



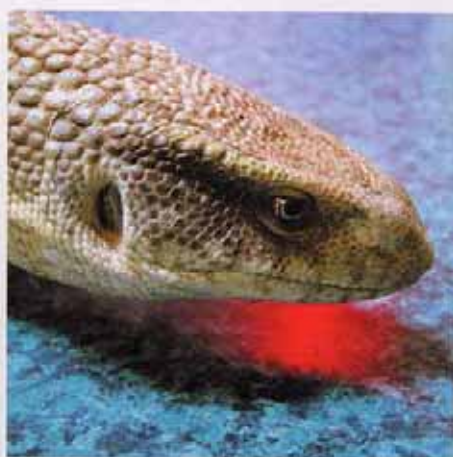
TORONTO LIFE

www.torontolife.com

Miracle on Wanda Road,
by June Callwood

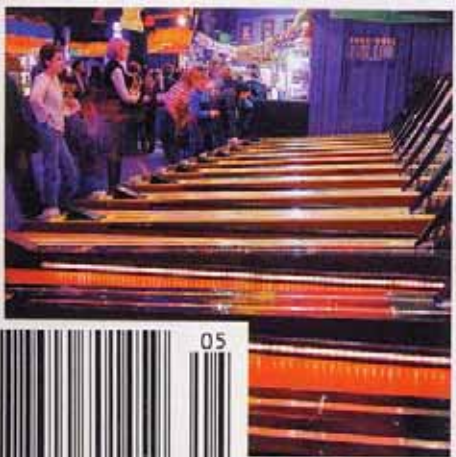
How the Red Cross made
a bloody mess of things

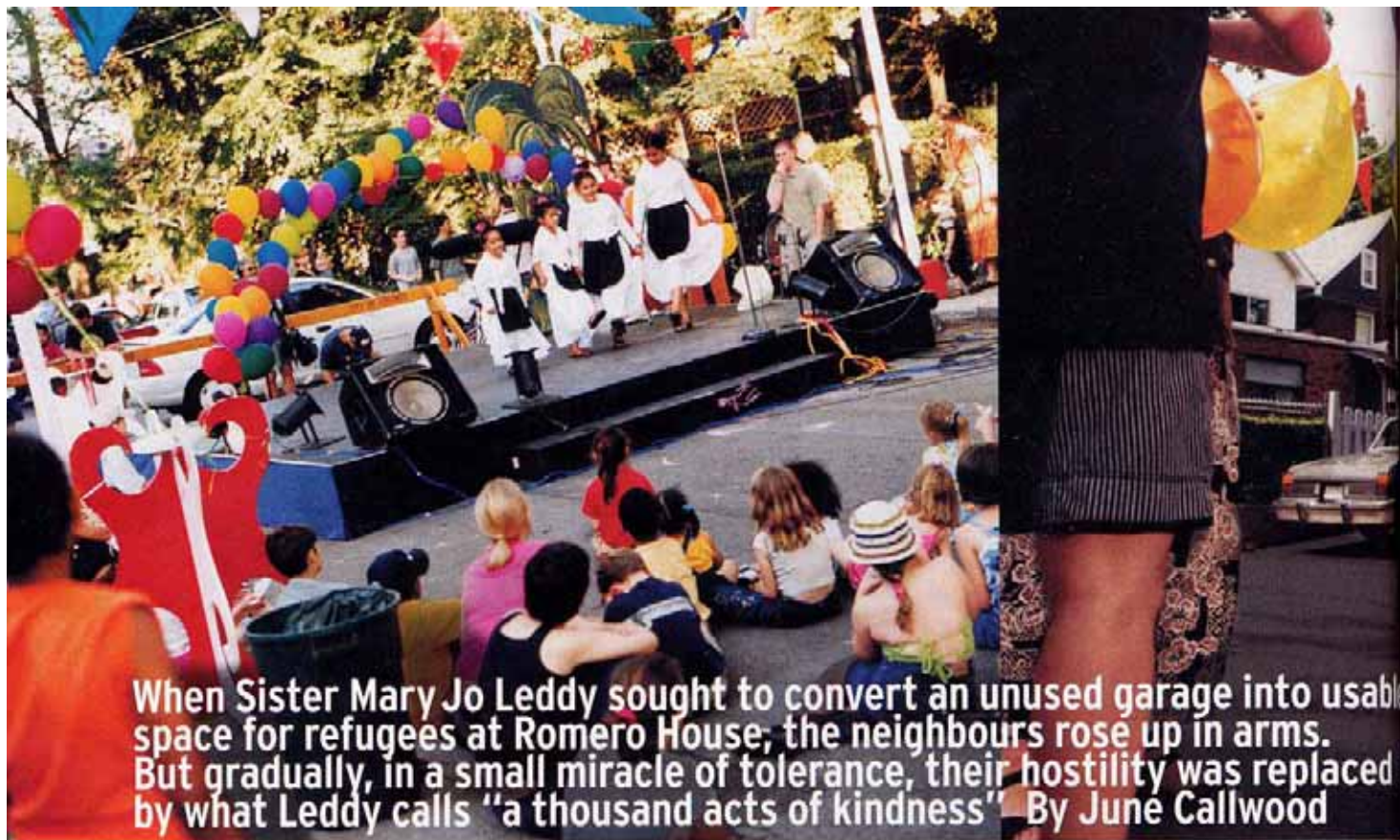
Plus: Hydro's last laugh,
Irshad Manji's multiple
personalities, and the
city's best bouillabaisse



905

IS COOLER
THAN YOU THINK





When Sister Mary Jo Leddy sought to convert an unused garage into usable space for refugees at Romero House, the neighbours rose up in arms. But gradually, in a small miracle of tolerance, their hostility was replaced by what Leddy calls "a thousand acts of kindness." By June Callwood

A STREET CA

IN THE SPRING OF 1991, IN A REFUGEE HOUSE RUN BY THE Christian Brothers, Sister Mary Jo Leddy, the night supervisor, was sipping tea in the kitchen with a teenage refugee. Hiwet, an Eritrean, had just arrived from a camp in Africa, which her family had fled to avoid slaughter. Looking idly out at a neglected backyard, she asked, "Who lives out there?"

Mary Jo noted the weeds and rocks. "No one. Well, maybe a few birds."

Hiwet thought her rudimentary English had been misunderstood. "No," she insisted. "Person there. House there."

"House?" Mary Jo looked again and saw a garage. She considered how to describe its use to a homeless child. "It's a house for a car," she said carefully.

"A house for a car?" Hiwet said, astonished.

In short order, the garage was converted into a place for meditation, a sort of secular chapel. The incident left Mary Jo with a moral imperative around the use of space. The next year, she moved into 48 Wanda Road, near Bloor and Keele, on behalf of Romero House, a non-profit consortium that shelters refugees awaiting papers. She was pleased to note a dilapidated but spacious two-storey garage. It wasn't really a garage; it was an 1890s coach house. Remembering her conversation with Hiwet, she resolved to turn it into something wonderful.

Mary Jo is a tall woman in her 50s, dressed for comfort and decorum, with a pronounced lack of interest in style. She holds a Ph.D. and has written books of spiritual subtext, including one about the love between her Saskatoon parents, a doctor and a nurse. She teaches theology at U of T's Regis College. She founded the justice-oriented biweekly and papal thorn *Catholic New Times*. She holds an Order of Canada. And she has participated in such high-hope activities as all-night prayer vigils at Queen's Park in aid of the hungry, and demonstrations against munitions makers. For 30 years, she was a nun in the Sisters of Sion, and she retains the air of seraphic detachment common to the cloistered. She has clear blue eyes, wonderful thick hair in shades of steel, the guileless, unlined face of the pure of heart, and a sincere belief that most people possess goodness.

After a few months on Wanda—once the basement and first and third floors had been converted into flats—Mary Jo had time to consider what could be done with the capacious coach house. It was simply not acceptable that it was sheltering nothing more redemptive than rusted tools. What it needed to become, she decided, was a place for communal activities, since the 12 rooms of 48 Wanda were jammed attic to basement with living spaces. Consulting with the residents,



LLED WANDA

she and her board decided to turn the first floor of the coach house into storage space and a repair shop and to make the upstairs a sort of sewing and crafts room. A sympathetic architect, Philip Beesley, drew up blueprints and estimated a cost of \$35,000. It took almost three years to raise the money. Finally, in the spring of 1995, Romero House applied for a building permit. Because these alterations were deemed a "minor variance" from building codes, the application would be decided by the committee of adjustment at city hall. As required, notice was circulated to some 30 households within a 60-metre radius of 48 Wanda, along with an invitation to attend the hearing on August 29, 1995.

Most people pay little attention to opaque notices from city hall, but some area residents read this one carefully and were enraged. In their minds, the garage was about to become a tower rising above the rooftops and teeming with family life. A woman around the corner on Indian Road Crescent saw her privacy coming to an end. Whenever she sunbathed, salacious eyes would be upon her. Others envisioned all-night parties and Wanda Road choked with bumper-to-bumper traffic. They noted that the proposed use for the renovated structure included furniture repair. *A factory!*

Partly this reaction grew out of a misunderstanding. The

notice stated that the proposed building would exceed the permitted floor space by 67 square metres and rise to a height of 6.73 metres instead of the permitted four. It sounded like a jaw-dropping expansion. In fact, the alterations would change the building's size hardly at all. It already exceeded the maximum dimensions, but it had the grandfathered rights of its venerable age. "One thing people hate, everywhere in Toronto, is the idea of a house behind a house," says Gail Johnson, the smart, genial woman who managed the committee of adjustment at the time. "That always makes for trouble."

INDEED, WANDA ROAD HAD NEVER SEEN SUCH TROUBLE. NOT when John Graves Simcoe strolled the high, airy wilderness in 1792 and ordered the area surveyed as crown land. Not when it was the site of fox hunts. Not when the Grand Trunk Railway came in the 1850s, later crossed by other bustling railroads that gave the area its name, the Junction.

The first occupants of the tall brick houses on Wanda had been railway workers, mainly Anglo-Saxon Protestants. They seemed not to mind the smells and rats from the stockyards nearby. By the late 1940s, that core group had raised families and moved away. The area gradually filled with Eastern Europeans: Polish, Ukrainian and German refugees fleeing pover-

ty and post-war chaos and drawn to the large houses at bargain prices. They were too preoccupied with working, frequently holding down two jobs at once, to be very communicative. Besides, they filled their homes with family, which made them inward looking. Valantin and Magdalena Mondry, at 50 Wanda, once had five generations under their roof.

Elfreda Mackay, a widow in her 90s, nearly blind, charming, and alert as a bird, has lived at 57 Wanda for more than 50 years and says of those newcomers, "They were good people, and they tried to learn English, but we were not in and out of their houses in the old way of being neighbours. You know, if you need a cup of sugar, you go borrow it."

The next change on Wanda began in the late 1980s, as the stockyards were closing and the air became less putrid. Drawn by the proximity to High Park, the shops and restaurants on Bloor and the easy walk to the subway, professionals began moving in. The first of these were Georgia and Gerry Helleiner, he a professor of Third World economics at U of T; and Keith Leckie and his wife, Mary Young Leckie, award-

"We didn't know anything about Romero House," Tony recalls. He is a powerfully built man of 48 with a neatly trimmed beard and steady dark eyes. He is a general contractor but also an artist, descended from six generations of artists, and his oils—biblical dramas—hang on his walls. "It looked like the beginning of something that wouldn't be good. Everyone would be converting their garages for housing." Besides, he adds, there were "those kids who lived at Romero House."

Many complaints about the garage got around to a mention of "those kids." Noisy. Thoughtless. Few said openly that "those kids" were the first blacks Wanda Road had ever known, but Tony Rebelo acknowledges that there were "a few racist remarks."

The arrival of desperate refugees in such a settled community had not been easy on the neighbours. Mary Jo was prone to holding potluck parties around a backyard barbecue whenever someone had a birthday, or started school, or welcomed a family member or, especially, secured papers as a landed immigrant. She believes such gatherings provide a respite for



winning filmmakers, who moved into a corner house at Wanda and Indian Road. When the flap began, the Leckies were almost the only neighbours who had ever actually been inside Romero House. On the previous Boxing Day, they had accepted a party invitation Mary Jo put at every door on the street. "No one else came," Mary Jo recalls ruefully. "We had a lot of leftovers. But Mary and Keith had a great time."

The leaders of the opposition to the garage were Milan and Irena Pekic, who lived around the corner on Indian Road Crescent, and Richard Wolkowski, at 56 Wanda. Among the other incensed residents were Valantin and Magdalena Mondry, who live next door to Romero House. Both are in their 70s, frail and worn, and both are lovers of quiet. Magdalena would weep when she spoke of the proposed expansion.

Antonio and Grace Rebelo, a couple with Portuguese roots who had moved into 58 Wanda, were also upset. They were absorbed with gutting their rundown house and turning it into a showplace. Tony had warned his wife when they moved in: "Let's not be too friendly too fast with the neighbours." They mostly kept to themselves, but that changed when someone knocked on their door to tell them the garage at 48 Wanda was about to become an apartment house.

people having a stressful time and help knit together disparate families. The festivities were poorly received on Wanda Road, even though they ended by 10 and often, because of Muslim prohibitions on liquor, were dry.

It also proved difficult in summer to hide the fact that Romero House was full of high-adrenalin refugee children, drunk on novelty and nervousness. Once, five-year-olds built a fort of cardboard boxes in the mutual driveway between Romero House and 46 Wanda, where Mary and Pat Collins live, obstructing car access. The children cheerfully removed it when Mary asked them to, but it was one of many issues around that driveway. Teenagers played basketball there, and when the ball fell into the Collinses' backyard, the youths would take a direct route to get it, weakening the fence and trampling the flowers. And then there was the time in a summer rain when younger children ran naked down Wanda Road, shouting with glee.

Pat Collins has lived on Wanda since 1943, when he was five. He loves the street, and when he married in 1962 he bought a house across from his parents. He and Mary are both 64 now and retired, their four grown children long gone. Observant Roman Catholics, they are unshakably accepting of what hap-

pens at Romero House. Mary Collins, a woman with fluffy brown hair and an easy laugh, hated having her flowers flattened but is charitable. "You have to remember the lives these children have had," she says. "They had no rules, no order to their lives. They've come from camps and unbelievably severe conditions. You can't just drop them here and expect them to honour fences and property." The Mondrys, on the other side, were not so forgiving. They erected a solid wooden fence six feet high that Romero House calls "the Berlin Wall."

The most serious affront came from the children's misunderstanding of the intermittent traffic on Wanda. Fresh from communities that were hostile to strangers, a few youngsters arranged pieces of wood studded with nails to puncture the intruders' tires. Mary Jo, working at her computer, heard the popping sounds and the triumphant cheers. She ran to apologize and make amends. "That was *once*," she says firmly. "We put a stop to that."

Noting the aloof respectability of Wanda Road, Mary Jo decided that the wisest course was to keep a low profile. "It is

long association with Mary Jo includes their activities in an international Catholic peace organization, Pax Christi. Together with many others, they protested the Gulf War by placing a barricade of oil drums across three lanes of University Avenue in front of the U.S. Consulate. Both were arrested, though the police commented that they were the most peaceful and respectful demonstrators they had ever met, and one desk officer asked Mary Jo to pray for his ailing father.

With Mary Jo away, Howcroft attempted to negotiate a last-minute peace. Knocking on nearby doors, he got a blast from a raging man who shouted at him that Romero House was in the refugee business for the money. Shaken, he considered his plight. Counting the Collinses as favouring the project and the Leckies and Helleiners as at least indifferent, it appeared that the other 10 households facing or abutting that block of Wanda Road were dead set against the garage. He and the architect would be the only supporters of the application. He appealed to the Collinses. Pat had left town on a fishing trip but obligingly returned to attend the hearing.



astonishing to me, in retrospect. We treated the neighbourhood like a backdrop." Once, people around the corner, seeing the refugee boys playing ball hockey with two-by-fours, donated hockey sticks. But that was an exception. The Leckies were busy making films and tending their children. The Helleiners, across the street, were potential allies because they had lived for four years in Nigeria and Tanzania, but they had little time for socializing. Georgia was occupied, almost to the breaking point, with the care of their son, Peter, born in Dar es Salaam in 1968 with Down's syndrome.

AS THE SUMMER OF 1995 DREW TO A CLOSE, ROMERO HOUSE was serenely unaware that trouble was brewing. Philip Beesley, the architect, and Lorne Howcroft, head of the Romero House Board, planned to attend the committee of adjustment meeting. What could go wrong when the renovation was so minor? The roof would be raised only a foot to allow for insulation, and a proposed bay window would extend a mere foot farther than the existing one. Mary Jo went out of town.

A week before the hearing, Howcroft heard from the Collinses that the application might be in trouble. He is a gentle and distinguished retired high school principal, now 73. His

"The committee of adjustment" has a Procrustean ring, and the private citizens who preside at hearings deserve danger pay (at the time, they received an honorarium of \$9,000 a year). As a cheap court of first resort for people with ambitions to make visible changes to their property, the committee acts as a brake on hubris. Its function has a noble lineage: rules governing property disputes in the interest of fairness and the public good date back to the Magna Carta in 1215.

Gail Johnson, the committee's manager, has 30 years' experience with neighbourhood confrontations and says, "Hearings are the best free theatre in town. They are pure melodrama. It's where people display everything from civility to rage. The raw issues are the value of property and the feeling that too much change is happening too fast." She shrugs. "The city has to have growth, and we want to keep Toronto diverse, but there is always the potential for bitterness that will drive people to move away."

Howcroft and Beesley gamely presented the case for Romero House, pointing out that the garage would be unchanged in "its use or general physical arrangement." Pat Collins told the committee, "We have had no serious problems either before or since Romero House bought the property."

Then it was the turn of the opponents. Grace and Tony Rebelo, who can read blueprints, were reassured by the architect's presentation, but others appeared not to be. When passion and reason collide, reason might as well save its breath: passion is born deaf, and glad of it. The protesters declared that the alterations to the garage would make it enormous, an eyesore. There was talk of endangerment to the neighbourhood's safety. One opponent spoke of "wife beaters" and "drug dealers" at Romero House, another of the introduction of a criminal element, wild parties and, especially, of too many children—"like rabbits." There was even a sinister reference to a rape that had occurred some distance away the previous year. Pat Collins couldn't help but remark on the irony: "About 50 years ago, they were the refugees."

In the end, the committee ruled against the application, declaring that the building was causing "a negative impact on the surrounding neighbours and therefore the proposal cannot be regarded as desirable." Lorne Howcroft never learned the names of the three-person committee that evening but

to those who had designated their donations for the renovation project. Eventually, the interior of the garage was repaired to make it available for storage and occasional fair-weather gatherings; because it's not winterized, the building has limited use.

Many times, Mary Jo wondered if Romero House should move, but her personal investment ran deep. At the time, she was writing a book about Romero House, *At the Border Called Hope*, a condemnation of mean-minded Canadian immigration officials and a paean of praise for the joys and spiritual enrichment of living with refugees.

What has become her mid-life work—passionate advocacy on behalf of refugees drifting in the system—began casually. A colleague on the *Catholic New Times* had asked Mary Jo to do her a favour and replace her as night manager at the Keele Street shelter run by the Christian Brothers until someone else could be found. All Mary Jo had to do was live there. There was no pay, but the accommodation was rent free. She had no official duties but loved to spend her evenings chatting with the refugees. She found them to be cultivated, educated



imagined they were bureaucrats blown by a political wind. They were not. The chair was George Hislop, the first openly gay person in Toronto to run for public office. To commemorate his principled leadership at a difficult time, the city named a park after him. Another was Douglas Lee, former dean of architecture at U of T and no stranger to the struggles of visible minorities. The third was Michael Haughton, manager of the Ted Reeve Arena. The workload for committee members is massive.

"It is a prestigious appointment," says Gail Johnson. "We need people with standing in the community, people you can respect even if you don't agree with them."

The refugees were disheartened by the rejection. Mary Jo was appalled to find herself disliking neighbours she didn't know, a state of mind unacceptable in her theology. "I wasn't sure we could make it," she says now. How could Romero House offer refugees from hostile lands a safe place to begin new lives when it seemed Wanda Road itself was hostile?

ROMERO HOUSE COULD HAVE APPEALED TO THE ONTARIO Municipal Board, but Mary Jo decided that protracting the struggle would only make things worse. Money was returned

people. Emotionally and financially drained by their brutal ordeals, they were hungry for friendship.

As time went on, she grew uneasy about the way the shelter operated. The Christian Brothers ran it like a typical top-down, paid-staff social agency, which seemed to have a muting effect on the refugees. At night, her non-official status permitted the residents to emerge from their shells and relax. She developed a sweetly impractical view that good works should be done out of a Samaritan sense of responsibility for the well-being of others rather than as part of a job description. One of the refugees said as much to her—that they knew she really cared about them because she wasn't paid to be there. Mary Jo was distressed that winter when refugees were paid for such minor chores as shovelling the drive. She felt it violated the ideal of collaborative family life.

Her differences with the approach of the Christian Brothers never came to a confrontation, but changes happened nonetheless. First of all, the seedy Rupert Hotel at Queen and Parliament burned down, a disaster that took the lives of several homeless men and led to a compassionate Ontario government providing assistance to the "hardest to house," in the form of start-up funds to be distributed through an organiza-

tion called the Rupert House Coalition.

To apply on behalf of refugees for some of that money, Mary Jo needed to be more than one distressed nun, so she put together the Toronto Refugee Committee for Non-Profit Homes and Services, Inc., headed by Lorne Howcroft. Though the coalition had street people in mind, it agreed that refugees qualified as among the hardest to house. With Queen's Park guaranteeing the mortgages, Mary Jo's group was able to purchase three houses in the Keele and Bloor area. One was the residence formerly owned by the Christian Brothers (who were withdrawing from that effort), one was on Dorval Road, and one was the house on Wanda. The buildings were named Romero House, after the archbishop martyred for his work among the poor of El Salvador. In 1992, Mary Jo became executive director of all three houses and moved her narrow cot into a small bedroom on the second floor of 48 Wanda.

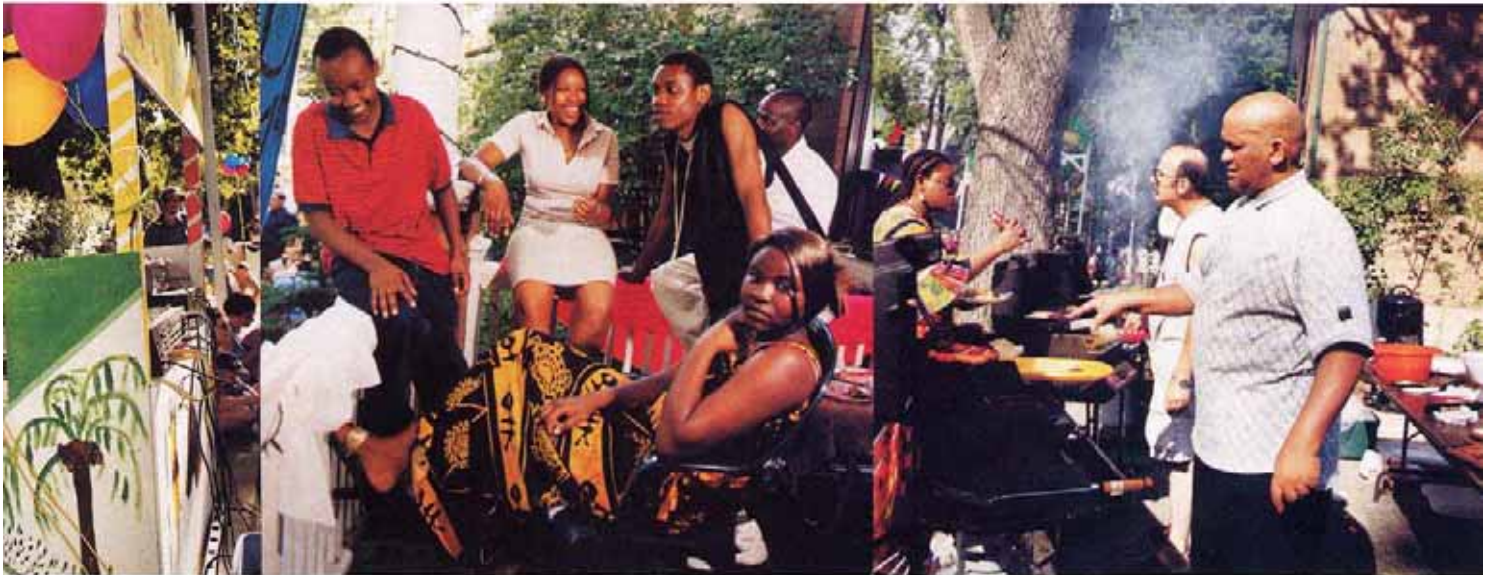
Renovations were begun, but refugees desperate for housing moved in despite the upheaval. Among the first to arrive were four delightful Sri Lankans, all in their 20s. When their

person who showed them that you can love equally men and women and children from all nations. They had heard about it, but they never saw it practised quite so well. Muslim or Buddhist or whatever, they know Mary Jo is for real. Many of them call her Mother."

By the winter of 1995, stung by the ruling and by the animosity of so many neighbours, Mary Jo feared she would have to abandon the house on Wanda Road. It was a time for soul-searching. But, as she says, her face brightening, "the garage proved to be the turning point."

THE CATALYST WAS THE HELLEINERS. AGHAST TO LEARN what had happened at the committee of adjustment hearing, Georgia invited a few people over for a barbecue. Many accepted, including a handful of refugees and volunteers from Romero House. Grace Rebelo joined them, then rushed home to tell her husband, Tony, that he should come, too. "These people are really interesting," she told him.

"Georgia helped the street, and she helped all of us to



landed immigrant papers came through, their places were taken by frightened, tense families fleeing the tribal struggles of Somalia and Eritrea. Mary Jo made the families feel welcome and set out the terms of their "agreement."

Everyone is treated with respect, new residents are told, without regard to race or gender or religion. "We are Christians, but we have no desire for you to be Christians," she assures them. They are expected to share chores and get along together, even those from African tribes who for generations have been blood enemies. For reasons Spinoza would understand, loving thy neighbour as thyself works as a dispute resolution device at Romero House. "We work for free," Mary Jo explains, "and we expect you to help and contribute in the same spirit. If you just want an apartment, this is not the place for you." No one is asked the intake questions that are routine elsewhere: "Where are you from?" "What did you do?" "Describe your claim for refugee status." What is hardest for most newcomers to accept, especially if they've lived in camps, is Mary Jo's rule that they are not to lock their doors. She believes that if you trust people, they will be trustworthy.

Jack Costello, a Jesuit priest and the former president of Regis College, says, "For a lot of refugees, Mary Jo is the first

understand the refugees," said the elderly Elfreda Mackay. "These things change a person."

Meanwhile, two houses on Wanda changed hands. One of the new families consisted of Eddy Gerek, an accountant turned headhunter, and his wife, Denyse Richardson, a doctor, who moved in at 49 Wanda. The actor Fiona Reid and her husband, McCowan Thomas, a set constructor, bought number 45. That autumn, there was a progressive dinner party involving a dozen neighbours, old and new, who wound up having coffee at Romero House. Much uneasiness evaporated. "The minute refugees have a face and a name," says Mary Jo, "something happens."

Mary Young Leckie called Mary Jo before Christmas that year. She said, "Our children have way too much stuff. How about you make me a list, and we'll bring over some gifts for people at Romero House?" Mary Jo, overwhelmed with gratitude, drew up long lists tailored to every refugee in the house (at any given time, about a dozen adults and children live there), along with a short description of what each had endured. Torture, vile prisons and witnessing the killing of family members were the common lot. Mary remembers some poignant items on Mary Jo's list: the man with no winter

clothes who needed "a warm hat," and the woman with several children who "could use cooking utensils." Taken aback by the magnitude of the enterprise, Mary called on neighbours to help. They turned up at Romero House on Christmas Eve with exquisitely wrapped, individually chosen gifts for every person, and hampers of chocolates, oranges, walnuts and wine. One little girl was given the most beautiful party dress Mary could find. The child's expression when she saw it made everything worthwhile. The gifts and Christmas hampers for Romero House have become a Wanda Road tradition.

Magic began to happen on a street where people had kept to themselves for 50 years. Mary Jo describes the year or two after the garage fiasco as "a thousand acts of kindness." Wanda Road discovered that Elfleda Mackay was alone much of the time, her only child in a state of shock because his wife lay in hospital in a coma. Georgia Helleiner began running errands for Mrs. Mackay; Grace Rebelo planted flowers in her garden and mowed her lawn. Magdalena Mondry got a key to her house in case of emergency, brought food for her cats and

ting coats and boots, to help. At Christmas, Romero House residents of many faiths go door to door singing carols. "It is such a gift to have Romero House on this street," says Mary Young Leckie, a glowing beauty with long, carrot-coloured hair. "Racial and religious differences just vanish here."

What of those who opposed the garage? Some, like the Rebeles, changed their views. Others, like Elfleda Mackay, still think Romero House was pushing it. "I was against [the building permit application]," she says, her eyes snapping. "The government wouldn't think of letting anyone else do that. We all kicked." Some opponents moved away. Others made it plain they did not wish to discuss the matter. "You'll have to find somebody else," said a woman who answered the telephone at the home of the Wolkowskis, "because I'm not interested in talking to you." It's easy to understand why someone would not want to risk being hung out to dry by a journalist.

Valantin Mondry was similarly reluctant to talk, though he eventually yielded. When I arrived on a summer afternoon, he was taciturn with resentment. He continued to water the lawn



phoned almost every day. When Romero House gave a birthday party for Georgia one winter night, two men carried Mrs. Mackay across the street to attend. Grace became godmother to the child of one refugee family. Magdalena bought a birthday cake for another who was turning 18.

"I don't know how Mary Jo does it, because she never asks for anything," says Fiona Reid. "She describes a situation, and somehow you find yourself doing something about it." Keith Leckie says much the same: "There is no pressure, but suddenly you want to help." When Mary Jo let it drop that the refugees were pinched by poverty and found the long waits for immigration hearings tedious, Tony Rebelo began hiring them to do painting and odd jobs; once, he took on all five men in one family. Fiona Reid pays for occasional help around the garden and house. When Pat and Mary Collins asked a refugee to help in Mary's mother's garden, they discovered he was a professor of agronomy, no less.

The thousand acts of kindness were reciprocated. A Mexican family with three daughters, two of them blind, kept the shared driveway impeccable and shovelled sidewalks for neighbours, refusing to be paid. Whenever a car was stuck in the snow, the men of Romero House would rush out, forget-

while I sat on his front porch and waited. Finally he sighed, fastened the spraying hose to his fence and joined me, limping painfully from arthritis. He was grumpy about "those people" at Romero House, about the refugee children who stepped on his flowers years ago, about the noise from teenagers, about Romero House's burned-out, weedy front lawn, an affront to his adjoining emerald carpet, and about the despicable plan in 1995 to move people into the garage, something he still believes was the intention. We talked idly about his youth in the German army, about how half his right hand was shot away on the Russian front, about the cruel deaths of his parents in that war. When he grew more comfortable, he went inside to get a photo album. Turning the pages, we studied a picture of his granddaughter and her husband, a man whose family, I learned, came from India. Valantin's pride in this picture didn't fit with the general view that opposition to the Romero House garage had a racist component.

"He is very handsome," I said of the grandson-in-law.

Valantin was suddenly enthusiastic: "Yes, and *smart!* He is one of 11 children, and they are all good, all educated."

"But isn't he a different, uh, religion?"

I was given a pitying look. "Sure, but he is *religious.*"

It was such a good answer, so right, I had nothing more to say. In companionate silence, we listened to the summer sound of cicadas and watched the arc of sun-silvered water falling from the hose.

ONE EVENING IN EARLY 1999 AT A ROMERO HOUSE GATHERING, Tony Rebelo said, "You know, Mary Jo, we should hold a street party. Bring everyone together." With a meaningful look, he added, "Make sure *that thing* doesn't happen again." Mary Jo pictured a barbecue, maybe games for the children. Instead, what Wanda Road got in the summer of 1999 was a Tony Rebelo production. Mary Jo was pressed into service to obtain a permit to close the street and find a hundred or so folding chairs. Grace Rebelo, an insurance underwriter, arranged for appropriate coverage. Tony lined the street with wooden standards festooned with pennants and Christmas lights borrowed from his Portuguese church. A stage appeared in the middle of the road, with a sound system and helium balloons. People loaned barbecues to cook hamburgers

program. Denyse Richardson would supervise the games. Such chores as set-up, cleanup and emptying garbage bins were assigned; lists beget lists.

The Leckies mentioned that the party coincided with their 20th anniversary and that they would like Jack Costello from Regis College to give them a sort of blessing. Tony Rebelo was inspired to construct an enormous crescent moon out of Styrofoam, which Grace upholstered in bright blue cloth. They dressed dolls as bride and groom to dangle from the cusp. The whole contraption would be suspended from the trees and unveiled as a surprise for the Leckies. The idea had something to do with the Frank Sinatra song "Fly Me to the Moon," which Tony decided was appropriate for the occasion.

Then it was discovered that the party coincided almost exactly with Mrs. Mackay's 95th birthday. Mary Jo ordered a cake big enough for everyone on the street. Grace Rebelo bought Mrs. Mackay a new dress and a wide-brimmed hat to match. "I'll look like the Queen," Mrs. Mackay gasped. Meanwhile, a new couple was moving into 44 Wanda? Wonderful!



and hot dogs. Banquet tables were arranged, laden with potluck food, and there were iced tubs of water and juice. A program of entertainment featured Wanda Road's children, dancing and singing their hearts out. A mounted police officer arrived to make a safety check, and so did firefighters on a fire truck. The children were ecstatic. That first party was a resounding success, and the following year's was even better.

Preparations for the third annual Wanda Road street party began in the dead of winter. Neighbours received notices of the planning meetings at the home of the Rebelos. So much to do. Get the Nyamamusango marimba band, which plays music from Zimbabwe. We'll need noisemakers for the kids' parade around the neighbourhood, with a banner inviting everyone to come. Pans and lids and spoons should do it. Grace would make the banner. Parents were assigned to corners as crossing guards. Keith Leckie agreed to carry a boxful of extra noisemakers so other children could join in.

Someone offered to round up a generator for the Christmas lights to be lit at dusk. It was decided five barbecues would be set up on the driveway belonging to Maxine Wilson, at the corner of Wanda and Indian Road Crescent. Max works for the school board and was a natural to design the children's

They would get an official welcome and a presentation. And an orphaned 12-year-old boy, fresh from five years in a refugee camp in Angola, had just joined his long-lost sister at Romero House. Great, we'll welcome him, too. Mary Young Leckie, the filmmaker, would produce the talent show. The program would include a traditional dance by four Mexican children, the Tibetan Preservation of Culture group performing in ceremonial dress, and Ned Gallagher, a 12-year-old prodigy on bagpipes. Fiona Reid, who knows her way around a stage, would be the announcer.

Mary Jo cringed to learn she was expected to sing. She researched the history of Wanda Road and wrote astoundingly corny lyrics for something she titled "Willoughby Blues," named for the family that originally owned much of the area. She planned to render this ditty while wearing dark glasses and a floppy red hat pulled low: "The refugees love it when I make a fool of myself."

The third annual street party last June was crazy, wonderful and touching, a splendid example of tolerance and community. A banner in the yard at Romero House summed up the little miracle on a street called Wanda: "Love for All. Hatred for None."