

JUSTICE AT LAST

Reynolds

(1)

There was an advert from UCCB for a course in _____
_____ taught by Dr. Graham

Reynolds. I expressed an interest in it and Joe urged me to inquire further since he knew I always wanted to attend University. I called and was assured that I was more than welcome to audit the class.

My immediate reaction to attending the university, the students, the lectures, the halls, was one of exhilaration.

During one of Dr. Reynolds' lectures the New Glasgow incident involving Viola was shown in a video. I mentioned she was my sister and Dr. Reynolds realized that there was personal history in his class. He asked me to speak to a few of his classes and this developed in to speaking at a number of the local schools in the Cape Breton Regional School Board. I also spoke about Viola in a few schools in Halifax and Truro.

In 2006 CBC reporter Adrian Harewood from Toronto, interviewed me about ~~Viola~~ in preparation for a planned radio play about Viola. He spoke of the injustice and suggested that I contact the Mayor of New Glasgow suggesting that a commemorative plaque or something similar be considered for the town. On his return to Toronto Mr. Harewood visited New Glasgow and spoke to the then Mayor Anne Maclean about the incident and made the suggestion of a memorial. He advised us that she seemed open to some form of recognition but that it would have to be up to the town council for deliberation and decision. ?

The 2009 April / May issue of The Beaver (now - Canada's History) printed an article titled "Canada's Rosa Parks" about Viola and the New Glasgow incident. This prompted me to consider writing New Glasgow again.

It was now 63 years since the incident and my thoughts were that very few would know about it, and fewer would care to do anything about it. I did write and Mayor MacLean said much the same as she had indicated to Mr. Harewood. Since she was retiring it would have to be presented to the new mayor. I procrastinated again but finally wrote to Mayor Barrie MacMillan in July of 2009. He replied that the

copy of letter enclosed

matter would be looked into and thanked me for my letter, ~~this led to a later phone conversation with the town lawyer.~~ (2)

On February 25, 2010 I was invited to speak to the students at Oxford Street School in Halifax. The Chronicle Herald reporter Sherri Borden Colley ^{+ newspaper quote} interviewed me and also retired provincial court judge Clyde F. MacDonald of New Glasgow. The articles were printed on March 6, 2010 as "Unintentional Activist", referring to Viola, and "Desmond Should Be Pardoned".

The following day Premier Darrell Dexter announced that the province was investigating the possibility of issuing a pardon for Viola and Justice Minister Ross Landry would contact Viola's four remaining sisters, three in Montreal and myself in North Sydney.

On April 16, 2010, in the Red Chamber at Government House, Premier Darrell Dexter apologized to Viola's family on behalf of the province of Nova Scotia. The Provincial Lt.-Gen. The Honourable Mayann Francis granted Viola a free pardon under the Royal Prerogative of Free Mercy. This was the first time in Canada that a posthumous pardon had been awarded.

Explanation of "free" pardon. Copy of pardon?

On August 16, 2010, I was invited by the Town of New Glasgow to take part in celebrations which coincided with the Black Homecoming Gala. A commemorative bench was dedicated in the Africentric Heritage Park, also, an interpretive panel was unveiled by The Honourable Mayann Francis in Laurie park New Glasgow and at the Town Hall a portrait of Viola by Pictou artist David MacIntosh was unveiled by Mayor Barrie MacMillan and the Hon Mayann Francis.

On November 8, 2010, the portrait of Viola was unveiled in Province House by Lt.-Gen. The Honourable Mayann Francis.

On the same day as the portrait unveiling I ~~attended~~ (was attending) the launching of the Viola Desmond chair in Social Justice at Cape Breton

University. Dr. Graham Reynolds was appointed as the first holder of the chair.

* *Author of "Innocent until proven Guilty"*

200
requests
5
granted

At the same event it was announced that the Viola Desmond and Wanda Robson Scholarship was to be established by the university.

3

ENDING

I owe much gratitude to many people and institutions for permitting me to tell "Viola's

Story". I sincerely hope that it has helped others to develop cultural tolerance in the fight against racism. Educating myself so I could help in the education of others in the fight when social injustices are perpetrated has been my goal. Thank you, Cape Breton University, (my alma mater), thank you for giving me the most memorable years of my life!

(STAMP)