Harold Meyerman’s biography reads like a who’s who of the banking world. His long and prestigious career includes titles like President & CEO of First Interstate Bank in Los Angeles, Senior Managing Director of the Global Financial Institution, M&A with what is today JPMorgan Chase and Chairman of the US Export-Import Bank’s Advisory Committee, appointed by President George H.W. Bush.

He has served on numerous boards both in the for-profit sector as well as non-profits. He still does today as Chairman of the Palm Springs Art Museum and as Lead Director of Affiliated Managers Group (NYSE:AMG), Boston.

But not so long ago, Harold remembers arriving in Canada as a fresh-faced immigrant. A time, he laughingly recalls, when he had more ideas than money. Harold credits the University of British Columbia for allowing him to unlock his full potential. “To recognize and honour what UBC has done,” Harold and his wife Dorothy have chosen to endow the University with a generous legacy gift.

It was 1957 when Harold arrived from Holland with his parents and his brother Gerald. “I started work immediately at the Imperial Bank of Canada, which later became CIBC,” he explains. “I recognized early that there were very few university graduates working at the bank. They were bringing in graduates for all the new training programs and top positions.”

With visions of reaching the top, Harold knew university was his best option. “UBC had this very interesting commerce and law program,” says Harold. “You could attend commerce for four years and then do three years of law school for a combined degree.”

But tuition costs were a challenge to the ambitious young banker. “I was very concerned about paying my way through school and running up debt,” explains Harold. “I started rather late at age 25. Because of that I was ineligible for the scholarship offered by Imperial Bank of Canada. I enrolled just the same and did reasonably well.”

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Estate Gift Funds Critical Conservation Research

We first introduced you to the Hesses in 2003. Today, their wonderful planned gift carries on the ornithology research they valued so dearly.

Werner and Hildegard Hesse’s relationship with UBC started in 1956; Richard Schuster’s started some 40 years later, yet they are intrinsically connected by a profound love of birds and the conservation of natural habitats.

Inspired by a road trip through the Cariboo, and curious to discover more about the birds they kept spotting but were unable to recognize, the Hesses’ journey started with a three-year UBC night course reviewing birds of BC and soon turned into a lifetime passion for avian research. They had a special concern for the harmful effects of human development on bird habitats and populations.

Thanks to their generous estate gift their concerns are still being actively researched today by Richard Schuster, PhD candidate and recipient of the Werner and Hildegard Hesse Fellowship in Ornithology. Schuster is currently using bird data from old-growth forests to measure optimal areas for land conservation. His research will give future planners the “practical tools they need to help them make more accurate decisions about which lands to acquire and protect” thus allowing them to maximize their limited resources.

Thanks to his funding Richard has been able to fully focus on his research to the extent that he recently organized a workshop inviting “a number of experts in the field to get together and really work out the details of which restoration treatments would be most cost effective”. This potential for the practical application of research, which Schuster himself is so excited about, makes it hard to imagine a place where the Hesses’ legacy would be more impactful: “there is a lot of rigor in terms of scientific practice at UBC,” he says, combined with the important goal “to make [the research] applied.” UBC is thereby providing a bridge connecting the Hesses with people who will ensure their passions remain active well into the future.

On Mandarte Island: Werner & Hildegard (left) and Richard (right)
“Pursuing what you love will lead to life-altering experiences that can help change the world.” That’s the philosophy of David and Normajean McGuire, two people passionate about life and learning, who also made a bequest in their wills to create bursaries at UBC’s Okanagan campus.

The couple wished to endow a gift that inspired student learning, a legacy that represented what they valued in life and how they wanted to be remembered. “We felt that it was no longer a name that keeps your memory alive,” says Normajean, “but the students.” The David and Normajean McGuire Memorial Bursary Endowment will help generations of UBC students pursue their own passions in life, opening up a world of possibilities to impact the lives of others.

David loved working with people and pursued a degree in social work which led him to the Canadian Mental Health Association in Edmonton. Normajean, born and raised in Edmonton, was drawn to helping people with special needs. Her love of sign language translated into a career as an employment counsellor. One day, their passion for helping others led David and Normajean to each other. David, witty and intelligent, made Normajean laugh at one of his jokes. She was eighteen and knew she’d fallen in love.

Five years ago, the couple packed up their dogs and moved to Kelowna on a whim to live the Okanagan lifestyle. And then David became ill. The McGuires considered how what they loved in life could become a legacy for others. “David loved school and school favoured him,” Normajean says. For David, studying anthropology, languages, sociology and psychology, was like breathing. He became a full-time university student for fun while balancing a successful professional career. Learning, for David, was an important part of living life.

Inspirational professors motivated David to study what he loved— and he wanted students at the Okanagan campus to do the same. “People drop out of school because they can’t afford it,” Normajean explains. “With funds in place they can focus on school rather than paying rent and working.” The McGuire’s planned gift will assist deserving students overcome financial hardship and finish their degree.

Planning a gift to UBC was an easy decision for the McGuires. “There is a connection between you and the students you help,” Normajean says. “You have the chance to help them do great things and set the example for them to give back to others.” The couple’s desire to help people will live on throughout the lifetime of the University, something the McGuires valued. “Planned gifts,” says Ian Cull, AVP Students, “are especially powerful as they remind us of the passion people have for our University; such a passion that they want to remain attached to it in perpetuity.” David passed away in 2009 but his love of learning will continue through the UBC students he and Normajean will support. ♦
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To help finance his education, Harold started The Thunderbird Shop on campus. Unlike the bookstore, the Thunderbird Shop sold records, magazines, and other paraphernalia that appealed to students. “It became a huge success,” Harold remembers.

By working several jobs, including acting as “Don” of men’s dormitories, a supervisory position that afforded him free housing, Harold successfully completed his degree and moved to New York. He began a position with Bankers Trust. And the rest, as they say, is history.

UBC was named as a beneficiary of the Meyerman Family Trust almost 20 years ago. “Our gift is designated for the Faculty of Law at UBC,” explains Dorothy. “Although Harold never practiced law, that experience and education has stood him in great stead.”

As a US citizen, Harold admits setting up the gift was complicated 20 years ago. Today, UBC has established the American Foundation for The University of British Columbia, which ensures donations can be made more easily and are eligible for tax benefits in the United States. Similar programs are available for people living in the UK and Hong Kong.

Thanks to Harold and Dorothy’s generosity, a new generation of UBC students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential—to push boundaries and make intellectual discoveries for the benefit of the community and the world.

“I tend to believe being generous is what life is all about,” says Harold. “I feel a sense of obligation to give to institutions that made this possible. Anyone who’s experienced success should give back to their university. It doesn’t have to be a lot—but it’s an important concept to accept.”