

Arts Whistler is thankful for the gift that was Isobel MacLaurin.

Arts Whistler joins with the community in mourning the loss of legendary local artist, Isobel MacLaurin. Isobel passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by her family, on February 12, 2024, at the youthful age of 92.

Isobel was a vivacious, sassy, stylish, witty and joyful human being. To know her was to love her, truly. Isobel's passion for living a good life was matched by her commitment to having a good death and she got just that. Could we expect anything less from a woman who painted her and her husband's caskets with the things they loved, complete with the line, "You can take it with you". In the days before she passed, she visited with beloved friends and family, with laughter erupting at every turn.

Leading the way for artists in the Sea to Sky corridor, Isobel was the first celebrated professional artist in Whistler. She put Whistler artists on the map, contributing as both an artist and an instructor teaching children and adults, all the while sharing her passion for art and nature. From the very beginning of the Whistler Children's Festival in 1983, Isobel stepped up to volunteer, teaching Whistler's kids how to paint. And she never stopped teaching, helping or simply spreading joy with her famous peanut butter cookies.

Isobel and her late husband Don MacLaurin, called Whistler home for 50 years. Their deep connection to Whistler began in the early 1960s, after finding a spot to build their weekend summer cabin. The MacLaurins, who met at a dance in New Brunswick, married in 1958, settled in Port Moody, and began raising their four children — Lee, Jill, Sue and Mark. The Whistler community embraced this vibrant couple who shared their love of painting, dancing, travel, forest sustainability, skiing, hiking, and adventures in their red MG convertible. Their passion for Whistler contributed greatly to the community we know today and Whistler has so much to thank them for.

Isobel loved to barter as an artist, often choosing to be paid in experiences, such as season passes to the mountain for her family; trades work on their home; or tickets to join her husband at conferences around the world. In each place they visited together, Isobel could be found sketching under a tree, in a town square, or up in the mountains creating fine art, through "snap shots" in time. As she often said, "I'm an artist dear, because I really don't know how to do anything else." It was in her DNA.

Isobel's murals can be found on Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains, on the Valley Trail, in several Whistler parks, at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), in various Burnaby parks, and, internationally, at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and the Cook Islands.

Isobel would be most unhappy if we did not include some words about her partner in life, travel and all kinds of misadventures. Her husband, Don MacLaurin, had a celebrated career as a forester. He studied both economics and ecology and his work took him on travels around the world, but some of his biggest impacts were here in Whistler. For decades, Don worked tirelessly on the Whistler Interpretive Forest, mapping and developing the trails — such as Riverside Trail, designing tours, and helping people understand the forest and its importance. He also helped to preserve the Ancient Cedars, the Musical Bumps, the Community Forest, and Lost Lake Park, to name just a few. In honor of Don's contributions, the suspension bridge spanning the Cheakamus River is called MacLaurin's Crossing.

Isobel's talent, skill and diversity as an artist was celebrated in 2018, when Arts Whistler hosted a retrospective exhibition of 70 years of her work. And now, as we celebrate her life, we are so grateful for the kindness, affection and friendship she gave to Arts Whistler. There will never be another like her.

We love you Isobel and we're going to miss you terribly. Rest in peace... but maybe after a glass of bubbly or two.