



SHARON TAYLOR-HENLEY
June 8, 1952 – August 17, 2020

With great sadness we must announce that Sharon Taylor-Henley (PhD) passed away unexpectedly on Monday, August 17, 2020.

Sharon was born in Montreal to late parents, William and Marion (Campbell) Taylor. She leaves her partner of 45 years, Dick Henley, and daughter Kate Henley (Thomas Janssen). She grew up in and around Minto, New Brunswick. She attained an Arts degree from St. Thomas University and an MSW from the Maritime School of Social Work, Dalhousie University before heading to Western Canada to begin her career in social work.

She learned her craft as a frontline worker in the employ of Indian Affairs in Thompson, Manitoba; as a hospital social worker and then a social worker for the City of Winnipeg Welfare Department; and as a social worker for the Children's Aid Society (CAS) of Metropolitan Toronto, where she also did time as a community organizer (Sharon called it her time as a "paid malcontent"). One of her supervisors remarked that she had great assessment skills. Her later university teaching was always grounded in these real life social work practice experiences. But this Toronto sojourn also began her life in trade union activism. Sharon became an important player (chief negotiator) in the successful drive to organize everyone who worked for the CAS into a single bargaining unit affiliated with CUPE. The highlight of that campaign came when, after a fiery speech, Sharon invited everyone in attendance at the annual meeting of the CAS to join her in a mass walkout in support of the workers. She was making her mark on Toronto, so her friends there were astonished when she informed them she was leaving the city to go back to Winnipeg.

Sharon was lured away by the opportunity to work for the First Nations Confederacy (FNC), headquartered in Winnipeg, to advise on matters of child welfare policy. In the immediate post-Charter period, child welfare was a matter of early jurisdictional negotiation on the path to Aboriginal self-governance. Sharon was interviewed in Ottawa by a panel of Manitoba Chiefs and she always claimed she won the job because she knew what a band resolution was; she had a lot to learn. It marked the beginning of a strong bond that developed between herself and First Nations people, one of mutual affection and respect.

Housed at FNC was a pioneer educational program to prepare First Nations students for jobs as community child care administrators. The University of Manitoba ran the certificate program that employed instructors and students at centres throughout the province. When the coordinator of the First Nations Child and Family Services Certificate Program left the position, Sharon was

convinced to take up the challenging task of bringing the program to a successful conclusion for a whole host of interested parties and, most important to her, for the students.

After the closing of that program, Sharon was employed first as a sessional instructor and then as an Assistant Professor at the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC), an off-campus social work program for less advantaged people in the inner city. She remained there for the next eight years. Two years into her position at WEC, Kate "came to Winnipeg" (as her grandmother put it) and Sharon did everything to ensure that her daughter had every opportunity to express herself. Kate excelled at everything she undertook and brought great delight to her mother. Sharon was looking forward with great joy to Kate's wedding planned for next year.

Of course, Sharon recognized that she would need a PhD if she were to ever properly address her standing in the university. So off she went, pre-schooler in hand, to begin the course component of the program at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Not long after that sabbatical year, she won a competition for a tenure track position on campus.

With teaching and research obligations, a kid in elementary school, and living with a partner who worked out of town half the time, Sharon somehow managed to become active in her new trade union, the University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA). Throughout much of her academic career, Sharon served UMFA in a variety of capacities, including as the union's Treasurer during the strike of 1995. One of her colleagues marveled at her cool and collected manner as she negotiated a large union loan, noting, "Big numbers don't scare her." One of her great regrets was that she never had the opportunity to be the president of UMFA.

Towards the end of the 1990s, Sharon developed symptoms and, after a few years of testing, was ultimately diagnosed with Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis, an untreatable degenerative condition. Sharon somehow summoned the energy to carry on, earning her doctorate and Associate Professor status along the way.

Sharon made important contributions in teaching, and especially in increasing the role of historical scholarship in social work. Her research contributions included the development of an understanding of the emergent organizational forms for First Nations child welfare in relation to provincial authorities, and of urban Indigenous planning for gerontological services. She also supervised many graduate theses and practica. She retired in 2017 after over 30 years of service to the University of Manitoba.

At the time of her death, independence remained her primary life goal. Thank you to Ronnie and Catherine, and special thanks to Clarence Morancie and Loretta Ross for their assistance in this regard.

Sharon will be missed by Dick, Kate, her east coast families and special cousins, Jill and Judy. She will be remembered as a courageous and determined fighter, and a reliable and respected friend.

Sharon's final voluntary activity was to serve as the treasurer of her church and it is in the Crescent Fort Rouge United Church that a memorial service to celebrate Sharon's life will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, September 3. Her ashes will be scattered privately by her family. Alterna Cremation in care of arrangements.

In lieu of flowers, financial contributions can be made in Sharon's name to the Esther Seidl Scholarship, an educational fund through the Faculty of Social Work, that Sharon helped set up in memory of her friend, or any other worthy recipient.