

Bluffviews

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Falling in Love with the Land

By Joann Fricke

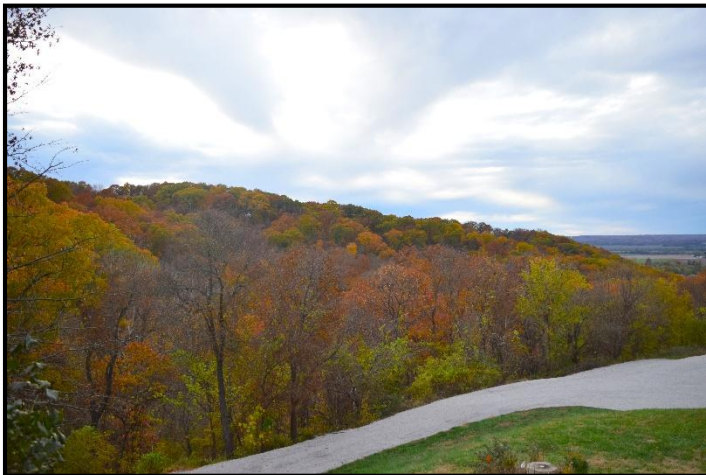
When my husband and I bought our current house situated in the bluffs on 40 acres, we had no idea where it would lead us. Honestly, we purchased it for the view. From our porch, we could see where my parents' house had once stood in original Valmeyer before the flood of 1993. We had a view of houses built in the bluffs on the Missouri side of the river. And, of course, we were surrounded by the upland forest of the bluffs—beautiful any time of year, but especially in Autumn.

We knew nothing about invasive plant species, how to improve our forest or even what a hill prairie was, yet we fell in love with the land. Shortly after meeting her, Debbie Newman, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) Natural Areas Preservation Specialist gave us photos of our property that she had taken from an airplane after leaf drop. The leaves of the trees had dropped, but the bush honeysuckle leaves had not. (See photo at right) We were horrified to see all the honeysuckle so close to our house. Removal of the honeysuckle became our pet project. In all the years since, we have pulled or cut and treated thousands of bush honeysuckle plants on our property, surrounding property, and on other protected property.



In addition, we have become champions of prescribed burning and hill prairie preservation. Just last year we each surpassed assisting on 100 prescribed burns, twenty one of which have been on various portions of our property. And we have restored the five hill prairies and two glades that we own—with our own sweat equity as well as contractors hired through INPC and federal programs.

So you see, this love affair has been, and continues to be, a lot of work!



The view to the southwest from our front porch.

Editor's note: The following article has appeared in a previous issue of Bluffviews as well as a CLIFFnotes article in a local newspaper. It felt like time to run it again. And so we go from love OF the bluffs to...

Love in the Bluffs

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The 19th century English poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling wrote that "God gives all men all earth to love, but, since man's heart is small, ordains for each one spot that shall prove beloved over all." And so it is for many that our majestic and towering bluff tops, offering fiery sunsets, eagles on the wing, and panoramic vistas of the American Bottoms have proven to be the spot for love.

Bob Stewart, Monroe County's longtime District Conservationist with USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, adores prairies. An ardent advocate for prairie plantings he assisted many locals in establishing prairies through the Conservation Reserve Program. Bob loves to visit Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve. In June 1988 Bob and his girlfriend Ruth rode bicycles from Waterloo to Fults Hill Prairie and then hiked up to Big Prairie on the north side of the preserve. They sat to rest and enjoy the magnificent view of the floodplain from the vantage of the large healthy prairie. As he viewed beloved lands beside his own beloved Bob made an impromptu declaration and proposed to Ruth. They were married in 1989.



Shannon Melliére accepted Mike Krebel's 2007 proposal. Photo courtesy Ed Weinhoff, Monroe County Independent.

Acting far less on spontaneity than predetermination, Mike Krebel carefully plotted and planned his marriage proposal using the bluffs as background and the family farm as parchment. The Krebel family farm nestles against the cliff face to the north of Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve and unfolds out into the fertile American Bottoms. Wielding a tractor and disk rather than a pen and ink Mike engraved in very large typeface the huge letters, "Will You Marry Me" into a fallow field in March 2007. He then invited his longtime girlfriend, Shannon Melliére, for a hike in the nature preserve. She liked the message she saw as they looked down from Big Prairie and they were married in June 2009.

Our bluffs also have served as wedding sites as well as a romantic spot for marriage proposals.

In June 1995, Monroe County Circuit Court Judge Dennis Jacobson performed a civil marriage ceremony at Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve. Richard Spener and Toni Armstrong had often hiked the Preserve and wanted to be married at the place they so enjoyed. Knowing their friend Dennis also was an active outdoorsman, Richard and Toni asked him to perform the ceremony. With his somber judicial robe stowed in a backpack, Dennis joined the wedding party of eight adults and three children as they slogged up the trail to Big Prairie on a very hot day. They changed into their wedding attire, and Dennis conducted the ceremony. Toni's bridal-day list of must-haves



Judge Dennis Jacobsen conducts the wedding ceremony for Richard Spener and Toni Armstrong. Photo courtesy Richard Spener.

included bug dope, bottled water, toilet paper and snacks for the trip back down to the parking lot. A reception in St. Louis followed.



Richard Dotson, of rural Baldwin, often hunted deer at Charlie Frederick's bluff ground in southwestern Monroe County. With time and many hunts, Richard fell in love with Angela's Prairie, a dedicated Land & Water Reserve on the Frederick property, which overlooks the beautiful wetlands of ancient Conner Lake. In October 2008 Richard got married at a ceremony at Angela's Prairie, and the wedding party of about 40 people then attended a reception at Lisa's Restaurant (now Lisa's Market Street Grill) in Prairie du Rocher.

In our bluff lands, whether for love of nature or the nature of love, passion may outstrip awareness.

In June 2009, Mike Marlen, a biology professor at

The Dotson wedding, conducted atop Angela's Prairie. Photo courtesy Richard Dotson.

Southwestern Illinois College, was leading a summer school biology field trip at Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve, with about 15 students eager to see and learn all they could about the nature of nature. The study group had nearly finished ascending the wooden staircase from the parking lot to the top of the bluffs when they encountered a naked couple -- in flagrante delicto -- who were at the very top of the long staircase. The couple was so caught up in each other and in the moment that they were completely oblivious to the entire world.

The study group -- still hoping to continue their ecology studies -- stopped, coughed and stamped their feet, and made a lot of noise. The couple persisted. After a number of minutes had passed, a student yelled: "hey, we're trying to have a field trip." The startled couple jumped up and scurried into the trees. Mike and the students waited about five minutes longer and then completed the walk up the last few steps.

At the top, the study group saw a young couple sitting on rocks at an overlook. The couple smiled and greeted members of the study group as they went by: "Beautiful view isn't it?" and "It's a lovely day." Mike notes that members of his study group certainly recognized the day as a lovely one, and adds that all were unanimous in hoping that ticks and chiggers weren't out in great numbers on that beautiful day.

While we all have love **for** the bluffs, a few -- perhaps the most fortunate among us -- have experienced love **in** the bluffs.



Wild Things conference moves south in 2026!

The success of the conference has inspired Wild Things to move for the first time to a new location -- but don't fret! Wild Things will return to the Chicago region in 2027.

Early bird tickets are on sale now at this link:
<https://wildthingscommunity.org/>

Photo gallery...



An AmeriCorps team worked at White Rock the second week of October. They put in a fire break, installed diversions on a trail, cut honeysuckle and some cedar trees in a glade.



Members' Day 2025



We enjoyed pizza and conversation as we gathered at PWSNP on Oct. 25. Site stewards offered insight into happenings at the properties they steward. An unexpected falcon presentation was offered by a Clifftop member and her birds, Bristle & Phoenix.