



# Sharon Syrette

(1945 - )

Sharon was born in 1945 and raised on Vancouver Island. She always liked drawing, coloured pencils and crayons, and says that on the first day of school, "I knew I had arrived in Paradise! There were books everywhere, and 60 colours of crayons instead of the eight I was used to".

Sharon's mom died when she was 14. Both parents always encouraged Sharon and her two sisters to do whatever they wanted to do – there were no restrictions that girls do this and boys do that.

Sharon has always been a social activist. She became involved throughout high school and university in organizations such as the United Nations Club, the debating team, and various political groups. As a university student in the turbulent 1960's, Sharon organized and participated in Sit Ins, rallies and protests against lack of access to education, and gender and racist issues, and of course, the Vietnam War. She comments on the huge gender bias in high school, when girls weren't even allowed in the hallway where the shops and the boys' classes were. "In Grade twelve, I wanted to take physics but could not register because I wasn't allowed to be the only girl in the class. I objected, and went to the principal; my Dad talked to the principal; Dad and I went to the school board, and disputed the decision because I wanted to be a teacher and therefore needed the sciences – they just said no".

She earned her Bachelor of Education degree at UVic, and after having taught only two years in Canada, became head of the English Department at a school in Tanzania, East Africa, where she volunteered. One thing this proved to her was that having worked in a school for 40 years doesn't mean you are any better or smarter than brand new people, and that sometimes new ideas are what it's all about.

Sharon and her partner Harold Peters have 2 daughters, Joanne and Jessica and a son Joseph. Over the years they have provided a home, guidance and love to many others in their extended family. They have taken seriously the phrase *it takes a village to raise a child*. "My family is obviously important to me - and all children - we have to give them the best start we can." They now have seven grandchildren, and Sharon says they are great kids: "they are interesting, exciting, fun and silly".

Sharon's volunteer life in Mission comprises a 1 ½ page list of social causes that began in the early days of Fronya Women's Resource centre. The word Fronya means "a woman who thinks for herself". In the late 1970s, when domestic violence was making a lot of headlines, Sharon was instrumental in all aspects of opening the Mission Transition House. Sharon says she has probably been involved with every local women's organization and all of the social helping causes.

She has recently changed her volunteer focus to the Heritage Asset Mapping of Mission, which she sees as a great way to get people to think and talk about their history. Sharon's most rewarding experience as a volunteer is having a person say, 10 or even 20 years later, "I remember when you did that for me – it changed my life". Sharon's response is, "No I didn't; I opened the door so that you could make a decision to change your life and you decided to step through the door."

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