

## Sheilah Lorraine Wheeler Sweatman

February 8, 1982 – June 29, 2011

Sheilah Sweatman was born in Winnipeg on Feb. 8, 1982, the third of five children of Wynn and Teddi Sweatman. She was raised in the River Heights area and graduated from Kelvin High School. After high school, Sheilah entered the University of Manitoba where she graduated with a Fine Arts degree. Later she went to Nova Scotia Community College to become a carpenter, where she became the first female carpenter hired by a local prominent builder. It seems Sheilah felt education was important and was a lifelong course.

As an artist, Sheilah worked in many medias and sold artwork across Canada and the U.S. Her “signature piece” was a six-by-eight-foot work made from 500,000 jigsaw puzzle pieces which drew national attention. She called it, Finding Me. This piece was never sold as Sheilah donated it to the Children’s Hospital Foundation of Manitoba. The piece is still on display today in the John Buhler Research Centre for all to admire. She also spent months making personalized gifts for her family and friends through her talent and creativity, as well as her love for family and friends.

Sheilah was a person of many interests and talents. Even at a young age, while others would watch and walk around building sites such as a new deck at the family cottage, Sheilah would find some way to participate and get involved. Sheilah was always helping her cousins drag branches and logs out of the woods to build the biggest and best forts, would resurrect old boats or create more adventures for all of them. Growing up between her home in Winnipeg and the cabin at Lake of the Woods and throughout other parts of her life, Sheilah participated in a number of activities either organized or for the sheer enjoyment of participating. Hockey, ringette and soccer kept her busy, but if that wasn’t enough, she also swam, fished, skied, dog sledged, trained for marathons, cross country enthusiast, snowboarded, mountain biked, hiked and rafted. She was always involved in some type of physical activity as a child and young adult, indoors or outdoors, wind and weather, rain or snow, winter, spring, summer or fall, from the east coast to the west coast, it didn’t matter. Her family described her as one of the strongest people physically, pound for pound they have ever known; she was extraordinarily fit. Physical fitness and the outdoors were two of what could only be called her passions.

Sheila’s love of nature, the outdoors and her thirst for action led her to Nelson, British Columbia, a small picturesque community nestled in the Selkirk Mountains. She had lived on the prairies and the east coast, but was eventually drawn to the beauty and opportunities of the west coast.

Here on the west coast of Canada, Sheilah continued with her other passion, art and again dove into her love of nature and particularly animals. When in Winnipeg, Sheilah raised and worked with her beloved Alaskan Malamutes as part of her dog sledding adventures. In Nelson, she opened her home to an abandoned cat, named him Bob Dylan and nurtured him into a great companion and beautiful animal. Sheilah also adopted a very old dog, Sage, who needed special care and wasn’t expected to live long and love it for the last nine months of its life. In March of 2011, Sheilah added a new member to her family,

a German Shepherd pup Freya, whom she loved and wanted to train for avalanche rescue missions. Her love and caring for animals was not restricted to her home, but she also worked at the Nelson Animal Hospital. Here Sheilah began by doing entry level jobs, but was soon integrated into their whole operation, including assisting in the operating room.

Just when you think a young woman has filled up every moment in her life, Sheilah decided to join up and train with the Nelson Search and Rescue Team. This was a volunteer position, but Sheilah's heart always told her to do the right thing. Throughout her life she was dedicated to serving others. Sheilah trained with Search and Rescue for nearly two years. A co-worker was quoted, "Sheilah may have been one of Nelson's Search and Rescue's newest members, but her motivation and desire to learn put her on the frontline along veteran search members. Already certified in swift water rescue and first aid administration, Sheilah hopes to one day expand her skills to include dog search and rescue."

Here again, we see her dedication to education as lifelong learning and to her service to others. She joined the team because she thought it was important to provide help to other people, maybe save a life. Her mindset went beyond helping others, as she also thought it was very important to rescue those who already died for the peace of mind that would give to the families left behind. Sheilah also wanted to be a volunteer fire fighter and performed all the physical feats required to enlist. Again her energy, athleticism and physical fitness had served her well. When it came time to suit up for action, at five foot two inches tall, there were no helmets or boots small enough to fit her. As a result she couldn't join the volunteer fire department, even though her heart and body wanted to.

Sheilah was known for many things in her life. Strength of character, physical strength, creative ability, earning the respect of others, doing her share and more, never doubting her ability to learn and above all, she was dedicated to serving others. She was a role model to many, even as a young girl growing up and continuing into adulthood.

On June 29, 2011 at 29 years of age, while serving with the volunteer Swift Water Search and Rescue Team on the swollen and raging Goat River in British Columbia, Sheilah Sweatman gave her life attempting to rescue or recover a car's occupants which had veered off the road into the river. After entering the water to check for occupants in the car and attaching cables to pull it out, Sheilah returned to the dangerous waters, and became entangled. In spite of her magnificent physical fitness and attempts by her fellow rescuers, she succumbed to exhaustion and drowned. It was the first time a British Columbia Search and Rescue Technician had been killed in service. Her loss is a great one to that organization and to her family and friends.