

# Cheryl Ann Milford: A Tribute To Someone Who Gave So Much of Herself To Help So Many

Sage N. Saxton, Psy.D.

The National Perinatal Association (NPA) is an interdisciplinary organization that strives to be a leading voice for perinatal care in the United States. Our diverse membership is comprised of healthcare providers, parents & caregivers, educators, and service providers, all driven by their desire to give voice to and support babies and families at risk across the country.

Members of the NPA write a regular peer-reviewed column in *Neonatology Today*.



***“Ms. Cheryl Ann Milford, Ed.S., gave tirelessly throughout her life to the fields of infant mental health, hospital staff support, and neonatology. This became abundantly clear during the recent annual National Perinatal Association Conference (held December 2-4, 2020).”***

***“My mom never let me forget that I was her first priority and the love of her life. But, I always knew that her (very close!) second priority was her work. For as long as I can remember, I’ve known that the babies, parents, and staff of every NICU she worked in were like a second family. I am so incredibly proud to be her daughter, and I hope I have even a fraction of the impact that she did.”***

***“It is not so much what we have in this life that matters. It is what we do with what we have.” – Fred Rogers.***

Ms. Cheryl Ann Milford, Ed.S., gave tirelessly throughout her life to the fields of infant mental health, hospital staff support, and neonatology. This became abundantly clear during the recent annual National Perinatal Association Conference (held December 2-4, 2020). Many touching tributes and special memories were shared among conference participants. Some of those memories, among others, are shared here to honor the late, great Cheryl. Cheryl lived in Huntington Beach, California, with her beloved cairn terriers Nessa and Baxter. She passed away on February 29, 2020.

***“Perhaps the only time we can truly recognize a huge contribution is when we are grieving the loss of all that Cheryl has given to us.”***

***“Cheryl was like a second mother to me... she took people under her wing without ever expecting anything in return. She was the epitome of generosity and selflessness...it is undeniable that through her influence and love, she left this world brighter, kinder, and overall better than it was before she came.”***

Cheryl practiced as a neonatal psychologist for over 40 years. She spent 34 of those years providing psychological, neurodevelopmental, and infant mental health services in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) and developmental follow-up clinics.

Cheryl graduated from high school in 1972, earned her B.A. in psychology (1976), M.A. in psychology (1977), and her Ed.S. in school psychology (1978) at Western Michigan University. She was certified as a School Psychologist in both Michigan and Pennsylvania and practiced as a school psychologist in the East De-

troit Public Schools until 1982. In 1983, her work in early childhood and infancy began, and she served as a psychologist and coordinator of the developmental follow-up program for St. Francis Hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She was a Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the University of California, Irvine Medical Center from 1985-1993, where she served as the Developmental Director of the HOPE clinic (which provided support for opiate exposed neonates and their families). She attended The Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders Graduate School to pursue her Ph.D. between 2011 and 2014. She was a licensed educational psychologist in the State of California until her untimely passing.

***“Cheryl was a force. Her tenacious spirit and desire to help others made such a great difference in so many lives. Her legacy most certainly will carry on for generations to come”***

***“Cheryl was a force. Her tenacious spirit and desire to help others made such a great difference in so many lives. Her legacy most certainly will carry on for generations to come”***

***“You never had to wonder what she was thinking because she always told you, that is one of the many things I loved about her.”***

Cheryl was passionate about **neonatology**. She served as an expert witness in numerous medical malpractice and neonatal cases and a neonatal psychologist for Children’s Hospital and Magee-Women’s Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA. During her 21 years as a neonatal psychologist in Pittsburgh, PA, Cheryl chaired or co-chaired multiple committees focused on family-centered care, coordinated the neonatal follow-up clinic, and administered weekly NICU discharge rounds. She helped create and implement comprehensive developmental programs at both the NICU of

Readers can also follow

**NEONATOLOGY TODAY**

via our Twitter Feed

**@NEOTODAY**



Magee-Women's Hospital and the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

*"Your selfless giving to the "business" of advocacy and policy in the perinatal space put you as a leader and model to others."*

Cheryl's **research** primarily focused on nursing practice environments and NICU outcome. She was Primary Investigator or Co-investigator on multiple studies and was involved in multiple trials examining the Magee Neonatal Feeding Assessment. She was interested in the impact of interventions in the NICU including adaptive car seat inserts, antidepressant use during pregnancy, music therapy, co-bedding, and delivery room resuscitation. Publications included multiple chapters, manuscripts, and internet contributions related to implementing family centered nursing care and promoting best practice in NICU follow-up settings.

*"She was profoundly motivated to provide the best for those who were most at risk."*

Cheryl was a leader in the **promotion of staff wellness**. Her independent practice: Cheryl Milford Consulting Innovative Service for the NICU, Infant Mental Health & Early Intervention Agencies and Professionals was created to reduce burnout among professionals in intensive and critical care units. She was proud of her program: Caring for the Caregiver: Supporting Optimal Mental Health for NICU Staff to be taught bedside to ensure optimal mental health for NICU staff. Components included self-care, staff support, developing a supportive staff culture in the NICU, and best practice.

*"When she left clinical practice, and the opportunity came up to become more involved at NPA, she was thrilled... she felt like she had found "her people," professionals and advocates that shared her passion and love for improving the*

*lives of children and families."*

*"Cheryl is part of the DNA of NPA."*

Never one to sit still, Cheryl became **Director of Development/ Outreach for the National Perinatal Association (NPA)** in 2017. This role combined her passion for infants and young children, support for vulnerable families, and interest in creating a personal and professional connection with like-minded nonprofit and industrial partners. It is through the NPA that many of us first met our beloved Cheryl.

*"She was an invaluable asset and a tireless worker, totally devoted."*

*"She was the most cerebral down to earth intellect I've ever known."*

Cheryl was passionate about **education**. She served as an adjunct professor at Chatham University (2008-2016) and as a lecturer in Infant Mental Health through the University of Pittsburgh (2016-2018).

*"She was a loving combination of friend, co-worker, drill sergeant, cheerleader, and wise sage advisor."*

Cheryl volunteered her time to many national and international organizations, including the National Perinatal Association (NPA), Postpartum Support International (PSI), the World Association for Infant Mental Health, the California Association for Infant Mental Health, and the Pennsylvania Association for Infant Mental Health. She was both a founding member and past Vice-President of the Pennsylvania Association for Infant Mental Health.

*"I am sure that her mentorship was one of the reasons that our membership of NICU psychologists has grown. Cheryl had experienced everything that could happen in the NICU."*

*"She was a mentor, friend, confidant, buddy, and my inspiration in so*





**many ways.”**

Cheryl was a mentor and friend to everyone fortunate enough to know her. Along with Dr. Michael Hynan, she provided structural expertise, guidance, and mentorship, for the newly reorganized National Network of NICU Psychologists.

Cheryl would say it is the little things that give life its richness and meaning. Thank you, Cheryl for the million little things you shared, the laughter, joy, and tears. Our lives are better because of you.

**“You will always be remembered. You will always be treasured. You will always be loved.”**

On Behalf of the National Perinatal Association (NPA) and the National Network of NICU Psychologists (NNNP)

*Conflict of Interest Disclosures: The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose.*

*Disclosure: The National Perinatal Association [www.nationalperinatal.org](http://www.nationalperinatal.org) is a 501c3 organization that provides education and advocacy around issues affecting the health of mothers, babies, and families.*

**NT**

*Note from the editor:*

*Cheryl meant so much to so many. I met Cheryl as a Fellow during my training at University of California, Irvine. She transcended traditionally boundaries, impacting so many families and perhaps, more than she even realized, clinicians as well. She made a huge impact on me and my approach to patient care. Cheryl was someone I could talk to who could relate to me at all levels of my career. She and I also worked together at Loma Linda Children's hospital and of course, the National Perinatal Association.*

*The last time we talked, at dinner, just before COVID times, she recounted the story of how Lou Gluck, MD, the Division Chair and renown academician, insisted on attending at the birth of her daughter. Somehow, what should have been routine was at once transformative. Cheryl knew how to tell a story. I wish I had the chance to sit with her and hear a few more.*

*As we look forward to new challenges in our field, we should not forget those who brought us to where we are today. Cheryl, may your memory always be honored by those whose lives you have touched.*

*Mitchell Goldstein, MD  
Editor-In-Chief*

**Corresponding Author**



Sage N. Saxton, Psy.D.  
Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics  
Training Director, LEND Program  
Director, NICU Follow Up Program  
Child Development & Rehabilitation Center  
P. O. Box 574  
Portland, OR 97207-0574  
office 503 494-2672 | fax 503 494-6868  
Sage Saxton <[saxtons@ohsu.edu](mailto:saxtons@ohsu.edu)>

