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FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

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Honouring a Quiet Warrior: Larry Morrissette

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The recent death of Larry Morrissette is a major loss, not only to his family and friends but also to the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that he has worked closely with in recent decades in efforts to re-build Winnipeg's inner city and revitalize Indigenous cultures.

Larry was the founder and Executive Director of Ogijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin (OPK), a grassroots organization that works closely with Indigenous people in trouble with or at risk of being in trouble with the law. Larry was loved by the many whose lives he changed. He was a co-founder—as part of the Thunder Eagle Society—of the highly successful Children of the Earth High School. He was a founder of the original Bear Clan Patrol and played a key role in its recent revitalization. He was a skilled researcher, involved in a wide range of inner-city studies, perhaps most significantly as co-author of the award-winning book, *Indians Wear Red: Colonialism, Resistance and Aboriginal Street Gangs* (Fernwood Publishing, 2013). And he was, for many years, a university teacher, bringing a rare combination of street-level experience and academic training to the classroom. Students loved the authenticity and quiet passion that he brought to their learning experience.

It was adult education that turned Larry's life around after a difficult youth. As he wrote in a chapter that he authored in a recent book about Aboriginal adult education: "Like most Aboriginal children, my experience in the educational system was not positive.... I left school after one week of grade 8, and spent the next 10 years trying to find meaningful employment." In the early 1980s, on his

second try, he was accepted into and later graduated from the University of Manitoba's Inner City Social Work Program. "It transformed my life," he wrote. He later went on to teach in that program, and in the University of Winnipeg's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies, both of which are innovative and successful university programs located on Selkirk Avenue in Winnipeg's North End.

Like so many Indigenous people who are able to benefit from this kind of education, Larry chose to use his skills and his wisdom to "give back" to the Winnipeg inner-city community in which he was raised. As his older brother Vern said, "Larry was a quiet warrior" who never sought the limelight but was always there to do the work. Even while still a student in the Inner City Social Work program in the early 1980s, Larry was actively involved in efforts that led to the creation of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre—"one of the few guys who were involved," as Kathy Mallett, one of the group of strong Indigenous women who led that struggle, said recently. "He was our conscience," said elder Wilfred Buck who conducted the pipe ceremony at Larry's wake. The community is struggling with what is an enormous loss.

Larry believed deeply in the transformative power of the kind of adult education being offered today as part of the "Selkirk Avenue Education Hub" in Winnipeg's North End. He

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knew from his own personal experience what a difference this kind of education can make, and he encouraged young Indigenous people to follow a similar path. As Indigenous activist and Urban and Inner-City Studies student Lenard Monkman wrote upon hearing of Larry's death:

He knew what the hood life was like, and the work that he did tried to change it. I found out last year that he was instrumental in creating Children of the Earth High School. It was the only high school that I ever attended. I was valedictorian of my class and just this past June I was invited to be their keynote speaker for their 25th anniversary. Larry was honored for his work on making COTE a reality, right before I went up to speak. We ended up sitting beside each other for the ceremony. While we were talking, he mentioned how proud he was of our generation. He spoke of seeing young, educated, Indigenous people being able to carry the torch for the type of work that he built his life around.

That is why the **Larry Morrisette Memorial Scholarship** has been established. This annual scholarship will be awarded to Indigenous students in UW's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies who meet three criteria: financial need, strong academic performance, and active and positive involvement in Winnipeg's inner city. The scholarship will lead to more Indigenous people saying about university education in the North End, as Larry did: "It transformed my life." We all benefit when this happens.

To contribute to the Larry Morrisette Memorial Scholarship visit www.uwinnipeg.ca/larry-morrisette, or send a cheque to: The University of Winnipeg Foundation, 901 – 491 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, R3B 2E4.

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