



**In Memorium  
Lyn Taylor  
October 1, 1948 – February 1, 2007**

by

Charlene Morrow

Director, SummerMath/SEARCH; Faculty, Psychology and Education  
Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts, USA  
WME Past President, 1991-1993; WME Co-Executive Director, 1988-1998

On February 1, 2007, the mathematics education community lost a dear and valued colleague. Lyn Taylor, WME Past President and Board member and Associate Professor at the University of Colorado, Denver, passed away after a 10 year battle with brain cancer.

Lyn and I were not only colleagues, but we were friends for the past 21 years, and during that time we always knew that we would be there for each other. We could pick up the phone and chat no matter how long it had been since we had talked. We exchanged good news, bad news, advice, chit-chat, birthday cards, and postcards. We attended Lyn and Mark's wedding. We knew each others' families. We encouraged each other to write papers, organize panels and presentations, and present new ideas. She provided this kind of support for many other colleagues as well.

My husband, Jim, and I met Lyn at our very first National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) meeting in 1986 where we were wandering around in a daze in a foreign land of 10,000+ math teachers. We were brand new to the field of math education and we decided to attend a Women and Mathematics Education (WME) panel, since we had just taken on the job of directing a summer mathematics program just for girls. Lyn was presenting her dissertation work on mathematical life histories, and she threw us a life line. Soon were working together on gender issues in math education. Much of our time at NCTM meetings, and during the rest of the year, revolved around WME activities. Lyn served as President of WME from 1989 to 1991, and was on the Board of Directors from then on. It was an extremely important aspect of our professional --- and personal --- lives. There are so many people I am connected to now who I would not have known if not for Lyn.

Until recently, we saw each other at least annually at meetings. We worked hard on improving the climate for women in mathematics, on supporting each other's talks and workshops..... and on taking care of each other during food poisoning episodes at 2 different meetings! We were all avid travelers, so we went on several adventures before or after some of the conferences. For instance in 1991 we traveled in Puerto Rico with my parents, her mother, Jim, and our daughter, Hannah --- it was a three generation adventure! My mom and her mom really connected over knitting and quilting and this tickled Lyn. She almost always mentioned that connection when I saw her. While in Newfoundland for a meeting, we all (not the parents) went sightseeing. Adventure number one was when we took a ferry to St Pierre (an island that belongs to France off the coast of Newfoundland). It was a sunny day when we left, but about halfway there a truly "batten down the hatches" storm rose up with waves washing over the boat. The ferry back the next day was cancelled due to the weather and we spent the day inside watching it rain. After we made it back, we took a drive near the shore and stopped at a scenic spot to take a photo. A young man popped out of a shed and asked if we wanted to see his 2 freshly killed moose. This will give you a flavor of what can happen when you traveled with Lyn. I know she also had some adventures when she went to Hungary, Russia, Australia, and Hawaii with other colleagues.

Lyn related to everyone in a very holistic way. Some people might have thought she was a bit intrusive, but truly she wanted to know all aspects of a person's life and how they fit together. When she traveled, she considered her trip extra successful if she was invited to the home of a colleague. This interest enriched her work in gathering mathematical biographies and showing how mathematics was embedded in a person's life.

Mathematics was not relegated to the academic sphere. Lyn saw math in everything. She once asked me if I knew Marion Walter. When I said no, she said, with awe in her voice, "Marion once presented a whole session on teaching mathematics using just a milk carton to demonstrate mathematical ideas!" She introduced me to Marion who is now a dear friend. In this same way, Lyn brought culture into the classroom through the mathematics that can be found in ethnic designs and structures, particularly that found in American Indian cultures.

Lyn nurtured, encouraged relentlessly --- yes sometimes, even bullied, but always with your best interest in mind. As an example, Claudette Engblom-Bradley, who now teaches at the University of Alaska, said this: "I am grateful for having Lyn Taylor as a friend and colleague, for she believed in me as a professional educator when I did not believe in myself. We published an article together, which I had started several years before showing it to her. I admired her energy and confidence in working with me and making the paper into a publishable article." She was especially dedicated to motivating her students.

For all of her mentoring and networking, she really wanted to be known as a researcher. She was a faculty member in the College of Education at the University of Colorado, Denver (UCD), from 1987 until her death. She was well-published with articles about writing mathematical biographies, about using culturally based material to

teach mathematical ideas, about attitudinal and emotional aspects of learning mathematics, and more. She mentioned to me many times how proud she was of her Elizabeth Gee Memorial Lectureship Award received from UCD in 2000. I think to her it proved that she was a respected all-round academic. And she really enjoyed the contacts this award afforded her. Lyn also earned several other teaching and research awards from UCD.

She would be pleased to know that WME member Dorothy Buerk, faculty emerita from Ithaca College said, "When I got the message from Edie (Kort) that Lyn was dying, I thought about Lyn and her work. I got out the volume she edited for Focus on Learning Problems in Mathematics. It is the special issue on Gender and Mathematics: Multiple Voices. I am reading it from cover to cover and feeling Lyn's spirit in its pages. It is giving me a chance to reconnect with works of a number of you on this list and with the issues we faced and researched ten years ago. It is my way of connecting with Lyn and with all of you." Regina Brunner said, "Lyn has been so proud --- rightly so --- of the wonderful volume she produced of one of her favorite journals. I was one of the authors she encouraged. She taught me so much about persevering and never giving up in spite of what may have seemed to be at that time insurmountable challenges. She worked thru the article with me a small piece at a time while aiming for that elusive target of the "perfect" article."

I think it is safe to say that when you were with Lyn, the day would never go as expected. Sometimes this would be because you were looking forward to a quiet dinner out after a long day of presentations and committee meetings, and suddenly there would be eight people going to a restaurant with you because you just HAD to see this friend or you just HAD to meet that new colleague. After momentarily longing for lost peace and quiet, you would have to agree. It was always interesting and you were always glad you went.

Sometimes the day would go off track because, for instance, she caught her toe in the escalator and had to go back to her room and ice her foot and get two other people to help her with her presentation.

I have to say that the nature of our adventures changed rather a lot after her surgery and treatment. There was the time at the NCTM meeting in DC when Lyn and I went to the exhibit hall just as it was closing to see just one more person --- in characteristic Lyn fashion. She tripped over a rug and hit her head on the floor. Oh, did I say it was Saturday night.....Saturday night at an emergency room in DC is a full night's entertainment. I figured we would never be triaged to the top of the list. I did get to ride in the front seat of the ambulance --- new for me.

Several of us remember that exact moment in 1996 in Albuquerque at an NCTM meeting when Lyn said she had a headache and was dizzy. A friend said to me, "That moment she told me she had a headache in Albuquerque has popped into my head from time to time. It was a significant moment, yet it was an ordinary moment. I can visualize it as if it were last week. That's what's incredible about it." She had promised to pick someone up at the airport and she asked another friend to do it for

her. We all knew that was very uncharacteristic. She really did know that something was very wrong. When she went home from that meeting, she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. At least outwardly she never doubted for a moment that she would recover. She was all about finding the right treatment and dealing with the consequences. She was brave and she was a fighter, no less for herself than for others. She did make an amazing recovery. She wrote several professional articles after that and was still active for most of that time. I know that the moment that she was no longer able to provide supervision for student teachers in the schools, she felt the plug had been pulled and she was as down as I've ever known her. Perhaps at that moment she knew that she was going to be taken on a different path than planned.

When it became clear how near was the end, a group of us, all of whom know each other through Lyn, talked over email, keeping up on the news and shared how much Lyn meant to us all. We recalled memories, a few of which I share here:

"She was a wonderful role model for me and someone I deeply admired for her work in the mathematics education community."

"I am reminded that Lyn was a very generous person with both her time and what she could share with others. At one of the NCTM conferences, Lyn and I had a long conversation over lunch or tea about how our health problems had affected our lives."

"I had a wonderful time rooming with Lyn at an NCTM conference. I brought her to Allentown to speak to a large regional group of mathematics teachers at Cedar Crest College and she shined with her special magic. She brought everybody into her talk about posing mathematical problems from the real world."

This is part of a much longer, interesting story from Steve Rasmussen: "I remembered that many years ago (turns out it was 1992), Lyn visited Berkeley and interviewed my mother. I finally located the tape of this interview just hours before Char told me that Lyn was in hospice. I have been playing the tape, savoring both the sound of Lyn's voice and the sound of my mother's voice as Lyn, in her frank and insightful way, prompts my mother to tell her life mathematics story. Anyway, it's been a wonderful way to keep Lyn in my thoughts these days. In her most difficult moments she is giving me and my entire family a gift of joy and incredible value."

"Lyn always motivated people and encouraged them to stretch themselves. She was encouraging and supportive of junior people."

And this final story: "It happened during an NCTM conference. A group of us went shopping (after all the sessions were over of course) for hats. I thought we were getting hats because it was cold out. Lynn was up-beat, happy, and joking with the rest of us as we all picked up various hats, examined them, and tried them on. Lynn found a hat that was to her taste, and removed the hat she was wearing. I immediately saw that she had lost almost all her hair. My heart stopped and I was overcome with a sudden awareness and sadness as I had not known that she was going through chemotherapy. Our eyes met briefly and without skipping a beat, she

saw what I was feeling, she grabbed another hat, smiled at me, and said, "Here Grace, try this on this one. We talked later at dinner, but what stayed with me, was that moment. In an instant, Lynn reminded me of how compassion and love save us, and connect us to one another. In an instant she created a perfect moment of grace."

At the luncheon following the memorial service held in Denver at the All Saints Episcopal Church, many friends, colleagues, former students, and family members shared memories of Lyn. Her first dissertation student mentioned that Lyn was always popping up unexpectedly to provide support for one challenging situation or another. A colleague mentioned Lyn's irrepressible optimism, and a friend recalled Lyn's love of American Indian art and culture. Her last dissertation student was beside herself in tears and sadness. These themes resonated through many others' comments, and capture some of the things that were central to Lyn's identity and outlook on life.

Lyn spent her entire career bringing people together, inspiring students and colleagues, with endless enthusiasm. It seemed like she was always preparing to be that elder stateswoman who passes wisdom to the next generation --- who makes sure there IS a next generation to carry on creatively, thoughtfully, and with energy. She deserved to enjoy this status --- she worked so hard to be there and now that is not going to happen. We thought we would have Lyn to inspire us forever.

Our friend Marion said, "One must make use of every day." I think this is a philosophy that Lyn would have endorsed.

(Note: The motif appearing at the beginning of this piece was designed by Char Morrow especially in honor of Lyn Taylor, inspired by the Ganado Red Rug, Denver Art Museum, by Elsie Jim Wilson.)