

CAROL PUTNAM, RSCJ
April 26, 1921 - April 16, 1993

Caroline Canfield Putnam was born - the first of six children - on April 26, 1921, in Springfield, Massachusetts, to Roger Lowell Putnam and Caroline Piatt Jenkins. Seemingly, she was "to the manner born" for she followed in a pattern set by her mother who was highly regarded for her long years of effort toward bettering the lot of black persons through the medium of education. Mrs. Putnam was supported in this important work by her devoted husband.

Carol's first three years of schooling were under the direct supervision of her mother who, together with a friend, ran a small school for children of the neighborhood. The remainder of her elementary education was obtained at nearby MacDuffie Country Day School. She first became acquainted with the Society of the Sacred Heart when she was sent to Eden Hall as a boarding student for her secondary education. Her satisfaction and joy in what she experienced there are evidenced in the fact that she chose Manhattanville for her college and that upon graduation she sought and received permission to enter the Society of the Sacred Heart. This significant event took place on September 8, 1942. Seven and a half years later, on July 30, Caroline made her final profession at the Motherhouse in Rome.

For graduate work Carol went to the Catholic University of America where she took two Master's degrees, one in Art and one in Philosophy. Finally, in 1960, her published doctoral dissertation was entitled: Beauty in the Pseudo Denis.

During the years of her on-going education, Carol taught at the secondary level in several Schools of the Sacred Heart. After receiving her doctorate she taught courses in both art and philosophy at Newton College where she chaired the Art Department. During these years also she took membership in a wide variety of societies and associations, becoming especially active in those dealing with education in urban areas.

Then, In 1968, there occurred a decisive event determining the direction her future apostolic ministry would take. She was invited to join the Boston Archdiocese's Urban Task Force which comprised a team of Sisters from various congregations collaborating to bring about change in **Boston's Roxbury-South End** [inner-city] **Parochial Schools**. This 3-year project was funded by Cardinal Cushing; during its progress Carol's teaching load at Newton was reduced to one course each semester; However, because she had a very strong desire to remain linked to the Society's institutions, she brought Sacred Heart student volunteers into this and all her future works for the underprivileged. This first experience of working closely with the poor and discriminated against - reminiscent of the work so dear to her mother - set Carol on the trail she would blaze so successfully to the advantage of refugees and migrant farmworkers in Florida and in California.

In Carol's own words: "The Task Force disbanded after the schools had been given all the educational resources we could link them with. I moved on to help develop a program for Hispanic women, mostly Puerto Ricans, who were locked into cold tenements not knowing the language and not having any saleable skills. We started **Casa del Sol** for them. Their first request was for classes in English and then for help getting jobs. We ended up providing classes in typing, bookkeeping, preparation for the G.E.D. diploma, etc., not only for Hispanic women but for their men and for the street kids of the area. As far as I know, the program still continues. It has changed hands several times, but the need is still there."

"Then I went to Florida in answer to the Washington Province's request for an alternative ministry in the Miami area. ... they had needs especially among the migrant farmworkers [and] wanted Sisters in the **Indiantown** area. Joan Gannon, Connie Dryden and I arrived in the Autumn of 1978. The pastor asked us to start a **day-care** program for the

migrant children. In the space of two years, with the help of women from the community, we set up three centers. All of them continue to serve the children and babies of migrant and non-migrant farmworkers."

"The pastor then suggested beginning a school for migrant children. So we began **Hope Rural Elementary School** in 1980 - the only full-time school in the country dedicated to the needs of migrant children. The pupils are Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Haitian, Mayan-Indian and American black and white. Not all are from farmworker families but the focus is on three things: providing the kind of permanence missing from migrant life, respect for the culture of each child and strong development of the three R's. The children were hungry to learn. One little Mexican boy was heard to say excitedly to his friend: 'Let's stay in from recess so we can get smarter quicker!' " In the fall of 1986, when the school was well established, Carol and the other RSCJ left it in the hands of the Sinsinawa Dominicans and moved on to other ministries.

Carol, having heard of the plight of migrant workers in California, asked and received permission to join a newly formed community of RSCJ in San Jose who were investigating the possibilities for fruitful ministry there. She was warmly welcomed in the Menlo/San Jose Area and soon was appointed Area Director, in which position she was greatly appreciated and much loved. Josefina Montalvo, who had worked with Carol in Boston at Casa del Sol, was now doing parish work in Alviso, a small, poor, mostly Mexican town adjoining San Jose. Carol visited Josefina there and was appalled by the poor housing situation of most of the residents. Together with the pastor and the priest director of the diocesan Office of Justice and Peace, she succeeded in setting up a community corporation, winning financial support and the cooperation of Habitat for Humanity. When she left Alviso at the end of the third year, four poor families were housed in fine new homes and three more families were preparing to move into three other new homes in process of completion.

In between times, Carol had investigated other areas of California where the needs of the poor were most evident. Her interest centered finally upon Mecca, a migrant town just north of the Salton Sea. She knew that Cesar Chavez had said that this was the area where migrants were hurting very severely. She procured a mobile home and moved into Mecca with two companions. They began working with teenagers of the migrant-farmworker families, then with the women and the men, developing "a skills bank" so that these people could market other skills than farm labor. Women from the fields were organized into housecleaning teams [Carol joined them in this work]; others learned how to make beautiful wedding cakes for sale, still others who sewed well were grouped into a "sewing alterations" team. Carol herself did most of the "marketing" among the well-to-do families of nearby Palm Springs. In addition, and most importantly, Carol selected men and women who could become leaders in the struggle for justice in working conditions and taught them the knowledge and skills required. One such couple spoke eloquently in praise of and gratitude toward Carol on the day of the prayer service and funeral Mass. Of Mecca, Carol had said: "For me it will surely be the end of the line."

Those words had a prophetic portent which she may have sensed. In the fall of 1992, she saw a doctor regarding severe headaches she was experiencing. The diagnosis was recurrence of a melanoma which had been initially diagnosed several years previously. After a few weeks of treatment, she came to Oakwood. At first she was able to come to Mass and to meals with the help of a walker and we enjoyed her accounts of the ministry at Mecca. Decline and diminishment progressed quite rapidly, with Carol showing great fortitude. On April 10 there was a change in Carol's condition and a member of the community was with her until she slipped away in the early morning hours of April 16. She leaves with us a legacy of zeal for the relief of the impoverished and for those caught in a web of discrimination and unjust working conditions.