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CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

# REFUGEE

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Vol. 10, No. 4

April 1991

## A Special Issue on Refugees from Ethiopia

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### In Memoriam

## KATHLEEN PTOLEMY

I had the good fortune of knowing Kathleen as a colleague, neighbour and friend.

All those here who worked with Kathleen would, I think, agree that she was an absolute pleasure to work with. She was collaborative, dependable, thorough, thoughtful, absolutely honest and direct without being insensitive to the feelings of others.

She was an example of how to bring out the best in people. She used to say she was a process person - as concerned for the way a decision was made as the actual decision itself. At meetings she would always come fully prepared, not only for the issue, but also to listen to others before speaking herself. When she spoke she was clear and her focus invariably helped to resolve matters. It was these skills that enabled Kathleen to do so much for so many people.

To give you a sense of just how great her contribution was, I thought I would tell you of a conversation I had yesterday with Beth Ferris, a friend and colleague of Kathleen from the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Beth related to me the overwhelming sadness that so many

people in Geneva felt upon hearing of Kathleen's death. While Beth expected that those who worked in Africa would be particularly upset at Kathleen's passing, because of all the work Kathleen had done there, Beth did not expect the response she got from other departments as well. One of her colleagues on the Middle East desk was most distraught, relating how Kathleen had done so much for Palestinians. Another colleague on the Latin American desk wept when remembering how Kathleen had been one of the first to respond to the desperate call for help by Chileans fleeing for their lives after the coup in their country.

As a neighbour, Kathleen epitomized all the old-fashioned values that are so hard to find today. Her door, both literally and figuratively, was always open. The Ptolemy kitchen should perhaps be protected as a historical site for so numerous have been the visitors and world travellers that have found comfort there. Kathleen, I know, would want it to be said that she herself drew enormous enjoyment and support from her neighbours. Her

commitment to community was constantly fuelled by the kindness of those that lived near her.

As a friend, Kathleen was warm, generous, supportive and absolutely loyal. She was all too willing to put aside her own needs and agenda for someone close to her. Yet, as I think about her friendship, I realize that no matter what I say about Kathleen, a more powerful portrait can be drawn from the words of the lady herself.

Several weeks ago I asked her if, when looking over her life, she had any regrets. She said no, that although she could have done a few things better as a teenager, she had no regrets. She then quietly added that she knew she had never compromised herself.

In speaking about death, Kathleen said that she did not fear it. Her anguish and grief in dying was in being separated from Dave, Margie, Rob and others that she dearly loved. As for death itself, Kathleen felt it marked a new beginning. She believed that if you lived a decent life, at death you joined in communion with other decent souls who had died before you. Her philosophy was close to



that of Teillard de Chardin. In describing his most "dearest and profound conviction" this French scientist, anthropologist, and "seer" to some wrote:

I believe what gives the universe ...its consistence is not the apparent solidity of the materials from which bodies are made. Rather it is the flame of organic development which has been running through the world since the beginning of time, consistently building itself up...Far from being impermanent and accidental, it is souls, and alliances of

*souls, it is energies of souls that alone progress infallibly, and it is they alone that will endure...*

What radiates from living beings is more valuable than their caresses.

What radiated from Kathleen is, I believe, ultimately more valuable than her mortality. As I loved her, I shall miss her, more deeply than words can express. But I *can* celebrate her life. It will be a beacon for me, a constant reminder that one can live with integrity, and with compassion for others in the larger world in which we live.

*Ninette Kelley*

## ICCR MOURNS

The Inter-Church Committee for Refugees mourns the untimely death at 51 of Kathleen Ptolemy, its first Coordinator. Kathleen most recently served as Anglican church consultant for Refugee Affairs. She was a former Secretary of the Canadian Council for Refugees. Kathleen championed the rights of the refugee. She was nurturer, encourager, prober, information source and personal helper for many refugee workers and refugees.

Emilio Castro, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches said in his letter of condolence, "We shall cherish ... her passionate solidarity with the "least among us", and her firm commitment to truth and justice ..."

The funeral took place in Toronto on Saturday, March 16, 1991.

### *Memorial donations to:*

Quaker Committee for Refugees  
c/o Nancy Pocock  
52 Elgin Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M5R 2V8

### *or to:*

The Primate's Fund  
Anglican Church of Canada  
600 Jarvis Street  
Toronto, Ontario M4E 1N3

### *Condolences to:*

David, Margie and Rob Ptolemy  
28 Bracken Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M4E 1N3

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## RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

The Centre for Refugee Studies at York University has announced the inauguration of the Kathleen Ptolemy Research Fellowship.

This fellowship, worth \$15 000, will be made available to assist a visiting scholar from developing countries to undertake research on refugees.

Preference will be given to scholars interested in the study of refugee women who have protection problems.

Donations welcome.

Please direct your inquiries to the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University.

## IN THIS ISSUE...

- 3 Ethiopia's Refugees ..... John Sorenson
- 6 Stranded 'Birds of Passage':  
Eritrean and Ethiopian Refugees in Khartoum ..... Gaim Kibreab
- 12 Women Refugees: Empowerment & Vulnerability ..... Helene Moussa
- 15 Resettled Refugees from Ethiopia:  
Who Gets Into the United States ..... Peter Koehn
- 21 Cross Cultural Understandings of Independence and Dependence:  
Conflict in the Resettlement of  
Single Ethiopian Males ..... Lucia Ann McSpadden