

## Ineke Dijks (1943-2009): A Tribute

Everyone has a story to tell, and it's perhaps ironic that we are often asked to reflect on people's contributions after their death. But I am proud to do so and attempt to pull together this reflection on, and tribute to, a respected colleague and friend: Ineke Dijks. Ineke was many things to many people: loving daughter; proud mother; a much loved and devoted wife; respected professional; and a free spirit. And add to that list seamstress, archivist, consultant, photographer – and school-bus driver!

Born in Rotterdam in 1943, Ineke trained there as a dress-maker, worked in a garment factory, and rose to the position of assistant costumer for Opera Forum Enschede. With this experience behind her, after settling into Canada in the 1970s, her initial intention was to pursue Theatre Studies at the University of Lethbridge. However, after finishing her High School Diploma as a Mature Student at Lethbridge Community College in 1983, Ineke saw the light and graduated with a major in Geography in 1989.

That year, she had another revelation and traveled east to pursue her Master's at Queen's University! Three of her close colleagues there, Susan Wurtele, Bill Crumplin, and Jim Raffin, have all reminded me of Ineke's ebullient personality, infectious cheerfulness, and her "big sister role" to so many of her fellow students. In 1994, Ineke completed her thesis, "Rails to the Great Inland Empire: Colonization and Settlement in Alberta 1925-1930, with Special Reference to the Peace River Region." That year, the Canadian Association of Geographers presented her with the Starkey-Robinson Award for the best MA thesis in regional geography. Touchingly, Ineke kept her Queen's Master's hood in a bedside table drawer to the end.

After leaving Queen's, Ineke and her devoted partner and colleague, Michael Wilson, moved west to British Columbia where she studied Canadian labour history and modern European history at Simon Fraser. In 2004, Ineke was accepted for doctoral work in the Urban and Regional studies Institute at Rijks University, Gronigen.

Throughout these years, Ineke developed strong professional relationships with colleagues at several institutions: Douglas College, New Westminster; Kwantlen University College, Richmond; Columbia College, Vancouver; University College of the

Cariboo, Kamloops; and the University of Lethbridge. Nor did she fail to present her research at conferences and workshops. From the beginning, she had a profound interest in the genre of local histories and, over the years, it was developed into an appreciation of their power as pedagogic devices and also as expressions of the power of time and place in people's identification with their lived-in worlds. Another theme focused on the Peace River region and the role of rail in overcoming its isolation. This came through in her Master's work at Queen's and introduced her to a joint research project with my colleague, Susan Wurtele, and me. It stimulated her own subsequent studies of Canadian immigration during the inter-war years of the Railways Agreement that exposed its racist categories and exploitative labour demands. And finally, her recent focus on industrial heritage and place-identities are at the cutting edge of work on the interface between material and intangible heritage. As Bill Crumplin put, "Some people merely read geography, but Ineke was a geographer and she learned and taught geography as she lived it, every day."

But there were always challenges along the way. First, as an immigrant learning a new language, then as a mature student in university driving a school-bus to meet the cost of tuition and the raising of two fine children. But the greatest challenge of all came four years ago when she was diagnosed with colon cancer and endured demanding rounds of chemotherapy, including a program of experimental medication to seek a cure for herself and, hopefully, contribute to research that might help others. Despite her courage and determination, Ineke died on 8 July 2009. It was the mark of the woman she was that in the March before her death, she attended the annual meeting of the Western Division of the CAG, an organization with which she had had a strong and productive connection for some twenty years. It was to be her last conference. Declining physically by that time, she attended papers, rested awhile, and then summoned her energy to receive the "J. Lewis Robinson Award for meritorious service to the discipline of Geography." She accepted the award with the grace and eloquence of the seasoned professional knowing that she was in the company of friends and colleagues.

Throughout these years, I enjoyed a close relationship with Ineke that transcended the formalities of professor and supervisor. She noted this in the standard acknowledgments to her Master's thesis, but added her "special gratitude" for my "friendship and genuine concern, academic and personal." And there is something more. Michael commented on our three-sided interaction, suggested that

I had played a role in bringing them closer together, and that “the results were quite remarkable.” Yes, Michael, the results were quite remarkable and you must be so proud of them.

*Brian S. Osborne*

Professor Emeritus, Queen’s University, Kingston  
Adjunct Research Professor, Carleton University