

Author Heather Robertson dies at 72

By Mark Pavilons

Canadian writer Heather Robertson passed away last week on her 72nd birthday.

The news came as a shock to her family, friends and former neighbors in King who knew her and worked with her on various local projects.

Robertson, a native of Winnipeg, had more than a dozen books and hundreds of articles to her name.

Robertson was also a strong supporter of the King Township Historical Society.

"She was a brave spirit. Indeed she was, having been through serious illness recently with inspirational calm and determined will to fight on. That was characteristic of our achieving leader; she had fought the formidable Canadian media giants as lead plaintiff in two significant copyright cases and won landmark decisions on behalf of Canadian freelance writers. Her awards have been numerous during the course of her career," said historical society member Virginia Atkins.

King Township will remember her as a member of the founding committee of the King Township Archives Project and ardent advocate for local history. One of her pet projects was the innovative celebration of the 400th anniversary of French presence in Ontario.

Atkins said Heather leaves many admiring friends in King who mourn her passing but are grateful to have been the beneficiaries of her wisdom and creativity.

Early in her career she was a very well read and controversial columnist for Maclean's, as well as a writer of well reported and beautifully written feature stories for most of the magazines in the country.

King Councillor Debbie Schaefer described it as "such a loss."

Robertson, she said, created and produced so much of value to the local community and across Canada. She had a passion for history, which was quite a bonus for King Township. "When you heard her speak, it (history) was very dear to her," Schaefer said.

She was also a co-founder of various writers' organizations including the Periodical Writers' Association of Canada, and The Writer's Union of Canada, and helped talk the Canada Council into recognizing non fiction writing as an art form. Most recently Heather was lead plaintiff in two electronic rights class actions, the first of which clarified who owns the electronic rights to freelance works appearing in newspapers and periodicals. "Robertson I" as it is called, went all the way to the Supreme Court and then was settled, to the great benefit of Canadian periodical writers, as was "Robertson II." Her career spanned a very interesting period in this country and her writing changed the way we think about ourselves.

She won the inaugural Ontario Speaker's Award for Walking into Wilderness: The Toronto Carrying Place and Nine Mile Portage. This was chosen over a total of 49 other entries. The 15 books short-listed for the prestigious new award included many by Canada's largest publishers.

Walking into Wilderness is a soft-cover illustrated history of Ontario's two major portages. Carrying Place figures prominently in the book, which Robertson wrote in 2008, leading up to the 2010 400th anniversary of the arrival of French explorers in Canada.

Robertson lived in King for some 18 years before moving to Aurora.

Heather Robertson was married to writer/broadcaster Andrew Marshall for 40 years, and their son, Aaron Marshall is a very active

film and video editor, having worked most recently on the first two seasons of the hit series, Vikings, seen on History Channel and Global Television.

An informal communal gathering to celebrate Heather's life will be held at the King Township Museum, on King Road, just east of Jane Street, on Sunday, March 30, starting at 2 p.m. All friends and admirers are welcome, and speeches and formal tributes will be kept to a minimum, so people can simply hang out and remember Heather in their own way to each other.

For information about this, please contact Andrew Marshall via email at Andrew@audio-ideas.com.