

Eulogy for Grace Mirehouse

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Ghandi once said, "We must be the change we want to see in the world." Grace saw the change that she wanted to see in the world and lived her life fully toward advancing Aboriginal education. I would like to share some of the deeply felt thoughts of students and colleagues whom Grace taught and influenced over the years.

Grace had a teaching certificate and taught at the Indian Day School in Alkali Lake, BC, before enrolling in the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at UBC to complete her Bachelor of Education degree requirements. She graduated from NITEP in 1980 and worked on various projects, programs, and curriculum initiatives with bands, school districts, and colleges.

It was not long before she was teaching First Nations education courses for NITEP at various field centres. Grace was always up to date on the latest First Nations literature, and she loved to think of innovative ways to teach the material and to share her ideas with the other First Nations education instructors. She had an infectious laugh and sense of humor that brought joy to the group's planning sessions. Grace taught for NITEP for 20 years. Even though Grace worked for other organizations, she made time to teach an evening curriculum course, EDCI 396. She taught many NITEP students during her teaching tenure. Here is what some of the NITEP and Ts'kel alumni have said about Grace's impact on them:

Grace's teachings and leadership gave me the strength to continue fighting the fight (for the improvement of First Nations education).

I used to wish that I could be half as good a teacher as Grace was.

As a First Nations colleague, Grace continued to inspire me over the years.

Even when Grace was quite ill, she would come to class ready to teach. She even tried to talk a NITEP coordinator into letting her teach some of her courses. During her last week of life Grace was still arranging curriculum placements for students that were in her class. Her devotion to students and her dedication to teaching never wavered.

Rob Tierney, the Dean of Education, expressed the respect that the Faculty of Education had for Grace's teaching service, "Grace brought an infectious enthusiasm and dedication, which inspired the many students and colleagues with whom she worked over the years at the UBC Native Indian Teacher Education Program. She will be missed."

Grace completed a Master of Arts degree in Education in 1994 at UBC, and she was a member of the Ts'kel Graduate Studies. She was keenly

interested in Aboriginal postsecondary institutes and undertook research about students' choice to attend a First Nations institute and their educational experiences. Her thesis was *The Native Education Centre: Its Impact on Cultural Identity and Educational Outcomes*. She later published part of the thesis in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*.

Grace began working at the Native Education Centre (NEC) in Vancouver in 1989, first as Assistant Administrator and then as the Administrator in 1997. Staff remember that Grace started the welcoming ceremony for new students enrolling at the Native Education Centre, in order to make them feel comfortable and to show that they were valued. Grace's leadership at the Native Education Centre strengthened its welcoming, comfortable learning atmosphere. She had a calming influence on new staff. One former staffer said,

I hadn't started teaching yet, and I was very nervous. Grace told me that the students were probably more nervous than me. She told me to just go back to the classroom and make the students feel comfortable. After that I felt better. She made me feel at ease with her calm and positive attitude. I also felt that she had confidence in me.

Grace worked hard to ensure that the courses and programs offered at the Native Education Centre received proper articulation and recognition so that students could complete their courses of study through NEC and continue on to other postsecondary programs or to enter the work force with confidence. The staff characterize the learning environment of NEC as "an open door and a one-room classroom," which stems from Grace's educational and administrative leadership. Students are made to feel that the Native Education Centre is their home away from home, and even though there are many different programs and classrooms in its facility, there is a feeling of family and that students and teachers are there to help and learn from one another.

Community service was another important facet of Grace's life. She was President of the Association of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Institutes. This organization provides networking and advocacy for First Nations institutions and programs in the province. Members of this organization voiced their appreciation of Grace's key role in promoting and improving Aboriginal postsecondary education in BC. Grace also served on the Board of Directors for the Law Courts Education Society of BC, which provides public legal education. She also served on the UBC Senate, again representing a First Nations voice and vision on postsecondary education.

A Lakota Chief, Fools Crow, said,

We are created by God to be vision people. First we set the goal and then we see. If we create within ourselves a picture or vision and we hold that ... in our mind, whatever we picture will show up in our reality. If we see ourselves being educated, then schools and teachers will show up in our lives. If we picture in

our mind a positive, spiritual person to be in our lives, we will attract this type of person in our relationships. How big can our visions be?

NITEP and the First Nations House of Learning family feel honored to have known Grace as a teacher, mentor, leader, colleague, and friend. She enriched our lives and we will remember her heart-warming smile, her great sense of humor, her deep commitment to advance Aboriginal education, her memorable teaching ways, and her love for life and love for Aboriginal culture. We were fortunate to see Grace create and live her big vision. We feel blessed to have walked beside her and to have learned from her good teachings.

We raise our hands in thanks and respect to Grace's family for sharing your beloved wife, mom, sister, auntie with us.