

CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES
REFUGE

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In Memoriam

Lisa Gilad

Lisa Gilad became of blessed memory to us on May 28, 1996 when she lost her life in a road accident. Since that day her friends and colleagues have met privately and publicly to articulate their feelings of loss and to memorialize Lisa in a worthy manner. This is my effort.

It is not overstatement to say that everyone who came into contact with Lisa Gilad will forever be affected by her. This is the case in all her social and professional circles. It is because Lisa dealt with nothing lightly. Such intensity in some might be seen as unbecoming, a sign of absence of humour, a reason to be avoided. In Lisa this intensity inspired quite the opposite. Her Talmudic approach to all aspects of life reflected the depth of her soul not only her intellect. When one finds such a person, one wants to be around her. This is why we miss her so.

I first met Lisa about ten years ago at a conference sponsored by the Refugee Documentation Centre, the predecessor of York University's Centre for Refugee Studies. At one session I made a flippant remark with which Lisa heartily took issue. We became instant friends and I followed her career with great interest and concern.

The appointment of Lisa Gilad to the Immigration and Refugee Board was a stroke of brilliance. For in Lisa, there was the perfect combination of qualities to do such a job. I am not only thinking of objective characteristics, such as good analytical and writing skills, but rather of those which come from an almost perfect love of humanity: the ability to be serious yet compassionate, to suffer neither fools nor liars yet treat all with respect. When Lisa determined that the person before her was a Convention Refugee, she saw it not as a case of good fortune on the part of the claimant. Instead, Lisa was invigorated by the good fortune of Canada to be in a position to offer such protection. She would leave her chair, shake hands with those refugees and tell them so!

As a Jew, I have been taught that lives are measured by deeds. The deeds of Lisa Gilad measure much longer than her 39 years of life. Everything Lisa accomplished in her private and public arenas was important and significant. She loved to teach and did so by her actions. Lisa Gilad taught us to take nothing for granted, to invest significant energy into everything good. In death Lisa will continue to teach that lesson. We should understand more than ever the extreme fragility of life itself, and the necessity to contribute generously to the betterment of this place while we are able.

May the memory of Lisa Gilad be a comfort to all who mourn her.

Susan Davis

Susan Davis is a Special Advisor to Assistant Deputy Minister-Partnerships, Citizenship and Immigration Canada.