

Samantha Li

Samantha Stephanie Li was born in Toronto on 6 June, 1985, of parents Jane Li and Stephen Payne.

She was educated in downtown Toronto, initially, at Market Lane Public School and was in the Gifted Kids programme. Subsequently she attended Ledbury Park Middle School. Her secondary education started at Lawrence Park Collegiate, Toronto, and was completed at Queen Elizabeth High School, Halifax, after her move there at age 16. Samantha began her university studies at Dalhousie University in 2004 with a concentration in Music; she won the Bennett Chittick Prize in English that academic year. Subsequently she transferred to the English programme and graduated in May, 2009, B.A. with first-class Honours. She was awarded a SSHRC Postgraduate Scholarship and the James W. Tupper Fellowship and was to pursue a Masters degree at the University of British Columbia.

Samantha's musical studies began at the piano, initially at the Royal Conservatory of Music at age 5, and continued until age 13. She won competitions in various categories of the Kiwanis Music Festival. In Halifax she took up the violin, studying under Jennifer Jones for three years. She continued under Philippe Djokic at Dalhousie and won the 2005 Effie Mae Ross Scholarship in Music for violin performance. She played in the Nova Scotia Youth Orchestra, the Dalhousie Chamber Orchestra and was a member of two string quartets.

Tragically, it was while returning to Halifax after a quartet performance on 11 July, 2009 that Samantha Li, aged 24, died suddenly in a car accident near New Glasgow, NS.

English literature was Samantha's first love. Her imagination and a passion for reading and writing – including poetry – developed relatively early. By senior high school she was tackling the literary canon alone -Virginia Woolf would become her literary heroine - and writing seriously herself. Her intellectual horizons expanded rapidly at university, stimulated both by the courses available and by contact with like-minded people. Samantha exhibited an extraordinary intellectual reach, combined with a striking creativity and a rare originality, both in her written work and class discussions; she continually explored ideas and challenged interpretations. She earned the respect of her fellow students and professors alike. Although Samantha had started university with thoughts of becoming a writer, by the completion of her B.A. she was considering an academic career. She was full of promise.

Music, and the violin in particular, became Samantha's second love. The passion, discipline and pursuit of excellence evident in her academic work also appeared in her musical studies. Despite coming to the violin late she practised earnestly to become a fine performer in a relatively short time, and an appreciated young member of Halifax's classical music community. She cared about the quality of her tone as much as that of her writings.

Though accomplished Samantha was not competitive or pretentious, rather she displayed an open-minded generosity and a self-deprecating grace, both in the classroom and socially. Her family, friends and colleagues found in Samantha a thoughtful, gentle and compassionate spirit.

Amongst these were included faculty and staff of the English and other departments: Samantha engaged her professors as persons as well as mentors. Samantha was valued and loved by all with whom she shared her brilliant but short life. Her beautiful and luminous presence touched many.