

Kenton Miller: A biography by Sue Miller

Kenton Riegel Miller was born on April 9, 1939 to the late Henry Miller and Melinda Riegel Miller in Chicago, IL. When asthma kept Kenton from spending summers with his brother and all his cousins on his Riegel grandfather's dairy farm, he joined the Y and the Boy Scouts. He was so enthusiastic that he earned his Eagle Award several months before reaching the minimum age. He went on to earn the Order of the Arrow, and at 17 was one of 100 Boy Scouts in the U.S. to be selected to attend the World Scouting Jamboree in Japan. Meanwhile, at Y camp, after one summer as a camper, he became a junior and then a senior counselor, using the woodland and Indian lore as well as the canoeing that he'd learned through Scouting. During the school years, Kenton met regularly with the father of one of his Y campers, who was a professional photographer and learned the principles of photography, cine-photography, and dark room work. Meanwhile, inspired by a movie shown at his high school by CJ Albrecht, taxidermist for the American Museum of Natural History and the Chicago Field Museum, Kenton and a couple of friends drove as far north as roads would take them to Hudson Bay, Canada, and spent a week camping and living off the land. Afterwards, feeling he had perhaps earned the right to meet Albrecht, Kenton contacted Albrecht, was invited to the great man's home, and thus began a truly transformative friendship. Mentored by Albrecht, Kenton completed a correspondence course in Taxidermy, winning awards at science fairs.

Following Albrecht's advice, Kenton attended the University of Washington College of Forestry, earning a BS in Forestry and a Masters Degree in Forest Recreation, the first in his entire extended family to earn a university degree. While pursuing his studies, he played piano with Miller's *Men* at many university dances, and trombone with *The Saints*, a Dixieland Band of fellow UW students, which had a home in Seattle's Pioneer Square, and a weekly radio programme. During his undergraduate studies, Kenton took time off to serve as cine-photographer on a semester-long expedition to the Amazon organized by a group of Anthropology and Geology students, the beginning of his life-long love of Latin America. Kenton and two others flew in a single engine airplane from Seattle to Bogota, Columbia, joining the other members in Leticia. They joined a Spanish Capuchin Padre who was bringing two young nuns fresh from Spain and a pump organ to his uppermost Mission, some 1000 miles up river. The Americans would hunt and fish for food for the group, and help with the heavy lifting and paddling. When they finally reached the mission, and installed the organ in the thatched roof chapel, Kenton was the only one who knew how to play an organ, and the only religious music he knew to play was Martin Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God"! So the Indians had a unique exposure to church music, and Kenton began his life-long love of Latin America. Two years later, as a graduate student, he organized a three month expedition to climb and make the first crossing of "Devil's Mountain" or Auyan Tepui in Venezuela, site of Angel Falls, the world's highest waterfall. In addition to co-leading the expedition, and serving as its interpreter, he once again served as cine-photographer. The expedition was the basis for his Master's Degree Thesis, a Plan for the Development of Canaima National Park, and his film earned him membership in the Adventures Club of Chicago. Throughout his

years at UW, Kenton never had a car. Instead he bought a motorcycle in pieces in a bushel basket and assembled it for campus transportation, and with a group of friends bought a single engine plane, took flying lessons, and because his weekend nights were tied up playing music, used the plane to take his girlfriends on Sunday afternoon picnics in Olympic National Park, at least that's the story Sue heard.

A National Science Foundation summer course in Tropical Forestry in Puerto Rico led to a NSF Scholarship for PhD. studies at the NY State College of Forestry at Syracuse, which awarded him a PhD. in Forestry Economics In 1968. His studies at Syracuse were transforming on another level when he and Sue Horrocks, a soon-to-graduate nursing student at the university, swept each other off their feet. The Amazonian artifacts and the 16" x 20" black and white photos of exotic people and locales on the walls of Kenton's bachelor den helped to convince Sue that there were more interesting life plans than marrying a physician. For Ken it apparently was the short skirt of Sue's uniform—it was the 60's! They were married in the summer of 1964, and after a canoeing honeymoon in Minnesota's Boundary Waters, returned to Syracuse, where he continued his doctoral studies, and she worked as a public health nurse.

Several months later, Kenton received an invitation, out of the blue, to apply for a UN Food and Agriculture (FAO) position at the Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Sciences (IICA, now CATIE) in Costa Rica. Once his course work was finished, and with "only" his dissertation remaining to be completed, Kenton and Sue set off in the autumn of 1965 in an International Scout convertible, rigged out as a camping vehicle, arriving in Costa Rica a month later, after many adventures en route. In Costa Rica from 1965-1970, Kenton developed and taught graduate courses (in Spanish) in Parks and Wildland Management, and provided consultation to the park services of many Latin American countries, while Sue worked with the Costa Rican Demographic Association, helping to spread family planning awareness and service. Somehow, Kenton managed to complete and defend his PhD. Thesis.

Continuing as an officer with FAO, the new Dr. Miller spent a year and a half at FAO headquarters in Rome developing several projects for Central and South America, which the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund (RBF) was interested in funding. Meanwhile, Sue and Toddler Todd wore out two sets of stroller wheels exploring Rome.

During a summer in the US, after leaving Rome, Kenton and Sue were invited to join two other conservationist colleagues in buying an old abandoned farm in West Virginia, not far from Washington, with the idea of managing it as a wilderness. It had an almost habitable farm house, a big old barn and a two-seater outhouse, and was the best purchase they EVER made. Nestled deep in the Lost River watershed, it was inevitably christened Lost Hollow. It quickly became the family touchstone, and is now the site of the Miller homestead.

In the autumn, the family headed for Santiago, Chile, FAOs headquarters for Latin America. For the next several years (tumultuous ones, which included the last years of the Allende presidency, and the first couple of years of the Pinochet regime), with support from RBF and the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP), Kenton headed FAO's Latin American Programme on Wildland Management, and directed the teams he had recruited for the RBF funded projects in Central America and the "Southern Cone" of South America. The projects included two summer-long workshops (one in Chile's lake country, the other in Iguazu, National Park) for Forestry professors in the 'southern cone' countries to learn the basics of planning national parks, truly hardship duty! Sue and Todd alternated between joining workshop activities and vagabonding around the countryside in the family VW camper. Sue was able to return to family planning, working part time with a team at the University of Chile's Contraceptive Research Center, until the coup (9/11/73), which resulted in the exile of the key researchers and the closing of the center.

As the projects were winding down, Kenton's director advised him to take a break from FAO and write a textbook based on his experiences in National Park planning. RBF agreed to support this continuation of his work, and the University of Michigan offered him a position with time to do the writing. So the Miller family, which now included baby Natasha, left Latin America to set down roots in the US, not without regrets at leaving Latin America. Kenton arranged for a prolonged farewell, and the family traveled by air, land, and boat, taking a couple of months, visiting Cuzco and Machu Picchu, spending a week on the Beagle II, exploring the Galapagos, where 6 year old Todd snorkeled with sea lions and penguins, and baby Natasha bathed in a bucket of sea water, and finally revisiting old friends in Central America.

In Ann Arbor, Kenton and Sue experienced some unexpected culture shock, and reveled (at least initially) in home ownership after 10 years of rental housing; Todd, surrounded by kids his age, all speaking English, and available to play at any time of day, felt like he'd died and gone to heaven; his fluent Spanish was exiled to a remote corner of his long term memory, where it stayed until university. Kenton joined the faculty of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan, where he taught graduate level programs in Protected Area and Wildland planning about 75% time, and, with continued support from RBF, spent the other 75% writing *Planning National Parks for Eco-Development in Latin America (1980)*, the first text in Spanish for Latin American Parks professionals. Long out of print, it is still considered to be "The Bible" for Latin American park managers.

While at Michigan, Kenton was elected Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), based in Switzerland. Continued part time support from RBF enabled him to devote the needed time (another 75%) for leading the commission, having commission meetings in all regions of the world, and playing a significant role in planning and implementing the IUCN World Parks Congress in Bali in 1982. Once, when asked what he thought he might do when he grew up, Todd, probably reflecting on the many weekends, holidays, Halloweens, and snow days when his dad was away, remarked that he could get really excited about going down the Amazon with scuba gear and a chain saw! Meanwhile, once Natasha was old enough for Montessori, Sue went back to work at Planned Parenthood and began teaching Lamaze childbirth classes. When Natasha "graduated" to public school, Sue started a graduate programme in nursing,

and loved grad school so much, she went on to a PhD programme after getting her Master degree. Growing up in football mad Ann Arbor, Todd was counting the years until he could play football. Of course part of every summer was spent in Lost Hollow, picking wild black berries, watching for deer and other wildlife, doing lots of photography, taking long walks. Roots in the US were getting deeper and deeper.

Once again, out of the blue, destiny's finger tapped Kenton on the shoulder, when he was nominated for the Director General position at IUCN, a position he had never thought of, but of course could not refuse if he was elected. Those long deep roots were whacked off at the soil line, and the family soon found itself in French speaking Switzerland. The initial culture shock wore off as they began exploring the lakes, mountains, and castles of Switzerland and its neighbors, made new friends, began to understand and be able to speak a bit of French, joined the school Rugby team, began downhill skiing in winter and eventually windsurfing in summer (and for Ken and Sue, met Prince Philip, honorary VP of IUCN, and many other dignitaries).

As the Director General of IUCN, Kenton's focus necessarily broadened considerably from Protected Areas to the entire spectrum of international conservation. His managerial skills were stretched in many ways, and economics, politics, and diplomacy were suddenly paramount, as he realized when a colleague gave him a copy of Machiavelli's *The Prince* to welcome him to his new post. All of this was more than enough to handle, but once the family was settled, Kenton encouraged Sue to return to Michigan for a semester to finish up the course requirements for her doctorate, and added "managing an au pair" to his already full agenda. Sue did finish her PhD, and had several interesting writing opportunities, which helped to round out her resume. Kenton's many contributions to IUCN during those years are documented elsewhere. The contributions of the "IUCN Years" to each member of the family were enormous, and continue to this day. The Millers left Switzerland with many wonderful memories and the satisfaction that Todd and Natasha were very much citizens of the world, thanks to their opportunities and experiences during those years.

Returning to the U.S., Kenton joined the World Resources Institute (WRI) in Washington, DC, and led the international cooperative effort to prepare the Global Biodiversity Strategy, contributed to the Global Biodiversity Assessment, helped to plan and participated in the 1992 World Parks Congress, and played a significant role in the development of the Global Convention for the Conservation of Biological Diversity, a prominent aspect of the World Environment Congress in Rio. Sue put her new PhD. to work on the faculties of the University of Maryland Schools of Nursing and of Medicine.

Shortly after the return to the US, 12 year old Nathaniel Mack joined the family. Nathaniel's father had been a college friend of Kenton's, attended Ken and Sue's wedding, played an instrumental role in that very first letter out of the blue from Costa Rica, and had remained a good friend through the years. When he and Nathaniel's mother learned that they each had terminal illnesses, Ken and Sue were able to arrange for Nathaniel to join the family when the time came. Meanwhile, Nathaniel and his mother

visited Switzerland, and Nathaniel joined the family for summer vacations. There's no doubt that having an empathetic and fun-loving brother and sister was enormously helpful to Nathaniel in coping with his major losses, and growing into a responsible young man and very loving son.

The move to the Washington area allowed the family to spend frequent weekends at Lost Hollow, which they had previously only known in summer; and find that every season had its own magic. Finally, in 1991, construction began on the Miller log home, which Kenton had designed over the years, primarily on long plane trips. It was certainly a case of a dream long deferred being infinitely sweeter. Everyone took part in the construction process, and began camping out in it as soon as the log walls, roof, and floors were installed. It will probably always be "a work in progress." A trout pond, small orchard, vineyard, berry bushes, veggie, herb, and flower gardens have kept Ken and Sue in blue jeans, and the larders of family and friends stocked with jams, chutneys, cordials, and occasionally wines. The two Miller grandchildren, Kaia and Quincy Miller are now the third generation to love Lost Hollow.

In 2000, now WRI Vice President for Conservation and Development, Kenton was once again elected Chair of the WCPA, returning to his roots in Protected Areas, and taking a major role in the planning for the IUCN World Parks Congress in 2003. It was during these "WCPA years" that an obscure "indolent" blood cancer, which had been diagnosed years before, began to require more aggressive treatment. The treatments were quite successful and allowed him to continue working and serving as WCPA chair, though international travel usually required Sue to accompany him.

Immediately following the 2003 Parks Congress in Durban, it became apparent that his bone marrow had "crashed," a delayed consequence of the chemo used in the early stages of his illness. Survival depended on a successful stem cell transplant, if a compatible donor could be found. A donor was eventually identified; Kenton had the transplant in 2004, and after a rocky recovery period, was gradually able to resume a normal life as a retiree, taking care of Lost Hollow, the Miller's own protected area. To his great joy, he recovered sufficiently to be able to serve as an advisor to WCPA, and was able to once again attend meetings, even in different countries.

Kenton's commitment to the world's natural environment lives on in his children and now his grandchildren. Todd is the leader of a stream restoration team for Canaan Valley Institute, safeguarding the water quality of the Potomac and Ohio Watersheds; Natasha keeps things running smoothly for Conservation International's VP for International Projects; and Nathaniel, a white water enthusiast, has built an Adventure/Eco Tourism hostel in Chilean Patagonia. With their "Papi" as field instructor, Kaia and Quincy have been learning the trees, wildflowers, birds, and other critters of Lost Hollow, and enjoy gardening, fishing, camping, hiking, and snorkeling with the family. Kaia likes books about children in other lands, and Quincy has become an expert on African animals, even correcting those who refer to Cape Buffalos as Water Buffalos, and Impalas as antelopes! Lost Hollow will be well cared for, and another generation of nature-and-people lovers is on the way.