

In Memory of Lorraine Courtrille

On March 27, 1992, Lorraine Courtrille passed away in a tragic accident in Athabasca, Alberta.

Lorraine was the Community Liaison Officer for Native Student Services from February 1 until her death. She received her bachelor's degree with concentration in anthropology in 1991.

Lorraine had chosen the lonely road. As a single mother of two children she decided that her avenue to helping her people was by getting a university education herself first. During her time at the University of Alberta, she was a role model and a source of support for many other Native students. She was incredibly generous with her time in advising her co-students about resources that she had found herself. Her firm belief was, "If I can do it, so can anybody else."

Her people were always on her mind. She was deeply concerned about the rise in family violence. In cooperation with the Women's Research Centre at the University of Alberta, and with funding from the Secretary of State, she undertook a study of the fate of women who spent time in women's shelters. The results of the study were the catalyst that formalized the concept of the Aboriginal Women's Shelter in the city of Edmonton. Native spirituality and a culturally supportive environment were to provide essential support to the women at the center. The idea lives on. At the healing circle on March 29, Lorraine Sinclair from the Mother Earth Healing Society made a compassionate commitment to completing the work. The Women of the Metis Nation, of which Lorraine was a board member, are working toward this goal.

Lorraine had an energy that seemed unstoppable. On the day of her death she had traveled with another student to give a presentation to junior high school students in Wabasca-Desmarais. The day before she had been to the Yellowhead Tribal Council. In the days after her death, phone calls kept pouring in from schools that she had visited in the previous weeks. I remember especially the comment by a principal from an Edmonton school: "When we heard that Lorraine was going to give a presentation to grade 1 and 4 elementary school students for a two-hour period, we foresaw disaster. How would they ever sit through two hours of presentation? But they were spellbound by Lorraine's talk about pride in oneself, pride in one's culture."

Lorraine's work had a profound impact on many people. Her dedication to Native education was outstanding. In the wake of her death the Aboriginal Student Council at the University of Alberta has set up a Lorraine Courtrille Memorial Fund to help advance opportunities for aboriginal students with children at the University. Donations can be made through the Development Office at the University of Alberta. Schoolchildren at the places she visited are setting up activities in her memory. A study hall at Native Student Services has been renamed in her honor. Although she is deeply missed, those who are left behind have made a commitment to continue her work.

*Reinhild Boehm
Director
Office of Native Student Services
University of Alberta*