

# The ECOLOGICAL GIFTS PROGRAM

## CATHERINE SPILLANE REED

### *The Mont Saint-Hilaire Green Belt Gains Protection*

Catherine Spillane Reed with her son Tim and her granddaughters on the summit of Mont Saint-Hilaire, overlooking the Richelieu River.

Photo: © Centre de la Nature du Mont Saint-Hilaire



It was Pier 21. Or was it 23? Catherine Spillane Reed doesn't exactly remember, but she does recall that it was on a pier in Halifax that she set foot on Canadian soil for the first time some 50 years ago. The young Australian had left her native land a few years before to visit her grandmother in Ireland. One meeting leading to another, she had travelled all over Europe and ended up in Oslo, Norway. There she had met Owen Reed, a New Zealander who later immigrated to Montréal, where he found a job as an actuary. So there she was on this day in 1955, coming to rejoin the man who would become her husband.



Photo: © Centre de la Nature du Mont Saint-Hilaire

**The maple stand covering the property donated by Mrs. Spillane Reed is a forest environment characteristic of Mont Saint-Hilaire.**

Every weekend, the newlyweds would cycle to the Mont

Saint-Hilaire region on the south shore of Montreal. They liked this Monteregian hill and its surroundings. One day, they saw a forested piece of land for sale on the southwestern mountainside. It offered a beautiful view of the Richelieu River and Montréal. The couple bought it in 1957 with the idea of building a house, but the soil was solid rock and it would have been a lot of trouble to build there. So they left it in its natural state and settled in nearby Otterburn Park instead. They would go walking their piece of land once in a while. "It was a nice place with lots of birds. The trilliums were beautiful in springtime. I liked the big rocks that had tumbled down the mountain," Mrs. Spillane Reed says. Later, with their three children, they often went hiking, jogging or snowshoeing on the mountain trails.

In 1980, the Reeds moved to Toronto. As they got older, they began to think about the future of their land. The whole family loved the mountain and still remembered it very fondly even though they were far away. It held a special place in their hearts and they never thought of selling it. When Mr. Reed died suddenly in the mid-1990s, his wife and children thought the land should



Photo: © Léo-Guy de Repentigny, Canadian Wildlife Service

**The White Trillium often forms large colonies in the maple forests of southern Quebec. This slow growing plant takes seven to ten years to produce its first flower.**

belong to an organization that would care for it and offer the protection it deserved. This had also been Mr. Reed's wish. In 2003, Mrs. Spillane Reed donated their forested parcel of land to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)<sup>1</sup>, a private organization dedicated to safeguarding natural areas. She was helped in the process by the Centre de la Nature du Mont Saint-Hilaire<sup>2</sup> and by McGill University. Her donation was made through Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program; this allowed her to get some tax benefits, which certainly added advantages to the donation, although her gift was not motivated by this.

Ever since the construction of highways in the 1960s shortened





the distance between Montréal and Mont Saint-Hilaire, residential developments have been spreading at the foot of the mountain. The Reeds' forested land forms an oasis of green in this residential area. A Peregrine Falcon couple is known to have nested once on the tumbling-rock cliff that overlooks the property. The land also shelters two species of plants that only grow in the shade of the rich forests of southern Quebec: the White Trillium Mrs. Spillane Reed enjoyed so much, and the Bloodroot, which produces a blood-red latex. Both species, and the Peregrine Falcon, are listed as vulnerable in Quebec. The bird of prey is also listed as threatened in Canada. The legacy of this

one-acre (half-hectare) property will certainly help in protecting these species and maintaining the precious green belt around the mountain.



Photo: © Gordon Court

**Nearly extirpated from the St. Lawrence Valley in the 1970s, the Peregrine Falcon population is slowly recovering. Each year, a pair of these falcons nests on a cliff at Mont Saint-Hilaire.**

“My grandfather had a big property in Sydney, Australia. It had cliffs and woods and was bordering a marsh. I spent my childhood there. It was a land I loved, a place of beauty. When my grandfather passed away, his daughters sold it to a developer who levelled it and filled it with houses. He destroyed it. It was heartbreaking. I cried when I saw what he had done to it,” Mrs. Spillane Reed sadly recalls. The roots of this Australian-born Canadian made their way from her home country to Mont Saint-Hilaire and to Toronto, where she still lives. Her Australian place of beauty is gone, but her Canadian piece of land on a mountainside near Montréal will never meet with the same fate.

**For more information on ecological gifts, please contact:**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.natureconservancy.ca](http://www.natureconservancy.ca)

<sup>2</sup> [www.centrenature.qc.ca](http://www.centrenature.qc.ca)

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