

A TRIBUTE TO MURIEL SHEWCHUK

OCTOBER 11, 1940 – MAY 11, 2017

Submitted by: ORNAC Past Presidents Mary Knight RN, MN & Margaret Farley RN, BSN, CPN(C), based on tributes they gave at Muriel's funeral service on May 17, 2017.

Courtesy M. Knight



L to R Muriel Shewchuk, Mary Knight, Gloria Stephens during WCORN in Adelaide, Australia in 1993.

Courtesy M. Knight



Muriel in her Canada outfit at WCORN in Vienna, 1989.

Alberta-born and raised, Muriel Shewchuk began her nursing career graduating from the University of Alberta (first from the diploma nursing program in 1962, then with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree in 1968). Muriel's nursing career included roles as staff nurse, educator, manager, instructor in a school of nursing, assistant director, and director at Alberta's two largest acute care teaching healthcare centres (University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton and Foothills Hospital in Calgary).

Prior to Muriel's "retirement" in 2005 (although we all know that she never truly retired!) she worked 19 years as the Director of Surgical Suites in Calgary where she successfully led the regionalization of surgical services, including the consolidation of 47 operating theatres, into three adult sites. Muriel managed a budget of over \$95 million and staff of over 850 including 325 surgeons.

The Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada (ORNAC) published a video entitled "Who is Behind the Mask?" This is an apt metaphor for Muriel's role in perioperative nursing in Canada – she was always there, working quietly behind the scenes, supporting the work or project to the fullest... but she was not always front and centre or looking for recognition or credit. Many are unaware of the magnitude and scope of her contributions to perioperative nursing and, indeed, to surgical patient care in Canada. She was an outstanding nurse and always had the best interests of patients and perioperative nursing at heart.

Mary Knight met Muriel in 1980 when they both worked in Edmonton. When Mary was organising the first provincial

conference for recovery room nurses Muriel provided invaluable advice – her "how to plan a nursing conference". During that process, Muriel's willingness to share her knowledge and expertise, and to assist wherever required, left quite an impression on Mary – one that never changed over the many years.

In the spring of 1982 Marg Farley was a member of the newly formed Saskatchewan Operating Room Nurses Group (SORNG) and attended an operating room conference in Winnipeg, MB, where a memorable session discussed whether to form a national operating room nursing organization. After a short discussion, a voice was heard from the back of the room suggesting we had "discussed things long enough, and we need to just get on with it!" The voice was, of course, that of Muriel Shewchuk.

Muriel made Marg Farley want to be a better OR nurse, join ORNAC, become active in her provincial group, and to "get on the ORNAC train at the front" to help bring perioperative nursing into the national arena and keep it there. That conference, in 1982, was the beginning of a decades long mentorship and very treasured friendship between Marg and Muriel.

Muriel was one of the primary driving forces behind the successful launch of ORNAC in 1984. She worked hard behind the scenes on many levels. She organized the highly successful first National OR Conference in Jasper in 1984; helped establish Canadian OR Nursing Journal (the predecessor of the now ORNAC Journal); promoted the need for standards in perioperative nursing and later co-authored the first

Courtesy M. Knight



Muriel Shewchuk as Chair of the 1st ORNAC Conference, Jasper, 1984

standards; she worked tirelessly to have perioperative nursing included in the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) Certification program and; she developed an awards system for ORNAC.

Standards were an integral part of Muriel's approach to life and she tirelessly promoted the value of professional and technical perioperative nursing standards. Her contributions to numerous ORNAC Standards Committees spanned more than twenty-five years. She was always available for a consult, to review a document, to suggest changes to a standard, and to provide recommendations about new content needed in the next edition. Muriel was also a valued member of Canadian Standards Association (CSA) committees on sterilization for many years beginning in 1980, including the technical committee on sterilization, sub-committee on emergency and/or flash sterilization, and a committee to review and incorporate international standards into the Canadian standards.

Monday, May 1, 2017 in Niagara Falls marked Muriel's last contribution to the ORNAC Standards. For Marg Farley it was a joy, honour, and privilege to introduce Muriel and her long-time pal Gloria Stephens, ORNAC Past President, as they presented the history of ORNAC Standards. They received a well-deserved standing ovation. Muriel's props included a copy of the original 1986 standards (at only 42 pages) and a can containing an adult beverage which she said was needed after the lengthy sessions that had been spent working on the original standards! At the end of the session Muriel spoke to the 2017 Standards Committee and expressed her awe of the work done.

Muriel was an advisor to the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons regarding standards and for the monitoring of private sector surgical suites. Another standards-related highlight of Muriel's career was when she was asked by the then Alberta Association of Registered Nurses (AARN) about writing nursing

standards. Standards were truly a passion for her.

Although Muriel was a member of the first ORNAC Board, and its Secretary from 1988-1990, her contributions to ORNAC never ceased, right up to the recent ORNAC conference in Niagara Falls. Muriel's contributions included committee work, authoring articles for the Canadian OR Nursing Journal and many presentations at ORNAC conferences.

Muriel's accomplishments on the national level are even more impressive when you realize how active she remained on a provincial level. Muriel was instrumental in the organization of the Operating Room Nurses Association of Alberta (ORNAA) and was an active participant from 1964. Muriel was a member of the Provincial Executive for nine years, the President (1982-1984), and was Editor of their Snips & Snaps newsletter for nine years. She also showed her creative side by designing their logo and pin.

Muriel very regularly presented papers at provincial and national conferences, and provided stimulating and thought-provoking presentations. She was a prolific author and published regularly in the Canadian OR Nursing Journal, right from Volume 1, Issue #1 (Editor's note: See page 53 of this journal for her message in the very first journal). Many of us have read or heard her CORL Pearls of Wisdom, leadership thoughts, and sterilization & sacred cow presentations or articles. These were delivered with her special brand of humour, and had titles such as "Effecting Change in the Path of a Rhinoceros Herd", "Meetings, Blood Meetings", "Leader-nomics", and "Survival Tips in Organizational Chaos and Change".

In 1999 Muriel and her colleague, Pat Pocock, identified a need and formed the Canadian O.R. Leaders (CORL) Network to advance leadership education by sharing resources and knowledge from experts in the field to help members obtain the best practice information and support for making leadership decisions.

Courtesy M. Knight



Muriel with her daughter Marcia (also an OR Nurse) at a WCORN breakfast in Adelaide, Australia, 1993.

Courtesy M. Knight



Muriel with Pat Pockock in Banff, 1999.

While Presidents of their respective provincial OR nursing associations both Marg Farley and Mary Knight separately asked Muriel to do presentations at provincial educational programs/workshops. Muriel graciously came, and refused payment other than her travel expenses, saying that if one was committed to education of OR nurses this is what you did - what an inspiration and mentor!

Often people's first instincts were to call Muriel for guidance as she had a deserved reputation for being practical, yet always knew the latest perioperative practice or trends. Muriel was a consultant in great demand, and provided her expertise in surgical nursing practice, administration, planning and surgical suite design, work flow, legal and administrative issues, and problem resolution. She did consults in twenty hospitals in seven provinces and two territories, as well as in Puerto Rico and England. Muriel also advised private sector physicians in the design, development, and operations of their non-hospital, private surgical suites.

Muriel Shewchuk was recognised internationally as an expert in perioperative nursing. She was one of the first Canadian OR nurses to attend an international conference and she presented at six World Conferences of Operating Room Nurses (WCORN). Many OR nurses were encouraged by Muriel to submit abstracts to present at conferences. Mary Knight was fortunate to be able to travel with Muriel to WCORN in Vienna, Austria and

Adelaide, Australia. Very memorable experiences, and so much fun!

When Perioperative Certification through the Canadian Nurses Association finally became a reality, in 1995, Muriel was once again hard at work in Alberta preparing study modules and arranging study sessions for all Alberta candidates writing the first exam in 1995. Of course, Muriel took the exam. When results were mailed out, Muriel called Mary and said that she had failed. As you can imagine, Mary was absolutely stunned and speechless – whatever could she say? And then Muriel displayed that wicked sense of humour and laughed - of course, she had passed....

Perhaps one of Muriel's greatest contributions to perioperative nursing was her ability and willingness to coach and mentor others. Muriel was always generous with her precious time, and assisted others whenever possible. She was tireless, made sure that the job got done, but still had fun while accomplishing the task. When we were submitting this tribute to the Journal its Editor, Deborah McNamara, commented that she had also experienced this. "Muriel called me and asked if she and Gloria Stephens could take me for a coffee and 'tell me everything about ORNAC'..." remembers Deborah. "And boy did they! But their perspective has stayed with me until today and guides much that I do."

Muriel received many awards throughout her nursing career... too many to enumerate here. But Muriel also instituted two very special awards – the Muriel Shewchuk Leadership Awards, one in Alberta and the other at ORNAC. This was because she truly believed in fostering and recognizing leaders in operating room nursing. Muriel was recognized by ORNAC in 1991, when she received the Isabelle Adams Award, presented to an outstanding nurse who has made a significant contribution to operating room nursing in Canada.

In 2002, while President of ORNAC, Mary Knight spearheaded efforts to have

Muriel receive further recognition for her many continued and varied accomplishments. Applications were submitted to have Muriel awarded the Order of Canada and the Jeanne Mance Award, the highest honour of the Canadian Nurses Association. While unfortunately neither was successful, Muriel had been recognized once more by ORNAC and her colleagues as being "simply the best".

Every professional association should have an individual like Muriel Shewchuk to assist its growth – she was knowledgeable, professional, visionary, approachable, modest, reliable, and always a team player. ORNAC, ORNAA, and CORL were most fortunate to have had Muriel Shewchuk as one of their founders and to receive her continued and steadfast support.

To quote Marge Ensminger, of Medicine Hat, AB, who is another long-time perioperative friend of Muriel's: "Muriel had the gift and ability to teach young nurses and make them successful. She was tireless & dedicated to her family, friends and nursing."

Canadian perioperative nurses have lost a giant amongst us. And many of us have lost a beloved family member, friend, or colleague. Muriel Shewchuk will be greatly missed, but her legacy will live on. Rest in peace Muriel – we are all better for having known you.



Muriel with Mary Knight at the International Night at WCORN in Adelaide, Australia, 1993.

Courtesy M. Knight