

Hema Abeygunawardena
(1942 - 2004)

Hema Abeygunawardena passed away in Canada in June 2004, after a valiant 14 year battle with breast cancer. She was the wife of Hector and mother of three sons, Vish, Vinodh and Vikum. She was also a tireless advocate on behalf of breast cancer.

Hema was born in Sri Lanka and had a distinguished career as a teacher and educator there. She joined the CIE in 1986, with a Fulbright Scholarship. She brought to the CIE her rich teaching and training experiences and she was described as “a cheery and colorful asset.” After receiving her M.Ed. in 1989 from UMass, she went to Canada where she earned an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in 2002.



At the time of her death, she was involved in various projects in the area of qualitative research. During her battle with breast cancer, Hema distinguished herself by being a tireless advocate on behalf of breast cancer patients. She was a founding member of Willow Breast Cancer Services for women in Toronto and worked closely with the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Initiative. She was a constant presence by the side of anybody afflicted with this terrible disease. For her efforts, she was awarded the Young Women's Christian Association Women of Distinction Award for Volunteerism in 1998. The family would like to thank the medical staff at Sunnybrook, Mount Sinai and St. Michael's for taking great care of her during her epic battle.