

By: Monica Ann Evans

Challenges. Lew Batts knew them.

He was a man of many talents and numerous accomplishments: scientist, ornithologist, ecologist, naturalists, photographer, environmental educator, son, brother, husband, grandfather, brother-in-law and an uncle with nephew and nieces, friend, businessman, corporate trustee, developer, volunteer, founder, medical technician, college professor, traveler, writer, editor, leader, and champion of the natural world.

Walks through fields and woods with his dad and the raising of black-widow spiders in his bedroom at home merged into teaching bird identification to fellow college students. College pre-med studies became medical studies before his U.S. Army assignment as a medical technician. After his discharge, he and his wife Jean enrolled at the University of Michigan Graduate School where he changed his focus. He combined his passion and knowledge of birds with the field of ecology.

In tune with the out-of-doors, with nature, he knew the basic workings of ecological systems and he was appalled that the natural world was beginning to disappear.

Back in this community, he taught and entertained students, colleagues, and businessmen. The basic subject was the interdependence of humans with the natural world, and a more pressing subject – the stopping of pollution and the destruction of the natural world. Some believe him and spread the word. Others scoffed.

His talent took him into the business world and the boardroom where he converted some leaders with his levelheaded rational thinking, but not all of them. Now what?

He and friends established the environmental Defense Fund, now known as Environmental Defense. This nonprofit corporation has made a major impact on environmental cleanup. Scientists and lawyers working with businesses nationwide are protecting the natural world. If no progress can be made, EDF takes its reasonable position to the courts. In the long run the bottom lines of these companies benefit.

Locally, Lew and entrepreneur Burton Upjohn became a team. The now 30+ year-old Parkview Hills development illustrates how people can live in harmony with their environment in a community that benefits both residents and developers.

Also locally, he and other established the Kalamazoo Nature Center. Its focus has always been first on research, especially long-term monitoring studies of birds; second on education, from preschoolers through senior citizens; and third on conservation, now called stewardship, the long-term management of natural habitats for the benefit of nonhumans and humans. His philosophy was that research adds to knowledge, knowledge is imparted to people, and people then will understand, care for, and protect the natural world.

He believed in long-term solutions to problems.

He believed in a sustainable economy.

He believed that the natural world enhances people's lives. More importantly, he believed that the natural world is essential to human survival.

This visionary and outstanding leader has enriched the world we and future generations live in. Thank you, Lew.