

New Teacher's Creative Activities Fund



The memory of Emily Longworth lives on through a fund for new teachers.

The Longworth Legacy

BY DOROTHY BARTOSZEWSKI | PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE LONGWORTH FAMILY



Her enthusiasm is still contagious. It radiates from her toddler photos. It's there in her megawatt grin as she savours dim sum in Hong Kong, poses with Christmas reindeer and wise men in Bolivia and laps up ice cream on a sunny day outing with a pal.

Emily Longworth lived with a rare gusto. She loved people, travel – experiencing other cultures and sharing her own. When she applied to do her first year of university in England, at Queen's University, her parents were worried she might be homesick – but not a chance. Emily was too busy making friends and exploring Europe on the weekends to hanker for home.

So no one was surprised when Emily chose a career as a teacher, where her people skills could shine. And it was entirely in character when Emily, as a student teacher in a lower-income, culturally diverse neighbourhood, bought teaching supplies with the money she made from waitressing and helped subsidize students who couldn't pay for field trips.

"Sometimes I would pick her up after a field trip, and I could see how all the students really responded to her – they just loved her," says Emily's father, Tom Longworth. "And she really loved them."

Emily had the makings of an incredible educator. But she never got the chance to share all her joie de vivre with a class of her own. After graduating as a teacher, the 25-year-old celebrated with a backpacking trip to South America, where she died with her friend Lauren and eight others in a hostel fire in Chile in February 2007.

Emily's death was a terrible tragedy. But even while dealing with the initial shock and grief, her family wanted the good intentions of family and friends to be channelled in a way that would keep Emily's generous spirit alive.

"As soon as people heard what happened, large quantities of flowers started appearing on our doorstep. We understood – people wanted to do something and flowers were what they knew to do. But we wanted to find a more lasting legacy for Emily," says Tom.

A family friend suggested setting up a charitable fund through Vancouver Foundation. Tom and his daughter Katie investigated, and were impressed by the Foundation's professionalism, low overhead and capacity to accept donations in less than 24 hours.

"The Vancouver Foundation staff were fantastic. They understood the circumstances and did all the administrative stuff so we could focus on what we needed to do," says Tom.

The fund was easily ready in time for Emily's celebration of life. The Emily Longworth New Teacher's Creative Activities Fund has since received hundreds of donations in amounts from \$25 to \$10,000. It gives grants annually to fund curriculum enrichment or extracurricular activities by student teachers that "promote multicultural understanding, healthy lifestyle and environmental awareness, and inspire students to achieve their full potential in life."

The fund has already supported a plethora of creative projects. It has helped Grade 1 students create "cuddle quilts" to be donated to children who have lost a family member to cancer and enabled Grade 5 and 6 students to start a school-wide composting program. It also financed a permanent, multimedia mural about the oceans, produced by Grade 2 and 3 students under the direction of artist Angela Grossman.

"With Emily's Fund, the teachers don't receive money themselves; the projects benefit students and the broader community. We also try and direct it to lower-income kids who might not otherwise get these kinds of opportunities," Tom says.

"My wife Connie, my daughter Katie and I are all really involved with the fund. Bureaucracy used to really annoy Emily, so we've made it very simple to apply. The teachers who get the award are the same age as Emily was, and they're all very enthusiastic. We've met all of them and have visited the schools and seen the projects, and we send out reports to all the contributors on what's happened with the fund. It's really helped us in the grieving process, and it helps other people too. It's easy to forget it's not just the family that's grieving, Emily had so many friends."

"The fund has offered a place for all these people – from my business colleagues, people who know our family, Emily's teachers, to the parents of her students – to show their sympathy and remember Emily in a way that will make a difference to many children. We're really, really pleased with how it has worked out," says Tom. **VF**

To donate to the **Emily Longworth New Teacher's Creative Activities Fund**, or set up a memorial fund to honour someone special in your life, contact **Vancouver Foundation Donor Services** at **604-688-2204**.