

Kris Felbeck: Finding Life Lessons in “This Little Corner”

By Donna Ahrens

Kris Felbeck is an intrepid camper and hiker. A “mostly retired” finance and business manager. A mother and grandmother. A nature and bird lover. An active volunteer in the arts and for her church. An experienced mountain climber.

She’s also an Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, “super sub.”

Kris has volunteered at the Martha Crone Visitor Shelter for a dozen years, often subbing on short notice when volunteer shifts pop up. Says Volunteer Coordinator Lauren Husting, “Kris is one of my most reliable and enthusiastic volunteers, from her willingness to come in every week to her bringing along her young granddaughter [Elvie] to enjoy the beauty of the Garden at the volunteer picnic.”

NATURE AS A FAMILY AFFAIR

Raised in Rhode Island, Kris credits her parents with her love of nature. “My father was a passionate birder and developed a lifelong love of the outdoors by being a Boy Scout and Eagle Scout in Pasadena [California],” she says, adding that her family also did a lot of car camping. “My folks had a great system. They would do the driving, and then when we got to a campsite, they would get out their lawn chairs and evening drinks—and the three sisters would set up camp! I was the oldest, and set up the tent. Jeannie (sister #2) set up the stove and got dinner going, and Cindy (#3) collected wood and started a fire.”



In 1980, Kris moved to Minneapolis with her husband, Dave, and settled near the University of Minnesota. She discovered the Wildflower Garden when she was exploring parks in the area where she could take her two young sons. Over the years, her family’s enthusiasm

for outdoor life took them to dozens of state and national parks.

In 2000, when her sons were 12 and 15, they rented a tiny Peugeot and set off on a two-month camping vacation in Europe. She notes, wryly, “In hindsight, I would not camp again—it was harder to socialize with people than if we had stayed in hostels. And with two big, strapping boys, the Peugeot was a little on the small side! But the boys were good sports.”

David was an avid mountain climber, and Kris accompanied him on climbs in New Zealand, Mexico, Peru, and Africa, as well as in the United States. Their climb of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa’s highest mountain, was particularly memorable, she says. “On the summit day, we started climbing at midnight. Six hours later, we were on the top—and it was still pitch black out! We couldn’t see a thing.”

Sadly, David died of a heart attack on a climbing expedition in Colorado in 2012, “his fiftieth 14er,” Kris notes, referring to peaks exceeding 14,000 feet. She has continued to spend the summer months camping, especially in Colorado and other western states, and takes frequent short camping trips in Minnesota.

AN “UP NORTH” CABIN EXPERIENCE CLOSE TO HOME

After closing out a finance career in business and education, Kris wanted to do “outdoors volunteering that would force me to get out in nature on a regular basis.” Recalling the pleasure she and her family had from their visits to Eloise Butler, she signed on as a Shelter volunteer. One of her earliest interests was birding, and she still enjoys pulling a chair up to the shelter window to watch the birds at the feeders and building a fire in the fireplace on cooler days. “It’s like having an Up North cabin in the city,” she says.

Reflecting on what the Garden means to her, Kris says, “As with many things, it’s the people who make the experience.” She notes she has been especially impressed by the work of the Friends’ Invasives Plant Action Group (see page 6), led by Jim Proctor and Liz Anderson, and the Garden’s legacy stewards, who restore and maintain small plots in the Garden.

“Watching the invasives group work on removing species like garlic mustard and buckthorn, in specific areas, and seeing the results of the efforts over time, has been a lesson in dedication,” Kris says. “Instead of being overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, these group leaders and volunteers have tackled the job in little chunks. And now our little corner here is protected through their steady, ongoing work. It’s a lifetime lesson.”

Donna Ahrens is a Shelter volunteer and copy editor of the *Fringed Gentian*.

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT J Pamela Weiner	VOLUNTEERS CHAIR Lauren Husting	THE FRINGED GENTIAN Meleah Maynard, <i>editor</i> Donna Ahrens, <i>copy editor</i> John Toren, <i>designer</i>
VICE PRESIDENT Vivian Mason	MONEY MANAGEMENT Steve Benson	Colin Bartol Melissa Hansen Gloria Miller Jennifer Olson Sally Pundt Steve Pundt Barry Schade Anthony Waldera
TREASURER & MEMORIALS CHAIR; WEBSITE COORDINATOR Gary Bebeau	INVASIVE PLANT CHAIRS Jim Proctor Liz Anderson	
SECRETARY Candy Bartol	HISTORIAN Phoebe Waugh	
MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR Jayne Funk	GARDEN CURATOR, EX OFFICIO Susan Wilkins	