

In Memory of Ineke Dijks



The Ineke Dijks Memorial Award has been established to honour and pay tribute to Ineke's commitment to education, her students and her family, while providing support to students at Douglas College for many years to come.

Ineke Dijks was born in Holland, moving to Canada in the 1970s with her husband and two young children. She learned English, achieved her high school diploma and, as a mature student, embarked on a post-secondary education that culminated in enrollment in a doctoral program at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. After being widowed, she became the much loved wife of Michael Wilson, an instructor at Douglas College, and became herself an inspirational instructor at Douglas and other colleges. In 2009 she was awarded the J. Lewis Robinson Award for meritorious service to the discipline of Geography by the Western Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers.

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Ineke J. Dijks
(April 12, 1943 – July 8, 2009)

Ineke Dijks was born in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, during World War II. Her earliest years were spent in a land of Nazi occupation, rationed food, and austerity. The family moved to the textile-industry city of Enschede, near the German border. Ineke did well in school, both academically and in sports, but it was her family's preference that she would undergo further training in what Canadians long called "home economics." There she learned many skills, such as cooking and sewing. She excelled at pattern-making and so obtained work as a dress-maker in a garment factory. Then she became assistant costumer for Opera Forum Enschede, developing a love of opera that remained strong for the rest of her life. An excellent swimmer, she also became certified as a swimming instructor.

With her husband, Guus Bruining, and two young children, Marion and Matthijs, she immigrated to Canada in the 1970s, living in southern Alberta. Here she embarked on English lessons, then completed her high school diploma at Lethbridge Community College and was encouraged to consider university. She also took courses in Photography and became skilled not only with the camera but also in her darkroom. Her first intention was to take Theatre Studies at the University of Lethbridge, but the university's breadth requirements led her to a course in Human Geography and a new interest was born, or more properly rekindled, because from childhood she had been fascinated by maps and by stories about other lands. She turned, then, to the B.A. program in Geography, driving a rural school bus to help with the tuition costs. With the untimely passing of her husband, she redoubled her efforts and completed the B.A. in 1989. A travel scholarship allowed her to visit China in 1988, further firing her interest in Human and Historical Geography, and by 1989 she had published her first paper (with Prof. Frank Jankunis), a study of western Canadian local histories and their value to geographers.

She applied to Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario, where she received scholarship support and a teaching assistantship, as she undertook her M.A. studies in Historical Geography under the supervision of Prof. Brian Osborne. Prof. Osborne later wrote of her "ebullient personality, infectious cheerfulness and her 'big sister role' to so many of her fellow students." Ineke's thesis on railroad settlement agencies and their "social engineering" of western Canadian settlement was completed in 1994 and she was awarded not only the degree but also the Starkey-Robinson Award from the Canadian Association of Geographers, for the best thesis in Canadian regional geography.

She remarried in 1992 and with her husband, Michael Wilson, lived for short periods in both China and Japan, where he taught on exchange at universities. In 1993 they moved to British Columbia, where they both worked as consultants for the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development: Ineke on residential schools issues and Michael on land claim cases. Ineke studied Canadian labour history and modern European history at Simon Fraser University, then in 2004 was accepted into the Ph.D. program in the Urban and Regional Studies Institute at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, in the Netherlands. She had partially completed her thesis, on urban perceptions of industrial history, at the time of her passing.

During her years in B.C. she taught Geography courses at several colleges: first Columbia College, then the University College of the Cariboo, Kwantlen University College, and Douglas College (where Michael was also an instructor, from 1997 onward). She participated in many conferences and became newsletter editor for the Western Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers. One of her happiest moments was at a CAG conference when she saw that a woman who had been her student at Kamloops was also presenting a paper. Like Ineke, she had been a mature student and she said that Ineke had been her inspiration to continue – and she, too, was now entering graduate school.

It was during Ineke's teaching at Douglas that she first experienced the debilitating pains and fatigue that would turn out to be from cancer, but she pushed on to complete her work. In 2005 she was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer, which had already spread to her liver. With characteristic determination she underwent surgery and then embarked on round upon round of chemotherapy. Her condition would improve for a time with each new round of treatment, allowing her welcome "windows" of freedom to travel – as far afield as Mexico, Alaska, and The Netherlands -- and, as always, to learn new things. She delighted in the progress of her children and, now, granddaughters. Marion had become a sign language interpreter – and a graduate of Douglas College. Matt had earned a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Lethbridge and had become a bank manager. With Marion, Ineke took up the cause of fundraising for cancer research and, even though she was on chemotherapy, did a 5K walk for "The Underwear Affair." As she became less mobile she was only able the next year to cheer others on, but she chose to participate in trials of new, experimental medications, hoping to contribute to research that would help others. Understandably she became more introspective in her last year and even to question whether her personal ambitions had led her to be too demanding of others. But she remained mentally alert and intensely curious about her family and the world, up to the few days before her passing.

In March of 2009, though she had little stamina, Ineke attended the annual meeting of the Western Division of the CAG in Nanaimo, and there she was presented with the J. Lewis Robinson Award for meritorious service to the discipline of Geography, crowning an all-too-brief but very productive career. She passed away peacefully on July 9, 2009, in the Crossroads Hospice in Port Moody, in the company of family members and in the happy knowledge that a new granddaughter was on the way.