

Nova Scotia

## Nova Scotia columnist Jane Kansas remembered

Friend recalls her legacy as 'foundational activist' in Halifax queer community

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Jane Kansas speaks during a radio interview at CBC Nova Scotia in 2016. (Alex Mason/CBC)

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Nova Scotia columnist Jane Kansas is being remembered for her way with words.

Kansas created zines, plays and appeared on local radio stations — including CBC Radio. She also wrote for the now-defunct Halifax Daily News and The Coast. [According to her obituary](#), she died on Sunday in Kentville, N.S., from chronic kidney failure. She was 68.

"She was so sharp and so witty, and you thought she hated everything, but the truth was she loved everything," Kansas's friend Tara Thorne told CBC's *Mainstreet Halifax* in an interview on Monday.

"And you thought she hated people, but she loved people. If you go back into her writing and you see how observational it is, how thoughtful it is, how emotional it is — even though she outwardly might not be — you'll just be struck by the way that she viewed humanity. And she was so, so, so funny."

Kansas was born in Wichita, Kan., but grew up mostly in Ottawa. In the mid 1980s, she moved to Nova Scotia and opened the queer-friendly eatery Debbie Dinette in Hubbards. She then moved to Halifax and was involved in LGBTQ activism.

"Jane was a foundational activist in the queer community here. And, you know, she was gay when it wasn't OK, especially in a conservative place like this ... if there was an issue, she showed up for it," Thorne said. "If there was a parade, she went to it. She was loud. This is such a cliché, but she was loud and proud, and it was so important to her and so integral to her identity."

## Funny and profound

During Thorne's interview, *Mainstreet* aired past excerpts from Kansas that exemplified her wit and off-the-cuff observational humour. During a sound check in the 1990s, Kansas's guest asked her how she was that morning.

Kansas replied, "Oh, I'm fine, except I'm a little sleepy. But usually I get up quite early. But I'm still feeling sleepy because the milk was all sour at home, so I had to use coffee mate. Which is OK if you don't, you know, you've got to think of Coffee Mate as something entirely different. Don't classify it as milk and then you're fine. Kind of like Nescafe. Nescafe is great if you don't consider it coffee."

In another clip from 2015, Kansas talked about things that bother her, including people who buy lottery tickets and scratch them in public and people who look at photos they just

developed at the mall.

"There's just something about the pathos of buying lottery tickets — and I include my own patheticness as a lottery purchaser — but watching them, like, exercise it in public. For God's sakes, go home, eat your litre of ice cream by yourself — which is the way that I do it — and then scratch the Lotto ticket. Don't let us, the rest of us see it," she said.

Kansas likened people who looked at recently developed photos on a mall bench to "people who sit on the beach, you know, on Corfu, reading their tour guide to Greece."

"Like, you're right there, close the book, put your photographs away and look around and see all the little things that can make life worth living ... It's like if you drive all the time, looking in the rearview mirror, looking at your old photographs, you're going to crash sooner or later."

### ***Listen to Mainstreet's full interview with Tara Thorne***



**Mainstreet NS 16:54**

'Jane Kansas was an icon': Tara Thorne remembers her late friend

Halifax storyteller and activist Jane Kansas is being remembered for her writing, her wit and the path she paved for members of the LGBTQ+ community. She died on Dec. 18 from chronic kidney disease.

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*With files from Mainstreet Halifax*