

REMEMBERING SARAH MILLER

Remarks delivered by Theresa McClenaghan, July 2025

It is with great sadness that I pay tribute to Sarah Miller today, and her unparalleled legacy in environmental protection in Ontario. CELA staff and Board extend our sincere condolences to Kali and all of her family on losing their Mom, grandmother, and so much more.

Sarah worked at the Canadian Environmental Law Association for over 35 years from the mid 1970s to the mid 2010s, and her unflagging efforts left the people of Ontario and our environment in a much better state than would have been the case without her work. This is not something we can truly say of very many people, and all of you who cared about Sarah who are here today, and who were part of her personal ecosystem of family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, and collaborators can be very proud of her.

Sarah helped to truly shape the character of CELA and the Ontario environmental movement. She understood the big picture and what mattered; what needed to be changed; but also attended to the details so that visions did not just stay on paper.

Her attention to detail was evident close to home where she paid attention to the kind of beautiful spaces we worked in, and watched out for all of the staff at CELA. She always paid attention to hospitality; it was unthinkable that anyone should visit CELA without some kind of food and drinks. She made sure that the ambience reflected CELA values, working hard to secure spaces that were recycled buildings just as we argued for reuse and recycle in the broader policy world. She also brought artistry into our work, reaching out to Toronto artists to enhance its impact, whether with the design of our logo, covers on our reports, or the art on the structural support in our office on Spadina Ave.

Sarah truly cared about the people around her, and was sure to know about, and ask about our family and friends, and what was going on in our lives away from the office. And when our family lives intersected with the office, like the annual trip for each of my children to come to work with me, she gave them important work to do – she put my then very young daughter on reception with a script, and my tween son to figuring out how to disassemble office furniture for a move.

Sarah had a gift in finding resources, connecting with project funders, and pulling the people together who would be able to get important and essential work done like advocating for cancer prevention, reduction of toxic chemicals, or ensuring the right of Torontonians to know what was being released into the air around them. She was also central in the work of having CELA become funded as a pilot legal aid clinic in the 1970s, and continuously supported as an integral part of the Ontario legal aid clinic system every since.

We would not have current protections against water takings and diversions out of the Great Lakes basins without her dedicated work over many years. She always had her ear to the ground, had connections to many decision makers, could push politicians, and get the attention of media. She knew how to argue for strong protections and not give in, but also to make sure

there was a result. Similarly we would be under much greater threat of privatization of public drinking water services in Ontario without her steadfast understanding of the risks of such an approach and her eagle eye working to forestall any such ideas.

Sarah also mentored all of us who worked with her over the years. She introduced us to many people; gave us significant opportunities through her networks, and had confidence in us. People trusted her, and she trusted us and that mattered.

Throughout the time I worked with Sarah, her dedication to her daughter Kali was always foremost. While she was dedicated to her work, she also highly valued her home on the Island, her family, and her multitudes of friendships and projects outside of work.

For much of her career at CELA the title she preferred was “Co-ordinator” and it was very apt; only after she retired did we realize how much she had been the glue that kept us together and the key to smoothing the way forward for our work. She was a real connector and we are all the richer for having had her in our lives.