

March 30, 2015

### **Honouring the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mira Ashby Praunsperger's death**

Mira was a remarkable woman who touched many people's lives, as a friend, educator, social worker, humanitarian, mother and patriot working for Croatia.

Mira was born in Zagreb where she completed high school and studied medicine at the University of Zagreb. She had to interrupt her studies to leave Croatia in January 1945. She lived in Belgium, the USA and then finally landed in Canada in 1959, first in Montreal and finally settling in Toronto. For two years, she worked with her husband, Lord Ashby, in the United Nations, collaborating with French and English medical doctors to establish hospitals for refugees after the Second World War.

She was well-known in Canada and the USA for establishing a rehabilitation centre for people with brain damage from traffic accidents or workplace injuries, in 1973. This centre became a model for Europe, Australia, and Japan. She was the first to organize an international symposium for head injuries, under the name, "New Beginnings". These symposia were held each year in Canada in Calgary, Vancouver and Saskatoon. The participants were not only neurosurgeons but also educators and people from other professions related to this severe medical problem.

The centres help hundreds of children and teenagers return to high-school, university or their professional and private lives.

Mira played an active role in the community she lived in through the following actions:

- Volunteer work in social humanistic field with ethnic groups. Helping new Canadians adjust to their new country
- YMCA – Working with young people as a Counsellor and Group Leader
- Toronto General Hospital, Social Services Department – Summer relief Social Worker assigned to Neurosurgery and Cardiovascular Services
- CHIR /Community Head Injury Rehabilitation

She was in demand as a speaker at many conferences, which opened many doors to spread her message across Canada and establish her international recognition.

Over 1956, 1957, and 1958, Mira hosted the Croatian radio hour. At the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto on Jarvis St., she and members of Katarina Zrinska were busy teaching English to new immigrants, and participating in various festivals celebrating cultural diversity such as the 'Old World Bazaar', the Garden Party, Folk Festivals and concerts with exhibits of Croatian art, paintings and handworks. Mira always fondly remembered and talked about those days, and although life of new immigrants was tough, those were the happy times for Mira and

her friends. She was also an active member of the Croatian Academy of North America and AMCA.

Mira received many important awards, among which the most prominent are the:

- 1978 Distress Centre Award in recognition and appreciation for years and commitment to the lonely suicidal and depressed
- The Order of Canada Medal/Member of Order of Canada, 1984 (*this award is only shared with by another three people of Croatian origin*).
- The Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal, 2003

When Croatia proclaimed independence in 1990, together with Slavko and Biserka Butkovic, she visited Zagreb for the first time since she left in 1945, which made her extremely happy.

Passed away on June 16, 2005.

Sincerely,

**Margaret Butkovic**

Director, Library Services

CC Clemmer Health Sciences Library

**Mladen Vranic** O.C, O.Ont, MD, DSc, FRSC, FRCP(C), FCAHS

Professor Emeritus (active) of Physiology and Medicine

Canadian Medical Hall of Fame Laureate

University of Toronto