

Margaret McCullough

We are sad to announce that Margaret died shortly after midnight on April 17th this year. She is survived by her husband Lawrence and her children James (Annemarie), and Katie (Peter). On April 22nd, in accordance with her wishes, she was interred in the Green Burial section of Royal Oak Burial Park

To her immediate family she was many things: daughter, wife, mother, gardener, seamstress, cook, dog lover, and a hundred other things. She was an extremely talented seamstress; her costume design for a Langholm Court Theatre production of a Midsummer Night's Dream in 2008 was given a rave review in the Globe and Mail. She even out did that with her work in the kitchen; friends have been able to exactly describe meals she cooked for them after 20 or 30 years.

However, to the world she was known principally as a teacher and environmental activist.

Ironically, she resisted joining the teaching profession and only did so with the intention of

collecting enough funds to return to the University of Liverpool to secure her Honours Degree in Genetics, which she did with flying colours. She started her career in teaching as a part timer at a very small school near our home in the South Liverpool suburb of Aigburth.

After graduating with her B.Sc. Hons. in Genetics, she decided that teaching really was for her and joined the staff of Formby High Comprehensive School. A huge school drawing students from some of the less privileged areas of North Liverpool as well as rural Lancashire. It was here, working in the Science Department under the direction of Roy Taylor and Head of School Jack Lowndes that she began to develop her deep commitment to the profession and her personal beliefs as to how the profession was to be approached to the benefit of both

the staff member and the students.

Shortly after she joined the staff at Formby we moved from Liverpool to Wallasey on the Wirral. After commuting over an hour each way from home to school for nearly two years she decided enough was enough and looked for work closer to home, which she found at a wonderful, small school on the Wirral, Upton Hall Convent Grammar School. She was always convinced that she was offered the job on the strength of her surname but soon came to realise that a great school is like a great family, full of love and mutual support. She learned much in those two years and always expressed gratitude for her time there and to her colleagues Sister Jane, Josie, and Freda.

We emigrated from the U.K. to Canada with our son James in April of 1978 settling in Victoria. Some time later, after the birth of our daughter Katie, she joined the staff at what was then, Norfolk House School, for what was to become a 35-year tenure. Initially she taught Grade 11/12 Biology, did a stint at Glenlyon School as the Grade 7 Teacher and then returned to the Glenlyon Norfolk Campus to teach middle school science. During a conversation with a parent of one of her student's, a local physician, he summed up her educational ethos in one simple sentence "Mrs. McCullough taught my son to think, no one else has ever done that". Many others have expressed similar opinions. For example, the Nobel Laureate Biochemist Michael Smith once told me that the undergraduates entering his Department at UBC from GNS were amongst the best prepared he had ever met. For Margaret, education was never about facts and data. If it were, why do we have places you can look them up? Whether they be books or the internet? For Margaret it was always about the organization of facts and data through the application of critical thinking skills. To form one's own opinions about where real value lies to, as she might put it, escape the fate of being a sheep, or as I might say "a mindless follower".

Margaret's skills as a teacher were nationally recognised when

she was awarded the Prime

Minister's award for Teaching by the Harper Government. At the time she found this somewhat amusing given her avocation as Environmental Activist. She would want me to recognise the team who most influenced her teaching in Canada, her one-time Head of School the late David Graham, and her favourite colleague and closest collaborator Lance Pimlott. Also, for her amazing work in putting the application together, Fiona Witten.

Margaret's work as an activist was inspiring to many. She herself was inspired by an

environmentalist, the late Rob Stewart, to take up arms against the trade in shark fins. Along with her friend and close collaborator, Jen Harvey, she set out to visit retailers, including restaurants and traditional medicine stores, and wholesalers throughout the Lower Mainland and southern Vancouver Island. Approaches to the Federal Government of Canada did eventually lead to a ban on the trade.

Next came the big effort to get municipalities to ban the use of single use plastic bags in the retail trade. She and two of her students, Charlotte and Anastasia, made presentations to city councils up and down the Island and the Lower Mainland. Again, many politicians expressed their support, including the then mayors of both Victoria and Vancouver. There was unilateral praise for the presentation skills and commitment of the two students.

Finally came the frustrating and only partially successful attempt to close puppy mills. By now she had honed her skills in approaching influential political figures, and many indeed were very supportive and helpful. However, this iniquitous practice is so entrenched in certain provinces in this country that her efforts were only partially effective.

As one final acknowledgement of her educational excellence in 2021 she was invited to join the Selection Board of the Prime Minister's Award for Education.

She was a remarkable woman, and many will miss her, as we do already.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the S.P.C.A.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens

www.mccallgardens.com

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