

## **My Sense of Place, Sense of Time...**

by Steve Ward

At the end of the summer in 1979, I was beginning the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. My teacher was a sweet, soft spoken woman that I only knew as Ms. Mann. At the time, the only thing I knew about Ms. Margaret Mann was that she was the only teacher with bird feeders outside her classroom and she took her students on field trips.

For the next two months, daily lessons pertaining to the birds, the environment and even more specifically, a place called Radnor Lake, became a ritual. I soon learned that Ms. Mann was not only my teacher, she was an avid birder.

From a 5<sup>th</sup> grader's perspective, Radnor Lake was a far away place described in mythical proportion by my teacher...nothing more. I knew nothing of the tireless effort lead by citizens, state officials and neighbors to save this oasis of nature that even then was being threatened by development and urban sprawl. The fundraisers, the creation of Friends of Radnor Lake, along with the sustained and committed effort by so many concerned citizens were as distant to me as my move to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

One fall day in 1979 after much preparation, Ms. Mann finally led us on the much anticipated field trip. Radnor suddenly became a very real place to me. Our trip began with a hike that lead us up what seemed to be a mountain. Over time I came to know this "mountain" as Ganier Ridge. Little did I know or could comprehend, that one day it would be part of my job to hike this ridge, and the trail would become a part of my daily life. Also, little did I know, 26 years later I would be sitting down recording an oral history with my 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher learning everything I could about Radnor Lake and her attachment to what has become a very special place to both teacher and her student. Once again, I was the pupil under the tutelage of Ms. Mann.

Each time I hike Ganier Ridge, I still think of the sweet, soft spoken educator who guided us across that "mountain" and I am reminded of the importance of our environmental education today and the responsibility we have in preserving these assets. Most importantly, I am reminded of the real purpose of Ms. Mann's field trip.....to experience a living classroom, her outdoor classroom called Radnor Lake.

In January of 2006 we began our 4<sup>th</sup> year of conducting oral geographies at Radnor Lake. Throughout the project, a number of significant themes and common threads relating to Radnor Lake have become obvious to me as a former student and now park manager. One of the most significant is the role of past and

future educators in the protection and preservation of Radnor Lake. My personal introduction to Radnor through Ms. Mann is a story that can be multiplied hundreds of times, largely in part to the educators who understand the significance of instilling an appreciation for environmental, cultural, and historical preservation to their students. As state park rangers, our goal with educational programs is to emulate exactly what educators like Ms. Margaret Mann, Dr. Douglas Heffington, Dr. Oliver Yates and others have done at Radnor Lake. We want our visitors both young and old to “experience” places like Radnor Lake State Natural Area and to understand the ecological and historical and importance of its preservation. Continuing environmental education and nurturing our human-land relationship(s) is the key to successfully preserving the last remaining undeveloped land around Radnor Lake and ensuring its protection for future generations.