

**Episkenew (Thom), Jo-Ann** (1952-2016) (BA, MA, PhD)

Jo-Ann was born in Winnipeg on August 19, 1952 to Scottish Métis parents Jim and Wilma Thom.

Jo-Ann Episkenew was the Director of the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre. Originally from Manitoba, she was a long-term resident of Saskatchewan. She was on leave from the First Nations University of Canada's English Department. Her research focused on how Indigenous literature and drama can heal Indigenous communities from historical trauma. She completed her PhD at the University of Greifswald in Germany—the first Métis woman to obtain a doctorate in that country. To that end, she was part of an interdisciplinary research collective that was awarded an operating grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to examine health leadership in Aboriginal youth through theatre. Their research findings have been published.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, her book *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing*<sup>2</sup> won the Saskatchewan Book Award for Scholarly Writing in 2009 and the First Peoples Writing Award in 2010.

Jo-Ann Episkenew was a past-president of the Association for Bibliotherapy and Applied Literatures, and served as Prairie Region representative for the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literatures and Language Studies. She was a member of the Regina Riel Métis Council and was a board member of the Aboriginal Health Research Network, the University of Regina Press, the Lung Association of Saskatchewan, the Indigenous Literary Studies Association (a founding member), and was a member of the Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction.<sup>3</sup> She also served as a mentor for dozens of Indigenous academics, encouraging them to pursue their post-secondary goals. A mother of 13 children in a blended family, she lived in Regina with her husband Clayton and two of her grandchildren. In 2015, she was awarded the Regina YWCA Women of Distinction Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2016, Jo-Ann Episkenew was awarded an Indspire Award for Education. In February 2016, she died of viral pneumonia.



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<sup>1</sup> Linda Goulet, Jo-Ann Episkenew, Warren Linds, and Karen Arnason, "Rehearsing with Reality: Exploring Health Issues with Aboriginal Youth Through Drama," in Sharon McKay, D. Fuchs and I. Brown, eds. *Passion for Action Building on the Strength and Innovative Changes in Child and Family Services—Voices from the Prairies*. 2009. *Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal*.

<http://cwrp.ca/publications/1120> and Warren Linds, Felice Yuen, Linda Goulet, Jo-Ann Episkenew, and Karen Schmidt, "Exploring and Re-creating Indigenous Identity through Theatre-based Workshops," in Drew Chappell, ed., *Children Under Construction: Critical Essays on Play as Curriculum*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010, 41-62.

<sup>2</sup> Jo-Ann Episkenew, *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Jeanelle Mandes, "Tribute to Dr. Jo-Ann Episkenew," *Eagle Feather News* Feb. 19, 2016.  
<http://www.eaglefeathernews.com/news/index.php?detail=1912>.

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