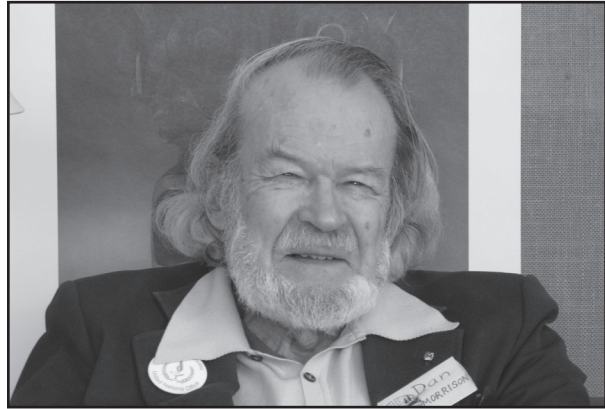


# Dan A. Morrison

*Humanist, Rationalist, Idealist*

*1936-2017*



*Photo by Richard Young, January 2009*

## **Madeline Weld**

I met Dan Morrison in the early 1990s. It could have been at an event of the Humanist Association of Ottawa, of which Dan was a founding member in 1968, along with Blodwen and Joe Piercy, Paul Pfalzner, and others. Or it could have been at a national conference of the Humanist Association of Canada (now called Humanist Canada). But I would see him quite regularly at HAO meetings or social gatherings and HAC conferences. After I became a board member of Canadian Humanist Publications in 2012, I would also see him at the CHP board meetings. Dan was the treasurer. I hoped he wouldn't mind staying in that position for a long time, because it was not one I wanted. Accounting makes my eyes glaze over. But I need not have worried. As I learned after Dan's death, he had been treasurer of CHP for 32 years. Talk about dedication!

During his long tenure on the board of CHP, Dan didn't just serve as treasurer. He had previously also served on the editorial board for CHP's quarterly magazine (once called *Humanist in Canada*, now *Humanist Perspectives*) and was book review editor for a long time. And right up to the end, he was the one who stored the stock of CHP books in his home and mailed them to buyers. Dan tried to promote our magazine and books at libraries and book stores by bringing them copies of the magazine.

In addition to his many administrative activities, Dan was also a humanist officiant. He and Simon Parcher became the first two certi-

fied humanist officiants in 1996 when – after years of lobbying the Ontario government – the Registrar General of Ontario authorized the Humanist Association of Canada to nominate humanist marriage officiants. Dan served as an officiant for 15 years.

Dan Alexander Morrison was born on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1936, in Cambridge, New Zealand, to Carl Schmidt, a Dane, and Margaret (née Baird), of English descent. His only sibling, Maria, was born a year later. It was from his father's Danish heritage that he received the given name "Dan." Carl Schmidt died of stomach cancer in 1941 and five-year-old Dan's family moved briefly to Auckland before settling in Whangarei. Margaret met and married Travers Morrison, and, at age 13, Dan was sent off to boarding school with his new name: Dan Morrison. He returned to Whangarei for three years and finished high school at age 17. He immediately entered Auckland University College, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in 1957, followed by a Master of Science in Chemistry in 1958.

After graduation, Dan worked for three years in the New Zealand government's Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, while earning a yellow belt in judo. In 1962, at age 25, he pulled up roots and went to England on an 8-week voyage by ship, passing through Singapore and the Suez Canal. He visited his relatives in Denmark and was soon touring Spain with a friend. Then he went to London

where he drove a wine delivery van between stints as a supply teacher. That summer, he was touring Scandinavia by car with three friends, ending with a return visit to Denmark. Then he went off on his own through Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, hitchhiking and staying in youth hostels.

In the fall of 1962, Dan began three years of teaching chemistry at Orange Hill Girls' Grammar School in the Edgware district of north London. He still had the travel itch, touring Scotland in the summer of 1963 and revisiting Denmark in the summer of 1964, then driving through Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands in his tiny Morris Minor, which sometimes served as alternate accommodation to youth hostels. In the summer of 1965, he took a train to Florence and Rome, then hitch-hiked to Venice and Milan, before returning home through Calais, France.

In the fall of 1965, Dan took the ship *Queen Mary* to New York. On September 5<sup>th</sup> of that year, he became a landed immigrant in Canada at Fort Erie. He taught chemistry at Lambton County Collegiate & Vocational Institute in Petrolia, Ontario. In 1966, he moved to Ottawa to take a job at the Eastern Ontario Institute of Technology (now known as Algonquin College) where he taught chemistry and physical chemistry for 33 years.

Dan married Elisabeth in 1968. Three years later, the couple moved into a house on Sunnycrest Drive, which was to remain his home for the rest of his life. In 1972, their son, Daniel, was born. (Many thanks to Elisabeth and Daniel for sharing the story of Dan's life!)

Dan supported many good causes and could be very generous with his donations. He got a write up in Estelle Taylor's *Hello Volunteer!* column of the February 1995 issue of *Peace and Environment News* (kindly sent to me by Elisabeth Morrison) which describes Dan's activities in Operation Dismantle, the Humanist Association of Canada, the Ottawa Disarmament Coalition, the Peace and Disarmament sub-committee at the First Unitarian Congregation (he was committee chair when the article was

published), and the New Democratic Party. (I get exhausted just reading the list.) He had joined the Peace and Environment Resource Center (PERC), which publishes *Peace and Environment News*, in 1986 and served as president from 1989 to 1990. The *Hello Volunteer!* article said that Dan, who was a chemistry teacher at Algonquin College, chose to work only part time in the 1980s in order to dedicate more time to his organizations, but eased up on volunteering to again work fulltime around 1990 as he felt "too old for that kind of thing anymore," choosing instead to give money to organizations.

Early on – in the 1990s – Dan became a member of an organization that I have been involved with since its inception, which now goes by the name of Population Institute Canada. Like me, he was concerned about a world population growing by one billion people every dozen or so years. For many years, he often attended our meetings. At PIC's AGM in 2016, our vice-president Clifford Garrard was speaking about the difference that life members had made to our organization. Dan pulled out his cheque book and wrote PIC a cheque for \$500 to become a life member on the spot! He also gave generously to Canadian Humanist Publications. From 2000 on, he was a member and supporter of the New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists, who sent their condolences upon his death.

That Dan had many causes was attested to by the signs plastered on his front door and kitchen wall and his collection of buttons. One of the buttons said "Wearing buttons is not enough." Clearly Dan had taken that one to heart!

A person who so desires to do good on earth understandably sometimes gets impatient with humans as they really are. And Dan was not always patient with us earthlings. Dan read *Humanist Perspectives* (of which I became a co-editor shortly after I joined the CHP board) very carefully, and would inevitably find a typographical error or some other irritant. And he would let us know about them – sometimes in a way that questioned our intellectual qualifica-

tions. To quote from the tribute to Dan at his memorial service by his son Daniel, “In his efforts to be Correct, he has been described as Contrary, and sometimes Cranky – even Crotchety. If we dare move up one letter in the alphabet, some might say he was Difficult.” Indeed! (But as I get older, I’m more and more inclined to ask, “What’s wrong with being Contrary, Cranky and Crotchety? Heck, look at the state of the world!”)

One might also say that Dan was Challenging. In Daniel’s tribute to his dad, he relates how, during their pre-dinner together time, Dan would challenge his son with games ranging from logic puzzles to word games to math, the last of which were beloved by the father, not so much by the son. One time, Dan asked Daniel to divide 134 by 5. When Daniel asked for a piece of paper to work it out, his dad asked: “What for? Don’t they teach you anything in school?” (Note to Daniel: We on the CHP Board can feel your pain!) But don’t you know? – it’s so simple: just multiply by two! When the youngster had trouble understanding why you would multiply by two when you’re trying to get a smaller number, Dan persisted, until Daniel came out with the answer “268” to his dad’s satisfaction. All you needed to do was shift the decimal point – a fairly elementary thing for someone at home with a slide rule – because dividing by 5 is of course the same as multiplying by 0.2. And obviously, dividing 134 by 5 would bring you somewhere in the range of 20 to 30, so clearly the answer you’re looking for is “26.8.” Elementary, my dear Watson!

In addition to learning how to use shortcuts in math, Daniel says he also learned the importance of finding ways to work things out and not just doing things by rote. Daniel says that Dan showed him the importance of searching for the best method to achieve one’s goals. And Dan Morrison had many goals – which perhaps can all be summed up as trying to make this world a better place. He also had persistence – not letting a near-fatal motorcycle accident in 1992, which left him with permanent physical consequences, deter him from pursuing them.

As another leading humanist, Richard Thain, said in his tribute to Dan: “Dan was a man who was guided by strong Humanist beliefs and principles. He lived his day-to-day life by those principles.” Richard met Dan at the first HAO meeting he attended. The meeting was about the public funding of separate schools in Ontario and Dan gave him a copy of *Peace and Environment News* – all of which led Richard to join the organization. The next meeting was at the Morrisons’ house, where Richard was able to become acquainted with Dan’s truly impressive collection of buttons and the quotations and guiding principles adorning his kitchen wall.

Dan’s involvement with the Humanist Association of Canada allowed him to be involved with substantive projects dear to his heart: abolition of the death penalty, abortion rights, gay rights, the fight against public funding of religious schools, and the right-to-die movement. Typical of Dan’s frugality was his complaining to Richard about the expensive venue when the HAC, the American Humanist Association, and the Quebec Skeptics held a joint conference in Montreal in 1987. Surely Margaret Atwood could have received her Humanist of the Year Award at something less pricey than the Hôtel du Parc!

Ever the pragmatist, after he became ill, Dan apprised CHP President Simon Parcher – who would have to take over the functions of the treasurer in a hurry – of the whats and wheres of CHP’s finances from his hospital bed. Dan died in his sleep, after a brief illness, at the Civic Campus of the Ottawa Hospital, on April 8th, 2017, at the age of 80. His wife Elisabeth and son Daniel and friend Richard Thain were at his side. One of his favourite musical programs was playing on the radio. As Daniel says, we can only hope to leave this Earth as peacefully as Dan did. •

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