

Catharine Salt

One may say Catharine was preordained to be both a Soroptimist and a hotelier since her mother, Mrs Ewing, was a prominent Glasgow Soroptimist, who ran a highly successful family business in the south side of Glasgow, the Ewington Hotel. Thus was Catharine introduced at a very early age to both her profession and her "hobby". Her quiet demeanour belied a shrewd head for business and the hotel expanded greatly under Catharine's management.

Catharine joined SI Glasgow South in 1958 and rose rapidly through the ranks. She became Club president in 1963 and held many convenorships during her long membership in Glasgow South. Catharine was President of Scotland South Divisional Union in 1966/67, SIGBI President in 1978/79 and International President of Soroptimist International in 1981/83.

To all of these positions, Catharine brought her unique blend of quiet humour and charm and determination to work for improvements in the lives of women and girls throughout the world. During her time in office SI expanded at a steady pace. By the end of her term in office as International President, 1983, Soroptimist International provided a programme of service internationally through 71 countries and 2,250 Clubs. Catharine was particularly interested in gaining UN recognition for all this work.

The UN had recognised 10th December as Human Rights Day and since 1956 Soroptimists had recognised the day as International Day. In 1981, during Catharine's inaugural address, Catharine asked members to go one step further by introducing the International President's Appeal Day on 10th December. She asked that all Soroptimists make a personal sacrifice that day, so that money could be donated, at the International President's discretion, to women in great need anywhere in the world. The first project to benefit was on the island of Pulau Bidong, Malaysia, aiding refugee women and children. Approximately US\$20,456 was raised for the 1982 Appeal and was so successful that subsequent International Presidents have continued with the 10th December Appeal Day. During her tenure, Catharine visited all four Federations and toured two international projects.

Throughout her long Soroptimist career, Catharine always spoke of the need to ensure equality for all and stressed the need for members in the rich countries of the world to share their resources, time and expertise with the less well-off nations. She hoped that by so doing women could join men by working for a peaceful and prosperous world.

When Catharine Salt died in 2001, Soroptimists throughout the world pondered on what they could do to honour Catharine and her work. Monies came in from all over the Soroptimist world, and two fitting projects were funded. The first was the erection of a memorial bench in the Soroptimist area of the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.

The second project was one which would have received full support from Catharine. The Catharine Salt School Building was erected in Kibera, a vast densely populated slum area in Nairobi, Kenya. Here women and girls were taught basic skills in literacy, numeracy and sewing. At the end of two years' training there, the women and girls had the skills to set up small businesses and were thus able to provide for themselves and their families and so lift them out of poverty.

Glasgow Soroptimists provided funds annually for the upkeep of the building and for the education of two pupils, including board and lodging. The project was so successful that by 2016, it was self-sufficient and no longer needed support.

A fitting tribute indeed, to Catharine Salt, member of SI International.

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