

Six Nations iconic land defender, Ruby Montour, passes

By Jim Windle

SIX NATIONS – Ruby Montour, who became an icon and a symbol of Aboriginal land rights while at the same time striking terror to the hearts of developers in Brantford, Caledonia Hagersville and along the Haldimand Tract, is gone.

On Friday, May 22nd, at the home of her daughter Linda on Fifth Line Road, Six Nations, Montour suffered a fall which resulted in her heart stopping.

Floyd, her husband of 28 years, watched Ruby leave their home and walk across the road to her daughter's. While walking up the stairs to her daughter's house, she fell backwards striking her head on a large stone. First responders were unable to resuscitate her. According to the coroner, she died instantly. She was 73 years of age.

For almost a decade, the little woman in that familiar, signature red hat could be seen — and heard — at most protests, work stoppages and community meetings where Six Nations land rights and treaty rights were the topic throughout the Haldimand Tract.

In the eyes of those who did not know or care to know why Ruby did what she did, they may have labelled her a troublemaker.

But to those who knew the truth behind what Ruby was doing — she was looked up to as a brave and courageous woman with deep-rooted conviction not only in the traditional Confederacy Chiefs Council, but also in her Creator, whom she would quote



regularly, even while insisting construction stop immediately.

"We're here for our children and our grandchildren," she would tell people who asked why she did what she did, and she meant it.

Floyd learned in his years with her that whatever she said she said from her heart.

"I remember being at a meeting in Brantford once with Ruby and she stood and spoke," Floyd recalls. "She only said a few words and a non-Native guy sitting a couple of seats down said, 'now that is coming from the heart.' People recognize that."

Ruby was never afraid to go nose to nose with anyone, even if she had to stand on a chair to do it, armed only with her convictions, love for her people and a searing sense of humour that could surgically slice and dice anyone who opposed her point of view, while at the same time remain respectful of the person. This is a rare art that earned her respect from both friend and foe

alike.

Developer and former Brantford Council member Mike Quattrociocchi became quite familiar with Ruby and Floyd when he began construction on a small housing development in Brantford which Ruby and Floyd attended several times and stopped almost as often. He was shocked to hear of Ruby's death.

"What is there to say about Ruby," he told TRT, "She was a passionate woman with strong convictions and not afraid to stand up for what she believed. You can't fault anyone for that."

Another Brantford developer, Steve Charest, also recalls his experiences with the Montours.

"During the first half of my time knowing Ruby, I did not fully understand the deep passion and commitment she had for not only her people, but for all people," says Charest. "I am forever grateful for Ruby and Floyd coming into my life."

Ruby was home after several weeks in hospital

with complications after gall bladder surgery. She was still a little weak when she was released, but it did not slow her down much as she continued to keep tabs of development in the area and get around the community.

Along with her husband Floyd, she brought Six Nations' land issues into the mainstream not only with her presence at construction sites and ensuing media interviews, but with speaking engagements where she tried to educate the non-Native residents living on the Haldimand Tract of the broken treaties, the land thefts and the human rights violations perpetrated against her people.

Sitting on his porch Tuesday afternoon where he and Ruby spent a lot of time together, it was clear that Floyd has found peace with it all and only wants to remember the good things and not dwell on the sorrow.

"I don't feel like grieving," he admits openly. "It's not because I don't love her, it's just that although

we were always very close, we each had our own lives as well and although I will miss her, I have come to grips with it all. We had a good life together."

Upon news of her death, it is interesting to note the broad spectrum of messages of condolence and sorrow that began to flood the social media from provincial politicians and developers to fellow land protectors who stood along side of she and Floyd on the front lines.

Rank and file Six Nations residents, Caledonians, Brantfordians and others who follow Native rights issues were also saddened by Ruby's death. Even if they disagreed with her, for the most part they recognized and respected her passion and her courage.

Hazel E. Hill: Ruby Montour took 'the red hat ladies' to a whole new level and meaning. Her love of our people and her love and faith in God the Creator provided her the strength and insight to take on the development world by storm and allowed her a platform, to speak out against the atrocities of colonialism; genocide as against the Haudenosaunee, in an area that had in some respects been the shield for those acts for generations. It was an honour and a privilege to know her, work along side her and to call her my friend. Ruby was truly a gem.

Elected Chief Ava Hill: "I am truly sorry to hear about the passing of Ruby Montour. Ruby was a fierce and feisty Land Protector and wasn't afraid to stand up to anyone. Over

the past few years, she became known for always being on the front lines and for standing up for what she truly believed in. She will always be remembered in our community as Ruby "Red Hat" and for being passionate and outspoken about the Six Nations Land Rights. On behalf of the Six Nations Elected Council, I want to extend sincere condolences to her husband, Floyd, and to the rest of her family."

Brantford Mayor Chris Friel: "We're very sorry to hear of Ruby's passing. Our condolences go out to her family. We may have stood on opposite sides of barricades but I have always admired her passion and commitment to her beliefs."

Carrie Lester: My deepest condolences to Floyd and friends. Ruby was passionate and tenacious about defending the land of the Six Nations. To see her in action in her matter-of-fact way standing up to judges was truly inspiring!

Jan Longboat: "I think she took her role as a Haudenosaunee woman quite seriously and I commend her for that. Our role is to protect Mother Earth for future generations and she worked at it tirelessly, at all hours of the day and night. She also used her voice and that's important. I work with women who are survivors of the residential school and we always say use your voice to express your feelings. You must be heard."



There is more than one way to make your point, and Ruby would always find it, even by commandeering a backhoe.



Marching together with Elected Chief Ava Hill and Councillor Helen Miller in Ottawa.