

## **Saving Parker's Paradise**

### **Memorial fund in Sutherland's name aims to heal lake he loved**



Family of Parker Sutherland – Brandon, Brenda & Madison, along with many friends and family help create the Parker Sutherland Memorial Fund

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There's a cottonwood tree on the beach at Lake Winnipeg's south basin and though to most it's just one tree among many, to Brenda, Madison and Brandon Sutherland it tells the story of their lives.

And it tells the story of Parker Sutherland – Brenda's husband and Madison's and Brandon's dad.

For as long as they can remember, they spent their weekends at the beach at the lake. They'd get up early in the morning, get the boat ready, pack the coolers and head for the Red.

Madison says she and her brother learned to swim at the lake. They learned how to build fires and how to fish. She was in awe of her dad's knowledge, especially how he seemed to have a map in his head that guided them to their little piece of paradise.

"I was always amazed at how well my dad knew the waters, it all looked the same to me but he knew exactly where to turn, when, and got us there safely every time," she says.

"Dad knew when to turn around, or take a different route, and which spot on the beach would be the best.

"For a long time it was like our own private island, we were often the only ones on the beach until we started to share our secret place with friends and family. We then called it 'Paradise' and found our nest at the base of the big cottonwood tree that housed an eagle's nest."

Brenda says she and Parker started going to the south basin around 1982, when they first began dating. They used his dad's boat first, before they got their own pontoon.

The last time they went was about two weeks before Parker passed in 2014. They took Madison and Brandon, and Parker's parents, who hadn't been to the lake in a long time. His dad, Wayne Sutherland, was shocked at how much it had changed.

What used to be a little channel leading to the lake was now a wide expanse of water, to be navigated only by those with knowledge of the waterscape.

“I think it really hit us then how much it’s changed,” Brenda says.

“His dad said he wouldn’t even know how to get to the lake anymore. Whatever’s going on out there isn’t healthy.”

Parked passed away on Sept. 17, 2014.

The Parker Sutherland Memorial Fund now does the work that Parker was so passionate about. Brenda says Parker was deeply concerned about the health of the lake, having witnessed it deteriorate over the years.

He was an environmentalist and cared about the health of the land, water and sky and it makes Brenda beyond proud to have a fund in his name that will care for those things.

After Parker’s passing, Selkirk and District Community Foundation executive director Bev Clegg paid a visit to Brenda, to let her know just how many people had donated to the foundation in Parker’s memory.

It was an impressive list, and while families are notified when donations are made in a loved one’s memory, this was different.

Brenda recalls Clegg saying they’d never really seen anything like it – the donations in Parker’s name kept coming and coming. It was then that Brenda decided the family would start the memorial fund. A minimum of \$10,000 is required to create a fund, so the family put money in, and obtained some matching funds as well.

She’s touched by the fact that so many people donated in Parker’s memory, and continue to do so.

“I get choked up because it was overwhelming to see, how much and how many people wanted to support the Foundation and put it in Parker’s memory,” Brenda says.

“A small community is certainly so much of what it’s about. This community has been amazing to the kids and I. It’s overwhelming, but in a beautiful way.”

Brenda says the beach at the lake was once their own private paradise, but Parker introduced it to many others, and even more people discovered it on their own. With the fund, people can continue to discover the beauty that surrounds us here and that awareness can propel Parker’s dream of healing the lake forward.

“Parker’s greatest love, other than his family I believe, was the lake,” she says.

“I think Parker would be shocked to see the support.”

The Parker Sutherland Memorial Fund will support local environmental projects. This year, the family also gave an immediate gift to the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium, which triggered another private donor and a matching amount from the Thomas Sill Foundation.

The cottonwood tree is still at the lake, adorned now with a sign that says ‘Parker’s Paradise’. Brenda and the kids continue to go, and when the eagle flies above they think of Parker.

“When he got there, that was his paradise. It’s important for us to go there, we feel him there. He knew how fast the lake was changing and he had a fear that it wouldn’t be there one day,” she says.

“The memorial fund continues Parker’s desire to improve the lake’s health. We didn’t want it to get lost.”

**For more information contact:**

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**The SDCF: Here for Good** was founded in 1995. It has \$8.9 million in assets and provides grant to community organizations from the interest off the assets. Since incorporation the interest has allowed the SDCF to give \$2.1 million to over 125 local non-profit organizations throughout Selkirk, St Andrews and St Clements. The SDCF creates different ways for people to donate by offering a range of different funds that support everything from books for babies to furniture for palliative care patients. SDCF also helps connect donors with community wishes and dreams by allowing families and organizations to create their own endowment funds dedicated to a specific service, issue or project they care about and want to support for a long time. In 2017 SDCF grant \$249,506 to 44 organizations, ensuring that the funds touch a lot people.