Suzanne MacKenzie
(1950-1998)
In Tribute to
Suzanne Mackenzie

Fran Klodawsky and
Fiona Mackenzie

Some people are a country and their deaths displace you. Everything you shared with them reminds you of it: part of you in exile for the rest of your life. (Bronwen Wallace, Common Magic, 1985, p. 33).

Suzanne Mackenzie was such a person. She made such a difference in the world and it is very tempting to mourn how much greater her impact might have been had she been able to sustain the incredible energy she brought to every occasion. But we would rather celebrate her life and pay a personal tribute to our very dear friend.

Suzanne died in Nelson, British Columbia on 24 October, 1998, at the age of 48. As a scholar, her intellectual legacy to the discipline of geography and to the fields of political economy and women’s studies is substantial. She is recognized as a pioneer in Canada and internationally in establishing a research programme in gender and geography. For two decades, her research was at the leading edge of feminist geographic thought and included the publication of Visible Histories: Women and environments in a post-war British city, (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989) and Remaking Human Geography, co-edited with Audrey Kobayashi, (Unwin Hyman, 1989). Her work, as her life, was motivated by her profound commitment to social justice and an inclusive feminist politics.

She gave unstintingly of her enormous energy without regard to the cost to herself. Suzanne lived fully, joyously and courageously. For those who worked with her at Carleton, we miss her explosive laughter and sense of fun that continually called into question every artifice of the academy.
Suzanne left us with an invaluable legacy—thanks to her, many more of us feel part of a web of intellectual, emotional and political involvement that is so much richer than what would have been the case without her.

And she illustrated so fully the power of being passionate about ideas, and of exploring the possibilities of those ideas wherever they led. She herself was forever crossing borders and bringing together supposedly disparate realms: academic and community, professional and personal, intellectual and emotional. She never stayed in one place; her ideas, as well as her life, were always in motion, always becoming something more than what was there before.

In her writing, she anticipated many of the arguments that have occupied feminist theorists throughout the 1990s, and did so in a language meant to inform and include as well as to challenge. In 1986, she edged us on with the following words:

...Feminism remains an analysis directed towards providing understandings which allow us to actively and consciously overcome the oppressive aspects of gender relations, a process which will involve profound and far-reaching social, interpersonal and environmental change. In attempts to develop understanding necessary for this change, feminists in the last few generations have extended the area over which we have, and know ourselves to have, some control—interpersonal relations, sexual relations, family life—from a “natural” area to an arena for articulate, international politics. Simultaneously, feminists are utilizing the forms of analysis designed to delineate “grand theory” in discussion of and action around daily life and, thus, imbuing this analysis with concrete content.

The potential implications of the restructuring of the productive and reproductive work, which homeworkers are creating, are profound, not only for our environments and gender relations, but for the content of our analysis. Yet it is perhaps fair to suggest that the most audacious crossing of the boundaries—the integration of personal politics and theory—may be the most profound result of such restructuring. (from Suzanne Mackenzie, “Women’s Responses to Economic Restructuring” in Roberta Hamilton and Michelle Barrett (eds.) The Politics of Diversity (Montreal: The Book Centre Incorporated, 1986), p. 100.

A memorial scholarship for Suzanne Mackenzie has been established through the Canadian Women and Geography
Study Group, of which she was a founding member. The scholarship reflects Suzanne's wishes for a final contribution to women in the discipline. The terms of the scholarship will reflect her dedication to students and to feminist geography. Please send donations to:

The Canadian Women and Geography Study Group
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