

# Delhi 'Y' Cancels Booking

Conference delegates told to make other arrangements

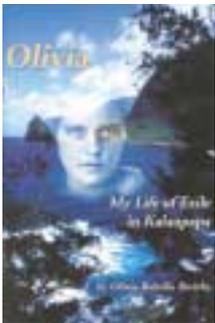
When the Delhi YMCA Tourist Hostel canceled the booking for a group of delegates to the recent national conference of people affected by leprosy held in India's capital in October, its action made clear just how much more work needs to be done to overcome the stigma and discrimination surrounding the disease.

In a letter to IDEA India President Dr. P.K Gopal dated September 9, the hostel manager wrote that the room reservations were cancelled "as we were not aware that the group consists of lepers." The letter said that other guests may object "as it has happened in the past when the

same group stayed last year."

The incident sparked strong protests from IDEA India, The Leprosy Mission Trust, India, and from the American Leprosy Missions (ALM), among others. ALM President Christopher J. Doyle wrote, "I find it hard to believe that a Christian agency would deny access or accommodation to people just because they are affected by leprosy. Did not Jesus himself reach out and touch people with leprosy? ... You need to reexamine your policy and position."

The YMCA has since apologized.



## OLIVIA ROBELLO BREITHA

Olivia Robello Breitha, who was diagnosed with leprosy in 1934 and spent the rest of her life at the Kalaupapa settlement on Molokai in Hawaii, died in September at the age of 90. She published her autobiography, *Olivia: My Life of Exile in Kalaupapa*, in 1998.

Breitha once wrote: "My name is Olivia, not L-E-P-E-R. ... I wrote a book because I wanted people to know what I feel, what I felt, how much I struggled, fighting the disease, fighting ignorance, fighting bureaucrats, fighting that awful hurtful word. ... Trying not to be a statistic — trying to be a person." ■

## FROM THE EDITORS

### FOREVER YOUNG

On October 4, Dr. Shigeaki Hinohara celebrated his 95th birthday. In a newspaper column to mark the occasion, the much-published author and president of the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation recalled having pneumonia as a young man. "Left weakened by the disease, I felt I would be satisfied if I could work up until I was 60. Instead, here I am at 95, still in good shape, working harder than I did when I was young and delighted by the fact."

By comparison, Dr. Hinohara's fellow countryman Yoshimi Komaki is a relative youngster at 76. But he too fell victim to disease when he was young. In 1947, at the age of 17, Komaki was diagnosed with leprosy. As a result, he was sent to the Hoshizuka-Keiaien leprosy sanatorium in Kagoshima, southwestern Japan, where he spent the next 58 years.

In January 2003, Komaki took a trip to southern China to see the lives of people

affected by leprosy in that country. What he saw shocked him. Living in isolated, impoverished communities, the inhabitants of the villages he visited had little access to medical care and many were suffering from wounds.

Spurred by the desire to help, Komaki the following year donated ¥5 million of his own money. This was used to build a road to connect a village he had visited with the outside world, and also a school. Wanting to do more, in 2006 he took part in a work camp organized by student volunteers. He has since moved to China. Working with the NGO Joy in Action (JIA), he now visits some 20 villages in southern China, distributing bandages and medicine, and teaching the student volunteers how to clean and care for wounds. By sharing his own experiences, he is helping the villagers believe they can change their lives.

For both Dr. Hinohara and Mr. Komaki, old is not a word in their vocabulary.

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