

## Helen Caldwell refused passive approach to life: [www.heraldtimesonline.com](http://www.heraldtimesonline.com)

Reader submission  
11/24/2010

This guest column is by Christian Freitag, executive director of Sycamore Land Trust.

Bloomington, indeed all of Indiana, lost a friend recently. Helen Caldwell, who passed away on Nov. 4 at age 96, was well-loved as an artist, philanthropist, storyteller, materfamilias, and caring companion. I am proud to have known Helen for the past 15 years.

Helen, along with her late husband, Lynton Keith Caldwell, championed environmental conservation throughout her life. They built their home, Cedar Crest, in the woods east of Bloomington in 1956, where they raised their family. They taught their children, Ned and Elaine, to cherish and respect nature, and their children taught their children to share that ethic. Helen's love of nature's beauty is reflected in her home, her art and the stories she would tell of her travels around the world to some of Earth's most breathtaking places.

Perhaps most impressive, however, was Helen's gumption. People with such a combination of compassion and energy are a rare breed, and Bloomington is fortunate to have more than its share of them. We should not take them for granted when they're here, and we should take time to recognize them when they're gone.

Countless organizations in Bloomington have benefitted from the Caldwells' hard work and generosity over the past 50 years, including Sycamore Land Trust. Keith helped found the land trust 20 years ago, and together, Helen and Keith donated their home and land for the organization to use as a permanent headquarters.

This generous donation has laid a firm foundation for SLT to grow, and to reach its potential in protecting southern Indiana's natural beauty, the place they loved most of all. It was gratifying to speak with Helen about the growth of the land trust in recent years. She'd say she knew it would happen, and when I'd tell her all the things I thought we could accomplish, how this group could literally change the future of Indiana, she'd say something elegantly plainspoken like "Just keep at it. Just keep working hard." That sort of comment reflected her worldview. It's always easier to do nothing, and hope others solve problems for us.

Or worse, it's easy to turn the other way and just ignore things or take them as inevitable. Can't stop progress, right? Helen, as well as Keith, refused such a passive approach to life.

Put simply, Helen never expected anything to get better on its own, and believed that she could make a difference.

When community needs became evident, she organized people and raised funds.

She gave generously. She believed that those who have the ability to make a positive impact also have a concomitant obligation to try.

Helen took responsibility for shaping the world she spiritedly inhabited.

We would all do well to learn this lesson.

We at Sycamore Land Trust emulate her spirit in our work, and we are proud of the indelible footprint the Caldwell family has left on us.