiful gardens.

