



Hazel Blennerhassett FOUNDER / PRESIDENT



Hazel was born in London, England, in 1947. Her father was head of Dentistry at Charing Cross Hospital; her mother managed English Houses Ltd., a rental property company founded by Hazel's grandfather, Richard Fenwick.

Hazel was educated at St. Paul's Girls' School and the London School of Economics, graduating with a B.Sc.(Econ) Honours degree. At University she played bridge every day, and became a National University dinghy sailing champion. She loved theatre and earned a Gold Medal from the London Academy for Music and Dramatic Art.

Hazel married in 1968, and in 1969 she and her first husband Russell Flint emigrated to Manitoba. Hazel was employed at St. John's Ravenscourt School as the Bursar, and later became Office Manager for the Winnipeg Presbytery of the United Church of Canada.

Hazel joined Augustine United Church in 1969 and served in many different roles for 25 years. She became a glider pilot and instructor. She was also an avid curler, and played bridge whenever she could. She served 6 years on the Allocations Panel of the United Way of Winnipeg, ending as Chair of the Family Panel.

Hazel's children Jenny and Chris were born in 1977 and 1980. Chris was born with Spina Bifida and Hazel became instrumental in founding both the Manitoba and National Spina Bifida Associations and served on both Boards for many years.

In 1985, after separating from Russell, Hazel went to the Winnipeg Foundation as the Grants officer. Over the next 5 years she worked with many non-profit organizations in Winnipeg, reviewing grant applications for her Board.

Hazel met her second husband Ryon Johnston, a horticulturist, at Augustine Church, and they were married in 1988.

In 1990 Hazel became Executive Director of the Laurel Centre, an agency counselling survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

She was also a consultant for the Thomas Sill Foundation, and was appointed to the Manitoba Council for International Co-Operation which allocates the Province of Manitoba's overseas grants.

In 1993 Hazel and Ryon moved to Roblin, Manitoba, and started a greenhouse business, Your Prairie Gardener, growing plants and operating 3 retail plant centres. Hazel and Ryon have enjoyed renovating their lovely old farmhouse, developing a 4 acre garden and raising sheep.

In 1998 Hazel sold her share of English Houses Ltd., using part of the proceeds to create the Blennerhassett Family Foundation. Thus she continues a lifelong interest in grant making.

Hazel and Ryon retired in 2006 and now are able to do as most retired people do: travel a lot, enjoy their grandchildren and tend their garden.

