

Keep your library

An open letter to those East London City Council members who voted to close the library to Blacks. From Russell Ally, a teenage pupil at John Bissiker High.

A LEAKING roof, a flickering candle and... a large air-conditioned library. A kitchen table, rickety chairs, five of us and... a large air-conditioned library. Squalor, poverty, us.

We need a place to study, to read, to breathe. Our primary school brothers and sisters swarm our already too small library. The city library is closed to us. Where now? Have we caused any damage? Destroyed books perhaps? Given the place an unpleasant odour? Or does our presence cause embarrassment, uneasiness, maybe? Might we steal from somebody? Might we harm somebody?

We only want somewhere to sit, for you, for others, and you need have no fear of us taking over your library. Not for a chance in education we ask, but for education.

A sinking carpet, soundproof cubicle, silence, atmosphere of learning, feel of life... a library. A kitchen, a baby screaming, brother and sister fighting over who must sit nearest the candle, mom washing pots.

If we promise not to touch any of your books, not to sit on your chairs or use your tables, not even to look at you, would you allow us to sit on your carpeted floors? You could build a separate entrance for us at the back. We will not use your toilets. Honest we will give you no trouble.

You could order us to work for a visit. A kind of covert. We will work for the floors we use. Dust shelves, sweep floors, clean toilets, and where we have sat we will spray, fumigate so that no-one will know we have been there.

Do you know you could make special hours for us? Midnight, early morning, your convenience first.

About subsidies, administrators, what is right and what is wrong, we know little. About three storming out of a meeting in a teacup we do not understand. Conditions, concessions, we do not care. We have up till now eaten half loaves of bread. Whole loaves cost too much and besides one cannot live on bread alone.

Could we come with a police officer present? Some dogs, strict security?

On second thoughts, keep your library. We can do without. The complete loaf of bread will be ours one day.

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THERE must be few who, at the age of four score years and six, could reach the end of a very full and useful life with the same tempo and enthusiasm that marked its span. FLORENCE DRUMMOND was one of those singular people. Perhaps the tempo had slowed down a little; but even on that Friday, the day before she died on Saturday, September 11, she had motored out to Mobeni to collect material for the stall she ran for the Progref fete.

So the news of her sudden, quiet death came as a shock to us all. We mourn for her family to whom she was a wonderful mother.

Aunt Florence, as we knew her, was strong in mind and body, and because of her interest in people, both young and old, and in the affairs of her country, she had a sort of "ageless" quality. So it was natural that she should have been one of the first to join the Black Sash movement that stood out against the Nationalist Government's rape of the Constitution in 1954. I remember, also, on returning from Johannesburg after the inspiring inaugural meeting of the Progressive Party, speaking to a group of Aunt Florence's contemporaries.

Only Aunt Florence, and my mother, realised that the time had come to break through the sound barrier of old attitudes. It was not easy for people of their generation to discard outdated habits of thought, but it was characteristic of Aunt Florence that whenever a situation or need arose, she faced up to it squarely, not purely out of a sense of duty, but because she believed it was right and she enjoyed doing it.

She had an amazing capacity for hatching "new ideas" to help a cause, and with her mental and physical stamina, her fearlessness, her sense of humour, she was able to undertake any task, not just with dedicated purpose, but with great enthusiasm.

She was a very genuine human being, and we shall all miss her greatly.

Elizabeth Franklin