

ON THE PASSING OF JUNE CALLWOOD

By Rutherford

June Callwood (2 June 1924 – 14 April 2007)

Canada has lost a living treasure.

Respected journalist, author, broadcaster, June was widely regarded as “Canada’s conscience”. Especially active on issues affecting children and women, June founded or co-founded over 50 Canadian social action organizations, including *Jessie’s*, a centre for teenage parents; *Casey House*, Canada’s first AIDS hospice (named for her 21-year old son, killed by a drunk driver); *Nellie’s*, a hostel for battered women; PEN Canada, the Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation, and Feminists Against Censorship. June was awarded the Order of Canada, made a Companion of the Order in 2000, and named “Woman of the Year” by B’nai B’rith. In 2005, in recognition of her commitment to neighbourhoods and human-scale urban planning, June was awarded the *Jane Jacobs Lifetime Achievement Award* (presented by Ms Jacobs herself shortly before her death in 2006).



Photograph of June Callwood by David Henderson © 2004

In addition to her articles, essays and books written in her own name, June was also the ghostwriter behind several books on the lives of several prominent Americans, including Charles Mayo, Otto Preminger and Barbara Walters.

I had the privilege of meeting June in 1995 in a workshop she led for aspiring writers, and after I left Canada, we stayed in contact through regular letters in which June continued to offer encouragement on my efforts. Her dexterity and tact in defence of the beleaguered reader still cut me to the quick. (She once described an early version of *The Shadow of the Photographer* as “...pitched too high for the human ear”. Anyone else would have said “shrill”.)

While there are many who knew her better than I, including her husband of over 60 years, Trent Frayne, her children and grandchildren, there are thousands more who can – and will – bear witness to her legacy of kindness, generosity. Her lifelong commitment to personal and social justice have been an inspiration that we will carry within us always. Thank you June.

When it is time to depart, there are not many of us are able to say that “we have warmed our hands by the fire of life” – but there are fewer still who have helped to stoke the fire that warms us all. June was such a one. In Japan they would have called her “a living treasure”, and her loss has made us all just a little poorer.