

Dedication

MELISSA J. KNAUER

(19 December 1953 – 16 June 1985)



Melissa Knauer (front row, second from left)

Melissa Knauer, a feminist anthropologist, died in a truck accident while doing research in Botswana in June 1985. Melissa was a woman who identified strongly with other women, who was committed to the struggle for women's liberation in Canada and internationally, and whose research was on African women. It is very appropriate that this issue commemorating the 1985 United Nations World Conference on Women be dedicated to her memory.

Melissa received her B.A. from Pennsylvania State University in 1975 and then went to the University of Toronto, where she received her M.A. (1977) and Ph.D. (1984) in Anthropology. As a graduate student she was part of several projects studying primate behaviour. In 1980 she was assistant co-ordinator of a research expedition on Gibraltar which studied the mating patterns of the Barbary apes.

Her Ph.D. thesis, "Breastfeeding Patterns and the Resumption of Postpartum Menstruation/Ovulation in Urban Canadian Women," was based on in-depth interviews with nursing mothers and was designed to investigate the relationship between biological activities, such as breastfeeding and menstruation/ovulation, and cultural practices. It was part of her long-term project of studying the interplay of the biological and the social in structuring the lives of women.

Following the completion of her Ph.D. thesis, Melissa joined the research team of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded project: "Aging, Caregiving and Social Change in an African Population." Her plan was to spend a year in the Kalahari desert in Botswana studying !Kung and Herero practices of caregiving. One of our last memories of Melissa was on the evening before the accident. We were sitting in the cab of our truck driving through the cold, clear night. As she drove, she talked about some intricacies of provisioning the trip but also kept up a soothing line of chatter both to include the young child in the conversation and to ease her into sleep. We practiced the click sounds of the !Kung language. Melissa explained the best way to place the tongue in relation to the teeth and palate. We talked about our project and details of the questionnaire.

Work, caregiving, support – Melissa did it all. She did it beautifully; she did it with her whole being. She did it out of her love for women, her unaffected self-confidence and her quest to learn. We were fortunate to have our lives touched by this extraordinarily strong, intelligent and energetic woman. We miss her deeply.

R.B.L., M.L., H.R.