

**Remarks by Leslie Gaudette, President of the Council of Senior Citizens Organizations
At the Memorial Service for Sheila Pither. October 4, 2022**

Good afternoon. My name is Leslie Gaudette and as current President of the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (*also known as COSCO without the T*), Steve has asked me to make some remarks regarding Sheila Pither, in her role at COSCO where she most recently served COSCO as the Past President.

As I reflected, Sheila as Past President was not quite like having a mother-in-law, but her role did serve well to orient me to the responsibilities of my new position and to ensure that the long-standing policies and practices of COSCO were carried on. At the same time, Sheila, while respectful of values and tradition, was a constant source of new ideas to move COSCO forward. She was always willing to meet whether in person or more frequently of late, by Zoom to work out how to take action on the latest issue affecting the well-being of our elder citizens.

We always looked for the twinkle in her eyes as a sign that a new and creative proposal was in the offing. But we all knew that hiding beneath her pleasant yet slightly mischievous manner and keen sense of humour was a steel-trap mind – a mind that produced words that demanded respect whether from high and mighty politicians, or the newest COSCO Delegate.

Sheila joined COSCO in 1999 and served in almost every role on the Executive over the next 23 years, including Secretary, Treasurer, First Vice-President, President and Conference Co-Chair. Thanks to the history put together by Annette O'Connor and Linda Forsythe, I don't need to recite everything, but as Sheila did say: "We can't do everything but we can do something".

Key initiatives included planning major conferences about every 4 years, starting in 2002, and continuing her passion for education as a retired teacher. In 2007 she began the first COSCO Workshop on Falls Prevention. This has blossomed into the COSCO Seniors Health and Wellness Institute now headed by Barb Mikulec with more than 40 workshops on offer across the province as well as other parts of Canada.

Sheila, in part due to her personal experiences, maintained a keen interest in improving our health care system, which resulted in a remarkable letter personally signed by Health Minister Adrian Dix. This letter reads in part:

Ministry of Health staff worked with Sheila for many years on seniors' issues and, particularly on addressing elder abuse. She was a strong, compassionate advocate for change. I am sure that the Ministry staff who worked with her join me in expressing my great appreciation for the collaboration and contributions she provided in so many venues over the years.

Sheila was a true mentor not just to me, but to the entire COSCO Board. Her many and varied contributions to the work of COSCO has made us what we are today – recognized as the leading provincial organization for seniors' advocacy in the province, with national outreach due to the strong support we provide through our national affiliate, the National Pensioners' Federation.

The remembrances that have come in from many of her colleagues from across the country with words like:

Sheila was a force within many forces fighting for the rights and recognition of seniors.

She was a PILLAR at COSCO.

Sending condolences as she was a tenacious and remarkable woman.

Not a meeting went by that her brilliant contributions didn't plant seeds.

(Sheila was) such a gracious, knowledgeable and caring leader.

She was a force to be reckoned with.

On a personal note, how I will remember Sheila was when I visited her at her cabin on Gabriola Island in August 2020 to discuss some COSCO business. But then as we moved to a shaded seating area looking over the ocean on this warm sunny day, her son prepared and served for us, a brunch consisting of waffles, slathered with strawberries and whipped cream. Sheila's favourite meal and just a little piece of heaven on earth.

Rest in Peace Sheila. Your memory will live on and your work will continue. Thank you for a life well-lived.