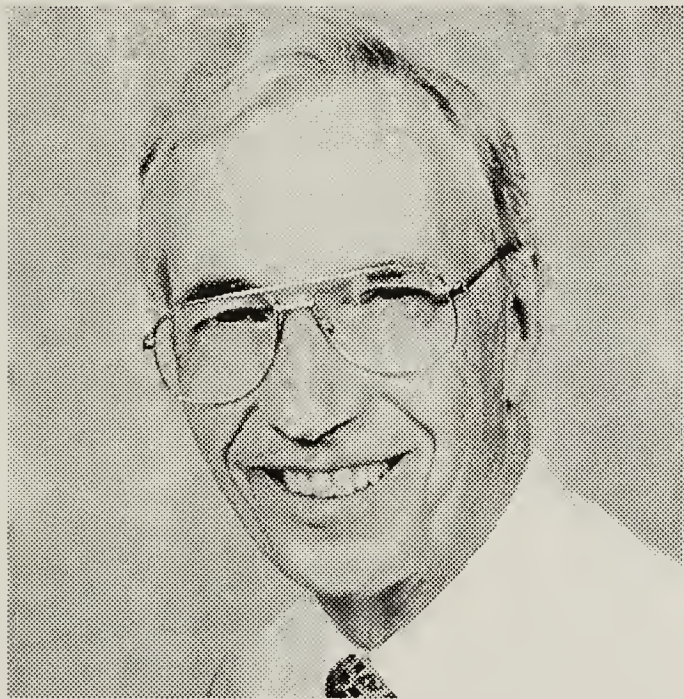

IN MEMORIAM

GARTH C. NELSON, 1929 - 2001

C. STUART HOUSTON, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0J8



Garth Nelson, the youngest of four brothers, was born to Vera and Maurice Nelson on November 24, 1929, at Chaplin, Saskatchewan. The family farm was on a ridge of poor land 18 miles south of town. Garth's father, Maurice, had homesteaded in 1909, lost his first wife in 1918, lost his barn to a lightning strike in 1923, lost his crop to hail in 1926 and to frost in 1927, then had his farm implements repossessed by the implement company after they were five-sixths paid for. Unable to continue farming in one of the most severely drought-stricken parts of the province, in 1932 Maurice took a homestead for the second time, this time in the bush south of Porcupine Plain. Almost their only income was cutting and selling cordwood. They had more moisture but many fewer acres to cultivate. They moved back south to manage a different farm not far from the one they had left, arriving in the driest year of all, 1937. Maurice next tried farming north of

McGregor, Manitoba, from 1941 to 1944, but eventually gave up and built a house in McGregor. Here Garth went to high school while Maurice earned his living building houses for others.

Garth attended United College in Winnipeg. His first pastoral charge with the United Church was in Flin Flon, Manitoba. He married Lillian Parsons in 1961. After he obtained his master's degree at Boston University, he was the minister at the mining town of Balmertown near Red Lake, Ontario. Both sons, Rob and Greg, were born in Red Lake. Garth also flew out to neighboring Indian reserves. His next ministries were in Thornhill, London and Ottawa, Ontario. In 1984 Garth and Lillian began an eight-year joint ministry at Grosvenor Park United Church in Saskatoon, retiring in 1992.

Garth was a modest, unassuming, kind, caring man but intense in his convictions; a man of integrity with high principles; a dedicated conservationist. In his post-retirement career, especially, Garth became a keen birder and a tower of strength in nature organizations in Saskatoon and in Saskatchewan. As president of the Saskatoon Nature Society, 1994 to 1996 he did a superb job. In the Saskatchewan Natural History Society (Nature Saskatchewan), Garth was Chair of the Environmental Committee, 1994 to 1999. For this he was awarded the society's Volunteer of the Year Award, 1999. He was the only new Fellow of the Society to be named at the annual meeting of Nature

Saskatchewan in 2000. The Meewasin Valley Authority presented Garth with the prestigious Meewasin Conservation Award in December 2000.

I thank Greg Nelson for permission to use the following two paragraphs from his eulogy for his father read at the funeral.

“He was fascinated, invigorated, and inspired by the natural world: from his study and appreciation of orchids, to his ardent bird-watching. He would pull the car suddenly onto the shoulder and screech to a stop if he saw something, reach under the front seat for the binoculars..... when he walked in the forest, he was scanning the tree-tops, his feet somehow finding their way over stones and roots. In his retirement, he transformed this love of nature into a passionate campaign for conservation of the environment. A “ministry of eco-justice.”

“He committed himself thoroughly to every task. If he said he would do something, he would do it. And he would do it well. He was a man seemingly incapable of guile. He provided an example of what it meant to be painfully honest, to be full of integrity, to have beliefs and stand by them, and act upon them. It was never enough for him to talk about problems. He always worked to educate, and to create solutions.”

After developing symptoms involving speech impairment, Lillian was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s disease) in 1998 and Garth cheerfully provided her with 24-hour care, seven days a week until her death in April 2000. While caring for his wife, Garth himself developed a speech impediment as a result of a brain tumor. The tumor did not expand rapidly as most brain tumors do and did not cause increased pressure and headaches but eventually led to his death on September 15, 2001. Even in his final weeks, Garth enjoyed being pushed around the neighborhood in his wheelchair, watching for birds. He was only in hospital for four days before his death.

When Garth took six weeks of radiotherapy for his brain tumor, I was his Monday driver. Once on our way out, on the elevator, by good fortune, his radiotherapist took time to tell me, in Garth’s presence, how very pleased he was with the response of his tumor. This chance exchange boosted Garth’s spirits enormously. Each week I was amazed at how consistently cheerful he was, a master of Positive Thinking.

Garth can be an exemplar to us all. His deep concern for the environment, his strength of spirit, and his cheerfulness under great adversity, should be an inspiration.



“Where rivers, creeks, canals, or roadsides go generally their way, the wanderers (as monarchs are also called) follow them. Here is water, here is nectar, here the likelihood of the sought-after herbs. Watercourses deliver them to milkweed grounds : fields, pastures, meadows, banks and bars; roads lead to parks and gardens and vacant lots, where few milkweed plants are likely to go undiscovered by *Danaus* in a good year.”

Robert Michael Pyle, *Chasing Monarchs*. p. 4