

REMARKABLE WOMEN

honouring women's contributions to our local food communities



Debra George

Debra George is a passionate, strong food educator in the Tsleil-Waututh community as well as surrounding communities. Her parents, Bob and Cassie George, had fifteen children, all of whom learned to respect food and the perseverance it took to provide for a large family in times of scarcity. Cassie George was known for her delicious pies and cooked for canoe club, as well as for her children, church, and community. Around the dinner table, this amazing couple taught their children the importance of love, respect, kindness and laughter. This table is still the place where generations of birthdays, anniversaries, births, and holidays are celebrated.

As a single mom to six children, Debra has sometimes struggled to put food on the table. However, this has never stopped her from feeding neighbourhood children she knew were going without. She consistently volunteers her time to bake and cook for Elder's program events, teach at the Food Skills for Families program, and serve nutritious breakfast at our Breakfast Club program for Tsleil-Waututh children. She was a kind and most patient teacher in a Foods Course for the Tsleil-Waututh nation school. Debra makes the best bannock on and off the reserve, and during blackberry season, she can often be seen handing out blackberry upside down cake because she loves to see people smile.

Debra stresses the importance of having a good heart while you are cooking, because you put yourself into the meals you are making. The food she cooks and the stories and teachings she hands out with it nourish the body, the heart, and the soul of the Tsleil-Waututh nation and all who have the joy of being taught by her!

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Ilana Labow

In 2001, **Ilana Labow** embarked upon a journey to learn more about herself and her family, traveling to farms across the world. In her journeys working on farms with people from different backgrounds, she came to understand the power of connecting and sharing stories through food and agriculture. When she came home, she established Fresh Roots Urban Farm Society, an organization that transforms the way urbanites interact with the land, food, and one another.

Fresh Roots' neighbourhood farms create green collar employment, train new farmers, teach food- and eco-literacy, and provide gathering spaces for community celebrations, culturally diverse knowledge sharing, and intergenerational learning.

As citizens in consumptive cities, it is easy to forget where food comes from and the incredible amount of hard work, physical resources, and labour necessary to supply the food that we eat. For Ilana, farming is not just a physical activity, but also a social, emotional, and spiritual endeavor that brings diverse communities together. As Fresh Roots' young farmers work side by side, they learn basic vocational skills while understanding the importance of honorable stewardship and the value of reciprocity in relationships to each other, the farming community, and the planet itself. All this can occur when food-growing spaces help people feel empowered, safe, and inspired.

Ilana is blessed to live in Vancouver, on unceded Coast Salish Territory, where soil has remained fertile through honorable stewardship. She believes that simple daily choices around food have the power to remind us of our rights and responsibilities as global citizens.

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Jerilyn Sparrow

Jerilyn (Jeri) Sparrow, Sulseemiah, is a proud Mother of two sons and five grandchildren. Jeri was born on September 9, 1942 in Vancouver. She is second youngest of eleven children born to Edward Sparrow Sr., Musqueam and Rose (George) Sparrow, Sto'lo. She spent the first six years of her life on the Musqueam Reserve. She grew up on the Musqueam Reserve, played in surrounding forest, fields and Fraser riverbank as a child. Jeri had a traditional upbringing, strong in culture, traditional knowledge, and ceremonies.

At the age of seven Jeri was sent to St. Paul's Residential School in North Vancouver for four years and then to public school. Her generation was the first allowed to attend public schools.

She began her working life as a hair stylist, and then went into office work after the completion of a Certificate in Business Administration and Computerized Accounting. Then a major shift occurred in her career, as a Native Outreach Worker. Jeri provided service in the Cedar Cottage area of Vancouver, where she successfully organized the Cedar Cottage Traditional Pow-Wow for many years. During this period she trained in many alternative health and healing practices. Her traditional teachings and knowledge from her parents on plants and their healing properties lead her to further her studies of alternative healing practices. She is an Iridology Practitioner, Reiki Master, Swedish massage and Skin Rolling Practitioner and has studied Hawaiian Huna. Jeri is now retired and in her spare time she likes to garden at home and UBC with an emphasis on wholesome foods and medicinal plants, and makes herbal medicines.

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Jill Weiss

Jill Weiss has worked all her life to ensure that green space in Vancouver is accessible to everyone, including seniors and people with disabilities.

Jill built and designed the first accessible community garden in Vancouver at Cottonwood Garden, a model of community integration where people of all ages and abilities work side by side. Though Cottonwood is currently threatened by a truck route, Jill and others can be counted on to speak out. Among other successful campaigns, Jill was passionately involved with the fight to save UBC Farm – the last urban farm in Vancouver.

As chair of the City's Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee, Jill developed guidelines that will open up community gardens to older people and those with disabilities. She coordinated the campaign to equip Vancouver's buses with lift systems, and she ensured that the City's Transportation 2040 Plan provides equality for seniors and people with disabilities. She's worked for the re-instatement of TaxiSavers, accessibility in housing co-ops and ferry docks, and the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Jill believes that people with disabilities can and should live in the community like everyone else, so she's working to ensure that new housing in Vancouver is accessible to everyone, that people with disabilities are not forced to live in institutions, and that no new institutions are built.

Jill Weiss is a gardener in the broadest sense of the word. She's planted ideas and projects that have flourished and made our city greener. Her gardens send out roots and tendrils that connect the citizens of Vancouver with each other and with the land that feeds and houses them.

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Joyce Rock

In the company of almost thirty other Downtown Eastside (DTES) residents, **Joyce Rock** co-founded the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTES NH) in 2005. Given that the DTES NH was invented by low-income, disenfranchised community members living harsh lives, they identified the Right to Food as the most natural organizing mechanism within which to promote meaningful social, environmental, and cultural justice initiatives among the thousands of people of all ancestries, genders, ages and descriptions who annually cross the DTES Neighbourhood House's threshold, in a community of 18,000 people where 70% of residents are low-income, +/- 700 are homeless and 5,000 underhoused in Single Room Occupancy (SROs) hotels.

The DTES NH's Right to Food Initiative led to the creation of the Downtown Eastside Food Charter in 2010. Developed with the participation of hundreds of community members, it complements the City of Vancouver's own Food Charter. In 2009, Joyce co-founded the DTES Kitchen Tables Project in partnership with Potluck Café Society. Its goal is to reform the nutritional impact, quality, abundance and delivery of food across the Downtown Eastside. It is based on a Community Economic Development model, designed to create employment for low-income DTES residents living with multiple barriers to traditional employment.

From sex workers to elders, had it not been for the inherent nutritional awareness and sheer courage of the average DTES resident which Joyce witnessed during the years before the modern food movement finally acknowledged the low-income community's Right to Food, none of these initiatives would have ever seen the light of day. This is but one reason that Joyce situates Community Development as the natural home for those who either have no experience of belonging or have had their belonging ripped from them.

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Margo Murphy

Margo Murphy was born and raised in Vancouver. Since graduating from UBC in Home Economics and going on to graduate work, she's educated thousands of young people about food and nutrition.

After stints at Tupper and Killarney schools, Margo collaborated with three other teachers to create the Spectrum Alternate Program, which allows students to complete their education in an alternative setting. In 1989, she moved to her current job - teaching culinary arts in the cafeteria at Templeton Secondary School. Her work there has exploded the boundaries of conventional classroom Prep Training. She brings famous experts like Chef Daniel Boulud, Chef Dale McKay, and Chef Dan Close into the downtown eastside school, and sends her students out of it - to cater at community events such as the HomeGround Festival. Her apprenticeship and work experience students can count on first class placements, including an innovative program with the Cactus Club Café with Chef Rob Feenie. It's no coincidence that her program at Templeton has expanded from twelve to one hundred and sixty students!

Margo engages even the most shy and reluctant learners and encourages them to shine. Under her expert tutelage, many have competed in Skills Canada Regional, Provincial, and National competitions. No less than thirty-five have come home with medals. One of her students, a gold medalist in the Canada Skills competition for baking, had this to say: "Were it not for her ability to lead and inspire her students to reach beyond their capabilities, we never would have discovered how gifted we all were, something she saw all along. Ms. Murphy taught us the most valuable lesson of all - to believe in ourselves."

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Maricela Medina Espinoza

Through her volunteer work in community programs, **Maricela Medina Espinoza** has helped build healthy lifestyles and robust communities for many Latin American people in Vancouver.

Born and raised in Asientos, a small town in Aguascalientes, Mexico, Maricela and her family arrived in Vancouver in October 2008 as refugees. When Maricela's kids started attending the Latin American Youth Program at Britannia Community Services Centre, they came home with stories about Cocina Latina, and four years ago, Maricela began working there as a volunteer cook and teacher. She teaches the young people in the program new recipes from all over Latin America as they learn culinary skills in a fun and safe environment.

Maricela is aware how hard it can be for new immigrants to integrate, and she also knows how important it is for them to retain a sense of connection to their first home. A kind and understanding person, she always takes the time to help new arrivals out, and her emphasis on traditional Latin foods and flavors encourages both community pride and self-esteem. Maricela's commitment and dedication to diverse food has been an inspiration to many community programs, for instance Kinbrace Community House, where she helps cook multicultural dinners for over fifty people.

This remarkable and inspiring woman is full of energy and vitality and looks for the positive in every situation. As well as commuting from Coquitlam to volunteer, she works a full-time job and is raising four children. She also enjoys dancing and exercising and makes time to attend the gym. Her colleagues say they can't wait to read the book she plans to write about her life and experiences.

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Meeru Dhalwala

Born in India, **Meeru Dhalwala** moved with her family to Washington DC, where she worked on nonprofit projects to do with international human rights and development. She acquired her master's degree in England and moved to Vancouver in February 1995. Here, she began to work her culinary magic at Vij's and Rangoli restaurants, hailed by the New York Times as "easily among the finest Indian restaurants in the world."

Meeru works closely with her all-female kitchen staff, originally from villages in the Punjab. The results of their experiments with new techniques and eclectic blends of spices and ingredients are enjoyed all over Canada in packaged gourmet curries. You can even enjoy Meeru's food at home – her two cookbooks have won awards in Canada and Paris.

Meeru's message is simple: she wants as many people as possible to eat delicious, healthy meals made through processes that are sustainable. She's promoted that goal through a regular column in the Vancouver Sun, CBC radio segments, and cooking shows at New York's Bowery Wholefoods Kitchen. She is committed to improving her businesses' environmental footprints; she sits on the board of directors for Vancouver Farmers Markets, and she organizes an annual international food fair called Joy of Feeding.

And - oh yes – in December 2012 she opened a new restaurant! In Seattle!

The question on the tip of your tongue may be this: "How does she do it all?" A Seattle Times journalist felt the same way. She asked: "Won't you find a three-hour commute to be a hassle?" Meeru's answer speaks volumes about the spirit behind this remarkable woman's success: "For me, a hassle is when you're bored."

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Mahinder Sidhu

Mohinder Sidhu is a treasured volunteer in the Sunset/South Hill Community – the Indo-Canadian hub of Vancouver. She has served this vibrant people so well and in so many capacities that she was awarded a 2013 Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for her work.

Mohinder has served at South Vancouver Neighbourhood House since 1999 as an advocate, educator, and leader on the South Vancouver Seniors' Hub Council. She continues to coordinate the South Asian Women's group, which meets weekly at Sunset Community Centre, and she also conducts a weekly Healthy Living Club at Moberly Arts and Cultural Centre to share food, chai, stories, knitting, and walking. Her contributions to Vancouver Food began in 2006 with SNVH's Community Kitchen Program, in which members of the community learned to cook intercultural food from a rich variety of recipes. In 2009, she undertook training in food and nutrition for diabetics offered by the Canadian Diabetes Association. Once certified, she began working for the association, and until December 2012, she delivered their Food Skills for Families workshops, teaching no less than sixteen six-week cycles! This program is especially important in the South Asian community, where diabetes has been identified as a particular problem.

Mohinder loves to teach people from all backgrounds and walks of life about Indian food and leads several Indian cooking classes at the Sunset and Trout Lake Community Centres. Her coworkers describe her as a dynamo, and her students say she is the best of teachers – dedicated, knowledgeable, and extremely thorough in all she does.

If you ever have a chance to taste her chai, you should. There is none like it.

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Shirdene Reynolds

Shirdene Reynolds says that though she's faced some challenges (like growing up in North Carolina in the 50s and 60s, and beating cancer), nothing is more challenging than cooking for kids. "Their taste buds are all over the place – somewhere between starch and sugar!"

As program cook at Britannia Services Centre Out of School Care Program, she appeals not only to the taste buds, but to the hearts and souls of children whose parents are working after school hours. Around 45 kids a day attend the program to socialize in a safe, secure environment, and, of course, sample the chef's diverse cultural cuisine. Shirdene feels that it is important for everyone to be exposed to different kinds of food and different ways of eating, so even when it comes to her native Southern style cuisine, she's happy to innovate. When asked to offer a vegetarian southern-style meal for the East FEAST micro-funding event, Shirdene was unfazed. She shipped in collard greens from California and now grows them in the OSC garden, a plot she cares for in her spare time, and with the help of OSC kids. She's put her creative background in theater to good use here by making and installing mosaic stepping stones, again in collaboration with her young colleagues.

Whether it's soup for 500 or hot dogs for micro-footie, Shirdene is a can-do cook, a Pied Piper gardener, and an inspiration in the Britannia community. You'll find her in the OSC kitchen three mornings a week knocking up snacks for those discerning taste buds, and, as she likes to say, "We're not talking cheese and crackers here..."

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Katie Mathias



Sisters

Left to right: Arlene Guerrero and Ida Baker Hasler



Kevin's Crew

Left to right: Chantelle Peters, Julie Peters and Sarah Massey



Three generations of Jacobs Family Cooks...

Back row: Suzanne Jacobs, Shayla Jacobs. Front row: Sandra Jacobs, Shawna Jacobs, Andrea Jacobs, Shelly Jacobs-Thomas and Jade Taylor

Honouring Squamish Nation Women who feed the people

These photos represent only a few of those who come to heart and mind when community need requires a meal for a few or a large group of people. The traditional events of celebration, birth, marriage, and funeral rituals are still marked with the sharing of a good meal. Whether for a family in their home or for a large group of people meeting to discuss Squamish Nation business, these are some of the women called upon to prepare food for the occasion.

There are many trained chefs that do this work with family. Preparation is done with health and tradition in mind. Diabetics and anyone with health issues are always planned for. Some feasts are made up in large part from traditional foods like game and sea food sent as gifts from friends and family.

'I remember going with my grandmother when she'd bring soup or stew to a grieving family. She'd just do it... hear someone was in need and make something... soup, bread, anything and bring it to them. I'd go along... then I'd just have to sit quietly and listen as she spent some time there. I started cooking for the longhouse in 1961 and now my daughters and their daughters do too.' Andrea Jacobs

'We are honoring our mother's teachings. The first time we went with her to help was when I was 12 yrs old and Arlene was 10 yrs old. We went with our Mum to help cook for a wedding. People loved her cooking and would just ask her to come to do the cooking!' Ida Baker Hasler

'You just hear about it and go. You start out helping, like with Aunty Posie... she was always in the longhouse kitchen. Pretty soon, you go and you know what needs to be done and you just do it!' Katie Mathias

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Stephanie Lim

Through food skills workshops, urban agriculture initiatives, and community events, **Stephanie Lim** gathers neighbours of many ages and backgrounds to address food insecurity as a collective concern. These projects support community resilience, culturally relevant and sustainable eating, volunteerism and leadership development, and environmental stewardship.

The first member of her family to be born in Canada, Stephanie grew up in a diverse (and largely immigrant) Toronto neighbourhood. Her early experiences inspired a longstanding interest in food as a means of cultural continuity and transmission and raised questions about identity and belonging which underscore her work today.

As a University of Toronto student, she combined the interdisciplinary approaches of Linguistic Anthropology and Equity Studies to better understand power relationships and manifestations of inequality. Her current work builds on earlier research around the effects of colonialism and migration on our relationships with food. Recognizing food insecurity as the intersection of multiple forms of inequality, Stephanie views food primarily as a human right, while also honouring its many social, cultural, and historical dimensions.

Stephanie has been involved in community food work for many years, most recently as the Renfrew Collingwood Food Security Institute coordinator. She also sits on the Working Group of Neighbourhood Food Network Coordinators, which enables, among other things, a united voice with which to advocate for just food policies.

Being fortunate to work with people whose passion and gifts enrich community life, Stephanie gains something unexpected every day, from nutritional factoids to new insight into the depths of human kindness. She has lived in Vancouver since 2004, where she and her husband Jesse enjoy imagining the neighbourhood dogs' reaction to hypothetical backyard chickens.