

# An invitation to join us in celebrating Dr. Lotta's 100<sup>th</sup>



November 28, 2009 will be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the founder of the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada, Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova.

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## Maison de Sèvres

By Marie Dulude, April 2009

In July 2005 when travelling with my family to France for a holiday, I decided my children and I would spend a day to find *la Maison de Sèvres*. All I knew was that in that suburb of Paris in 1947 Dr. Lotta, then only on her second postwar visit to Europe, visited a special school and from then on USC supported the sponsorship of war-shocked children. It is a project I had often referred to in speaking engagements for USC Canada, as its description in old project reports I had dug out at the National Archives had left quite an impression on me. Although I had visited USC-supported children's homes in Bangladesh and in Lesotho, I would remain intrigued by the special philosophy of *la Maison de Sèvres* using art in every form as therapy for the terrible shocks children had suffered in wartime.

It is no surprise that Director Yvonne Hagnauer's philosophy appealed to Dr. Lotta's own sense of beauty and culture and that that project had, according to her biographer Clyde Sanger, remained a favorite of her for more than thirty years. When I first started working for USC Canada in 1984, the Executive Director's office at 56 Sparks Street was filled with children drawings, potteries and needlepoint art. Although it was no longer Dr. Lotta who occupied that office, the walls and shelves remained stocked with these poignant testimonials from children whose realities I could not even begin to imagine. I still rest my pencils at the end of my workday in a small beige and blue clay pot with a big monogram MS (for Maison de Sèvres) on it that an orphan named Corinne had made for Lotta in 1980.

My husband, three children and myself arrived in Sèvres Ville-D'Avray after a short drive south west of Paris. We had the privilege of spending a few hours in the company of Robert Leopold, treasurer of the *Association des anciens de Sèvres*, who had been a resident of *la Maison* in the early 1950s. I had contacted him earlier in the year and we carried an e-mail conversation and agreed to meet to talk about the history of *la Maison de Sèvres*.

What was then a big, dilapidated castle was now gone. The original *Maison de Sèvres* had moved from 14, de la rue Croix-Bosset in 1958. All that was left was a plaque at the top of a steep cobbled staircase. The plaque had just been inaugurated, in June 2005. Leopold told stories of Yvonne Hagnauer and her husband Roger's community approach to education and her incredible courage to



For more information on Dr Lotta's 100<sup>th</sup>, please visit [DrLotta.ca](http://DrLotta.ca) .....

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provide a shelter, a family, a way of life and an education to damaged children. In Leopold's days, there were 130 children at Sèvres between age 3-12 for boys and 3-17 for girls. Leopold remembered the diminutive Lotta in her uniform and with her black notebook. The children would stage a Canadian festival to honour her presence alongside Pauline Vanier and also send Christmastime letters and art to 56 Sparks Street in reconnaissance of the support. As the in-house translator and only francophone on staff I answered some of these cards as they still came in the 1980s.

To this day, there remains an *Association des anciens de Sèvres* who gather to remember and to support each other.

It was very humbling for me to meet someone whose life had been touched directly by the generosity and the humanity of Canadians whom he had not and would never meet. I had had the great privilege of meeting numerous beneficiaries and partners in the course of my work with USC but few with whom I could converse in French. Did you know that Lotta spoke beautiful French? You can hear her on this link: <http://lamaisondesevres.org/mus/lott2.html>

