

## Home of the Wolves

*By Helen Zahniser Snyder, May 1938*

Tionesta native Helen Zahniser Snyder knew in her soul that rare and special Keystone State wildlands like the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness in Warren and McKean Counties along the eastern shoreline of the Allegheny Reservoir are something to be forever cherished and championed. Her older brother Howard Zahniser, born in Franklin in 1906, was raised in their home on Bridge Street in Tionesta with Helen, and their siblings Elizabeth and Harold. Howard of course went on to become the executive director of The Wilderness Society in Washington, D.C. and the author of the Wilderness Act of 1964, legislation that created America's National Wilderness Preservation System for current and future generations to use and enjoy. Helen went on to become a clinical social worker for Family Service of Philadelphia, but she never lost her deep-rooted love for wilderness and Tionesta, or her undying respect and admiration for her older brother and his magnanimous work for wilderness all across the country – work that has resulted in the protection of wilderness right here in the Allegheny National Forest at Hickory Creek and the Allegheny Islands.

When Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, the Forest County Historical Society, and others were working in 2001 to have a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission historical marker commemorating Howard Zahniser established along U.S. Route 62 north of Tionesta near the Allegheny Islands Wilderness, Helen was an active participant throughout the process. She and I talked frequently over the telephone, as she wanted to make certain that her beloved brother's life and love for protecting deserving areas of our federal public lands, such as those in the Allegheny National Forest, was accurately represented on the marker and during the dedication ceremony in August of that year.

Helen passed away in May of 2007, but Howard's son Ed recently rediscovered his aunt's below 1938 essay about Tionesta, "Home of the Wolves," a touching reminiscence of the passing of her and Howard's father, Rev. Archibald Zahniser, in 1933. As you read through her firsthand account, a then 18-year-old young woman's deep love for Tionesta, nestled in the southwest corner of what by then had become the Allegheny National Forest, comes shining through.

Helen and her husband of more than 50 years Lee Snyder, and Howard Zahniser and his wife Alice, are laid to rest in Tionesta's Riverside Cemetery in close proximity to Archibald and his wife Bertha, and many other Zahnisers. Although they have passed, their passion and work for wilderness lives on in those of us who seek permanent protection for some of the most wild and untrammelled portions of the Allegheny National Forest – such as at inventoried roadless areas like the 9,700-acre Tracy Ridge area and the 7,000-acre Allegheny Front area along the National Wild and Scenic Allegheny River, not far upriver from the Zahnisers' final resting place. It is not difficult to imagine Helen and Howard wishing – indeed urging – us to leave a legacy for future generations in this fabled Allegheny River valley by protecting in perpetuity these and other deserving tracts under the Wilderness Act that Howard labored for so long and so hard.

*—Kirk Johnson, Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, March 2016*

## Home of the Wolves

The wolves and I have something in common; for, Tionesta, which means "home of the wolves" in an Indian tongue, was, and always shall be, my home. I fancy that my love for Tionesta, in Pennsylvania's Forest County, and the hills and woods about the Allegheny, the river on whose banks our home lies, is akin to the passion that the wolves possessed in their blood when they once roamed this region – although their love was a savage instinct for the raw and the wild, and mine is a tender feeling, a mixture of human emotions, for the quiet beauty and serenity of the small town and its peaceful setting.

I sometimes feel that I owe those wolves something for thus taking their home. The spots from which man has not driven the wild creatures are becoming fewer and fewer. I am glad that there are left some families of bears to still inhabit the forests, and that one may sometimes have the experience of glimpsing (perhaps from the window of a car) a buck deer through the trees, or of seeing a doe, slim, graceful, timid, beautiful, that has come with her young fawn to the water's edge to drink at eventide. I shall always thank God for a home with such surroundings and for being one of those who succeeded the wolves in the possession of "Penn's Forests."

You see, I was moved when but a small babe to Tionesta, and at the same time that I was learning to love my father and mother, my sister and my brothers, I was learning to love Tionesta. Even though I left to live elsewhere, home and Tionesta remained synonymous. To my mother, also – and the rest, too – there can never be another place like Tionesta. To know that they feel the same love of this region in their hearts and the same call of the hills in their spirits, is a part of, and strengthens and makes dearer, the tie that binds me to the place. One of my fondest and most cherished desires is to live again with my mother in the house that my father bought in Tionesta.

That home lies mid-way on a little hill leading up from the main street,

a street typical of the small town, with its business block of a bank, a small wooden post-office, a hardware store, a barber-shop, and a handful of general stores. Young trees grew in front of the house and on the lower lawn, which sloped gently, there were a large butter-nut tree, a lilac bush, and rose bushes. Below our house and the adjoining vacant lot, sometimes plowed for a garden, was the little red brick Free Methodist Church. There I went to Sunday School, listened to Bible stories and sang "Jesus Loves Me This I Know," "Bring Them In," and "Beautiful Words, Wonderful Words of Christ." I went to church Sunday evenings, also. My mother sat by a window on the right hand side and I could watch the shades of dusk and the blackness of night settle about our home. I shall cherish forever those times when I sat as a child with my mother in the small congregation, and I shall never forget how those dear, good pilgrims sang "Sweeter as the Years Go By."

And there were walks to the woods – sometimes on Sunday afternoons. I loved to climb around on the large stone rocks and to wade in the brooks. The woods grew deeper and deeper. I loved the sense of fear and excitement, mingled with simple childish pleasure and happiness that I felt in "The Woods." We children, and older ones too, had great fun in the fall, gathering hickory nuts and chestnuts. The town and hillsides were beautiful when fresh and green in the spring, and finding wild flowers was delightful, but I think that autumn was best of all, for the leaves of the trees then were so varied and bright. I learned some verses about those leaves one day --

"Come, little leaves," said the wind one day

"Come over the meadows with me and play;

Put on your dresses of red and gold,  
For summer is gone and the days grow cold."

I think it ends---

"And so, fast asleep in their earthy beds,

The snow lay a coverlet over their heads."

That bit of verse came to me, along with many, many other memories of

the past, as I rode toward Tionesta one October day in '33. I was going back to the little red church. We were taking the body of my father back to the region of his youth. There would be one last service, a burial, and after that there would be – emptiness, an aching void, grief and sadness, and memories and the influence and inspiration of his life. He was dead. The foundation of all our lives was knocked from under us. I had never known such sorrow. My very being was numb and conscious only of the awful fact that death had robbed me of my father. I should never see him again, never hear his voice. Only memories were left. But with all the ache and grief and sadness there was the peace that he was with God. That was a beautiful drive! The hills were brightly colored with the red and gold leaves of the trees. There was just enough brown to tone the color so that the landscape was in tune with our procession.

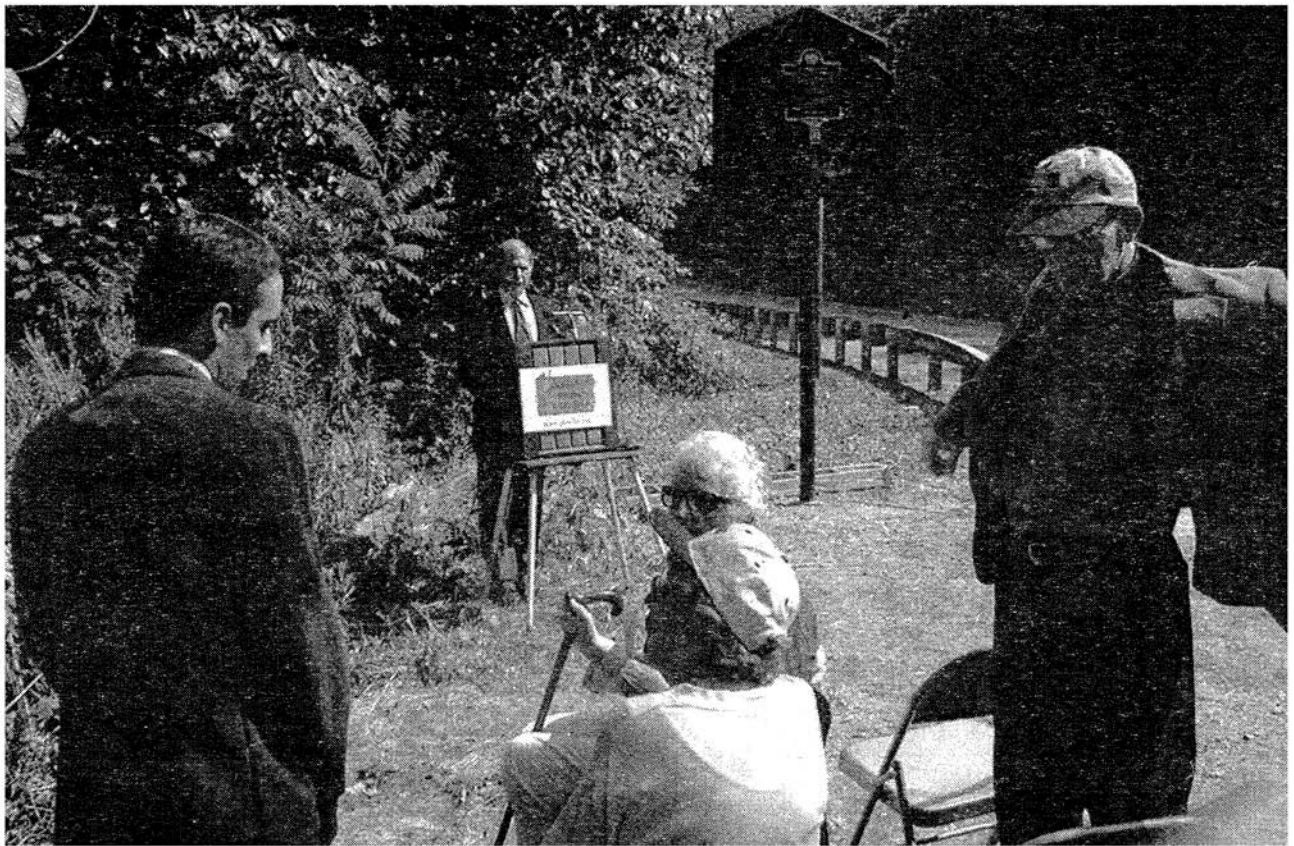
Riverside Cemetery lies by the Allegheny River and as we stood at the grave, conscious of the beauty of the hills across the river, the murmuring of the leaves, the rippling of the water, the cool, comforting language of Nature, it was impossible to cry. The numerous people bothered me. I should have loved to stay there for hours, quiet, sad, peaceful – aware of the existence of God and at one with Nature, His world, but the minister was saying "ashes to ashes; dust to dust."

We left Tionesta that day with three graves in our lot instead of two. The brother and sister who died in infancy and whom I had never seen had been buried years before. With part of my very own self left there in Tionesta, we returned home, but not to my true home. Tionesta can be the only true home. There I lived as a child and there I wish to be buried. I shall be happy to become a part of the earth by the side of those rippling waters and beneath those big, kind trees.

*Helen Zahniser Snyder was born in Union City, Pennsylvania on August 27, 1919. She was a graduate of Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri. She passed away at her home in Philadelphia on May 14, 2007.*



Siblings (left to right) Elizabeth, Helen, and Howard Zahniser in Tionesta, 1925. Photo courtesy of the Zahniser family.



*Photo by Jeff Johnson*

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness executive director Kirk Johnson, Helen Zahniser Snyder (seated, in hat), Howard Zahniser's son Ed (donning jacket), and Helen's lifelong friend and Tionesta native Phyllis Dunkle (seated in front of Helen) at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission historical marker dedication ceremony for Howard Zahniser, August 13, 2001. In the background at the podium is then-PHMC executive director Brent Glass.