

# A U S T R A L A S I A N P A R K S & L E I S U R E

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## Sara Raymond

March 25, 1985-  
August 10, 2010

by Geoff Canham

Tragically, on the morning of August 10th, 2010, Sara passed away in her sleep. She had died of an epileptic seizure at some point during the night. When Sara was found in the morning by her flatmates, it was already too late.

Sara Raymond was a vibrant, bright, energetic young woman on her way to lead and change the recreation industry, in ways the rest of us could begin to see but sadly now can only begin to imagine. Sara had a firm vision for the legacy she wanted to leave, and had already commenced her goals on an international basis. Following her degree in Parks and Recreation from the Utah State University, and her earlier degree in business management, Sara had only just started taking the world by storm. I had the honour and pleasure of hosting Sara at Opus International Consultants as a Parks and Recreation Project Intern, in Tauranga, New Zealand. This was after the availability of interns to New Zealand was advertised on the New Zealand Recreation Association website. Sara and I always used to laugh when Sara was never able to say N-Zed-R-A, always, N-ZEE-R-A.

Sara was intelligent, kind, generous, funny, fun, creative and adventurous. Sara was constantly busy, and in her short 11 weeks in New Zealand Sara had made a huge impact on her colleagues, the community groups

we briefly worked with, and the New Zealand Recreation conference attendees at the 'Thinking Recreation!' conference held in Gisborne during July.

Sara had been offered a full time job with Opus. On the previous day to her passing were finalising the new projects for Sara's full time role, and finalising NZRA articles for the journal that Sara had authored. Sara had had an immense influence on us all while she was briefly with us; Sara immersed herself in New Zealand and wanted to, as she put it succinctly, find a fine young Polynesian man and live here forever. There was a cultural connection; as a native Hawaiian, Sara's coming to New Zealand and immersion with Maori in our community saw an unfolding relevancy for many people.

At Sara's memorial service, Sara's Mother and Aunt planted a mighty Kauri tree, a tenacious pacific species with vitality and mana. The tree was planted amongst an area of other native revegetation plants Sara had planted during a voluntary planting day, when Sara was also incredulous at these things called 'gumboots', and wondering why our Kiwi men wore 'short shorts' that reminded her of American underwear (boxers), and why they were called 'stubbies', or 'Canterbury shorts.' That was just the beginning of a relentlessly humorous and at times ruthless treatment of the popular culture differences between the U.S and the rest of the world. In a seemingly infinite resource of subject matter, we started on words that should have 'u' in them, to less 'zeds' in other words, to straight out banter on accent and American 'Valley Girl' language, etc.

I only made Sara speechless once; that was when I went on and on about wooden decks for a visitor centre project, and only after a long silent trip back to town did she ask if this was something New Zealanders were

into. Specifically, Sara asked, were they common, and what was our fascination with them? I said, well, don't you have wooden decks in America? There was no answer. I said of course they were common; I had two at my house, to extend the size of the house, and we often stood on them to have our BBQs. I said that I'd point some out as soon as we got to the suburbs. Sara's eyes couldn't have been wider; and when she saw my example at the first house came to we had to stop the car until she had stopped laughing in a way that had made the car sway. 'Deck' was not the word Sara had heard with my Kiwi accent.

Sara infiltrated new situations quickly and was an infectious presence wherever we went. Sara's strong vision to create youth centres structured around physical activity and other forms of recreation to supplement youth services was an evocative 'construct' that was growing as a concept with those we discussed it with. Sara said that this was ultimately her goal and that she wanted that to happen in New Zealand with her input. Sara wowed us at the July 2010 'Thinking Recreation' national recreation planning seminar and the audience wouldn't let Sara sit down following her reflections on recreation in the U.S. and the benefits of internships. Sara captivated the audience and had us wanting more.

Sara leaves a substantial legacy, even after just 11 short weeks with us. Sara's university has set up the Sara Raymond Scholarship, NZRA will be naming a conference attendance sponsorship in Sara's honour, and Sara's mother, Susan Raymond, and I will be launching a project to place more interns into the New Zealand Recreation industry. Sara's attitude to life and goal setting is best articulated by herself on her facebook page; Sara showed us what is possible in a life and provided us a glimpse of what can happen dare we dream, work at it, and recreate.