

REMARKABLE WOMEN

Honouring Women From Our Vancouver Communities



photo courtesy Anna Nobile

Aline La Flamme

“Throwing rocks is easy,” says **Aline La Flamme**. “And it’s important to shed light on what’s not right. But the real work is rolling up your sleeves and actually doing something.” A woman who stands by her words, Aline has been practicing traditional aboriginal healing for over twenty years.

A graduate of Simon Fraser University with a degree in criminology and psychology, Aline has brought together her training with her talents in traditional healing to help many people become productive members in their community. She co-founded the Aboriginal Front Door Society in 2001 to provide a safe space to aboriginal people in the downtown eastside. The foundational teaching and guiding principle used and incorporated into the Society’s documents was: *We will walk with love, honour, respect and compassion for all things in Creation, including ourselves.*

Aline’s healing circles focus on recognizing aboriginal people’s strong ancestral roots, working through the events and repercussions of contact and residential schools, and offering them tools to move toward a renewed sense of self. The Executive Director of Aboriginal Front Door from 2003 to 2007, Aline established the Elders Training Program, where, through a combination of traditional teachings and therapeutic work, people learned their own wisdom to become resources and role models in their community.

In addition, Aline is a founding member of the Skemcis Medicine Wheel Society; founder of Daughters of the Drum; provided culturally-based healing workshops and ceremonies through the Native Women’s Association; and developed and operated culturally-based healing programs for aboriginal people in five prisons.

A Métis grandmother, pipe carrier, Sundancer, and singer, Aline is also the maker of over 1200 drums. An inspiration to many, she has led by example, following a basic teaching of the Elders Training Program: *We will show the way by going first.*

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photo courtesy dm gillis

Bonnie Klein

Bonnie Sherr Klein's life with disability is informed and enriched by the movement for disability rights.

A documentary filmmaker, Bonnie immigrated to Canada from the US during the Vietnam War and began a long career of activist filmmaking with the National Film Board of Canada. She was a key member of the innovative Challenge for Change Program and later the historic women's unit, Studio D. Her award-winning films include the infamous theatrical feature documentary, *Not A Love Story: A Film about Pornography*.

In 1987, at the age of 46, Bonnie had a catastrophic stroke caused by a congenital malformation in her brainstem. She became locked-in, quadriplegic, respirator-dependent, and experienced panic attacks. After six months in hospital and three years in formal rehabilitation, Bonnie now walks short distances with two forearm crutches, and moves through the world on Gladys, her motorized scooter.

Bonnie used her documentary and activist experience to address people's fear and ignorance of disability. She created several CBC radio features based on the intimate journals of her stroke experience. She then wrote, in collaboration with Persimmon Blackbridge, the 1997 VanCity Book Award winner and best-seller, *Slow Dance: A Story of Stroke, Love, and Disability*.

Believing in the power of art to change people's lives, she co-founded KickStart (formerly the Society for Disability Arts and Culture), which produced Canada's landmark KickstART! Disability Art and Culture Festival.

Bonnie returned to filmmaking and the NFB 17 years after her stroke to make *SHAMELESS: The ART of Disability*, a collaborative and intimate film about five disability artists who challenge the stereotype of disability as tragedy.

Bonnie now counsels, consults, and speaks about health care, rehabilitation, disability rights, and disability arts and culture to health care professionals, disability and survivor organizations, and the general public. She continues to be inspired by the creativity of people living with disabilities.

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photo courtesy Alana Rothstein

Chris Morrissey

Chris Morrissey has been advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights for almost twenty years.

Born in England in 1942, she immigrated to Canada in 1951. After years of working and living abroad as a Roman Catholic sister, she left the convent and came out as a lesbian. She returned to Canada with her partner, Bridget, in 1989. As Bridget was not a Canadian citizen or resident, they began their journey to find a way to stay in Canada together.

In 1992, Chris filed a suit in Federal Court against the Government of Canada alleging discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, family, and gender. After much negotiating, Bridget was made a permanent resident of Canada. Not one day was spent in court. They had succeeded, but the law remained the same. The publicity surrounding the case brought together other Canadians who were experiencing the same difficulty. They formed LEGIT: Canadian Immigration for Same-Sex Partners. In 2002, after 10 years of advocacy work, the law was changed to include same-sex partners in the Family Class.

Chris has continued to work with other volunteers providing support and information to those wanting to sponsor a same-sex partner for immigration to Canada. In 2000, she was a co-founder of Rainbow Refugee Committee which supports those seeking refugee status because of persecution due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV positive status.

In 2001, she began working with aging and older LGBT people. She has increased the visibility of LGBT seniors and raised awareness for the need of culturally appropriate services for this group of older adults within the senior serving sector. Chris has been a member of the City of Vancouver Seniors Committee for five years.

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photo courtesy Hank Bull

Christina Panis

Christina Panis is a strong advocate for the rights of Filipino-Canadians and actively works to raise awareness of the issues in her community.

Born in 1980 and raised in Vancouver by Filipino-Canadian immigrants, she has always felt a strong connection to her community. After graduating from Burnaby North Secondary School, she completed a Bachelor degree in Sociology at the University of British Columbia in 2003. In 2004, she began community organizing, as well as working in the not-for-profit sector.

Being a young woman of colour in Canada informed her experiences and led her to question and search for answers about her Filipino community's history in Canada and her place in it. As a member of the Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance, she learned to educate, organize and mobilize Filipino-Canadian youth against systemic racism, gender oppression, and exploitation at work. She has worked at Centre A, the Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, since 2008. She sees that this crossroad between art, culture, and politics contributes to feminism in Canada, and challenges existing systems to further women's advancement. This is a perfect fit with her social justice work as a member of the Philippine Women Centre of BC (PWC-BC). She was invited to join the Board of the PWC-BC in 2007, and is a founding member of the PWC-BC's Young Women's Committee.

Christina is the current Chair of the Philippine Women Centre of BC, which celebrated 20 years of Filipino-Canadian women's organizing in 2009. She finds strength and encouragement in the community's experiences of migration, struggle, militancy, and the transformation through self empowerment and social justice.

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photo courtesy Doreen L. Hatton

Doreen L. Hatton

Doreen Hatton has dedicated her career and extensive volunteer work to improving the lives of individuals living with diabetes.

As a teenager, she babysat a toddler who had diabetes and quickly learned the devastating effects of the disease. She also became acutely aware of the lack of community resources for those with diabetes. She has worked to raise awareness of this complex, life-long condition through her pioneering research, innovative education programs, written resources, advocacy, and outreach programs, significantly improving diabetes care not only in Vancouver, but throughout the world.

Doreen was the Clinical Nurse Specialist with the Diabetes Program at BC Children's Hospital from 1987 to 2003. Based on her research into the emotional needs of children with diabetes and their families, she changed the entire focus of care and education of newly-diagnosed children from an in-patient to an out-patient model. This mode of care reduced the trauma and stress of hospitalization for both child and parents, and created an environment where families could relax and learn more effectively. This unique program became the basis for similar day care facilities throughout North America. Her 1992 groundbreaking research into the needs of parents caring for an infant or toddler with diabetes was the first ever nursing literature available that describes the challenges faced by this high risk population. Her work is still referenced and used worldwide today.

Described as an angel by many of the families whose lives she has touched, Doreen has received many honours and awards for her work, including the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for outstanding contributions to her community and Canada. She is currently an Adjunct Professor with the School of Nursing at UBC where she inspires students to follow in her footsteps.

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photo courtesy Todd Duncan

Jane Gatwiri Rukaria

Jane Gatwiri Rukaria uses her knowledge and expertise of the law to assist those who would not otherwise have a voice in the legal system.

Jane grew up in Thuura, a small village in Kenya. Jane, her two sisters, and her single mother Harriet, in the Kenya of 1970s, had little status. Her uncle Rukaria, the male relative, stepped forward, providing a home and some form of status for her mother. Through this experience, Jane realized that the law did not always help those who needed protection most. She studied law at Nairobi University and was called the bar in 1992.

In 2002, Jane became a permanent resident in Canada. She attended UBC Law School and was called to the bar in 2004. Finding that the concept of “billable hours”—lawyers charging a per hour rate for their services—puts the law out of economic reach for many people, Jane prefers to charge a flat fee to make her services as accessible as possible.

Jane practices real estate, wills and estate law, but her heart is in immigration and refugee law. She gives pro bono legal counsel through the Access Pro Bono Society of BC and the Lawyer Referral Service of BC, two organizations that provide legal services to those of limited means. Jane acts as a resource person for the African community in BC, speaking not only about law, but about the challenges of settling in Canada. She is a co-founder of the Kenyan Community of BC Society (Ken-BC) and is board member of the Cambie Village Business Improvement Association.

Jane and her family continue to help her village. To further their vision of assisting struggling women and girls both here and in Kenya, the family founded My Sister’s Shoulder Society of BC in October 2010.

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photo courtesy George Diack / Vancouver Sun

Leonora Markovich

Leonora Lucyna Markovich was the architect of some of the most innovative, livable and affordable housing developments built in Vancouver.

She arrived in Canada in 1941 from her native Poland, escaping the ravages of the Second World War. In 1949 she became only the fifth woman to register with the Architectural Institute of BC. Over the next 20 years, she solidified her reputation as a creative and responsive architect, and for a time, was the only woman architect in Vancouver with a private practice.

In 1965 Leonora designed Willow Gardens, a housing complex in the Oakridge neighbourhood at Tisdall Street and West 42nd Avenue. Believing that an apartment complex should reflect the needs of residents, she incorporated gardens and outdoor spaces with affordable high-rise city living. The site consisted of 116 one and two-bedroom suites and 20 two-storey townhouses surrounding a park and recreation area. Leonora included modern elements that we take for granted today: underground parking and a private patio entrance for each unit.

Following the success of Willow Gardens, Leonora was commissioned to design what was then the largest residential project ever undertaken in Vancouver: Langara Gardens at Cambie Street and West 57th Avenue. Between 1968 and 1970, three apartment towers and 20 two-storey garden apartments and town houses were constructed on 20 acres of land with a view to giving average income families access to such amenities as swimming pools, landscaped gardens, recreational facilities and a commercial block with stores and offices. While such multi-use complexes may be commonplace today, Leonora's approach to residential construction was creative and original for her times.

Leonora Markovich died at the age of 69 on April 29, 1970, but her buildings, and a legacy of innovative housing and responsive architecture, are still with us.

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photo courtesy Anabel Ho

Maria Mimie Ho

Maria Mimie Ho was a dedicated educator, volunteer and supporter of community arts and initiatives. Mimie immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong in 1967, beginning her teaching career in Clearwater, before moving to Vancouver and attending the University of British Columbia.

In 1973, Mimie founded the Strathcona Chinese Dance Company as a recreational dance program to promote Chinese dance art in Canada. Based in the Strathcona community, the company provides opportunities for inner city children and youth to explore and be proud of their heritage while promoting goodwill and fellowship through the performing arts. The SCDC has grown into a world-renown dance troupe, touring throughout the world, performing for many heads of state and dignitaries.

Also in 1973, Mimie co-founded S.U.C.C.E.S.S., an organization that helps new immigrants to Canada. Now a multi-service agency, it delivers employment, business, education, and health services to thousands of new Canadians from all backgrounds.

In addition to her community and dance work, Mimie was a high school math and Mandarin teacher, passionate about making a difference in the lives of her students. Mimie taught at Templeton Secondary School for 13 years, using creative and unique ways to incorporate cultural activities, and of course dance, into the language program.

A well-respected member of the community, Mimie was recognized for her dedication and volunteer work, twice receiving the Volunteer Award from the Vancouver Park Board in 1983 and 1993. In 1984, she received the Citation for the Promotion of Multiculturalism, and in 1996 was honoured as the first Chinese Canadian woman to receive the Civic Merit Award from the City of Vancouver.

Madame Ho passed away on March 11, 2010. The Maria Mimie Ho Memorial Fund was established to honour her legacy of promoting Chinese culture, and provides bursaries and scholarships to students.

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photo courtesy Deb Grant

Mary Bernadette Roberts

Mary Bernadette Roberts was born on July 18, 1948 to George and Ethel Roberts (née Pierre). She was raised in the Musqueam community all her life with a strong cultural and traditional upbringing.

Mary has been the First Nations Support Worker at Southlands Elementary School for 23 years. Mary helped put together a program for children needing additional or alternative forms of support. This and other types of programs she has participated in or initiated, support the value of inclusiveness for the many youth in our community, and range in all types of activities from health and cooking to tutoring and crafts and cultural values.

Mary ensures she incorporates Musqueam's traditional values in everything she does. She has a unique way of teaching where children do not even realize that lessons are being taught. Mary is "Auntie" to everyone and that is how it is here traditionally: it is respect and honour. As a connection for our youth to our ancestors, she has and continues to mold and guide our young people. She dedicated a great deal of time and effort in helping to revitalize and keep our language alive and worked with Musqueam Elders in this area, as well as protecting our culture through working on archaeological projects.

Mary actively participated in sports and recreation by supporting Musqueam teams, by traveling with them, assisting with fundraising, working at events, and supervising the children and youth. She is always there to help in any way possible and wherever she may be needed, including funerals, celebrations, and traditional ceremonies, without expecting payment or thanks. Mary truly represents the past, present, and the future with her gentle way of incorporating language, culture and the teachings.

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photo courtesy Sonia Johal

Preet Bal



photo courtesy Sonia Johal

Poonam Sandhu

Vancouver sisters **Preet Bal** and **Poonam Sandhu** have been knee deep in recyclable containers for the last three years. In 2008, the pair started a pilot project to divert waste generated from the annual Vaisakhi parades in Vancouver and Surrey. These parades, which are attended by up to 100,000 people, are well known for the free food that is distributed, including bottled water, juice and pop. Due to the sheer size of the event and lack of appropriate receptacles, historically many recyclables were discarded into garbage bags.

In 2008, with a dozen blue bins and less than a dozen volunteers in tow, Preet and Poonam set up recycling stations along small sections of the parade route. Each recycling bin was staffed by a volunteer, highlighted with bilingual signage (English and Punjabi), and monitored closely to prevent contamination. The bin started as a foreign entity, but quickly became a welcome addition, saving 200 containers per hour from going to the landfill.

Subsequent years have seen the pilot project successfully grow with the support of the City of Vancouver, City of Surrey, Metro Vancouver, the respective temples hosting the parades, and an increasing force of green-minded volunteers and citizens.

Community interaction is not new to Preet and Poonam. The duo spent nearly five years before a television camera hosting a weekly entertainment program for the South Asian community. Besides entertainment, Preet and Poonam used television as a medium to communicate health, community and environmental messages. They were also the first in the lower mainland to produce a children's television program for South Asians which taught basic numerical and language skills in Punjabi, Gujarati, English and French. The show was a hit!

Both are deeply rooted in the belief that true success comes from community betterment and betterment starts from within. Poonam Sandhu is a registered nurse. Preet Bal is an environmental technologist.

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photo courtesy Carleen Thomas

Rosemary Thomas

Rosemary Thomas has been an integral part of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation her entire life. Mrs. Thomas grew up in North Vancouver in a family that always participated in building community.

Mrs. Thomas exemplifies leadership, creativity and hard work through her many years of service to the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. She supervised TWN's After-School Daycare and Summer Day Camps. She led a team of women in teaching high school students to be day camp counsellors, and on how to provide care for children 6 to 12 years of age. Throughout the year, Mrs. Thomas built community by organizing special holiday events for the entire community. We always celebrated two major holidays: Halloween and Christmas. At Halloween families would gather at the Hall for activities and contests and hand out treats to other children. At Christmas, there would be a sit-down dinner including turkey and all the trimmings. One year featured a Nativity play. Throughout the year, Mrs. Thomas inspired and led other community members in her creative ways to help boost funding for programs by organizing auctions, flea markets, and Boxed Dinner evenings. She also ran the Burrard Canoe Club as manager and cook, and spent six years as an elected member of the Tsleil-Waututh Council.

Mrs. Thomas also has a deep Catholic faith and spent many years building community through this faith, teaching many of our people Catechism over the years. In addition to her own 10 children, her faith brought many children into her home, providing them all with love and support. To this day many still call her "Mom" and their children call her "Gramma".

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photo courtesy Charlene Williams

Gwen Harry



photo courtesy Brian Dennehy

Juliette Baker

Mrs. Gwen Harry is an active member in her community, providing leadership and guidance in all that she does.

From 1967 to 1991 she served on the Education Committee. For eight years she drove the “Bunny Bus” for Totem Nursery School as well as serving as a teacher assistant. She started a local cub pack and opened her home to children in need by becoming a dedicated foster parent.

Gwen served on Squamish Chief and Council from 1986 to 1998, and since her retirement has remained active in community meetings, land code planning and is involved in the Alternative Justice System with other Elders from the community. In 2002, she received the Queen’s Golden Jubilee Medal for exemplary service to her community.

A mother of seven children and grandmother to 14 grandchildren, Gwen remains a mentor and role model to the many people she has helped, many of whom still call her “Ma” or “Chesha7”.

Juliette (Julie) Baker – Sxwelhcháliya serves the Squamish Nation (SN) people with dignity, honesty, common sense and respect.

For the past 30 years, she has worked for various First Nation organizations, Squamish Nation Social Development and Membership Departments. She served as Chair for the SN Membership Committee and representative for SN Appeals Committee for 12 years. Elected to the Squamish Nation Council in 2001, she is currently serving a third term and was designated as “Head of State” on behalf of the Squamish Nation for the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympics Games.

Today’s work includes serving the Spo7ez Cultural Centre and Community Society and developing new exhibitions and educational materials for the Squamish Lil’wat Cultural Centre (SLCC). She was also part of an editorial team that completed a book for SLCC on the history of the Squamish people past and present.

Sxwelhcháliya is currently focused on Vancouver Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (VanASEP), employment and training; First Nations Land Management Agreement (Land Code) with Chief and Council; and working with various museums on exhibit partnerships.

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