Sheila Croteau, elder, friend, teacher and mentor, remembered

By SHARON MURPHY AND LYNAYA ASTEPHEN

Sheila Croteau offered a smudging ceremony to open a gathering of Sisters of Charity in July 2018 at Villa Madonna Retreat House in Rothesay, NB. Photo from the Sisters of Charity.

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Elder Sheila Croteau offered a smudging ceremony to open a gathering of Sisters of Charity in July 2018 at Villa Madonna Retreat House in Rothesay, NB. Photo from the Sisters of Charity.

A prayerful silence hovers over Saint John in April, as many mourn the tragic loss of a dearly loved elder, Sheila Croteau, who died in a house fire on April 5.

Heartfelt tributes for an unforgettable soul are flooding the mostly pandemic filed social media sites with joy for having known Sheila, mother of two and grandmother of six.

Sheila was a model world citizen. Participating in all forms of democracy from protest to politics, Sheila found common ground with friend and foe. Known for her witty optimism and insightful advice, all who ran into Sheila were left with a lasting impression.

Sheila was a High Plains Cree woman, born in Alberta on Nov. 14, 1953. Life was hard and painful for Sheila due to the loss of her language, family and culture after the Sixties Scoop. From this surgery will take over two years for my bones to heal.

Sheila Croteau, 68, of Rothesay, passed away peacefully on April 5, 2022, at Villa Madonna Retreat House in Rothesay, NB, following a life-long battle with chronic illness.

During her leadership, the youth experienced numerous camping trips where she taught them everything from building a drum that has been the heart of so many ceremonies and celebrations in the Saint John area for decades. Sheila was a part of a drumming group, Spirit of the Four Winds, and helped the University of New Brunswick in Saint John develop an Indigenous curriculum.

Sheila was remembered by many for her large sacred drum that has been the heart of so many ceremonies and celebrations in the Saint John area for decades. Sheila was also a close friend of the Saint John Multicultural Association, participating and sharing cultural practices to the greater Saint John community.

How my disability led to a life of uncertainty in New Brunswick

By KAITLYN LAYDEN

For many, marriage is a happy time full of celebrations and memories. For Sheila Croteau, it is an ongoing battle to tell her love story and why it has become such a challenge while living under New Brunswick’s household income policy for social assistance recipients.

I have known my fiancé Lucas for many years as we went to school together. We reconnected online years later and began dating on August 21, 2012. Due to our current policy, our relationship got more serious quickly than others might. I had to go through some medical procedures and at the time Lucas quickly became my rock. Because I have cerebral palsy, Lucas took public transportation with me and assisted me with my transportation because I was nervous to go through the city of Saint John alone.

Due to our current household income policy for social assistance in New Brunswick, we cannot financially afford to get married because I would lose my current social assistance and my rent subsidy.

The province’s household income policy states that any household in New Brunswick with two or more people must combine with incomes into one. Therefore, once we married, my husband’s income would count for both of us and stop me from receiving government support. As I am living with a disability, once I get married, my partner is legally forced to financially afford for me and all my additional needs.

This policy puts a lot of pressure on a partner. Lucas must take time off work to bring me to appointments and spend a lot of his earnings on my health, which isn’t what he should have to do. Lucas will have to make enough money to support both him and I. However, with my disability comes a lot of additional fees for equipment, medical bills, expensive medications, dietary requirements and accessible transportation that many people may not think about.

The household income policy in New Brunswick means I lose my ability to help financially and, instead, I become a financial burden to my partner.

It’s not that I don’t want to work and help Lucas, but I am living with a chronic mobility disability since birth and have not been able to get ahead. I’ve had approximately 20 surgeries in my lifetime, I am now in the rehabilitation stages, recovering from a left foot reconstruction surgery. Recovery from this surgery will take over two years for my bones to heal.

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Kaitlyn Layden and her partner Lucas. Photo submitted.
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Public sector kitchens could rescue New Brunswick's farmers

BY SIMON OUELLETTE

Despite being a major exporter of agricultural goods, New Brunswick is one of the most import-dependent provinces in Canada when it comes to food. Over 97% of what is eaten in New Brunswick is produced outside our province. Why? Because the province’s farmers have largely been cast aside for the agribusiness models of the chains of distribution. This is as true for safe respiratory masks as it is for food.

Now, the provincial government has a chance to change the narrative and build an economic recovery that doesn’t work for Indigenous loggers in New

Shelia Croteau, remembered

by TRACY GLYN

hearing in 2016: ‘Sheila brought her grandson and spoke on her behalf. She told the story of the seventh and eighth fire and of the importance of water for life. It was very powerful and moving. She was a true Mi’kmaw warrior.’

‘Sheila’s family welcomes financial aid to help with Sheila’s memorial and accompanying family expenses. Email Jennifer with donations for this need at Jennifer.milton@gmail.com’

‘A legacy fund honouring Sheila, to be known as Sheila’s Fund, is set up in memory of Sheila Croteau and the John Corbin Foundation. This yearly gift will give a helping hand to youth in Saint John in Sheila’s memory.’

Sharon Murphy is a long time Saint John eco/social activist, businesswoman, health and birthing expert who sometimes plays politics. Lynne Astarheil is an environmental and human rights justice activist in Red Head. Both were friends of Sheila Croteau.

A life of uncertainty

...and I am now completing bi-weekly physiotherapy. Costs of all post-operative supplies are also incurred by me. Because of my disability, I have not been able to work enough hours to qualify for the Canadian Disability Pension (CPP).

Life with a disability is a lot more complex than one may think. Simple tasks such as using the bathroom or taking the bus become daunting and complex. Cerebral palsy affects body movement, muscle control and coordination, muscle tone, reflex, posture and balance. It can also impact fine motor skills, gross motor skills and oral motor functioning. As a result, I use a wheelchair for mobility.

Once I get married, my partner will be left to pay the bills. All of them. The ones we could hardly afford when we both made an income. Due to this unrealistic standard, I have remained engaged for over three years. I have spent the past three years trying to find a way we can get married and still stay financially stable while both maintaining our health and well-being.

However, the only obvious answer is to re-evaluate the province’s household income policy for social assistance recipients. Those living with a disability and cannot work should not have to be forced to pick between love and financial stability. The current system makes it difficult to live independently and maintain a balanced quality of life.

Just because I am differently abled does not mean I don’t have the courage to stand up for what is right. Like my friends and family, I deserve to live as long as I want to without the worry about the potential. Getting married is something I’ve always dreamt about and I want to do it properly. It is something I want to do for me, into a life of poverty and financial uncertainty. No one chooses the cards they are dealt. We just need to live and learn together and stand by one another. With determination and a positive attitude, anything is possible, and giving up is not an option for me.

Kaitlyn Layden is a Saint John resident living with cerebral palsy. She loves coffee, her cat and is an advocate for those living with cerebral palsy. She also owns the small business, Layden’s Keepsakes.