

EverGreen Legacy Voices: Mary-Gail Smith



Photo by Bert Hess

Mary-Gail Smith has always known where she belongs. Long before Green Hill was home, the Rhode Island shoreline was a place she kept returning to—first as a teenager driving to Misquamicut, later as a seasonal resident finding her way back again and again. She bought her beach house in 2011 and retired to South Kingstown full-time about ten years ago, drawn by the steady presence of the water and the familiarity of a place that had long felt like her own.

She puts it simply: “I always knew I wanted to come back.”

“Open space isn’t optional. It’s essential.”

What followed wasn’t a slowing down, but a settling in. After 24 years as a stay-at-home mother, Mary-Gail returned to college with just six credits from the 1960s. The same year her daughter was a junior at Trinity College and her son a freshman at Yale, Mary-Gail became a freshman herself. From there, she built a career in fundraising, specializing in planned giving—work rooted in foresight, trust, and care for what comes next.

When she moved to South Kingstown full-time, Mary-Gail understood that place alone wasn’t enough—community mattered just as much. Widowed and living alone, she picked up the local paper, circled what caught her eye, and showed up. She joined eight groups right away. Years later, she remains deeply involved—volunteering, serving in leadership roles, and co-founding Friends of Green Hill Pond. As she says, ***“Volunteering and being involved really matters to me.”***

The outdoors has always been her constant. Mary-Gail walks nearly every day and goes to the beach daily in the summer, a rhythm she has kept for almost 50 years—watching light change on the water, weather move in and out, seasons pass without ceremony. Her approach to conservation grows from the same attentiveness. She explains it this way: ***“You don’t walk through the woods thinking about conservation—you’re just enjoying the experience. But that experience only exists if the land is protected.”***

Mary-Gail believes deeply in balance, recognizing Rhode Island’s housing needs while also knowing that without intention, many of the places people love would already be gone. ***“Balance is the hardest part — but it’s also the most important.”***

The South Kingstown Land Trust was one of the first organizations Mary-Gail circled when she arrived. After attending events and forming connections, including SKLT in her estate plan felt natural—especially during a period of reflection and loss. She chose to make her Evergreen Legacy gift unrestricted, trusting the Land Trust to respond to future needs with care and flexibility. As she puts it, ***“I want a future that still has green in it.”*** For Mary-Gail, legacy isn’t about recognition. It’s about continuity—ensuring there will always be room for quiet, for balance, and for the kind of unencumbered beauty that first made this place feel like home. - TSM

Read Mary-Gail’s full story—and learn more about the Evergreen Legacy Society on our website at sklt.org.

Are you an EverGreen Legacy Member and would like to share your story? I’d love to hear from you!

Contact tasha.sussman.moss@sklt.org.