

Dorothy is my 1980 heroine

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"The fact of death has made me examine the priorities in my life. I can remember sorting through my mother's possessions when she died and ending up with just one small box of things to keep. I looked at my closet stuffed full of clothes and thought how could that have ever been a priority? People are so busy making a living, hurrying here and there that they forget what is important. Well it's the memories of how we help and care for one another that remains."

Dorothy Reid,
Canadian Single Parent
of the Year
before her death
May 18, 1980.

Cancer and an unhappy personal life never stopped Dorothy Reid from challenging and surmounting obstacles. A fairy tale marriage ended bitterly after 23 years in 1975. Doctors discovered cancer and just as it looked like a steady relationship was on the horizon, her loved one died. With four children of her own, Dorothy took in her dead friend's three teen-age children and managed to find room for a girl from a broken home. When the Single Parent of the Year award was bestowed on her, Dorothy's biggest thrill was

re-reading the glowing recommendations her children had submitted to the judges.

The Mississauga chapter of Parents Without Partners felt their candidate displayed exceptional courage and determination for her children and herself in the face of such an overwhelming enemy as cancer. Dorothy defied the disadvantages of being a single parent and proudly proclaimed that her children's school marks did not slide, which is usual in the case of separating parents, but went up.

Perhaps it was her experience as an adopted child that made Dorothy value her relationship with children all the more. Being a housewife and mother remained a privilege in a time when many women apologized around her constantly for "just being a housewife." Dorothy felt spending time with children was the key that would encourage a close relationship right into adulthood.

Dorothy attributed much of her strength to the fellowship of the Parents Without Partners club where a single parent and their children "could feel part of a sympathetic community and help get over the humiliation of being separated," Dorothy once said.

Any visitor to her hospital room realized why she proved to be a successful parent — she was a good listener and refused to dwell on her own burdens. Mrs. Reid could have cashed in on a lot of sympathy but she preferred to give you a slow smile and giggle while relating the number of Big Macs and Chinese dinners people smuggled into her hospital room.

Near the end of her life, Mrs. Reid hung on to the hope of living in an apartment with a relative. There in familiar surroundings she wanted some privacy before she died. Mrs. Reid got her first wish. She even lived long enough to send her two daughters to Sault Ste. Marie to collect her award for being the Canadian Single Parent of the Year. Her second wish came true when the girls came back in time to be part of the group of eight children around her bed when she died.

Among the list of 1980's most influential events including Terry Fox's heroic run, John Lennon's tragic murder, Ken Taylor's successful mission to smuggle Americans from Iran, I don't hear of Dorothy's accomplishments. I believe she has the qualities befitting this category and she is my candidate for Citizen of the Year in 1980.