

**Activity 2: *In Their Own Words Stories***

**Stories from the heart** from people who protected land. The following excerpts from *In Their Own Words: Fifteen Stories of Conservation and Inspiration* published by The Pennsylvania Land Trust Association focus on the value of conservation easements. For more information or to receive your own copy, please visit [www.conserveland.org](http://www.conserveland.org).

**Jim Holden** In 1973, my young family purchased an old dairy farm. The Holden Farm is an olde-style homestead operation. Participating in this process were three generations of our family, all of whom share the love of the land. The land was part of the spectacular French Creek Watershed. We decided to donate an easement of 122 acres of the farm to the French Creek Valley Conservancy to be used as a match for a grant to purchase an adjacent easement. In the end it was only a disappointing 40 acres. Our easement was the first and still is the only easement in Venango County. My son, John, and I led in the formation of a new conservancy—the Allegheny Conservancy.

**Lewis and Wanda Irion** This land is as much a part of our family as our children and our animals. We feel honored to have the chance to be its stewards. Our family so strongly believes in preserving open space for future generations that we have gone through the easement process two times in opposite ends of the state. We owned special property on the Chester County border at the top of a reservoir. When we moved, we donated a conservation easement. We chose Natural Lands Trust as the watchdog and developed a plan to allow future owners flexibility. We moved to northern Pennsylvania and placed an easement on our new property with the Northcentral PA Conservancy. That will be our legacy.

**Faye and Carl Oberheim** The land has given our family many years of enjoyment. All three properties border Penns Creek and surrounding mountains. Developments, homes and trailers were beginning to pop up around us. We learned we could protect a variety of the habitats through easements. We contacted Merrill W. Linn Land and Waterways Conservancy and an appraiser, forester, attorney and accountant with easement experience. We chose to have envelopes on each property to allow for changes like a pool or improvements. We have completed two out of three easements so far. It took about a year. We were very fortunate and privileged to work with so many helpful and knowledgeable people.

**Beverly Grening** Our son, Gregory, was born in Lewistown. He had a tree house in the woods. At about age 3 he wrote a note to a neighbor, who owned the woods, and said “John, Please don’t sell the woods.” Greg grew up and joined the Marines, fought in the first Gulf War in Iraq, returned home and proposed to his high-school sweetheart. Soon after, Greg died in a car accident. We decided to buy the woods Greg had so loved. We contacted the Central Pennsylvania Conservancy. On a beautiful sunny day in June 1996, we dedicated the Gregory Alan Grening Forest Preserve. Thanks to the help of many people, a young boy turned young man, who will never grow old, has his wish that no one will ‘ruin his woods.’