

Interview with Kenneth Hardcastle, PhD

By Jacqui Dres

Kenneth Hardcastle is a structural geologist and holds a PhD from Amherst. Ken lives in a 200 year old farm house in New Hampshire with his wife, Maya, and their 2 children.



Highland Hall Alum, Ken Hardcastle, Class of '79

What kind of work are you involved in?

I work for a small company that does groundwater exploration. We do research and exploration for communities or private entities that are in need of developing potable water supplies. There's a small group of us and I'm the specialist that has to do with hard bedrock, fractures, and remote-sensing.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

Well, it's dealing with mother earth, which is always very different and very challenging. I've been with the company since its inception, so I play a large role in how things are done. We're constantly reinventing ourselves, our approach and pushing the science a little farther. Plus, our work involves a lot of geological research which is always very interesting.

How did you become interested in this field?

After I left Highland Hall, I went to Occidental College and I thought I'd go into astronomy. I was interested in science in general, but I found that I didn't enjoy the intense math and physics, so I took some other classes, one of those classes being geology, and it made perfect sense to me. I found it very engaging, so I ended up majoring in it. Then I went on to grad school and ended up getting into structural geology, and studied the development of fractures in the earth's crust, and the fluids that moves through those cracks. When I was finishing up and looking for a career, I decided to utilize my knowledge of fractures and bedrock to go into potable water exploration so I could continue my own interest in science to do things that had a very practical result.

Where did you do your graduate studies?

My masters degree was done at Queens College in New York and my research work was at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University in New York City. From there I went on to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst to get my PhD.

What do you recall about your education at Highland Hall?

What Waldorf education provides from an early time is the ability for the individual to listen to their inner voice and try to follow that. Highland Hall did great job of exposing you to a lot of different things that are out there in the world. That carried on as I went through school and I was able to avoid being stuck on a path pushed upon me by others. I was able to follow what made sense for me. So, I think the whole fostering of the individual at Highland Hall works really well. And that's really what my parents were looking for when they put me and my brother and sister in the school.

Were you challenged academically?

I don't think it was as challenging as what I see today in some schools, but I don't know if that is any measure of the quality of an education. I live in New England and there's a lot of emphasis on education and academic rigor. Frankly, I think that some of it goes too far at the expense of educating the whole person; just because you can push people to do well on tests doesn't necessarily mean that you're educating them very well.

When I went to Occidental, I found that I wasn't familiar with the study-to-the-test sort of framework that the other kids were used to. But because of my education at Highland Hall I was still able to do very well there. It was a new learning process, but I felt well prepared for the challenge, just not the test taking.

Were there any aspects of your Waldorf education that gave you an advantage?

Absolutely. And that goes back to the ability to think out of the box and to have a personal connection to your education--that you're not just learning for the exams. At Highland Hall you're exposed to many different things and you're challenged to think independently. That's a very positive thing. I know for me, personally, that was in keeping with what my parents were looking for and it enabled me to do what was right for me and I think it worked out very well.

So, what do think are your greatest successes in life?

My wonderful partner and wife, Maya, and our two children, Max and Liana. We have a close and loving family that I am very proud of.

Any closing thoughts?

Highland Hall was an excellent education. There are huge challenges facing all of us in modern society here in the US; a strong, personal education of the whole young person, as offered at Highland Hall, is part of the key to a successful life.



Ken Hardcastle with his family at the high school graduation of his son Max from Sant Bani School in Sanbornton, NH. ("not a Waldorf school, but very much in the spirit").