

**RACHELLE D. CASTONGUAY**  
**1953-1985**



Rachelle Castonguay, Research and University Affairs Analyst, Office of the Northern Research and Science Advisor, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, died tragically in the Air India plane crash on 23 June 1985 at the age of 32. It had been the first day of her vacation to India, which was to include a three week hiking expedition through the Himalayas. Those who knew Rachelle were touched by her warmth and compassion combined with her extraordinary zest for life and adventure.

While many of her colleagues and friends involved in northern studies remember Rachelle for her outstanding role in administering the Northern Scientific Training Program and, in particular, her dedication and contribution to university development of scientific expertise in the North, Rachelle's northern scientific focussed career was nonetheless diverse and extensive. Throughout her successful completion of a variety of research assignments, including a widely acclaimed study of land occupancy in Fort Good Hope, N.W.T., Rachelle demonstrated her deep knowledge of the Canadian North

and sensitivity to the background and lifestyles of native people.

On graduating with a B.A. (Geography) from the University of Ottawa in the spring of 1975, Ms. Castonguay began with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development as a research assistant to prepare an inventory of the social content of the hearings of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry. This assignment also entailed an examination of the views and attitudes of the major intervenors regarding native employment during pipeline construction and operation and completion of a bibliography of socio-economic studies pertaining to the pipeline and other northern development projects.

Prior to her enrollment in the Master's program in geography at the University of Ottawa, in 1977 Rachelle spent her summer in the Yukon working for the Alaska Highway Pipeline Inquiry, assigned to prepare a detailed subject index of hearing transcripts. In her own field of toponymic research, Rachelle subsequently undertook a study of historical and ac-

tual land occupancy according to Emile Petitot's writing using place names as a tool to illustrate land use occupancy. This work resulted in a two-volume report entitled *Land Occupancy by the Amerindians of the Canadian North-West in the XIXth Century According to Emile Petitot (Volume I. Toponymic Inventory, by Rachelle Castonguay, 1979, 475 p., and Volume II. Analysis of the Toponymic Data and Legal Implications, by Rachelle Castonguay and Jeffrey Lester, 1980, 202 p.)*.

Complementary to this compilation and analysis of toponymic data, Rachelle's fieldwork to Fort Good Hope, N.W.T. (1979), supported by the Northern Scientific Training Program, was undertaken to gather actual place names as well as other information to obtain an insight on understanding the toponymic system of native people of the area. This material subsequently formed the basis of her Master's thesis in geography entitled *La structuration de l'espace telle que révélée par l'analyse du système toponymique des Indiens Peaux-de-Lièvres de Fort Good Hope* (1981). Finally, prior to her appointment as Research and University Affairs Analyst, Rachelle's knowledge of the North and its people was enhanced during the course of her duties with the Northern Research Information and Documentation Service. This section was charged with the responsibility to gather and publish information on current northern research projects undertaken by universities and government as well as private industry.

While Rachelle was captivated by the North and the lifestyles of its culturally diverse population, she was also keenly interested in applying her northern experience and knowledge

to problem solving in other plural societies, particularly Third World countries. It is within this context she had worked with Canada World Youth, an international youth exchange program with Third World countries, and looked forward to a future career in the delivery of educational programs addressing such issues as under-development, cross-cultural communications and language.

Rachelle's openness, tolerance and acute cultural sensitivity emerged, in part, as a result of her rural Franco-Ontarian upbringing and daily exposure to English and French cultures. Furthermore, her heightened sense of compassion and social consciousness drew her to actively participate in local and regional citizens' and women's advisory groups, as well as in African famine relief efforts. It was for this reason that her many friends and colleagues contributed so generously to a memorial donation in her name to the African Famine Relief Fund.

On the Friday before her departure, amidst the excitement over her pending journey, we said our farewells. As she was about to leave my office, armed with the travel diary I had given her, I wanted to embrace her, yet withdrew because of an inner apprehension about the finality of such a gesture. That was the last I saw of her, but I will forever cherish the memories of our friendship over the past decade, and the infectious laughter and vibrancy that was the essence of Rachelle.

*Harald W. Finkler*