

# Patricia THOMPSON

## Remembered

By Gerald Pratley

**O**n the afternoon of Sunday, June 27, on Highway 401, Patricia Thompson died tragically in a car accident. A few hours later, caught in a traffic jam on the same highway on my way to Stirling to attend my granddaughter's graduation, we passed the wreckage of a terrible collision near Cobourg, not knowing until the following morning that it was there that she had lost her life. Patricia was returning from a visit to friends in Ottawa, and the next day would have been her 72nd birthday, when many of her closest and oldest friends, including Arnie Ljungstrom, Warren Collins and Barry Chapman, would have gathered to spend a high-ol'd time talking about everybody and everything in film.

Patricia Thompson, known to everyone as Pat, might easily have passed for 52. A short woman of "ample proportions," as she once described herself, she possessed an untiring capacity for activity, force and vigor; a brightly lit lady who never seemed to run out of steam. To say that she was lively is an understatement. She bustled into a lunch or a meeting, a conference or a screening with an infectious laugh and a torrent of words. The life and soul of any party, she was never at a loss for witty comments and sensible observations. Everyone knew her, and it was no wonder because she was involved in almost everything taking place in film appreciation, first as a film lover and enthusiast, then as the publisher and editor of the *Film Canada Yearbook*, the inside "bible" of Canadian film business.

Pat was born in Portsmouth, England, and lived through the German Blitz. She was educated as a legal secretary and arrived in Toronto in 1957, where her services were in demand. But her hobby was film, in all its many aspects, and she became a freelance writer, dividing her time between nonpaying film work and well-paying legal commissions. Patricia began by joining the Toronto Film Society (TFS) at the time of Oscar and Dorothy Burritt, leading to her work with the Canadian Federation of Film Societies with its invaluable catalogue listing of all available films and their distributors. And there was the *Newsletter*, in its modest way a forerunner to *Take One*. There was little money to be had, of course, and all the printing was done by hand on the Gestetner. Pat was a vocal member of the Canadian Film Institute and the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, and throughout the years there seemed to be a never-ending stream of film programs, conferences, premieres and receptions. Her writing and research turned up regularly on the society and festival



circuits. She was always cheerful, forthright, outspoken among timid minds and forever honest and reliable.

Then came the reorganizing of the Canadian Film Awards (CFA) with our travelling programs across the country of the award-winning films. She would go westbound and I would go east. The next year, we changed direction. During one severe winter storm in Northern Ontario her bus overturned. She rescued the film cans and managed to get to her destination with minutes to spare. She was invaluable during our weeks of public screenings of CFA entries at the St. Lawrence Centre. One year she chased around looking for jury member Dusan Makavejev, last seen at the Royal York leaving "with a lady." She brought him back.

When I went to the Ontario Ministry of Tourism (no Ministry of Culture in those days) to discuss the formation of the future Ontario Film Institute, Pat and the late Clive Denton, gave me encouragement and moral support, with Pat typing up written briefs and submissions. When we succeeded, she worked with me for two years, leaving to go freelance once again. She worked for Paramount, preparing catalogues; she represented Rock Demers in Toronto; she chose Canadian short subjects for the Cineplex circuit; and became involved with educational institutions. She assisted me at the Stratford International Film Festival and with our "Days with Canadian Filmmakers." Later came the Canadian film programs at the Uxbridge Celebration of the Arts and the Guelph Spring Festival. Where there was film, there was Pat.

In 1977, she became editor of the *Canadian Film Digest Yearbook*, published by the legendary Nat Taylor, who had started it as the *Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry* in 1952 under the editorship of the energetic Hy Bossin. In 1985, with Nat in retirement, Pat made a very brave move and purchased all the rights to the *Yearbook* from him and formed her own company, Cine-Communications. She changed the name to *Film Canada Yearbook* and turned it into a highly successful enterprise. If you want to know about the Canadian film business, it is to this annual that everyone turns, and there is hardly a name in it that was not known to Pat Thompson.

On the Wednesday, when she left for Ottawa, Pat called to say that she finally had time to complete a book we were working on commemorating the Toronto Film Society's 50th anniversary. "Call you Monday," she said cheerily, "and we'll get the damn thing finished this time." Her absence is cruel and her familiar voice and figure will be missed more than words will ever tell. •