

# SELECTED OBITUARIES

## OLIVIA ROBELLO BREITHA



Olivia Robello Breitha - United Nations, New York  
October 30, 1997

### New York Times - October 8, 2006 “Olivia Robello Breitha, 90, Leprosy Exile, Is Dead”

*“Olivia Robello Breitha, who shared her story of exile as a leprosy patient on a remote peninsula of Molokai island and strove to dispel myths about the disease, died Sept. 28. She was 90. Ms. Breitha was brought to the Kalaupapa settlement on Molokai in 1937, three years after she contracted Hansen’s disease, also known as leprosy. Her 1988 autobiography, “Olivia: My Life in Exile in Kalaupapa,” enlightened generations of readers about leprosy, a disfiguring condition that had been feared for centuries. More than 8,000 people were banished to Molokai after the disease became epidemic in the 1850’s. Forced quarantine did not end until 1969, after sulfone drugs were developed to control it. Ms. Breitha continued to live in Kalaupapa even after the quarantine was lifted. Her death brought the number of patients remaining there to 33.”*

### Los Angeles Times - October 08, 2006 “Olivia Breitha, 90; Wrote of Living With Leprosy”

*“If life had gone the way Olivia Robello Breitha planned it, she probably would have married her fiancé in 1934, had children and lived an ordinary life in Hawaii. Instead she was diagnosed with leprosy and sent into exile. In an instant Breitha changed from Olivia Robello, who was happily waiting to be married, to a frightened girl, estranged from friends and family, none of whom had the illness. Breitha, a writer and activist who advocated for the rights of people with leprosy, died Sept. 28 of congestive heart failure at a care facility in Kalaupapa.”*

### BBC Radio 4 - Nov. 3, 2006

*“Olivia Breitha, born June 6th 1916, was diagnosed with leprosy and sent into exile on the peninsula of Kalaupapa. She died September 28<sup>th</sup> 2006, aged 90. An outspoken campaigner for the rights of leprosy sufferers. She was a prominent member of an organization called IDEA, which campaigns for Integration, Dignity and Economic Advancement for people with Hansen’s disease.*

### Honolulu Advertiser - September 29, 2006

*Kalaupapa writer Olivia Robello Breitha, whose autobiography "Olivia - My Life of Exile in Kalaupapa" was a compelling and inspirational account of life as a Hansen's disease patient on Molokai's isolated peninsula, died there yesterday at age 90, reducing the Kalaupapa registry number to 33 patients. Breitha once wrote: "My name is Olivia. It's 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 hurtful word. ... Trying not to be a statistic, trying to be a person."*

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