

CHICAGO: Remembering Claire Evans

Written by

Monday, 20 February 2012 13:02

Christian Peace Teams (CPT) activist Claire Evans died on the morning of 9 February 2012, five weeks after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She spent her last days with her twin sister, Sue, in Lansing, Michigan.

Claire Evans was not the most public personality in the wider CPT organization, but she was one of its most influential workers. As the Delegations Coordinator, she was often the first person that people who were interested in exploring involvement with CPT met. Her handling of finances brought her into contact with all of the full-time CPTers who submitted their expenses to her. Her commitment to Undoing Oppressions within CPT changed not only how delegations were conducted, but also how support team and all the teams in the field functioned. CPT Reservist Jerry Stein wrote of her, "She epitomized for me, as I was entering the CPT world, what a member could be and become..."

Before joining CPT in 1998, Claire was a member of four Catholic Worker communities in Norfolk, VA, Duluth and Moorhead, MN and Bloomington, IL. She was also librarian at New Moon Publishing, Bread for the World, the Congressional Quarterly, University of Maryland, and Gallaudet University. During her years with Christian Peacemaker Teams, she served on projects in Chiapas, Mexico, and Palestine, Iraq and with Indigenous peoples in Northern Ontario.

Tributes pouring in have praised her quiet wisdom, her integrity, her competence, her steadfastness, her caring heart, generosity, and hospitality. But variations on the word "passion" occur most often. In recent years, much of that passion was directed toward Undoing Oppressions within CPT, to make the organization a welcoming place for people whom society marginalizes. She scrutinized her own life for unearned privileges, and voraciously read every book she could get on the topic. In the introduction to a reflection about her occupation of land in Chicago that once belonged to the Miami and Potawatomi Nations, she wrote:

In the process of researching and writing the following piece, I more than once thought that my role as a white settler should be asking questions rather than presuming to speak with authority on the topic. □ How differently would the Miamis and Potawatomis describe the movement of their own people? □ Have there been any efforts by First Nations people to reclaim land in Chicago? □ Could I just not find any evidence of it because of the limitations of internet searching? □ It is not even clear to me whether the Miamis or the French explorers decided to name the area for the wild onion. □ It is in the spirit of questioning, rather than providing answers, that I submit this small attempt to raise my own and other's consciousness of the land on which we live.

Claire took charge of seeing that important CPT publications and notes were translated into Spanish, and several CPTers who had experienced discrimination both within CPT and in larger society have said they could rely on her to be their ally. Any CPTer with unearned privileges who spent time with Claire could expect at some point a thoughtful challenge to his or her oppressive behaviors.

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But her warm soprano speaking voice would soar up an octave more often in amusement and pleasure than in anger or judgment. Adriana Cabrera Velasquez wrote about Claire jumping for joy after getting the autograph of 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate Leyma Gbowee. She reported to Cabrera afterwards, "It is not every day that you get your thing signed by a saint."

If saints can live and walk among us, then too, can members of the Cloud of Witnesses referred to in Hebrews 12. Claire was part of that cloud during her life, bearing witness to the power of Christ's love, the power of nonviolence, the power of people to repent and lay aside their sins of oppression and domination. And now she has become more completely enveloped in that Cloud.

At the end of several of her fundraising letters, Claire wrote, "Peacemaking is too big an undertaking for any of us to do alone, and I carry you with me on my journey!"

Those of us who worked with Claire thank her for taking us this far and look forward to hearing more about the journey she is on now when we meet her among the rest of the Witnesses in the life to come.

A memorial Service for Claire Evans will be held on Thursday, February 23, 7:00 pm, at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. The church is located in Chicago at 1218 Addison, near the Red and Brown lines.