



Dr Clara Ellen Henderson

September 27, 1955 - October 2, 2016

DR. CLARA ELLEN HENDERSON, died in her 62nd year on October 2, 2016 in Bloomington, Indiana surrounded by loving friends and family. The cause of death was a rapidly progressive malignancy. Clara was her usual high-spirited, hilarious, active self until her final few weeks.

Clara was the youngest of four siblings born to the Rev. William A. (Bill) and Margaret (Peggy) Henderson on September 27, 1955 in Walkerton, Ontario (Canada). She is survived by siblings John (Dorothy), Margaret and Sandy (Patty); three nieces Sonya (Andrew), Emma (Scott) and Kate; four nephews Joel (Joanna), Daniel (Heather), Taylor and Graeme; one grandniece, Kaya, and one grandnephew, Noah. She is predeceased by her parents and sister-in-law Patty.

Clara lived in Woodstock where she completed her elementary and secondary schooling. She was graduated from York University in Toronto in 1978 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Clara was a versatile musician, gifted in voice, piano, dance, guitar and East Indian drumming. Whenever possible, she enjoyed spending time with her family in the summer and at New Years at the family cottage at Bruce Beach on Lake Huron.

In 1982 she was employed by The Presbyterian Church in Canada and invited to work in Malawi with the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian to help develop indigenous hymns and music. Using her taping of various choirs and congregations and her own knowledge of the principles of harmony, Clara wrote down the Malawians' music. Her quick grasp of

Chichewa, the language most commonly spoken in Malawi, her appreciation of their music and her sense of humor endeared her to the Malawians. She also enjoyed the community of other missionaries and of medical staff who worked in Blantyre. She was known for throwing parties, making Christmas tree buns and creating laughter. Her gift of mimicry extended into the orchestral (the trumpet) and natural (the African fish eagle, *Haliaeetus vocifer*) realms. It was in Malawi that she developed her passion for tennis and continued to play in Bloomington.

Clara worked in Malawi until 2001, (except for a hiatus in 1993-1995, for M.A. studies), paving the way for her doctoral thesis work, in the midst of which she returned to Malawi for another year in 2003-2004. She earned her MA in 1995 and her Ph.D. in 2009 in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University. Her doctoral dissertation was entitled "Dance Discourse in the Music and Lives of Presbyterian Mvano Women in Southern Malawi" and was awarded the Esther L. Kinsley prize for the outstanding dissertation in the humanities at IU that year. Her thesis examined the importance of dance as a means of theological commentary, individual and collective prayer, and social exchange for the contemporary members of Presbyterian women's guilds (Mvano) in Malawi.

She went on to play a major role in the EVIA (Ethnographic Video for Instruction and Analysis) project. More recently she was appointed Associate Director of the Institute for Digital Arts and Humanities in the IU Office of the Vice Provost for Research and held that position until her death. Here she advised faculty on grants in the area of the arts and humanities, particularly in the digital humanities. At IU she also taught several classes in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. Clara will be missed for the infectious sense of joy she brought to every social gathering and workplace she graced. She will be valued for the care with which she nurtured the research of others in her work with the Office of the Vice Provost for Research. And she will be prized for the passion she possessed for the digital humanities, particularly the EVIA project.

Clara's Bloomington home was the social hub for the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. She hosted innumerable visitors and gatherings, and along with a colleague, took a special delight in writing new lyrics for well-known songs to celebrate important birthdays, anniversaries and transitions within the department, such as the adaptation of Bob Dylan's classic song, renamed "The Field, It Was a-Changin'," to commemorate the retirements of several colleagues.

Clara was a member of First Presbyterian Church, Bloomington where she served as an elder, was involved in teaching Church School, mentoring confirmands, training a youth musical group and recently designing a mosaic which an intergenerational group created.

The Very Rev. Professor Silas Ncosana of Blantyre Synod wrote - "Clara, like no other missionary from overseas, entered into Malawian culture through local languages and music. She knew what "ziphwidzi" were and even ate them. She spoke Lomwe, Mang'anja, Chewa, Yao, Tumbuka and even Ngoni She danced chop. chintali, chide and so forth... Clara loved our people ate with them, danced with them, prayed with them, laughed with them and cried with them. She matured in Malawi, becoming truly one of us. Now she is home with the Father"

Clara's death is mourned by colleagues, friends and family of all ages from many places around the world who will miss her energetic spirit, quick and ready wit, her warm hospitality, her many specialty dishes, sly chuckle, thigh-slapping guffaw, her creativity on the dance floor, and her luminous, warm, nurturing, loving, kind presence.

In lieu of flowers, donations in memory of Clara may be made to International Ministries of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to fund music programs of Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Malawi or to Presbyterian World Service and Development for projects in Malawi or the Mission and Outreach program of First Presbyterian Bloomington Indiana.

A funeral service for Clara will be held in Trinity Presbyterian Church York Mills on Saturday Oct 22nd at 1pm and a Memorial service will be held in First Presbyterian Church Bloomington Indiana on Saturday Oct 29th 1pm. Another Memorial Service is being planned to be held in St. Michael's and All Angel's Church in Blantyre, Malawi.