Thelma Marie Pitt Johnstone

MAY 12, 2019

We are deeply saddened to share the news that our fierce, beautiful and beloved mother (and Gaga) Thelma Johnstone died on May 12, 2019. In keeping with Thelma's renowned sense of occasion, she passed away on Mother's Day when, after almost 85 years, her extraordinary strength at last gave way.

She will be missed always and every day by her children Jeffrey (Terry), Jennifer (LaVance) and Victoria and her adored grandson Tor.

Thelma is predeceased by her sisters Elinor and Bernice and her beloved niece Susan, and survived by her nephews Rob, Pat, David and their families, her brother Jack (Jennifer) and their children Brandon, Jason, Verona & Ashley.

Thelma was born in Rossland BC in 1934 and was always proud of her "West Kootenay" roots and her remarkable school career which foreshadowed her life of community service and accomplishment.

In Grade 12 Thelma was Student Council President, Class Valedictorian and won prizes in Math, English, Latin and Science at her school as well as a Canadian Public Speaking Contest and a national Math prize.

She then attended UBC on scholarship, supplemented by her many part-jobs on campus, earning her Bachelor of Arts in Honours Sociology and was accepted by Columbia University, NY for post-graduate work. After graduation, Thelma had a brief, but accomplished career in advertising as a Media Director for local and

national firms. In 1962 she followed her entrepreneurial spirit and incorporated Tanna Management Inc. – a company that she successfully ran for the next 25 years.

In 1957 Thelma got married and over the next six years had three children. Jeffrey was born in the back of a Studebaker at 10th & Alma in Vancouver; Jennifer and Victoria under more traditional circumstances at Vancouver General Hospital. But working full time while raising her three children was not yet enough for Thelma, she also needed to find ways to give back.

In 1964 Thelma was elected to the Richmond School Board and served as their Chairperson. In 1968 she was appointed as Richmond's representative to the founding council of Douglas College and served in that capacity until the College was opened, as well as serving as a volunteer for numerous local causes. In 1968 she was a proud delegate to the Liberal Leadership Convention that elected Pierre Trudeau as leader and, in 1969, ran for MLA in the riding of Richmond. While she was not elected, she was always proud of the fact that she increased the Liberal vote by a larger percentage than any other riding in the Province.

Throughout her lifetime, Thelma blazed a path for women in work and public service and passionately supported the struggle for women's equality.

In 1984 Thelma moved permanently to Whistler, BC, having spent weekends and holidays there since 1974. Once settled into her new role as Executive Director of the Whistler Chamber of Commerce, she set about getting elected first to the Howe Sound School Board, where she was re-elected twice and, in 1988, was elected to the Resort Municipality of Whistler as Alderman and re-elected 3 times as Councillor. In that same year, Thelma was named Whistler's Citizen of the Year. She was appointed by the RMOW as Whistler's representative to the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District Board and chaired that organization in 1995/96. In 1995, she was nominated for a Vancouver YWCA Women of Distinction Award.

Thelma retired from her position with the Whistler Chamber in 2001, returning to the Lower Mainland where it was not necessary to shovel the snow off her car in order to start her days and to be closer to her daughters. She continued to serve her new community of White Rock on the Board of the Semiahmoo Arts Council and the City Spirit Stakeholders Committee.

In the later years of her life, Thelma realized a few of her lifelong dreams – travelling to Europe, studying French and working on her family's genealogy – expanding her family tree to include 686 relatives and six generations of Canadians. And, since 2007, she spent as much time as she could with her grandson Tor.

In 2009 Thelma moved to Concord Retirement Community where she was supported with love and care for the next 10 years. We are tremendously grateful to Holly and all the staff at Concord.

Thelma did not want any kind of celebration event at the end of her life but if you would like to remember her by making a donation in her name to the Women of Whistler (WOW) Scholarship Fund at the Community Foundation of Whistler, we know she would be honoured.

You are invited to leave a personal message of condolence for the family.

Messages of Condolence

So sorry that Thelma has passed. We had a lot of great and challenging times together on Whistler Council and the Chamber. Thelma actually got the Chamber on a solid business footing and into their current home. She will be missed.

— Drew Meredith

I was fortunate to work with Thelma while she was the executive director of the Whistler Chamber of Commerce. For six years we traveled across the country attending Canadian Chamber meetings.

Her desire to put me in the fore front and her speech suggestions and edits made me one of the most comfortable public speakers in the organization.

As a grassroots organization we accomplished a lot the creation of the Whistler Spirit pass which has morphed into one of the most highly regarded employee training programs in the province and perhaps Canada.

I am and was always proud to be mentored by and considered a friend by her.

I have often fond thoughts of my education with this special individual.

Love and Respect

Rick Clare

— Rick Clare

Jenn and Tory I was saddened to hear about Thelma's passing from my former WOW colleagues. It seems very appropriate somehow. Many of the original organizing committee remain in touch and friends. Thelma was our inspiration.

I am eternally grateful to her for giving me my first job in Whistler and mentoring me throughout her time there. She supported me in work and community service. Thelma showed me what giving to your community was really about. Please know that I think of her often.

Bob always tells the story of us going to the big lottery house and her opening the door. Her small stature surrounded by this massive place welcoming us in. He loved the contrast.

She will be in my prayers.

— Bernie Lalor-Morton

My sincere condolences to Thelma's family.
I was one of those women that Thelma "blazed a path for" when she helped me re-enter the work force at the Whistler Chamber. A most fair, thoughtful, and helpful mentor.
Thank you, Thelma.

— Vivianne Drought

I am so sorry to hear of your mother's passing. I met Thelma during my time at cardiac rehab. We became friends and shared many art events and performances. She was a kind and generous friend, an intelligent and determined woman. "Fierce" is an apt description.....she was tiny but mighty. I felt privileged to know her. She will always be a fond memory to me. Deepest sympathies to your family. Peggy

— Peggy Hall

With faith in the complete perfection of what lies beyond our fragile and limited perception, we send you all comfort in this time of great loss. We will always remember Thelma fondly.

— Keller Moyes Family

Tory and Jenn - I’m so sorry to learn about your mom’s passing on Mother’s Day. I remember your mom from about 30 years ago when she would drive down from Whistler on those windy roads to spend weekends with her girls. She would drop into our office to pick up Tory and always stopped by to say hello and shared her joy and laughter. I will always remember your mom as a brilliant, classy and charming lady. May she Rest In Peace and my condolences for your family.

— Dolena Ward