Memories on the BPA’s 75th Anniversary

A lantha Carter and the Burnham Heirs

In 1911, our great, great grandparents, Frederick and Catharine Burnham, donated 30 acres of ponds, streams, woods and fields to the town of Morristown; it was to be a park – a quiet, natural, greenspace for all. The Burnhams were ahead of their time in numerous, compassionate ways, including recognizing the healing power of nature. Because of their vision, Burnham Park has been an incredible resource for the town and surrounding communities for over 110 years. And for 75 years, the Burnham Park Association, in conjunction with Morristown and Morris Township, has been working tirelessly to protect, preserve and enhance Burnham Park.

We are so thankful to the BPA for being such dedicated stewards of the Burnham vision. Our great, great grandparents would be very pleased to know that this beautiful and vibrant place of quiet enjoyment continues to this day.

Barbara Klingsporn, former long-term BPA Officer, President of Friends of Jones Woods

Another Glimpse of BURNHAM PARK ASSOCIATION HISTORY

The Parade Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of Morris Township’s Founding: Organizations in Morris Township were invited to participate in the parade. Burnham Park Association (established in 1948) complied, with a “float” representing the neighborhood and a wheelbarrow drill team to represent the years of park beautification efforts.

The “float” was [former BPA Treasurer] Bill Claxton’s shiny, burgundy red pickup truck adorned with live trees standing in the truck-bed — to represent Burnham Park — flanked by painted plywood cutouts of the houses around the park. Bill did the carpentry. Judy Perry and [BPA Trustee] Barbara Klingsporn did the painting. Bill did the slow driving, so hard on the truck.

A few rehearsals on Dorothy Drive were needed to perfect the marching and spinning technique of the wheelbarrow drill team. Taking a cue from a then-famous briefcase drill team, [BPA President] Lynn Siebert and Barbara choreographed a “dance”, pushing and spinning two wheelbarrows. Arielle Siebert [then teenaged daughter of Lynn and Don] acted as the Drum Major, brandishing a garden hoe as a baton, followed by BPA members carrying shovels and rakes, all wearing BPA shirts and marching/ doing their drill routine to the rhythm of band music down the parade line, as it passed the reviewing stand near Township Hall.

That was a festive day, honoring our municipal founders and the generations of volunteers who have served it, including those who have donated, protected and beautified the jewel that is Burnham Park.

Carrie Gazal Springer, childhood resident, now Manager, Environmental Science/Somerset Park Commission

Having grown up on Dorothy Drive in Morris Township, I was fortunate to have Jones Woods as my “backyard”. At the time (1980s-90s), the woods were privately owned and in the running for development. I remember attending township meetings with my parents and speaking about the importance of the forest habitat. Jones Woods was always important to me. I would spend hours in the woods each day playing survival, cops and robbers, building forts, swinging from vines, fishing
in the reservoir, and exploring the environment. Not only were the woods important to me personally, it was also home to various state threatened and endangered species. I remember listening to woodpeckers, searching for salamanders, digging for worms and watching large bucks wander through. I felt free and comfortable in the “wilds” of Morris Township. My mother was also a longtime member of the Burnham Park Committee, and on several occasions, I was recruited to help plant trees within the park and find ways to deter the geese.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, all this nature play helped foster my appreciation for the environment and connect me to Mother Nature. I ended up pursuing a degree in Wildlife Conservation, working on various wildlife research projects, teaching environmental education, and now I manage an Environmental Science Department and 500-acre park for a county park system which allows me to share and provide similar opportunities for future generations.

Jones Woods and the work the Burnham Park Association has accomplished will forever hold a special place in my heart.

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Tom and Mary Ann Gazal, former BPA Trustee and BPA Secretary, long-term residents

We moved to the neighborhood the summer of 1978. The house was just the right size and the property provided privacy because it was adjacent to Jones Woods. For our children Jones Woods became an extended backyard. It helped foster their love of nature that continues to this day.

There was always a kinship among the families who lived in the neighborhood. There were progressive dinners, block parties, Christmas cookie exchanges, or just hanging out on backyard patios or front porches. Even though houses have exchanged ownership that togetherness remains with the newer residents.

The BPA was an important part of the neighborhood. A number of residents volunteered to be on its board and serve as officers and trustees. This group helped keep everyone informed of town/township matters and events. In addition, every year the board would undertake projects around Arbor Day to maintain the park’s beauty. Residents always came out to help realizing their effort helped keep Burnham Park attractive for everyone to enjoy.

There was never a desire to move away as the area provided good schools, entertainment, recreation and excellent doctors and hospitals. It was a great place to raise a family and the neighborhood has not lost its charm. We’re here to stay!!

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Kathy Claxton, former Trustee, widow of long-term BPA Trustee/Treasurer Bill Claxton, long-term resident

75 years. Unbelievable.

I’m not sure anything will top the truck float and the marching trees bringing up the rear.

My other thought is that I have much respect and admiration for the leadership of the Drs. Siebert - and Barbara K. - in maintaining the Burnham Park Association over these many years. The teamwork they instilled made the difference in all the many projects undertaken, resulting in their success.

Thank you!
Lou Bodian, former BPA President and current Trustee, long-term resident

My wife, Helena Kloder, and I moved into our house on Fairmount Avenue in July, 1976 having moved from a small 2-bedroom apartment in Staten Island. We chose Morristown in that it was convenient to our jobs – Helena in Union, NJ and me in Newark. I was particularly excited to switch from driving on congested roads to taking the train. It was also nice to finally have some space where we could relax in the backyard and do some gardening (mostly Helena).

After about 3 years, our first daughter, Dena, was born followed several years later by our second daughter, Suzanne. The Burnham Park area was a wonderful place to raise kids. We erected a swing set in the backyard and had a deck installed where we could soak up the sunshine. Our kids made friends with other kids and had wonderful educations at the various Morris School District schools nearby.

We have been fortunate to have had great neighbors. One set of neighbors, Betty and Les Faulkner, invited our kids to help them decorate their Christmas tree, an experience they couldn’t get in our Jewish home. We have become good friends with our current neighbors – Michelle and Joe, Christine and Michelle, Debbie and Ray, and Jackie and Victor. It is nice how we all look out for one another.

Another great thing about living in Burnham Park are the facilities – both natural and constructed that are available. Our kids loved walking down to the park to watch Little League baseball (and getting ice cream as a treat). More recently, we have discovered the trails in Jones Woods and the Green Strip.

Now that we are grandparents, our grandkids love coming to Morristown. They treat these trips like going to the “Magic Kingdom.” It is so nice to see how excited they become when their parents announce their plans to visit.

In the early 1990s, I was privileged to be elected as President of the Burnham Park Association. This was a great opportunity to meet others in surrounding streets and work towards keeping the neighborhood as inviting to others as it was to us. The tremendous efforts of those who succeeded me as President helped preserve Jones Woods as a pristine forest rather than another clump of housing.

When I look back on our 47 years of living in Burnham Park, I can’t believe the good fortune my family and I have had in buying our house at #48 Fairmount.

Asher Siebert, PhD - Applied Climate Scientist/ Physical Geographer, childhood resident

My name is Asher Siebert and I am the son of the long-time BPA president, Lynn Siebert. The grassroots environmental activist work of the BPA has had a significant impact on my life. Growing up with a large tract of unspoiled forest land behind our home on Hillcrest Avenue (Jones Woods) is an experience that many young people living in suburbs do not have and for which I am very grateful.

As a young child, I would play in those woods with my sister or friends, walk the rim of the earthen dam around the reservoir and pretend another hill feature in the woods was a "Martian landing site." Were it not for the work of the BPA, this childhood experience would have been impossible or
significantly curtailed, as one of the BPA’s early challenges was winning a legal battle to stop an unnecessary housing development project that would have been situated in the middle of Jones Woods - disrupting delicate ecosystems and habitat and compromising local water quality. This battle began when I was one year old and didn't finish until I was 15 and faced some unpleasant and bizarre drama (such as an accusation by the developer’s team that the BPA and its allies had "planted" endangered species in Jones Woods to make a case for environmental preservation). Through the experience of my mother gathering with like-minded neighbors in BPA meetings to fight to preserve this community resource, I learned the importance of tenacity in such matters and that environmental resources can't be taken for granted and may need to be defended from other aggressive interests.

In subsequent years, many other local battles with other ill-considered, environmentally problematic development projects and proposed zoning changes have ensued, and the BPA has been largely successful at countering these efforts with a sense of environmental stewardship.

Throughout my childhood and into my adulthood, I have participated in Arbor Day tree/shrub planting activities at Burnham Park with friends and neighbors connected to the BPA and am delighted by the significant physical and ecological transformation of the park over the course of my lifetime. My own academic and professional life has focused on the issue of climate change - drawing on both a scientific foundation and a sense of environmentalism that I learned at an early age from my parents. From a climate perspective, reforestation and avoided deforestation are critically important carbon sinks and an important salve to the human spirit.

I'm excited to bring my wife and my two young children to Burnham Park on May 7th to continue in the tradition and am delighted that the BPA is still going strong after 75 years.