

Proud Women

a collection of stories

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association







Lydia M. Siapno



Amarilis Jerez-Dardón



Beatriz Dulay



Karin Richter



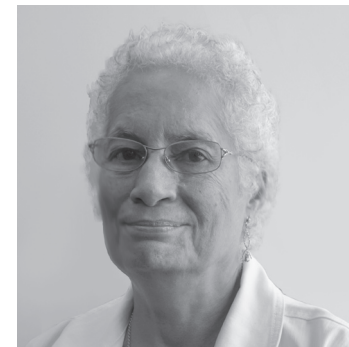
Gerda R. Bloemraad



Rossbina Nathoo



Chieko Imada



Shirley Fleming



Idrees A. Khan



Amtul Mateen Khan



Baljinder Gill



Myrtle Gomez



Manju Ahlawat



Rizwana Ahmed



Gurmit Sarpal



Maria Carmen-Macias



Effrossini Tzigalanis



Mervis Higgins



Kulwant Davlarh



Bea Twumasi



Valsa Peter



Umran Sumen



Kathleen Payne-Massiah

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Introduction

The purpose of the Proud Women project was to inspire and encourage intergenerational communication and understanding between immigrant youth and seniors. We wanted young immigrants to look for role models from their communities and glean knowledge and wisdom from the pool of experience that senior immigrant women have to share. Seniors, in return, could look back at their lives and conceptualize their integration experience in a way that opens avenues of understanding and appreciation for their heritage, their past, and where they are now.

What started as a humble initiative soon exploded into an ambitious project with numerous opportunities for meaningful involvement by many people affiliated with the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association. The project generated enthusiasm, energy, and a clear direction to uniquely present and celebrate diversity within our communities and point out its benefits to our society.

Indeed, the best part has been the value of engagement for all participants – youth being exposed to a learning opportunity, and seniors being able to express a sense of pride in their decision to become Canadians, adopt a new country and life for themselves and their families.

You, readers, will travel through the whole world and visit places that your fellow Canadians have come from. Women, who would otherwise remain just a face in the crowd, will become heroines within their inspirational life journeys. You will learn to love and respect them for their courageous actions, devotion, love and commitment to their families. You will learn about the sacrifices they made to attain a better life for their loved ones. A positive and optimistic message of peace and love will come your way and make you feel good about being their audience. Mostly unnoticeable on any given day, these women will remind you about

the importance of values, dignity in life, compassion and forgiveness.

The youth who went through the journey and took ownership of the project were inspired and enlightened. They are so much richer for the experience as they pursue their personal growth and foster ambition to reach their goals and dreams. And, yes, in a decade or two, I am sure their personal stories and achievements will be an inspiration for a new generation of immigrant women coming to this beautiful country.

Beba Svigir
Executive Director
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association



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Manju Ahlawat



By: Bronwyn Hepworth

Manju Ahlawat was born in Calcutta, India. What makes Manju so special and interesting is her love and passion to learn new things in life and take extraordinary risks to fulfill her dreams. Manju is an inspiring woman. She believes in volunteering and helping people. In India, she contributed her time to the Chelsea Organization that helps educate the young and old who live in rural areas of Africa about AIDS and the importance of using condoms. Here in Calgary, she is volunteering her time for a domestic abuse organization. The three words that I would use to describe Manju are: ambitious, loving and strong. These come from the goals that she has set for herself and the love she has for her family.

Being raised in an all girl family, Manju carries on the family name to show how proud she is of her family and of the fact she is a woman. The word strong describes Manju because of the sacrifices she has made for her family. Manju left behind her friends but also her beloved son in India to make a better life in Canada. Manju made me realize that life is not what it seems and chasing your dreams involves sacrifices. I admire Manju for taking risks in her life.

What shaped and changed Manju's life was her experience in different careers. Manju gained her Master's Degree in History and taught at a college in India. Leaving India for Canada in 1999 resulted in a career change for her. Manju started working with an immigrant serving agency in Edmonton where she was

inspired to get her Diploma in Social Work at Grant MacEwan Community College. Manju believed that helping people was her main priority. In 2007, she returned to university to complete her Master's in Social Work.

Moving to a new country, a new culture and learning new rules would be scary for many people, but Manju believed that her parents helped her prepare for challenges in life. Manju credits her parents for being able to tackle all the obstacles in her life. Her words of wisdom helped me realize the importance of enjoying what Canada has to offer immigrants today and that family is always there to help you fulfill your dreams.

Manju's advice to young immigrant women is to embrace the new culture and values that Canada has to offer. "Never give up dreaming because dreams are the foundation of reality."

I am grateful to Manju for helping me realize that anything is possible if you are willing to make changes.

Karin Richter



By: Jennifer Bhatla

“Be proud.” Karin’s mother used these words a lot. Karin did not know what they really meant then. Now, years later, and an ocean away, Karin describes her life and the pride she has gained as a result of her life experiences.

Karin was born in post-war Germany in 1950. Across from the house where Karin grew up were bombed buildings. Though there was evidence of war everywhere, people seldom spoke of it. Karin felt a lack of openness in the country and acceptance of people from other places.

From a young age, Karin had a passion for art. Her father always encouraged her love for art and she pursued art courses for many years along with gymnastics. When it came to choosing a career, Karin decided to study languages, English and French. This was a more secure choice of profession as it allowed her to work in many companies doing translation and interpretation. She worked in France and Germany, where she practiced both her English and French. Painting being her passion, she continued to make art.

At 23, Karin Richter boarded a Russian ship headed for Canada. When they sailed up the St. Lawrence in May, Karin was in awe of the vast land and the space that you can not see in Europe. They arrived in Montreal, a place to start searching for jobs and a place to stay. She fell in love with the country, the diversity and the vastness of the land. “I remember being

on the bus in the first few days and I thought, “Wow! There is a guy sitting with a turban behind me, and in front of me a Chinese person. That was fantastic. I loved that.”

Karin loved the tolerance and diversity she encountered in Canada.

She found a job as a translator and after that started evening courses in International Relations at Concordia University, an opportunity she might not have had before. In 1977, Karin moved to Calgary where she used her spare time to get involved in the arts community. She joined art organizations and learned the ropes of putting on art exhibitions.

Every three to four years, Karin visits Germany and her family has also traveled to Canada to visit her. She never imagined moving back. She considers herself Canadian. In Canada, she feels at home. She is proud of her roots but embraces Canadian life and culture.

Karin’s greatest source of pride is her children. Her daughter has inherited her passion for art, but she has taken to the performing arts rather than painting. Her son has gone into business. As a mother, Karin feels she played an incredibly important role in shaping her children’s future.

Karin works as an artist, teaches art classes and volunteers in the arts community. She

believes a woman not only nurtures her own children, but other people as well. Through teaching she has the ability to empower others and make a change in their lives. Karin’s numerous contributions to her community were acknowledged by the Immigrants of Distinction Award she received in 2010.

Karin hopes that gender inequalities in art will disappear. Currently, male artists make more money than their female counterparts. Karin feels that society views women’s art as a past time rather than a profession.

Karin’s advice to young immigrant women is to be proud, to honor their roots and to keep their individuality. Each woman has a unique gift to share. She believes it is important to work hard, keep a positive attitude and instill values in your children.

As for pride, Karin says that success is not the only factor, “Pride comes from doing the right thing. Do the ethical thing and do not take shortcuts.” Karin’s life is a proof of this.

She opened my eyes and allowed me to see what is right in front of me from a different perspective.



Kathleen Payne-Massiah



By: Laura Alvarado

Kathleen Payne-Massiah was born in Antigua, West Indies in 1947. She remembers her childhood and how she enjoyed the sunny, hot weather of her country with her friends. Her family was active in the church.

Kathleen has always been a hard worker. When she was a child, her aunt and mother taught her the importance of having a good education. She left home when she was still a young girl to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse. She also wanted to get married and have four children.

In 1978, she decided to move to Canada because her family was there and she wanted to experience life in this country. Things were difficult in the beginning because of the cold weather, but when she started meeting new people and discovering the opportunities that this country had to offer, it became easier for her. Kathleen wanted to further her education and took courses while working.

One of her biggest challenges was attending university as an adult student. In university, she was one of the older students. She is proud that she did not let that stand in her way. Kathleen graduated in 1990 with a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing.

Kathleen could not begin working as a registered nurse right away as she needed to complete a certification exam. In the meantime, she worked in a nursing home as a graduate nurse. She took initiative and visited

hospitals so she could learn how the medical system worked. She also read some nursing magazines and talked with nurses to increase her understanding. After studying very hard, she passed her certification exam. Currently, Kathleen works part-time at the Peter Lougheed Hospital and she is very happy.

The people Kathleen met in Canada helped her tremendously. The system in Canada was different and yet full of opportunities. She became an independent woman with the freedom to express her own feelings, get a credit card, own a car and buy a house. In Canada, women can start a business and live alone if they want to. Kathleen believes women play an important role in the society.

Kathleen likes to help people adjust to life in Canada. She volunteers with Calgary Catholic Immigration Society in the HOST Program for refugee families and with Big Brothers Big Sisters. The advice she would give to young immigrant women is that Canada is a country of opportunities. There are many things that women can do and succeed within their individual circumstances.

"You should never believe that because you are a woman you cannot do something. Women are powerful and they have a lot of love and wisdom to share. As women, we are in a great place and we should be proud of who we are."





By: Kate Han

Rosbina Nathoo

Rossbina is an experienced and vibrant woman. Her curly hair glimmers under the sun. Her eyes are gentle, yet alive, and she has a joyous smile. She looks different from anyone else I have seen.

She was born in Uganda and grew up in the capital city, Kampala. The city was a British protectorate filled with diverse people. Schools were ruled by the British and taught by their teachers. Rossbina received her education in English.

Her childhood was filled with friends and neighbours, and a carefree environment. Nature was her best friend. She loved climbing trees, catching grasshoppers, playing street games with sticks and stones, and hide-and-seek game. She would go to the prayer hall every day where all the Ismaili Muslims met to pray.

From her role models, her mother and grandmother, Rossbina learned discipline, how to be a strong woman, how to encourage those around her, and care for her family. Rossbina's mother was one of the first women in their hometown who learned how to drive. She was truly independent. At that time, most women took care of cooking, cleaning, and looking after their families. Rossbina's mother was different - she created balance in her life. She maintained the traditional role of a woman, but also wanted to do something for herself. Rossbina recognizes her mother's support and views her as an inspiration; "She had big visions, she wanted to be an entrepreneur, and to get involved in business."

When Idi Amin came into power in Uganda, Rossbina and her family were forced to leave the country with 90 days notice. She left

Uganda as a refugee in October 1972, and headed to Montreal. Rossbina and her family of five were among 50,000 refugees who were airlifted by Air Canada. She was excited to travel on the plane and was not afraid of the unknown. Upon arrival to Canada, the government offered them support and security and they also received support from the Ismaili community.

Rossbina's first impression of Canada was a dream come true. The winter was freezing with bone-chilling wind. Rossbina and her family were taken to a large navy warehouse and given warm clothes. She had never experienced winter and had never worn a winter coat.

In Canada, Rossbina was introduced to concepts she had never seen or heard of before. At first, Rossbina and her family felt they were not appreciated nor understood in a new country. They experienced lots of challenges and sometimes felt discriminated against. Within two years of their arrival, they felt a positive change in how they and their community were looked at. They felt respect and acceptance. By that time, Rossbina and her family owned a house and a car, and they felt more at home.

Rossbina remembers that in Uganda, she had no right to speak and express her feelings freely. In Canada, she gained confidence because teachers understood her and paid extra attention to her needs. The move to Canada was fairly smooth for her, but more challenging for her parents. It was very difficult for them to find jobs.

Her only regret in life was not being able to afford to attend university. "Without

education, there is no direction for young refugees like I was. Young women have so much potential in themselves."

Nevertheless, life in Canada gave Rossbina the means to fulfill her dreams and passions. Through her job at the Calgary airport, she finally was able to travel to places she had dreamed of such as India, China, and Iraq. However, Canada holds the top spot in her heart.

Rossbina wanted to give back to the country that accepted her. She started volunteering in kindergartens, tutoring, helping in hospitals, and teaching at the Muslim community in Calgary. In 2009s Rossbina's volunteer contributions were recognized when she received an Immigrants of Distinction Award and a Top 25 Canadian Immigrants Award. She is also the founder of a seniors' group in Calgary.

Like her mother, Rossbina has become a role model for others. She helps seniors shine and age gracefully. Rossbina also wants to be a role model for her children and grandchildren, and continue to learn.

Her dream is to see strong and confident young women that work towards making a better society. She wants to remind all young women about the importance of education for their future. Volunteering and giving back to the community is very important for her. Rossbina's final message is: "Plan your future, read, meet new people and educate yourself."

Shirley Fleming



By: Rebia Yassin

Shirley Fleming is from Grenada, also called “Isle of Spice” in the Caribbean. She has lived in Canada for 30 years. She came here with her husband and three children in 1980 after a revolution which took place in her home country.

As a young girl, Shirley’s mother taught her the importance of standing up for herself. She dreamed about becoming a lawyer because she also wanted to stand up for others. The death of Shirley’s father, when she was a teenager, changed her life and goals.

In high school, her favourite subjects were English, Literature and Geography. After high school, Shirley worked in the administration office of a department store. During her free time, she volunteered at the local radio station in the record library. She catalogued all the records and tapes. She also assisted with the programs that were going to air and reviewed letters that the station received from listeners. Eventually she started working at the station full-time.

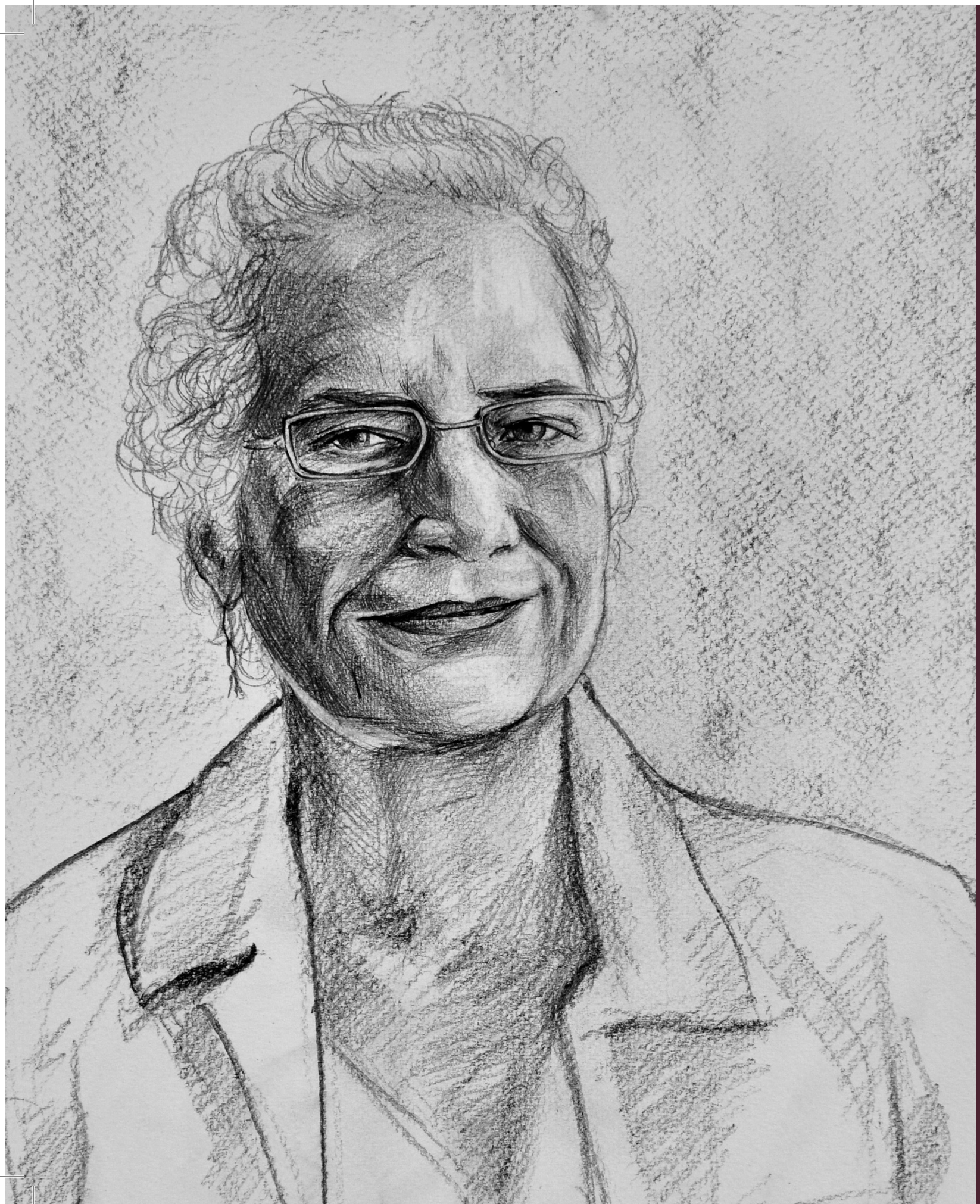
In 1963, Shirley got married. Her proudest moment was when she gave birth to her first child, her daughter. She couldn’t believe that this beautiful child was a part of her. She can

still remember the moment clearly. She also has two sons.

Shirley and her husband chose to immigrate to Canada because they felt it was a safer and better country for their children to grow up in. Her first impression when she arrived in Canada was one of freedom. It was pretty easy for her to find a job because of her experience in Grenada. Her husband’s background was in accounting and it was more difficult for him to find a job.

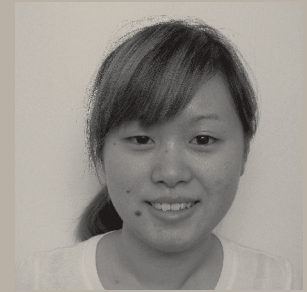
Her dream for the future is to continue to be healthy and to see peace in the world. Currently, Shirley is retired and spends her time volunteering in the community and pursuing her hobbies of cross-stitching, beading, knitting and crocheting.

She is proud to be a woman because women can do things that men can not do. The advice that she would like to give young immigrant women is to be proud of their heritage and who they are. “Be who you are because everyone else is taken.”





Chieko Imada



By: Kokoro Imada

My mother, Chieko Imada, is 50 years old. She is originally from Japan. She lived in Halifax with her family from 1988 to 1993 and then they returned to Japan. In 2008, Chieko and her husband decided to come back to Canada. Chieko now works at a souvenir store at the Calgary airport.

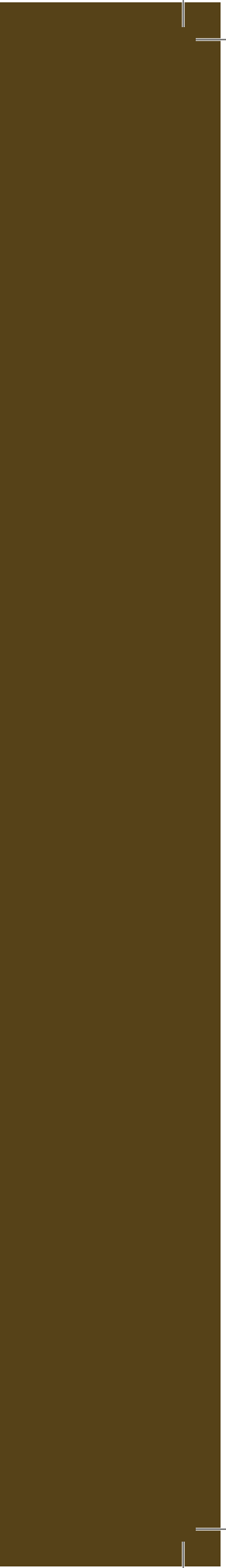
There are two reasons why she came back to Canada. First, she was tired of the society in Japan. Although she thinks that Japan is a peaceful, affluent and beautiful country, she also thinks there is too much of everything there - too much stuff and information. She prefers the simple life in Canada. Second, my sister and I wanted to live in Canada. Since we were little kids, we were interested in English and life in Canada. My mother and father talked about us children and made a decision to move back. She thought it would be a valuable experience for us to live in Canada because it is less racially homogeneous than Japan.

In Canada, my mother developed her goals and dreams. Her first goal was to work, so she found a job at the airport. Her second goal was to learn English. At first, she was worried about her English. At the store where she works, all of the staff are Japanese. Customers

come from all around the world and she enjoys meeting them. It is a good place for her to improve English. She still finds it difficult to express herself in English, but she is trying every day. She sometimes criticizes Canada because things are never on time here and she doesn't understand why. There are many things she loves about Canada. When she is down or sad, the beautiful skies and the Rocky Mountains help her feel better. She loves the Rocky Mountains. One of her dreams is to live in a house with a view of the Rocky Mountains.

Our family relationships became stronger since our move to Canada. We help each other more than when we lived in Japan. My mother says that Canada is a great country because it accepts immigrants and recognizes their cultures.

My mother is enjoying her life in Canada with her family.



Gerda R. Bloemraad



By: Naomi Baumert

Gerda R. Bloemraad is a woman who fights for her rights and never gives up.

After graduating from Law School in her home country, the Netherlands, she dreamed of becoming the first female judge appointed to the Dutch Supreme Court. Gerda gave up this ambition when she left the Netherlands in 1969 with her husband, a geologist, who was offered a job in Spain. The family lived in Spain, Thailand, England and Greece before coming to Canada in 1975.

Gerda remained at home the first few years and tried to integrate into Canadian society. She improved her English and became active in her daughter's school. Gerda realized that speaking in public with an accent is very different from talking to people face to face. She learned to ignore the giggles and people's unwillingness to understand her, but it was not easy.

Her professional degree was not recognized in Canada, so she decided to go back to school at York University in Toronto. Despite administrative challenges, she was accepted and attended evening classes since she had two small children to take care of during the day.

In 1981, her family moved again as her husband was offered a job in Saskatoon. Gerda completed her Bachelor's of Arts degree at the University of Saskatchewan in 1985. She hadn't given up her dream to become a lawyer. At 45 years of age, Gerda returned to Law School and completed her degree. She had difficulty finding an articling position, so, she wrote to the Law Society of

Saskatchewan and had them advocate on her behalf. Gerda passed the admission exam for the Bar Association in 1994.

That same year she was encouraged to run in the civic election for Saskatoon's City Council. As soon as she declared her candidacy, the people who had encouraged her disappeared for various reasons. During TV appearances and while knocking on 5000 doors, she discovered that her accent and her background were the topics of conversation instead of what her political platform was. She often received comments like: "What a lovely accent, where are you from?" When she responded that she had lived in Canada for 20 years and was a Canadian citizen, she was still asked which country she was from. People would tell her: "I prefer to vote for a candidate who is born and raised here and knows Saskatoon".

She experienced drawbacks as an immigrant, but also as a woman. She received several comments like: "Why don't you go back to your kitchen", "Politics are for men", "What does your husband think of you running" or "Who is looking after your kids while you are knocking on doors?" Needless to say, her political career did not take off.

In 1995, she finally started practicing law in Canada, first in a small law firm, and after moving to Toronto in a big company there. After her husband passed away in 2003, Gerda remained working, but being alone in Toronto was difficult. She decided to retire and move to Calgary, where her son and his family live. She is also closer to her daughter and her family in California.

Today, Gerda is the President and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Calgary Immigrant Woman's Association (CIWA) and she is also active at the condominium complex where she lives. Both positions keep her very busy.

One of her achievements is to have raised two successful children. Her daughter is a professor at the University of Berkeley in California and her son is in a management position at a fitness club in Calgary.

Gerda's advice to other women is to never give up, follow your dreams and do not let any obstacle stop you.

Valsa Peter



By: Neethu Sagar

When I first met Valsa Peter, I didn't feel she was different than any other woman around me, but when she shared with me her six decades of memories and experiences, she showed me a wider view of life.

Valsa was born and brought up in a remote village in India where people gave high priority to traditional values. Families considered marriage to be the biggest thing that can happen in a woman's life. They used to have celebrations when the girl matured and was ready for marriage. At that time in India, sons had the priority to go to school and daughters did not receive enough support to get higher education.

Unlike other families, Valsa's father inspired and supported her to create a different life than her girlfriends. Her ambition was to become a journalist. She managed to get admitted into a leading journalism school in India, but it was not meant to be. She married and had to let go of her dreams in order to settle down with her new family.

Later, when her husband went to work in Saudi Arabia, she got the chance to study to become a teacher. She had a successful teaching career in India for four years and then

moved to Saudi Arabia to join her husband.

In Saudi Arabia, her life changed dramatically. She got a chance to live in an international community, but the religious beliefs created boundaries between genders. Those experiences have given her the insight that human beings are the same everywhere in the world.

Her life in Saudi Arabia made her more independent and she started making her own money. Unlike in India, she started getting support from her husband with the care of kids, household chores, and other responsibilities. These changes enabled her to send her kids to a western school. She believes that was the right decision because her kids became independent and self-sufficient. Life in Saudi Arabia also gave her a career change from teaching to a corporate employee. She was hired by Saudi ARAMCO, one of the largest oil companies in the world. As a training coordinator, she assisted Saudi nationals with planning their education and professional goals.

In 2000, Valsa immigrated to Canada and found it was a good place for her to spend the rest of her life. She liked the values and freedoms in Canada, and the security for all

individuals irrespective of nationality, gender, and race. Valsa liked that in Canada, women had the same opportunities as men. Freedom of speech and cultural diversity are important to Valsa.

In Canada, it was difficult for Valsa and her husband to find jobs. They did not have Canadian education or work experience. She went to college again and started studying under teachers who were half her age. After completing her upgrading, she started teaching again.

Today, Valsa has completely adapted to life in Canada. She believes there are positive and negative values in all cultures. When girls from traditional cultures move to Canada, they should identify, choose and balance the values they adopt according to their personal identity. Girls have the opportunity to first identify themselves as women with freedoms to learn, work, choose life partners, and life styles. They need not bow down to family and cultural pressures due to fear and repression. Valsa is a living proof of this freedom.





Maria Carmen-Macias



By: Karen Vito

Maria Carmen-Macias was born in Nicaragua. At eighteen months, she was separated from her parents and was raised by her grandparents. She spent most of her childhood preparing for womanhood. In her culture, 15 is the age when girls are considered women. They call it “quinceañera”. She would daydream about that day, celebrating with her friends and family, dancing to vibrant music and feasting on various foods especially prepared to commemorate that day.

In Nicaragua, Maria worked as a secretary at an office while raising four children as a single mother. She remembers, during the winter, when it would rain really hard, she would walk home instead of taking the taxi. She loved walking home in the rain and by the time she arrived she was soaked from head to toe. Maria has many nice memories of her home country. She enjoyed two very important religious celebrations: “La Sangre de Cristo’s Imagen” (The Blood of Christ) and The Veneration of the Immaculate Conception.

Due to political problems in Nicaragua, Maria knew that it was not safe for her children to stay there. They escaped to Costa Rica. Although it was safer in Costa Rica, Maria had to work harder to survive and provide food and clothes for her children. She did hard labor jobs such as housekeeping, ironing and working in the coffee fields. From time to time, Maria helped her children pick coffee berries. One day during winter, they were working in the coffee fields and it was raining

really hard. When it was time to go home their supervisor offered them a ride home. They all got into his tractor and went through a big puddle which covered them with mud. They started to laugh thinking about what their relatives in Nicaragua would say if they saw them. Maria will always remember that time because she and her children were still able to have fun and laugh even though they were going through a hard time.

In Costa Rica, she learned of a program which helped people immigrate to Canada. She applied and was sponsored by the Canadian government to immigrate. With her four children she came to Canada in 1985. The journey took them from Costa Rica, to Miami, Toronto, and then to Fort McMurray.

In Canada, Maria worked many different jobs. Life was very different. She met a Mexican woman who was a truck driver. Maria was amazed to see a petite woman drive a really big vehicle. Back in Nicaragua, women were only allowed to do domestic or clerical jobs that would assist men.

Maria’s views on women and their roles started to change. She began to feel that as a woman, she could do anything and be treated with respect. Coming to Canada was like winning a big prize for her. She was able to bring her family with her and considers it a blessing from God.

Today, Maria’s passion is to teach people

about Nicaraguan culture. After seeing the Canada Day Parade for the first time she called her friends from South America and suggested that they make a float for the following year. Today, Maria represents Canadian Hispanic Seniors through the Calgary Connecting Seniors Cultural Council. She connects seniors to cultural festivals and has received acknowledgments for her achievements.

Maria believes that women enrich a society by celebrating different cultures and upholding the best values of each culture. As a woman, she is proud to have good children who she raised on her own. She now has ten grandchildren and is very happy.

The advice she wants to give to young immigrant women is to work hard and get a good education. She also tells them to not take anything for granted but appreciate the good things that come their way.



Lydia M. Siapno



By: Reika Enjambre

“Success seems to be connected with passion. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don’t quit.”

Lydia is a woman full of passion. She was born in Pangasinan, a province in the Philippines. As a young girl, Lydia’s mother taught her to be polite and respectful. Lydia’s passion was to teach dancing. Dancing makes her feels happy, free and energetic, and it gives her the opportunity to meet new people. Lydia always dreamed of teaching youth and seniors how to dance. Her fondest memory is gathering the neighborhood children and teaching them how to dance when she was twelve years old.

When Lydia grew up, she moved away from her family. She then met her perfect man, Pepe. Their love started when Lydia rented a place from Pepe’s brother and sister-in-law. Pepe would come to visit his brother and Lydia was introduced to him during a Philippine festival similar to the Calgary Stampede. Lydia and Pepe gave each other their hearts and eventually got married at the church in Asingan, in the Philippines.

They had two wonderful children. Lydia was able to travel to all parts of the world because

of her husband’s job - he worked as a marine machinist for the US navel base in Subic Bay. After travelling for many years, Lydia and Pepe decided that, instead of going back to the Philippines, they would settle in Canada. They felt Canada was an open country with lots of opportunities and freedom. They also thought about their children’s future and how they would be able to achieve better education in Canada.

New to Calgary, they did not know anyone, so Pepe went through the telephone book to look for familiar names. He found a friend from work who offered them to stay at his house. Soon, Pepe found a job and his manager helped them secure their visas. Lydia thought this was the most memorable experience of her life.

Lydia is a very smart woman. She finished her Bachelor’s Degree in Education in the Philippines with honors. There, she worked at an elementary school as a teacher. In Canada, community service is Lydia’s mission. She is the secretary of the Young Once Seniors Association of Calgary (YOSAC) and the Calgary Connecting Seniors Cultural Council (CCSCC). She is a very considerate woman who helps organize programs and activities

which include folk, line and ballroom dancing, choir singing, and stretching and strengthening exercises. Despite all the struggles in her life, she never lost desire to be successful.

Lydia and her husband have a strong, loving relationship that led them to success they achieved together. They have received many awards for their service to the Filipino community. They took part in 42 Filipino events during the last several years. Lydia’s eyes express joy when she talks about helping people. She loves what she does and is proud to be a woman because of the difference she can make in people’s lives.

Her dream for the future is that all her grandchildren follow her footsteps. She wants them to be involved in community service and become leaders. Currently, three of her grandchildren are volunteering in their schools and taking part in dance competitions. Lydia’s advice to young immigrant women is: “Don’t give up, keep trying in order to achieve your dreams. Follow your passions to excel in the world.”

Mervis Higgins



By: Rizza Geronimo

Mervis Higgins comes from Jamaica. She was born in 1939. She has a husband and four successful children. Her life in Jamaica was typical for that time. She got up in the morning to have her breakfast, went to work, did chores and went for walks during her leisure time. The family owned 55 acres of land. They used the land to grow fruits and vegetables for their living. Because of the farm, her family never experienced hunger.

In Jamaica, Mervis worked hard, but there were not many opportunities for young people there. She left her home country hoping to find a better future for her family in Canada. Mervis embarked on a journey that changed her life.

She arrived in Toronto on September 11, 1966. She had no relatives with her since only educated people were allowed and accepted to enter the country. Six weeks after arriving, she received her work permit and began working as a nanny.

Her first impression of Canada was that there were very few black people, and that people were either very nice, or not nice at all. At work, she met a nice Jewish lady. They worked together for five months and became good friends.

There were two things that Mervis didn't like about Canada: the food and the cold. Obviously, Jamaican and Canadian foods are very different. This caused her problems because of the differences in the way food is prepared and cooked.

Then came the first cold winter with 12 inches of snow...

During the Christmas season of 1966, she went to her cousins in Montreal for a holiday. There, she met her old friends and they had a good time together. When it was time to go home, she was surprised by the snow outside and then suddenly realised that her clothes were not warm enough to protect her from the cold. She found the snow fascinating but horrible at the same time. In Jamaica, winter season is just a slightly cooler version of summer. As time passed, she learned to accept the winter.

Mervis had sixteen siblings. Last year, they had a family reunion in Toronto. They all had fun and Mervis felt assured that her family's presence would be with her forever.

With regards to her perspective on women, Mervis thinks that women in our society contribute a lot. Women have become presidents, vice presidents and hold important positions that benefit our society.

Mervis accomplished her goals to marry, have children, send her children to school and live happily with them. Her mother always taught her to be honest. She admired her mother for doing a good job of raising her brothers and sisters. Mervis is proud of her family. Her family is her greatest achievement. Like her mother, she loves being a parent and spending time with her children.

I asked Mervis if there is any advice she could give to young immigrant women. She responded, "All men and women are equal and there is nothing impossible for you to achieve."





Gurmit Sarpal



By: Sahib Zadi

This is a story about a proud Sikh woman by the name of Gurmit Sarpal. She was born in Punjab, India in 1950. She was trained as a registered nurse. As a young woman, her passions included singing, playing with young children and helping others. The most important thing she learned from her brother at a young age was singing Sikh hymns. She moved to Canada with her husband at the age of 24.

Starting a new life in Canada was difficult for Gurmit. She had no family except her husband and his parents. The first challenge she faced was a serious health issue. This was a difficult time for her as she had to take care of her children while she was hospitalized. Her husband and his family never gave her much emotional support through the process, but her husband was a wonderful provider.

Living with her in-laws became increasingly difficult for Gurmit. She had a hard time living with her father-in-law who did not like her. There were times she had suicidal thoughts but the love of her children kept her going.

She decided to visit India and while she was there she received more singing lessons from her brother. Everyone encouraged her to

become involved in singing as she was so good at it. Once back in Canada, she began to sing hymns in the Gurdwara and then started teaching singing to children. She has taught music for 25 years.

Gurmit also started serving the community as she always liked helping others. At this time, she began her search for universal truth, but she found no answer. For many years she did research and met several spiritual people. On New Year's Eve in 1991, her life changed. Gurmit's neighbour, also from India, came to wish her a Happy New Year and noticed that Gurmit seemed sad. She asked Gurmit why she was upset. Gurmit told her about her search for universal truth and her inability to find it. Her neighbour told her about a book named *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* by Joseph Murphy that she owned and thought could help her. Gurmit started reading the book that very night. After reading a few pages she felt like she had found the answers she was looking for. Finally, her search was over.

Gurmit started taking meditation classes which further improved her emotional health. She also started teaching meditation and metaphysical classes because she wanted to

share her knowledge and experiences with others. She felt comfort in her practice. She became a totally different person. Gurmit now writes spiritual articles in the *Indo-Canadian Time International* magazine, as well as *Sikh Virsa*, a national Punjabi newspaper. She is the President of Royal Women Association which helps women settle in Canada and discover their potential.

Among her many interests, Gurmit also hosts a radio show on a Calgary station. This radio program teaches the Punjabi language. She also performs Sikh religious ceremonies and services in people's homes and Gurdwaras.

Gurmit is proud to be a woman as she believes women can overcome all the problems that they face. The sensitive nature of women makes them special. Women think from their hearts. She believes that every woman creates her own hell or heaven; it depends on the way she thinks. She proclaims that we are masters of our own minds. The advice that she has for young women today is to believe in yourself.



Baljinder Gill



By: Sama Mohamed

Baljinder was raised in Punjab, India. As a little girl, she had a difficult life. Her challenges began when her father died. She was the oldest child in the family and as a teenager, there were high expectations of her. Back then, women in India only had two professional choices: to be a teacher or a nurse. She decided to become a teacher. Baljinder finished her education and worked to support her family. As time went by, she was promoted to a principal of a junior high school. Although she advanced in her career, she was not making enough money to fully provide for her family. The financial difficulties that her family experienced made her search for new opportunities. As a result, she decided to leave India and come to Canada.

When she first came to Canada, she wanted to explore the country and understand the culture. She asked her friend for help. Her friend took Baljinder out shopping. For the first time, Baljinder was not worried that she would not have enough money to buy what she wanted. They went together to the meat store. Her friend showed her different kinds of meat, and Baljinder was shocked. She said "This was the first time in my life to see a big store that is full of meats of all kinds. In our country we only have one kind of meat."

After that experience, she was more curious and decided to discover Canada even more. Compared to India, Canada provided more opportunities, options and abundance.

Baljinder married in Canada. She worked as a high school teacher for 27 years in Brooks, Alberta. It wasn't easy for her to restart her life but she did. Her son lives in Vancouver working as a stockbroker, while her daughter lives in Calgary and has given Baljinder two beautiful grandchildren.

When I asked if she wanted to go back to India she said, "No way" because she did not want to live in poverty as she had in her youth.

Baljinder is a very proud woman. What makes her proud is that she believes that as a woman, she can do as much as a man can do. Baljinder has faced many challenges, came from a different part of the world, had a very different way of life, but managed to create a successful life in Canada that honors the values and traditions of her heritage while embracing the values and culture of a new life.

Rizwana Ahmed



By: Sarah Samson

Rizwana is a woman from Pakistan who thinks every woman should be treated equally, nothing more, and nothing less. She was a college professor in Pakistan and taught Home Science for eight years. Rizwana used to help villagers with their studies and health issues during the summer holidays. She is a mother of three children.

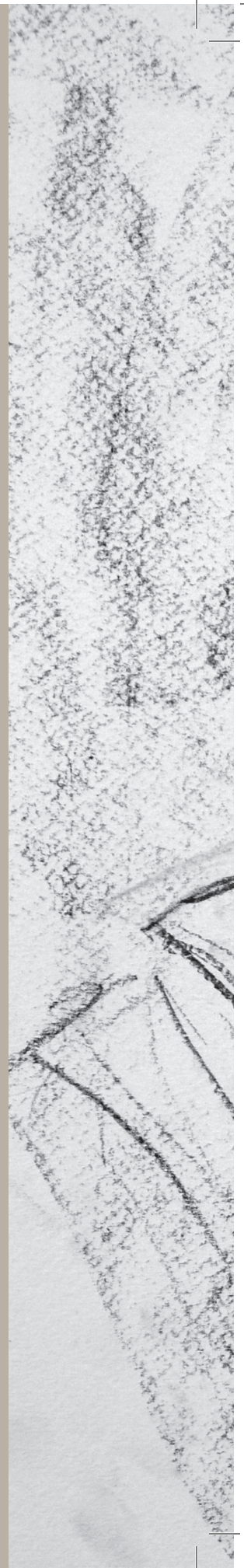
Rizwana's fondest memories of her life in Pakistan were Eid and her relatives' weddings. Eid happens at the end of Ramadan and during this time she would celebrate with her family, friends and relatives. Every Eid they would all come to her house, she would cook food for them and they would exchange presents.

Rizwana has been living in Canada since 2008. The reason she came here is because she wanted a better life and more opportunities for herself, her husband and children. When she first came to Canada she was excited as well as upset because everything was different here and the way of life is very different.

Rizwana only has one passion and that is for her children to get the opportunity to get a better education, to have security and freedom. Her passion has not changed. As a woman she feels very proud when her children are successful in their studies.

Her greatest achievement is her job in Canada because it was very hard to get a job in a foreign country. Her mother always taught her to be honest and to work hard; she is still following her mother footsteps.

Her advice to all young female immigrants is work as hard as you can and live like a Canadian, but do not forget your home country.







Amtul Mateen Khan



By: Semira Yassin

Amtul Mateen Khan was born in a small town in Rabwah, Pakistan. She completed high school in Pakistan. Through the Holy Quran she was always taught to respect seniors, so helping seniors became her passion. The most important thing her mother taught her was “love for all, hatred for none”. She believes that there is no time to hate others. Her dreams are to see peace in the world, to help people by listening to them and to do what needs to be done. Despite all her struggles and challenges, she still believes in being a positive and strong person because of her faith.

One of her favourite childhood memories is connected to the Ramadan, a special month for Muslim people, when everybody has to fast. This gives everyone the time to reflect on how important it is to appreciate what you have and to understand others who are less fortunate. It also is a time for people to celebrate with families and friends. That year, Amtul wasn’t fasting because she was too young at the time. She used to secretly go to the houses of seniors and taste the food that others cooked and check for flavour.

Amtul moved to Canada in 1982 because her dad passed away and her brother asked her to come to Canada and live with him. When she came to Canada, she could not speak English and she began attending English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Amtul also watched television and talked with other people so she could practice her English. By doing all of

these things her English improved quickly. Her first impression of people in Canada was that they were peaceful, friendly, and helpful.

Amtul was married in 1985 in Canada. She has four kids: three daughters and one son. She is proud to be able to take care of her family and be involved in the community as well. Amtul spends much of her time volunteering. For a long time, she worked in the Lajna Ahmadiyya Association in the women’s wing. She volunteered as the Director of Social Services helping women with transportation and food. She visited the women when they were sick and provided support and guidance.

In 1989, a family in her neighbourhood lost their house due to a fire. Her daughter came home from school early, upset about the incident. Amtul decided to gather clothing, food and other household items for the victims of the fire. She asked her Ahmadiyya Muslim community for help and within eight hours there were two trucks full of donations. Amtul was honoured by the Erinwoods Elementary School and the Calgary Board of Education with a Best Volunteer Award for her efforts in helping the victims of the fire.

In 2004, Amtul worked on a Learning Village project in her community. After that project, Amtul was nominated by Direct Energy for the Best Volunteer Award. Amtul took part in a senior project celebrating the Alberta Centennial in 2005. She was acknowledged by Deepak Obhrai, MP, and Wayne Cao MLA,

for her contribution. She was invited to sit on their Board of Directors, and she still holds these positions.

Amtul continues to help seniors by having seniors’ tea parties and social gatherings every second month in the Erinwoods Community Association. She always gets donations from the community for those events. Amtul donates the food which she cooks at home. She started off with two seniors and now there are 74 seniors that regularly attend her group.

The advice she offers to young immigrant women is that women have many roles such as a mother, a daughter, a grandmother and a sister. It is important to balance everything and stay positive. Even though there are some limitations within her culture, she has learned to keep a balance between the two cultures she has lived in. She has grown into a strong and independent woman.

Her dream for the future is to be able to share the message that seniors play an important role in our communities and they should be honoured and treated with respect.

Amtul taught me how to stay positive, to help other people, and respect everyone. She showed me how to be proud of my religion and what I believe in. She wanted me to know it is important to love each other.



Umran Sumen



By: Nur Helvali

I met Umran Sumen on her 41st wedding anniversary which coincides with Mothers Day. Umran was born in Bitola, former Yugoslavia, now Macedonia. After completing her third grade, her family moved to Ankara, Turkey.

Umran wanted to become a ballerina and she made that her career. At the age of nine, because she enrolled in the state conservatory, she had to live apart from her family and she began to feel homesick. Umran was very shy and she hated the food in the school. The students used to make fun of her because she did not speak Turkish fluently. Her father was worried about her. He visited her every night after work to see how she was doing. She did not want her dad to worry, so every evening, before he came, she would pinch her cheeks and make them red to show him how much she loved to be there and how happy she was. In a short period of time, she managed to become a respected member of the conservatory because of her kind personality and talent.

She received her Master's degree in Fine Arts from Hacettepe University in Ankara. For 16 years, she danced with The National Ballet Company of Turkey as a leading soloist. Umran had a great family support for her passion to become a ballerina. With their support, she became an important and recognized figure in ballet.

In 1982, Umran and her husband moved to Canada because her husband was in the oil and gas business. Once in Canada, she had many challenges and faced difficult situations. People made fun of her when she pronounced her name. They also did not respect her experience in ballet and did not recognize Turkish dances as ballet.

Umran decided to quit dancing and spend more time with her two sons and husband. After being a house wife for a couple of years, Umran's sons and husband encouraged her to start dancing again.

It has taken her many years, but Umran has made sure that Turkish ballet is recognized in the Canadian ballet industry. She became well-known in the world of ballet dancers. In 1988, she opened her own International Ballet School where she has taught dance and history of ballet. In classical ballet, dancers need to have emotional power as much as physical strength. Dancing has to be performed with heart in order to be successful. Transitioning from a dancer to a teacher and choreographer was challenging because she loved dancing so much. Classical ballet requires attention to detail. The first thing that her students learn from her is to say, "I CAN DO IT" and to believe it in their hearts. She teaches them that ballet is a lifestyle, not just a job or means to make money. Umran feels it is important for people to be aware of the power they have within and to know how to use it.

She has raised two great sons who are both very smart and well educated. In order to achieve success, Umran believes people have to think positively and do their jobs with passion. The difficulties we face help us gain experience and make us stronger.

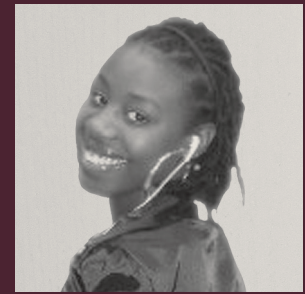
Umran has spoken up for her rights and gained the respect of the society and people who used to make fun of her. She was appointed Artistic Director of the Calgary City Ballet in 1986. She has won many awards, including the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada Medal, an Immigrants of Distinction Award, and the City of Calgary Community Achievement Award.

Umran's future goals are to continue to live a meaningful life. She is inspired when she sees her students become successful and win competitions in Canada and around the world. Currently, she is the owner and teacher of one of the most successful ballet schools in Calgary. The proceeds from performances at the school are donated to cancer research for children.

As an immigrant woman and a Turkish Canadian, I'm so proud to have had the opportunity to meet Umran. She inspires me as a woman, she is my idol and has helped me realize I should never give up on my hopes and dreams.



Beatriz Dulay



By: Blossom Dyall

My inspirational story is about Beatriz Dulay and her experience as an immigrant in Canada. Beatriz was born in 1938 in the Philippines. She came from a very poor family. Back home, she used to help her family with the housework and farming. Her father passed away while she was in the fifth grade and her mother was left alone to care for her and her two other sisters. Her warmest childhood memory was when she was selected as school princess in the third year of high school. There were not many celebrations in her home town because of financial difficulties, but the one thing they did celebrate was choosing the high school princess. It was a celebration which lasted for three days.

Beatriz married after graduating high school. Because she got married at such a young age she felt that she had not developed any personal passions or dreams. She has a daughter and two sons. In 1978, she went to Hong Kong to work as a caregiver for a family with four children. Her responsibilities included bathing, feeding and cleaning. After finishing her contract in Hong Kong, she moved to Canada in 1981 so she could send her son money to complete his education. Her oldest son was enrolled in a college in Manila. Beatriz worked hard for the next two years to ensure her son received his degree in mechanical engineering.

Her purpose in life was to make sure her children received a good education and succeeded in life. However, Beatriz was in a lot of debt

in the Philippines. She worked many jobs including a caregiver for two families, a nursing home laundry attendant, and a housekeeper at two hospitals in Calgary. She eventually was able to pay off all her debt because she earned more money in Canada and Canadian money is worth more in the Philippines.

The first impression of Canada for Beatriz was that the weather was very cold. She didn't mind it because all she worried about was making money to provide for her family. She felt that she had to make a sacrifice for her family. She experienced many challenges in Canada. Balancing money and expenses was very difficult for her. She felt that she did not have enough time because she had to pick up extra shifts whenever possible. At work, there were times when other women would start arguments and this is when she felt alone and missed her family.

After three years in Canada, Beatriz became a landed immigrant and financially secure. She sponsored her husband and their youngest son. When she left the Philippines, her youngest son was only in grade six. After a while, she decided that she wanted to sponsor her whole family. On December 9th 1995, which was her birthday, she received approval from the government to bring the rest of her family over.

Canada provided a good living for Beatriz and her family for twenty-five years. Her dreams are to travel the world. She hopes that her next

trip will be to Europe and the Philippines. Beatriz has not been to the Philippines since 1989, for a one month visit, when her mother was on her death bed. It's been almost twenty years since she has seen her oldest sister and she's planning on visiting her next year.

Beatriz is proud to be a woman because she was able to create a better life for her family and herself. She now lives with her daughter and she is happy. Beatriz shared what has made her become a strong woman. She separated from her husband after twenty-two years of marriage. She found the courage to leave her husband because he was abusive. Today, she is free to do whatever she wishes and to enjoy her life.

Beatriz is very proud that she was able to take care of her family and overcome life's challenges. She looks forward to reading this story to her seven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

The advice that Beatriz would like to leave with young women is that it is necessary to make sacrifices for yourself and your family to achieve a better life.

Bea Twumasi



By: Anika Asad

Bea Twumasi was born and brought up under the bright colors of Ghana and raised by her loving grandmother and mother. She remembers, in Ghana, to celebrate a girl's coming-of-age, a whole boiled egg is offered to her. This rite of passage was very special to Bea. The chickens that Bea grew up eating were natural and well-groomed. She had a tough decision to make when she decided to move to Canada over 17 years ago. With hope for a better life, she made the choice to come. Originally, Bea came to Canada with the intention to stay for about two years, but ended up making it her home.

Bea first aspired to be a school teacher, but something made her change her mind. Maybe the money, maybe the feeling of running her own business, or maybe the attachment to her home country led Bea to become a professional hairdresser. She was grateful to be able to follow her passion in Canada because in Ghana she would be stigmatized for her career choice. Bea says, "Hard work pays off in Canada."

In Ghana, English is required for jobs and social status. For that reason, Bea did not want her kids to learn their native language here in Canada. Afterwards, she regretted her decision and sent her daughter to Ghana to experience the culture, language and traditions.

One of Bea's goals is shared by women everywhere: to retire and fill her time with grandchildren's laughter. She has four

grandchildren and is hoping for more. Bea's love for her grandchildren comes from the fact that she was raised by her grandmother who spoiled her since she was the only child. Bea's relationship with her mother was great. She hoped to maintain the same style of parenting, but she struggled with the differences between generations. She feels that the two generations are 'not compatible.' Perhaps she is right. Her generation has the values of a different culture and experienced the hardships of life. In contrast, her childrens' generation lives in a different culture and has not experienced poverty and sacrifice. A small example of the alarming difference between the two generations: Bea celebrated Christmas without luxurious gifts and instead got chicken soup. Because of limited resources, even small things such as dresses and chocolates were considered luxuries. They were privileges that were appreciated and respected.

Bea is proud to be a woman and a mother. Her advice to young immigrant women is: "Respect your background. Respect and adapt to Canada. Pursue your dreams."





Idrees A. Khan



By: Brogan Hepworth

Idrees A. Khan was born in Pakistan. Growing up, her dreams were similar to any other girl's. She loved fashion but she also wanted a good education and the opportunity to interact with other people. Her fondest youth memories are of the events that she took up a leadership role for. She noticed that people would listen to her and follow her lead. People took a liking to Idrees as she was very friendly and a nice person, so she felt that she could be a prominent young leader.

Idrees was inspired and influenced by her mother and grandfather, as she didn't have a father figure in her life growing up. She was taught to take the best values from each culture, tradition and life style. Her family has shaped her into who she is today.

Idrees became a successful teacher and computer programmer in Pakistan working in an oil company. She decided to move to Canada at the age of 23 after being offered a job. She left her home town as an independent young woman and set off to fulfill her dreams in Canada.

Once in Canada, Idrees faced isolation at first as she had to adjust to the cultural shock and being among different faiths. She overcame these challenges by understanding the new

culture and the people while still maintaining her own unique identity.

The first impression of Canada for Idrees was very positive. She never once felt discriminated against and she feels that Canada allowed her, as a young woman, to be able to express herself and her beliefs. Canada also provided her the liberty to pursue her dreams. This is now her home.

The most powerful thing about being a proud woman is the ability to understand that one can be a mother and a grandmother and also a community activist. She is thankful to God for how He made her, and her faith has inspired Idrees to be good to herself and others.

In 2003, Idrees founded the Muslim Families Network Society, and then in 2004 she started a Muslim Halal Food Bank to help with providing food to low income Muslim families living in Calgary. Presently, she provides support services at the North of McKnight Community Centre as a counselor. Using her knowledge and experiences, she assists new immigrants and refugees by offering information about the various initiatives available to them as offered by the federal and provincial government. Due to her amazing community work, Idrees recently won the

Immigrants of Distinction Award in the category of community service, which she is very proud of.

The advice Idrees would like to give to young immigrant woman today is to believe in themselves. "If you want to bring a change, you have to change yourself first and that change has to come within you." She believes in the saying: "The best of humanity is one who serves humanity best." She believes that leaders are not born- they are made by acquiring the ability to understand people and let them use their best potential.

Her dream for the future is to share her experience with youth and help them understand who they are. Youth need to be very patient and tolerant because of the multicultural differences.

Idrees has inspired me to be proud of who I am and to respect the country I live in.

Myrtle Gomez



By: Elizabeth Tesfaye

The day was cold, I was heading to Calgary Immigrant Women's Association for an interview with Myrtle Gomez. We met at the office where we introduced ourselves. We set ourselves in a comfortable area and began to chat.

We started with Myrtle's background. She is 72 years old and was born in India. She grew up and completed her science degree in India. At the age of 24, she left India to settle with her husband in Singapore. She lived there for 42 years.

Myrtle has two children; a son who lives in Red Deer and a daughter who lives in Los Angeles. Myrtle's passions and dreams were like those of many other parents. She made sure her children and family got the best. Her dream has come true. Both her children graduated from university. Her daughter is a pre-school teacher and her son has graduated from a Motion Picture Art Program. Both of her children are married. She has two grandsons in Red Deer.

In India, Myrtle was a high school teacher. In Singapore, she worked with an airline for 19 years as ground staff. She retired from the airline at the age of 60 which was mandatory. She was not ready to retire and she went to work with an aircraft engine repair firm.

I asked her what her typical day in Singapore looked like. "If you are working it is hard. You don't get much help. Women are usually

busy," she said. Her parents were in India. In Singapore, she was on her own taking care of her family. This was difficult because of the language barrier. She did not speak Chinese or Malay, two of the native languages in Singapore. One day she went to the market to buy something and the lady spoke Malay. Due to this language barrier, Myrtle realized that she had to learn the official language in order to succeed in this new country. She learned Malay in one year and now she can read and write in that language.

At the age of 65 and a widow, Myrtle left Singapore and came to Calgary to visit friends. She decided to stay in Canada as a temporary foreign worker. She took a course in early childhood education at Bow Valley College in 2004. After that, she worked in a daycare, living on her own. Eventually, Myrtle became a permanent resident of Canada. "I wanted to make Canada my home," she said.

Myrtle finds Canada full of opportunities that allow her to pursue her dreams. She finds that Canadian women are open and naturally friendly. "Canadian women have the same roles like women in Singapore," she says. "Their view of life is that they are free to do anything they want."

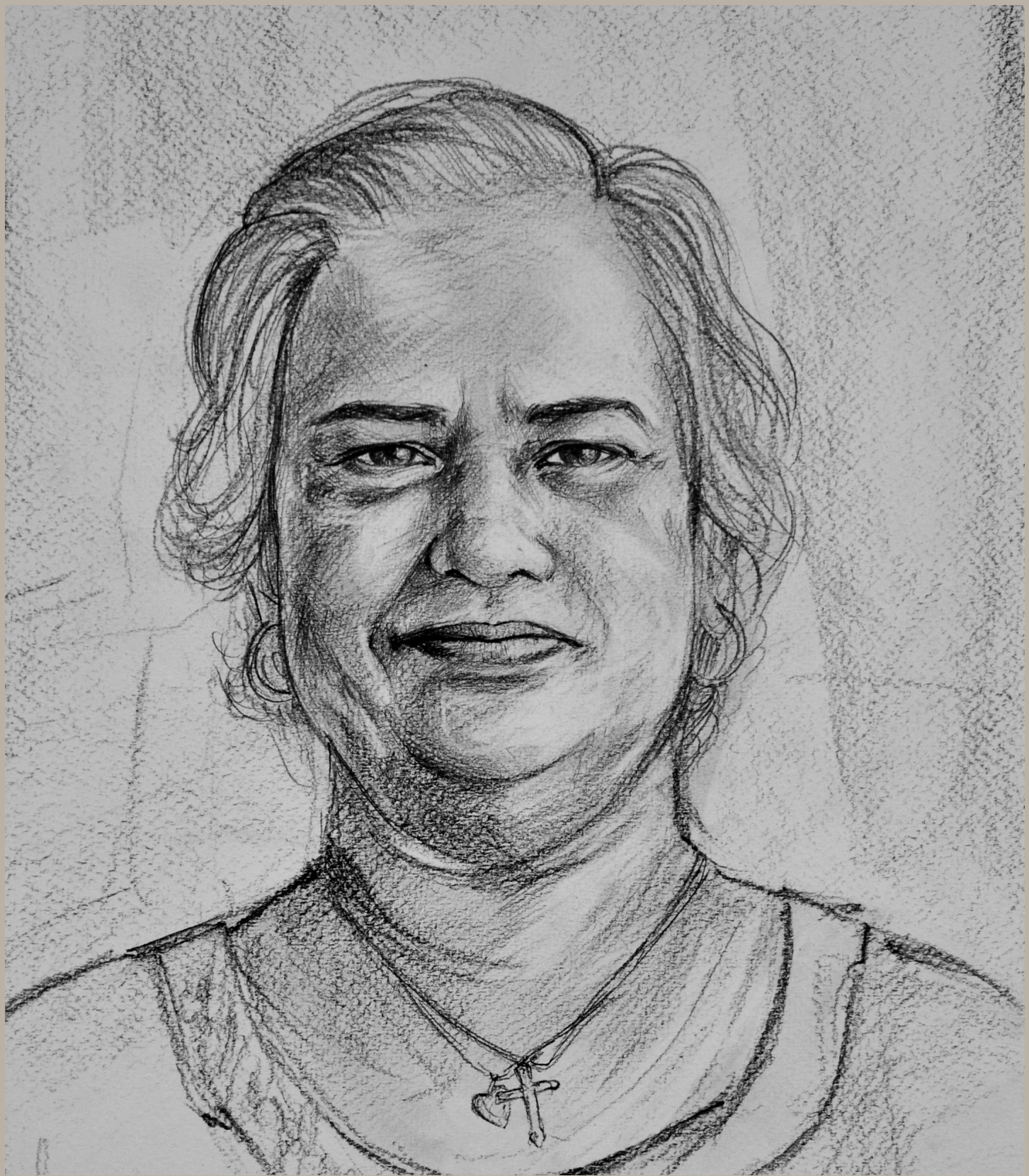
Myrtle thinks that women's contribution to society is that, "women are the ones who nurture children and prepare them for their future roles. If they slack in that, the children will not become fit to face the future. Women

contribute a lot to the well-being of a country and help build a society that is capable."

Myrtle's mother was also a university graduate. Her mother taught her that women are not inferior to men and can do anything. The best lessons she has learned were to lead a life where she can hold her head up high with pride and dignity, not to be afraid of anything, and to follow whatever dreams she has for herself.

Myrtle felt proud to be a woman when she saw both her children graduate from university and follow their dreams. Her children are independent. Her greatest achievement is that her children have reached their goals. She is also proud that even though she was born in India and follows the Indian tradition, she is able to move around and do whatever she wants to do to better herself.

Myrtle has a very powerful message for young immigrant women: "There is nothing you cannot achieve if you put your mind to it. As an immigrant, you may face difficulties - language, culture, family ties or anything else. Instead of focusing on differences, push yourself forward and be a winner not a whiner."





Effrossini Tzigananis



By: Yasmin Xuseen

I met a wonderful lady by the name of Effrossini. She was born in Greece and has lived in Canada since 1986. In Greece, she was a typical girl living her life and studying to become a nurse. She began working at a hospital in Greece and she loved it because she was able to help people. At that time, this was her only dream.

When Effrossini met her future husband, her life changed. As soon as they saw each other, they fell in love. She thought that if she went with him to Canada, they would have a better life and a brighter future. She was 29 years old at the time.

Effrossini quit her job at the hospital and moved to Canada. She got married here in Canada, and had two beautiful boys. She raised them with love and care. Everything was so new and different so she encountered some difficulties. Her husband was the only one working and he was gone all the time. She did not speak English well and felt lonely and isolated because her extended family was not with her in Canada.

Effrossini told me this was the hardest time of her life. She stayed at home for 13 years to take care of her kids. Eventually, she began working with her husband at their restaurant. She had to start working because her husband became sick. He worked a lot and suffered two heart attacks. The time came when he could not work as much as before. It was a very difficult time in her life. She did not give up but rather kept going.

Effrossini cares about everything and everyone in her life, even strangers. She helps poor people in her community and makes sure they have something to eat every night by donating food from her restaurant.

I asked her if she is proud to be a woman. She said "I'm a proud woman because I think that Mother Nature gave us the gift to be a mother." Effrossini loves being a mother. Her dreams now are for her boys to find good girls, get married and have a good life.

Effrossini's advice for youth today is to choose your friends wisely, and stay away from drugs and alcohol. She believes that being honest in your life is the most important thing and it doesn't matter if you make big mistakes. "If you are honest there is nothing to worry about." Effrossini says that people should love each other because that is the way it is supposed to be." It doesn't matter what nation you are from, if you are poor or rich, love people like you love your own family. Don't do bad things to other people, even if they have done bad things to you. Be nice all the time if you can, that is the most important thing."

Kulwant Davlarh



By: Simran Singh

This story is about Kulwant Davlarh, my grandmother. She was born in Punjab, India in, 1933. Kulwant grew up helping her mother with house work such as cleaning, cooking and sewing. School was not important then, so when she finished grade five, her family felt she had received enough education. One of the reasons for this was that her family could no longer afford to pay for her education. Kulwant also needed to prepare for her role of a wife.

Kulwant was passionate about cooking and dreamed of becoming a cook. She watched her mother in the kitchen and then tried recipes out on her own. The most important thing her mother taught her was to be generous and caring. After marriage, it was her role to ensure peace was kept in the family. She needed to work hard each day, complete the house chores, feed everyone and most importantly thank God for the wonderful life she was given.

In India, there were no special ceremonies to celebrate womanhood. Back then, no one was financially stable to have celebrations. Kulwant remembers getting married and moving into her husband's house. Each day, she would wait in excitement for him to return home after

work so she could sit with him and eat. She remembers having conversations of how his day went and him asking her how she was doing. Kulwant's saddest memory is of the day he passed away. She was left alone to raise seven children on her own.

In order to survive, she had to start working, and that was a new and frightening experience. She worked as a maid during the day and in the evenings she would sew clothes. There were nights when she had only a few hours of sleep. None of her relatives helped her and they barely came by to visit her. As Kulwant got older, it was harder for her to work. Her children started working and taking care of the household income and expenses.

Kulwant's youngest son immigrated to Canada and in 1996 sponsored her to come live with him. She fondly remembers the day she got her Canadian visa. She was the happiest person alive because she would be seeing her son after two years.

In Canada, she was excited to see new things and how nice and clean everything was. She wanted to see all the new places and explore the country. For her, it was not too hard to adjust to life as an immigrant because a part

of her was already here - her son and his family.

Her dreams for the future are to see her kids and grandchildren happy.

She is proud to be a woman because she overcame challenges and did what she needed to successfully raise her seven children as a single mother. Today, she is proud to see her kids stable and married.

Kulwant's advice to young immigrant women is to believe in themselves and not to give up on their dreams. "Dreams can come true if you are patient and if you work hard. It is better to make mistakes and learn from them instead of giving up or doing nothing. Sitting at home is not going to get you anywhere. Get out and achieve your goals."





In Memoriam Amarilis Jerez-Dardón

1930 - 2010



By: Giselle Morean

More precious than gold,
More valuable than honours of old,
Woman, wife, mother,
Better title there is no other.
The woman who sat in front of me,
Taught me things I esteem:
The woman's place
Is worthy to be praised,
To be better appreciated than gold,
For the face of God
Shone upon her in grace,
In the blessings of life.
Her gift doesn't show like the man's,
Nor does her voice rise like his,
But she carries life in her womb,
Which makes a society bloom.

Isn't the hand of a nobleman
The place for a diamond ring?
On the head of an admirable king
A golden crown stands.

The woman is more precious than riches,
She's got the beauty of a rose,
The strength of a lion,
Life in her eyes glows.

The old lady looked at me,
And I could see love in her eyes,
"A woman's called to excel herself,"
She said,
"But some of them drag themselves to the worst.
They abandon what is right,
They abandon what is honourable,
They abandon their very lives."

When God created her,
The man called her blissful,
For in her womb
Beats the heart of humanity,
And the soul of a country
Lies in her breast.

Más precioso que el oro,
Más valioso que los honores de los antiguos,
Mujer, esposa, madre,
Un mejor título no se puede hallar.
La mujer sentada al frente mío,
Me enseñó cosas que admiro:
El lugar de la mujer
Es digno de ser alabado,
De ser máspreciado que el oro,
Puesto que el rostro de Dios
Brilló sobre ella en gracia,
En la gracia de la vida.
Su don no es como el del hombre,
Su voz no se eleva como la suya,
Pero en su simiente hay vida,
La que hace florecer una sociedad.

¿No es la mano de un noble
el lugar para un valioso anillo?
En la cabeza de un rey admirable
Yace una corona de oro.

La mujer es más preciosa que las riquezas,
Posee la belleza de una rosa,
La fortaleza de un león,
Brilla en sus ojos vida.

La mujer anciana me miró,
Y pude ver amor en su mirada,
"La mujer es llamada a trascender."
Dijo,
"Pero algunas se arrastran a lo peor.
Abandonan lo que es correcto,
Abandonan lo que es honorable,
Abandonan su propia existencia"

Cuando Dios la creó,
El hombre la llamo bendecida,
Puesto que en su vientre
Palpita el corazón de la sociedad,
En su pecho yace
El alma de un pueblo.

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