

Sheila Timmins 1926-2000



Sheila held a special connection with each son and daughter and grandchild. She maintained these maternal threads and nurtured in each of us the joy of life. As each of us headed off on our life journeys, she kept a watchful sixth sense alert day and night, tuned to the wavelengths of her children.

Mum died August 25th, 2000. Well that is true, but it seems to me it must be a letting go of her earthly body because every thought and feeling was dispersed into a painting, a poem or a letter. Sheila was born in Blairgowrie, Perthshire, Scotland on November 3rd, 1926 to Angus Sidey McHardy and Gertrude Dawes. She grew up in Argentina with two sisters Doris and Alice.



After 17 years marriage, Mum realized that she would not share her life with another partner. She supported her children and continued with

her painting. Her 'aloneness' allowed her to reach out to many people, struggling with their own lives, and to share her wisdom, insight and life stories.

We celebrated Sheila's life and passing from life as we know it, as she would have wanted us to. All the invisible threads that she had spread, gathered us together at her home and studio on Hornby Island, B.C. Friends and artists told us many delightful stories about their spontaneous encounters with Sheila.



Sheila had found a way to manage her life, through limitation, peeling away the layers of convention. Learning to hitch hike, meant everyone knew her respected her and were in turn lifted by her humanity. She had a high regard for human life and a particularly close sensitivity and love for animals.



I loved to listen to Mum's recollections of family and friends, wherever we had lived in various countries, beginning with her childhood in Argentina, her service in the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) in the Operations Room during WWII, to the shores of Australia, and

returning to the frontier ranches in Northern B.C. Mum followed her heart and her love for adventure, our first Canadian home was in Celista, B.C., a farm which she named 'La Santa Rosa.'



This homestead was our introduction to the Canadian wilderness, where we could learn to survive, put down roots and explore the countryside. We remember the idyllic life, Mum lived the reality of no water, no heat, cows breaking through the fences, chimney fires, hunters shooting into the woods where her sons were getting firewood, forest fires and neighbouring homes on fire with no means to save the building. The pioneers in the community knew first hand life in rural conditions, we were the green newcomers, with Mum's will and strength to survive, she became a pioneer in her own right.

Life was not only about overcoming the hardships, we were also taught culture and spiritual values. Before leaving 'La Santa Rosa' Mum put on an art show of her paintings and also my early pen and ink drawings.



This show was the surfacing of Sheila Timmins as an artist and a survivor in the midst of life. A

moment of victory. It was time to move on, 'La Santa Rosa' was sold and our animals went to new homes. Our paintings and possessions were shipped to Calgary. The freight train derailed and rolled down the mountainside near Banff, our artwork was buried. One large crate had been sent by truck to Calgary.

Several paintings including 'La Santa Rosa' were in this crate. It seemed ironic that our belongings were lost in a short domestic journey, after all the times we had been evacuated from places in crisis, the partition of India, and later the Suez crisis.

Mum always made a contingency plan, no matter how bad the circumstances were, she found a way to make the best of it. Our original plan had been to live in Calgary after a trip to Europe. Now we were set for the open road, while traveling in Greece, Mum made plans to visit Australia, since her second son was living there, we made the 26 hour flight to Sydney. Our travels, meeting people, and adventures had replenished our souls, and helped us to forget our loss of material possessions. We considered living and working in Australia but female employment opportunities seemed to be fairly limited in the early 70's, we decided to return to Canada.



Our return to northern B.C. was inspired by Rich Hobson's books 'Grass Beyond the Mountains' and 'Nothing too good for a cowboy'. Gloria Hobson introduced Sheila to Vanderhoof and to our new home which Mum named 'Casa Verde'. Sheila's artistic sense absorbed the northern expanse of sky and land, as she worked on

various outdoor jobs. She tackled the grueling experience of piling lumber in the planer mill.

The work and the people became an integral part of her life and her art. In her home she maintained her 'visual order' which meant keeping up with the household chores, so that she could paint at various times before or after her job. The 'visual order' also meant creating a view inside or outside, which allowed the viewer a contemplative rest, and as the environment changed then a new visual space would be made.



Her paintings captured the invigorating energy of movement and emotions, while other paintings surrendered to her intuitive depths of spirituality. Where creativity took her to the centre of the universe, in daily life she knew she must live in the now of awareness and understanding the down to earth struggles of humanity.

Work and chores were done 'in passing' leaving her mind free and uncluttered and ready to create. She read to further her understanding and to expand her experience of art. Her paintings attracted attention locally and afar. In some cases patrons would redesign their environment to incorporate her artwork.

Mum's spirit of adventure took her on a horseback journey, herding livestock north of Ft. St. James. A far cry from the stories of life in the Argentine, her horses and the people on those estancias. She told us the stories of the plays that she and her sisters would put on for their own amusement and to entertain the grown-ups. Mum missed the South American enthusiasm for living and the daily interaction with Spanish people. On the occasional trip to Mexico, she would yearn for her Argentine home, but to move there herself would have taken her too far away from her children.

George, her youngest son was on a bicycling trip in New Zealand. One day in Vanderhoof, Mum became aware of a cross in the painting that she was working on, and felt impelled to alter that area of the painting, shortly after she heard that George had narrowly escaped being run over.

The youngest boys were grown up. I had returned home for a few years and had found my path again. Mum too, decided to leave Vanderhoof, to sell 'Casa Verde' and go solo.

Initially she moved to Prince George, where she had a successful show at the Prince George Art Gallery called 'Retrospective 30 Years of Painting by Sheila Timmins.'

Sheila visited George in Nanaimo and took a trip to Hornby Island, where she decided to make her new home.

As most of her children now had their own children, Mum wanted to gather us together for a family reunion in 1990. The early risers would find their way to her studio early in the morning, for tea and toast with marmalade. Her studio was a ship builder's workshop.

Found wooden shapes became pieces of art, she painted large standing shapes and various triangular sail shapes. Some sculptures were found beach wood that she painted in her abstract style.



Ten years later we arrived together again at Mum's house, she had gone but as we walked around her house and studio, we all felt the serenity of her space, the peace she wanted for the children of the world, the discipline of giving and of only taking what you need to live. As our artist mother, you are our inspiration, your art will make a difference in our lives for generations to come.

Sheila's paintings may be viewed online:
Studio Gallery www.articobiota.ca