

Raised \$10,000 for charity

Senior doesn't let retirement slow her down

BY JANET DUVAL
Special

When Audrey Symmes turned 80, wildlife artist Robert Bateman sent her an original color sketch of a woodpecker, and a personal tribute describing her as "positive, peaceful, persistent, philanthropic, plucky, and a person with panache."

His words were fitting. From her country home on 26 acres near Terra Cotta, Symmes has single-handedly raised \$10,000 in the last three years for her favorite charity, SHARE (Sends Help And Resources Everywhere), while maintaining a range of interests and activities that leaves a younger visitor breathless.

"I'm healthy; I like people; it's a joy to do these things," she says.

An inveterate traveller, she went kayaking in Belize at the age of 75, toured Australia and New Zealand with an Elderhostel group, and has gone bird watching in Mexico, Arizona, and Texas, where she studied whooping cranes.

Meanwhile, she's an active member of a book club, a garden club, and a cross-country ski group dubbed the Royal and Ancient Order of Barrel Stavers. She's also famed as a fisherwoman at her Georgian Bay cottage, where she ties all her own flies and serves fresh bass to visiting family and friends.

Her friendship with Bateman bloomed when she volunteered to catalogue all of his paintings, shortly after she was widowed 17 years ago.

"I would go down and stay overnight



Audrey Symmes used her photography interest to develop notecards which are now used as a fund-raising tool for SHARE.

with him and Birgit. I slept in the same bed as (bird guide author) Roger Tory Peterson, though not at the same time!"

It was a volunteer stint later on as a tour guide at the McMichael Gallery in Kleinburg that prompted her to take up nature photography. "I learned to look at the composition of a picture."

Reflections in a pond, lilacs seen through a barn door, a leaf-strewn road in autumn became subjects for her camera. Encouraged by friends in her SHARE group, she turned the pictures into notecards which were quickly snapped up by everyone who saw them.

Now they're available at Canoe

Country and Crawford's in Norval, and at the Belfountain Country Store. All proceeds go to SHARE. Run by a group of Peel and Halton farmers, SHARE "sends help and resources everywhere," particularly to farmers and street kids in South America and the Caribbean.

Greeting cards have become Symmes' specialty. She has sold over 3,000 cards so far. C&S Printing in Georgetown donated the heavy paper stock for her cards, and Craig Photo prints her film at cost.

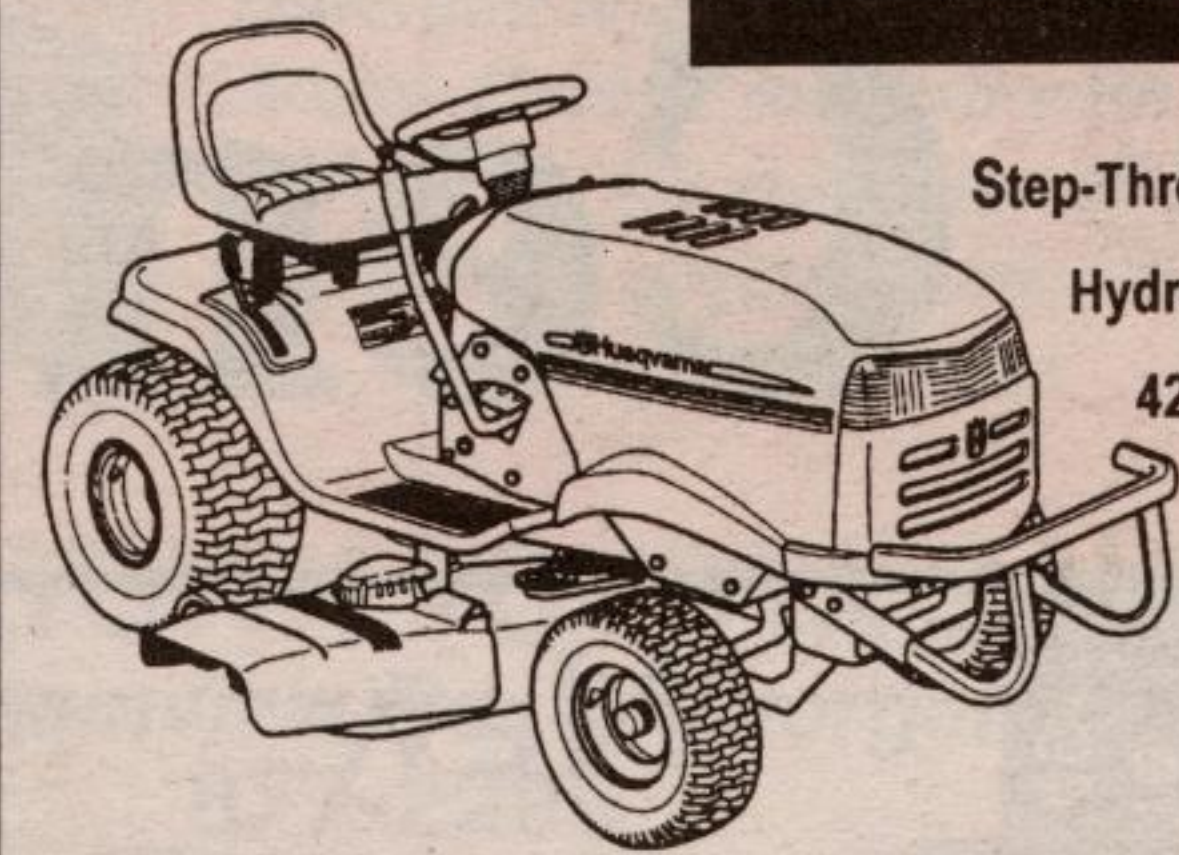
When the cause is good, she's a dedicated persuader.

"I can't speak too highly of volunteerism" says Symmes. "It does so much for the volunteer!"

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