



# from far & wide

cultural diversity in north vancouver





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# introduction



*Scottish Piper and Dancer, early 1900s*

NVMA 83

A café owner from Lebanon, a tailor from Uganda, an educator from Guyana, and a merchant banker from Hong Kong. These are just a few examples of the thousands of immigrants from overseas who now make North Vancouver their home or place of business. To walk down Lonsdale is to experience a host of different cultures: Japanese restaurants, Iranian grocery shops, a Turkish deli, a Greek taverna, and a Moroccan hairdresser. Residents can shop in an Ismaili food store or a Korean flower shop, or pause to eat in an Italian or Thai-owned

restaurant. North Vancouver is now home to people from every continent, save Antarctica.

Over the years, people have come to North Vancouver for a variety of reasons. First Nations people were attracted by the area's rich natural resources. The first non-native settlers came to harvest the timber that grew in the area. Subsequent settlers have also come for economic reasons, hoping that life in North Vancouver would provide them with a better livelihood than they had known elsewhere. Others have been enticed by the natu-

ral beauty of the North Shore, with its proximity to both the mountains and the sea. Some have come for love, as newly-weds following a spouse to the community in which the latter had been raised. Many came for a change in lifestyle, finding in North Vancouver a more relaxed way of life than exists in other cities. Still others have come for political reasons, fleeing to Western Canada, and ultimately, to North Vancouver, to escape repressive regimes in the lands of their birth.

This booklet is just a sampling of North Vancouver's culturally diverse population. Because it is a sampling, a number of cultures may not be represented. Some

of those who are profiled here were born in North Vancouver, while others have come from other provinces or countries. Despite speaking different languages and despite differing traditions, all are united by their appreciation of Canada and the principles for which it stands. Each has made a contribution, in his or her own way, to making Canada, and North Vancouver in particular, a better place in which to live and work.

Cultural diversity is nothing new in North Vancouver. The area now encompassed by the three North Shore municipalities was home to various bands of Coast Salish First Nations people for thousands of years before being



*The Yada Family, early 1900s*

NVMA 9532





*Squamish Longshoremen and Chinese Laundrymen at Moodyville*

CVA M1 P2

sighted by explorers from Europe. The principal of these were the Squamish, but Burrard Inlet was also traversed by the Musqueam, the Sechelt, and the Nanaimo people. Non-native settlement began with the opening of the Moodyville sawmill in 1862. Sawmill owner Sewell Moody was from the United States.

Moody and other sawmill owners employed people from around the world. Local First Nations people laboured as longshoremen, while Chinese immigrants were hired to cook and launder. Ironically, though several mills were to adopt a “white only” labour policy, it was not unusual for them to employ immigrants from Asia, including Japanese and Sikhs. Asians and First Nations people were often relegated to lower paying jobs in the mills, while the higher paying positions went to those with fairer skin.

While the early population was dominated by those of European origins, European residents were also a culturally diverse group of people. Many were from the British Isles, or descended from people born in England,

Scotland, or Ireland. Eastern Canadians were also numerous, as were people from western Europe. While English might have been the language of trade, politics, and education, it was spoken in a wide range of accents, and languages such as German, Dutch, and Swedish were often used at home.

People from a variety of cultures worked side by side, and patronised each other’s businesses. Visitors from throughout the Lower Mainland stayed at the North Vancouver Hotel, one of a series of establishments owned by Swede Peter Larson. Local residents patronised a laundry, and later, a grocery store, owned by Chinese-born Lim Gong. Others visited the Yada family’s store, owned by three Japanese brothers, or stopped for refreshments at one of several English-owned tea shops.

The North Vancouver waterfront was especially diverse. By the early 1940s, the Burrard Drydock, one of the city’s largest employers, was home to workers from over 50

*Lim Gong’s Grocery Store, early 1900s*

CVA Bu P670



nations. Captain Charles Henry Cates and his brothers, who traced their origins to Nova Scotia and New England, established a number of water-based operations, including the towing business that operates to the present.

Even by the mid-20th century, however, those “in control” tended to be of Caucasian birth. Those who sat on Council, and those who trafficked in land, often had British names. They are remembered in street names such as Lonsdale, Mahon, and Fell. Only occasionally did a member of a visible minority rise to public view and adulation. One such individual was Harry Jerome, a

Black high school student who became a noted soccer and baseball player. Jerome achieved even greater distinction as a sprinter, representing Canada at the Pan American, Commonwealth, and Olympic Games, holding world records in both the 100 metre and 100 yard sprints, and going on to head a tour of athletes who visited schools across the country to promote youth involvement in sports. In later years he worked to establish the Premier’s Sports Award programme. Jerome’s achievements were recognised by the nation when he was awarded the Order of Canada in 1971.

By the dawn of the third millennium, North Vancouver had become a more egalitarian society. Members of visible minorities were prominent in community affairs, serving with the Chamber of Commerce and sitting on City Council. The community was home to an active multi-cultural society that guided immigrants in their quests for housing, education, and employment. The City’s Centennial Theatre was home to Folkfest, an annual celebration of music and dance from around the world. A Caribbean Carnival had become a popular annual event. Residents flocked to the Squamish Nation’s Pow Wow and to the Iranian community’s New Year celebrations, while the local school district had formed a committee on cultural diversity.

Racism was still a challenge, but for many, it seemed less of an issue than it had in the past. Guided by policies on cultural diversity and multiculturalism, civic, provincial, and federal representatives strove to create a climate in which the cultures of the immigrant population would be seen not as a cause for division, but as a source of enrichment, inspiration, and joy.



*Chinese Fish seller, early 1900s*

NVMA 6367

# the squamish nation



Chiefs Mathias Joe,  
Simon Baker and  
Dominic Charlie, 1958

NVMA 10526



Chief Capilano Joe and other Squamish Nation members, 1906

CVA IN P41

For over 10,000 years following the retreat of the glaciers, what is now known as North Vancouver was home to First Nations people. In historical times, at least, the area was the site of a number of seasonal Squamish villages, inhabited by a people whose traditional territory encompassed much of both Howe Sound and Burrard Inlet. The area's rich natural resources of fish, cedar, berries, game, and cedar, formed the material basis of a rich and complex culture.

The life of the Squamish people seems to have been relatively peaceful, though raids by northern tribes may have resulted in periodic strife. The Squamish appear to have lived largely in harmony with nature, taking only what they needed, and paying homage to the natural forces and spirits around them. The arrival of Europeans on the Northwest Coast of North America in the late 1700s, however, brought changes that were to change First Nations life forever.

These changes began long before British and Spanish explorers first reached the area. A devastating

series of epidemics, of which the smallpox epidemic was the worst, brought previously unknown diseases into the area. With no natural immunity to protect them, First Nations people died by the thousands. Some authorities have calculated the loss of life occasioned by these and other diseases at up to 90% of the Native population.

With the establishment of the Crown Colony of British Columbia in 1858, further changes were to come. Roman Catholic missionaries arrived, and in concert with government, urged the Squamish people to settle into permanent villages, to adopt Christianity, and to abandon their traditions. Much of the land that the Squamish had formerly claimed as their own was taken away, and made available to newly-arriving settlers and land speculators.

With the establishment of the reservation system, traditional livelihood systems were largely abandoned, as Squamish people became increasingly integrated into the European-dominated economy. A residential school was built on the Mission Reserve, and Squamish



The Mission Reserve, after 1910

CVA IN P46





Wade, Mary, and  
Sierra Baker

Photo by Jennifer Friesen

that had earlier attempted to suppress the very culture that he aspired to preserve. His family and friends were even more supportive, his mother gathering berries and making baskets to sell to pay for his frequent trips to Ottawa and Victoria, as well as to help with the publication of his newspaper, *The Totem Speaks*.

More recently, Squamish hereditary Chief Joe Mathias took up the mantle left by Paull, spending most of his 56 years fighting for Native self-government, land rights, and compensation for the abuses of the past. Chief Mathias was instrumental in setting up the B.C. Treaty Commission to facilitate the treaty negotiation process and

travelled tirelessly across Canada in pursuit of Native rights. When he died suddenly in early 2000, his fellow Chief, Bill Williams, described him as "one of the greatest leaders the Squamish Nation ever had."

While Andy Paull and Joe Mathias laboured in the political arena, native elders such as Mrs. Eva Nahanee, an accomplished basket-maker, worked to keep Squamish material culture alive. Chief Simon Baker (Khot-La-Cha) earned the respect of people within and outside the Squamish Nation for his achievements in lacrosse, for his work as a band councillor, and for his efforts to preserve his people's culture. Chief Dominic Charlie, who was born at Jericho beach in 1885, provided the local papers with an annual forecast for the following year's weather, and heightened people's awareness of First Nations culture. Chief Charlie, who divided his time between Howe Sound and Burrard Inlet, taught many Squamish children to speak the Squamish language, providing them with a sense of pride and self-worth.

Recent years have seen an increasing number of Squamish youth going to college and university, and establishing themselves as positive role models

for the children of their communities. Visual artists such as Xwa-lack-tun (Rick Harry) and Wade Baker (Mintle-eda-us) have risen to the top of their field. Xwa-lack-tun and Baker can trace their ancestry to both Squamish and Kwagiulth origins, and their art incorporates the forms, traditions, and values of both cultural groups, as well as much that they have learned as individuals.

Xwa-lack-tun's roots as an artist go deep. He recalls his early childhood as being one where "art was always there." Xwa-lack-tun needed glasses from an early age, but his condition was not diagnosed for some time, so his was a "close-up world," where art became a natural activity. Xwa-lack-tun went on to take a diploma in art at Vancouver's Emily Carr School of Art, supplementing his studies there with further work at Capilano College. Today, he works in a variety of traditional and contemporary media, does many commissions, and teaches Native art in schools not only on the North Shore, but in Squamish, Maple Ridge, Langley, Coquitlam, and New Westminster as well. Like many of his people, Xwa-lack-tun has occasionally been the object of racist barbs. He is philosophical about the matter. "It's not my problem, it's theirs. I hold nothing against them. We are all one mind, one body, one spirit; and we're all connected to everything."

Wade Baker's Sky Serpent Studio is located near the northern edge of the Mission Reserve. Wade is no stranger to cultural diversity. His wife's (Mary) Hungarian-born parents escaped the invading Russians during their country's 1956 revolution by travelling through a minefield. His own ancestry includes high-ranking Kwagiulth and Tlingit chiefs, as well as an Englishman, Robert Hunt. Wade and Mary work hard to educate

their daughter, Sierra, about her diverse heritage, and the importance of respecting other people's backgrounds. "On the North Shore, there is an awful lot of racial stereotyping," Mary laments. Wade echoes her feelings, and recalls the racism he has experienced throughout his life. Through his art, he attempts to bring families and people closer together, and to promote better communication and understanding. He also pays tribute to his ancestral legacy, "Recognise your ancestors and they will help you without your knowing it."

Xwa-lack-tun (Rick Harry)



children were taken from their families and forced into a system that strove to eliminate their aboriginal heritage. A new set of surnames emerged on the Nation's reserves as people from other parts of the world intermarried with the Squamish. Families such as the Nahanees can now claim Hawaiian ancestry. North Shore surnames such as Gonzales and Miranda, point to intermarriage with Chilean seamen.

In the face of what might seem to be overwhelming odds, many aspects of traditional Squamish culture survived. Elders took care to preserve the Squamish language, and to pass down traditional art forms, and family stories, dances, and skills to their children. From time to time, noted leaders emerged to defend the rights and traditions of their nation. One of the earliest was Chief Capilano Joe, who went so far as to journey to Buckingham Palace with two fellow Chiefs, Basil and Charlie, to seek the assistance of King Edward VII in addressing the wrongs done to his people.

In later years, activist Andy Paull (1892-1959) was to spend the whole of his adult life in fighting for Native rights, and in helping his people to regain their culture and hereditary rights. In this, ironically, he found support from the same Roman Catholic Church

a coat of many colours

## Salah Abi-Farage



*"We should appreciate what this country offers us, as this is a great place to live."*

Prior to its tragic civil war, Lebanon was considered by many as a good example of how people from many cultural and religious backgrounds could live together in peace and harmony. Salah Abi-Farage came to Canada from a mountain resort area not far from Beirut, the country's capital, in 1971. His original intent was to attend college in Montreal, where he would study mechanical engineering. It was during a visit to his brother in Alberta that Salah decided to remain in that province and to enrol in Alberta College in Edmonton. There, he took two years of mechanical engineering and greatly improved his command of English. While in Alberta, he supported himself with the wages he earned working in a restaurant.

Salah moved to Vernon in 1974. He had previously worked as a chef at Hy's Steak House and opened a restaurant of his own. Mechanical engineering faded into the distance as he embarked upon a series of other res-

taurant ventures. By the mid-1990s, Salah had diversified his business interests and had founded a firm to export technology to less developed countries.

Salah loves the restaurant business, perhaps because it provides his outgoing nature with a natural outlet. Together with his wife, Rajah, an interior designer, he opened the Byblos Restaurant on East Third Avenue in 1999. Over 80% of his customers are Canadian. They appreciate the food, and in Salah's words, "like to try everything." Salah has lived in North Vancouver since 1988, and thoroughly enjoys life in North Vancouver, observing that the community is "just like a little village in a big city."

When Salah came to Canada, he considered it a very prosperous, neutral young country "with a great open heart." He is proud that Canada is "my country, by choice" and that he supports "what Canada stands for." He deeply admires the nation for its unqualified support of poorer countries all around the world and for its support of human rights in countries that enjoy fewer freedoms.

Salah hopes that Canada will learn from Lebanon's experiences, and that the country will promote greater pride in being Canadian. He worries about the potential for inter-cultural clashes: "We should appreciate what this country offers us, as this is a great place to live."



## Heros + Sofia Amirian

*"If you are honest in business, people will respect you."*

Heros and Sofia Amirian came to Canada from Iran in 1985. Both are proud of their Armenian heritage, and are active members of the Lower Mainland's sizeable Armenian-Canadian community. Though born and raised in Iran, both consider themselves Armenian-Canadians, rather than Iranian-Canadians.

Iran's cultural minorities had prospered prior to the revolution of 1979. Armenians living in Iran enjoyed their own schools and their own churches. Access to higher education was unimpeded. Then, things changed. Ethnic Iranians began to receive preferential treatment, and minorities such as Jews, Armenians, and Kurds found themselves less able to go to university, and less likely to be employed in higher paying jobs. As the Iranian government promoted Islamic fundamentalism, ethnic minorities began to feel concerned about their personal safety.

Heros's sister had already immigrated to Canada, and Heros and his family decided to follow. The Amirians knew that Canada had a small population, that it was a new country, a country of immigrants, and a

good place to live. Canada offered "a chance for everybody," Heros recalls. On reaching North Vancouver, Heros was pleased to find that the blue water and the verdant green hillsides reminded him of his home near the Caspian Sea.

Heros had earned his master's degree in civil engineering at a Turkish university. He had returned to Iran, where he found work designing roads, buildings, and bridges. On reaching Canada, he found his qualifications unrecognised. Prospective employers cited his lack of Canadian work experience. Heros took courses at college and even offered to work without pay for a year in order to gain the needed experience. There were still no takers.

Heros then spoke with a childhood friend who had immigrated to California and who had become the biggest olive importer in North America. Heros soon became an expert on olives and his friend's representative for all of Western Canada. He now has his own wholesaling business, and operates a retail outlet for olives and olive oils on Lonsdale Avenue. Heros is no longer disappointed at not being able to practice his original profession. "I found I was a very good salesman," he says with a smile.

Like her husband, Sofia Amirian was also unable to practice the profession for which she had been trained. Formerly an elementary school teacher in

Iran, Sofia worked with her mother-in-law and opened an alterations business on West 18th Street. Sofia knew little English when she first arrived in Canada, and is grateful to her customers for helping her to learn the language. Business was slow at first, but within

two years things had begun to pick up.

Heros, Sofia, their son Aret, and their daughter Arsineh love their life in Canada. In Sofia's words, though "everything is different, everything is easier for us." She now knows the community well, and prefers North Vancouver to the other Lower Mainland municipalities she has seen. When asked what he misses from Iran, Aret replies quickly and bluntly, "Nothing."





# the John Braithwaite Family

When John and Barbara Braithwaite arrived in North Vancouver, you could count the number of Black people on the entire North Shore on the fingers of both hands. Bi-racial couples were even rarer. In the early 1960s, the Civil Rights movement was only just getting underway and inter-racial marriages were uncommon. They were also disturbing to many. As Barbara remembers, “bi-racial couples were frowned upon, to put it mildly.”

The Braithwaites had both been educated as social workers at the University of Toronto. John had been attracted to North Vancouver by the prospect of a job at the North Shore Neighbourhood House. The couple had met in Ontario in the late 1950s and were married in British Columbia in 1963. John’s parents were both born in Barbados, and after brief spells in Sydney (Nova Scotia) and in Montreal, had moved to Toronto, where John was born. Barbara’s mother was from England, while her father was an Ontarian of Irish descent.

John had grown up in a culturally diverse community in Toronto, but one that was predominantly White. His neighbourhood was one filled with immigrants, from Eastern Europe, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, Scotland and England. The majority of the population was Jewish, but there were also a few families of Japanese origin. Cultural diversity did not bring harmony, however. Culturally-defined street gangs, name-calling at school, and school yard fights were all too common. Whites were favoured over Blacks for jobs. “There was heavy discrimination, it was just blatant,” John remembers.

Life in North Vancouver has also presented John and Barbara with a number of challenges. In the early 1960s, it was often difficult for Blacks to find housing, and the couple were “always careful to make a reservation before arriving at a restaurant,” lest they be turned away. Despite

the multi-national origins of the children at the Neighbourhood House, John recalls, “When I first arrived, some of the kids used to call me ‘Nigger’ all the time.” When race riots broke out in Los Angeles in the early 1990s, the Braithwaites were the object of a horrible, threatening telephone call, and a brick was deposited on their driveway with a meticulously written message, “Whites die, you die too.”

The Braithwaite children, now all young adults, are proud of their heritage. All three feel that racism is still evident in North Vancouver. John Jr. advises that “for the most part, living on the North Shore has been really good,” but talks of having to stand up for himself in the face of schoolyard bullying. Racism is often unexpected.

“When it creeps up on you, it hits you hard,” he adds. Mark Braithwaite remembers that “In Grades 1, 2, 3, and 4, you’re just a kid like all the others.” After that, “kids begin to learn their racist behaviour.” In his work as a

police officer, Mark is often exposed to racist taunts from youth. “It’s the same kids that will turn on rap music 5 minutes later,” he notes, with a sense of irony. His sister Miria feels that prejudice is something that has to be taught and attributes its proliferation to parents “who fear someone coming in and taking over what they feel they have already built up.”

“Things have changed for the better since our arrival in North Vancouver,” John concludes. “There is a substantial increase in mixed marriages and prejudice and discrimination are not as evident as in the early years. North Vancouver is now a racially and culturally diverse community.” All the Braithwaites are positive about life in the City. John cautions, however, “Racism still exists in subtle forms on the North Shore.”



## Eliza Chang

to accompany his parents to Canada. The pressures of his work now prevent him from even coming for a visit. The move also meant separation from Eliza’s parents. Eliza had married young, and lived with her parents-in-law. She saw little of her own parents and was saddened not to be able to say goodbye to her mother, who died in Taiwan after Eliza had moved to Canada.

For many Taiwanese women, moving away from Taiwan has resulted in a greater measure of personal independence. Taiwanese-Canadian women drive cars, shop unescorted, undertake repairs, and paint their houses, activities that would be unusual for them in their native country. Many have also

Eliza Chang came to Canada with her husband from Taiwan in the spring of 1994. Friends had previously moved to West Vancouver, and provided good reports about life on Vancouver’s North Shore. The mountains and sea were beautiful and there was an excellent education system for the children.

For the Changs, the move to Canada was far from easy. It was hard to meet local people. The couple were surprised about how difficult it was to find employment. For Eliza’s husband, this was less important. As he works as a script writer in the entertainment industry, his place of residence is somewhat immaterial. Eliza has cobbled together a number of jobs for herself. One is as a teacher of the Mandarin language. The other is as a journalist, reporting the proceedings at North Shore Council meetings.

The family’s move to Canada also resulted in stresses on the family. Eliza’s eldest son was about to go into the army. As a 20 year old, he did not qualify

“North Vancouver is a really good place to live”

become more assertive, a development that sometimes places stress on unprepared husbands. “My wife speaks louder now,” observes Eliza’s husband.

For Eliza and her family, North Vancouver is now truly their home. Eliza recalls going to New York City for a visit, and immediately became homesick, not for Taiwan, but for North Vancouver. “This is my home,” she quietly states. “North Vancouver is a really good place to live.”



## The Corsi Sisters

Sisters Carmelina Cusano and Teresa Battista arrived in Canada with their mother, Rosa, in 1962. Like many Italians who have moved to North Vancouver, the family came from Molise province, south of Rome. Molise was an agricultural area, but their father found it difficult to remain in farming. His brothers had left the family farm to work in a Fiat factory and he had no sons to replace them.

Signor Corsi left the family to work in Venezuela when his daughters were still quite young. After returning to Italy he applied to immigrate to Canada. His sister was here, and he hoped that opportunities in North America would exceed those in Europe. His early life in Canada was difficult, however. Three years passed before he was able to send for his family.

When they finally came to Canada, Rosa, Carmelina, and Teresa experienced a terrible sea voyage. Their cabin was, small, in steerage, and without a single porthole. Carmelina remembers that she and her mother were seasick for most of the voyage, while Teresa recalls watching Elvis Presley movies. Some people brought their own food, and the smell of oranges was pervasive. The two girls were terrified the first time the ship's fog horn sounded, not far from where they were standing.

At Halifax there was no one to help them disembark. The two sisters remember the strange assortment of things they had brought from Italy, including a radio that ran on European current and a provolone cheese. With no one to help them with their luggage, something had to go. Carmelina had been carrying a doll and other toys in a

cardboard shoebox. Though she was able to stuff some doll clothes into her pockets, the doll itself became surplus. Carmelina's most vivid memory of Halifax is that of her doll floating away across the harbour, and along with it, many of her connections with her childhood in Italy.

The two sisters remember the immigration pier resembling a concentration camp. Through some error, the family ended up on an express train. They departed in haste, and had no opportunity to buy food for the voyage. Unable to afford meals aboard the train, they lived on packages of potato chips for the next four days. In Toronto, their mother's father was waiting to greet them on the immigrant train. It had already passed. In Vancouver, their father missed them as well. Rosa, Carmelina, and Teresa spent the night on hard wooden benches at Vancouver's Canadian National Railway Station.



Rosa and her daughters missed their extended family. Teresa, who had just finished high school, longed for her teenaged friends. Disappointed that her new home at Lake Cowichan bore no resemblance to the North American cities she had seen in the movies, she recalls "crying for a year," repeatedly asking her family to send her home to her grandmother. Today, Teresa views Canada as "the land of opportunities." Both sisters have lived in North Vancouver since the 1970s. Carmelina dubs the community as "the best area in which to live." She is quick to cite the low rate of social problems and the high quality of area schools as two good reasons to live in North Vancouver. As if to prove her point, her son, Massimo, received the Jack Davis Scholarship as the best overall student on the North Shore in the year 2000.

## Farid Dordar

For martial arts instructor and software manufacturer, Farid Dordar, "Canada is a thousand times better than Europe," and offers a number of opportunities that were not available to him in his native Iran. Farid's journey to North Vancouver began in Tehran, where his family had an engineering business, rewinding rotors on electric motors. Farid, however, had a passion for the martial arts, and had earned himself a place on his country's national team. While he could compete nationally, however, international competition was simply not possible.

Farid knew that things were different in North America. In 1987, he made his way to France, hoping to apply for immigrant status in the United States. "I was kicked out of the American embassy," he recalls. "France didn't want me either."

Despite his experiences with the Americans and the French, Farid applied to Canada. The official with whom he spoke at the Canadian embassy was impressed by his unique combination of electronic and martial arts skills, and Farid was granted immigrant status. Farid was delighted, for "Canadians seemed more readily accepted around the world," and the martial arts federation of which he was a member was based in Vancouver.

*"Canada is a thousand times better than Europe."*

Farid's initial months in his new home were anything but easy. He had arrived in North Vancouver penniless, having had to borrow money just to pay his air fare. He knew little English. Although there were many Iranians living in the community, he didn't know any of them. Farid's earliest jobs were in community centres, where he taught the martial arts to the community's children. It was there that he met his future wife, Ingrid, who was also an instructor. Because he knew so little English, they had to converse in French. Farid eventually learned English by listening to his students.

Despite having to face the challenges common to many recent immigrants, Farid was thrilled with North Vancouver, and elated to be a Canadian. When he first saw the mountains and the harbour he knew that he had come to "the most beautiful city in the world." He wrote back to his family in Iran, noting that he "had made his way to Heaven without studying religion." Farid felt Canadian "the first week I was here," and remembers looking out the windows while first crossing the harbour on the Seabus, thinking with pride, "Man, this country is mine!"





# Ingrid (Katzberg) Dordar

Ingrid Dordar was born in Antofagasta, Chile, but left at a very early age. Salvador Allende was about to take office as Latin America's first elected communist president, and Ingrid's parents feared the economic repercussions of his election. They quickly sold their property (at a major loss) and moved to Germany, where Ingrid's father had been born. After a short stay there, they then moved to Australia. Five years later, the family moved back to South America, this time to Peru.

After seven years, the family was on the move again, travelling north to Canada. The family settled in Campbell River. Ingrid was surprised by the greenness of her surroundings and by the abundant rain. In the seven years the family had lived in the Peruvian desert, they had not seen a single drop of rain. Though only a small town, Campbell River seemed immense. Ingrid's school in the Peruvian wilderness consisted of just 32 students. Her secondary school on Vancouver Island was home to over 1,200. "It seemed more like a university than a high school," she remembers.

Six months later, the family moved to the North Shore. The Katzbergs were fortunate, as several people went out of their way to help them find housing and employment. Ingrid felt welcome in North Vancouver, much more so than she had in Campbell River, where her fellow students had taunted her simply because she was foreign. North Vancouver was more cosmopolitan, and people living here were more used to meeting people from different countries. Even so, it was hard for



Ingrid to adjust to life in British Columbia. She and her brother had loved where they lived in Peru, and didn't want to emigrate.

Despite having left Chile as a young child, Ingrid retains great affection for the country and its people. She has returned to visit Chile on several occasions, and always leaves renewed. Latin Americans, she smiles, have an innate ability "to be happy just to be alive," while North Americans often "forget about living."

# "Eddy" Khosrow Esmati

"North Vancouver is the  
best place to live!"

Known to his non-Iranian friends and acquaintances as "Eddy," Khosrow Esmati owns and operates a butcher shop in North Vancouver's Lower Lonsdale area. Khosrow is a native of Iran's capital city of Tehran, where his mother was the owner of dozens of stores which were rented out to others.

Khosrow left Iran in 1994, originally settling in Toronto. He knew little about Canada at the time, but found the Canadian government highly accommodating when he applied for immigrant status. It was in Toronto that Khosrow met his future wife, Shirin. Shirin was also Iranian-born, and had arrived in Toronto with her parents in 1977, shortly before the revolution that was to change the lives of so many Iranians forever. Too young to remember much about Iran, Shirin has always considered herself a Canadian. "Canada is my home," she states.

Moving to North Vancouver was a major step for both Khosrow and Shirin. Khosrow had always been interested in the butcher's trade and knew that there



might be a good market for "Halal" meat among the area's Middle Eastern and Jewish populations. Khosrow's Halal meat comes from Alberta, and is unique in that virtually all the animal's blood has been drained from its flesh. His products are no less popular among the area's general population, many of whom have become regular and valued customers. Only about 20% of Khosrow's customers are Iranian, the remainder including people from Japan, the Balkans, Russia, and Hong Kong, as well as native-born Canadians.

Life in Canada has been a challenge for the Esmatis. Though the volume of his business requires that he employ several assistants, Khosrow notes how hard it is to get ahead. He looks forward to the redevelopment of Lower Lonsdale and hopes that it will result in more business. He and his wife, who works as a dental hygienist, enjoy life on the North Shore. They allude to the area's natural beauty and the safety of its streets. "North Vancouver is the best place to live," states Khosrow.

# Kale + Zeynep Gular

*"We love both countries."*

Kale Gular, his wife Zeynep, and their son Matt emigrated from Ankara, Turkey in 1980. Kale was a native of Ankara, where his family had long been involved in the restaurant and supermarket businesses. Zeynep had been born and raised in Istanbul, where her family had worked in the public service.

In the early 1980s, Turkey was poorer than it is now. It was less democratic, with the military exerting a strong influence over its elected governments. There was less free enterprise, and fewer opportunities for a good education or economic advancement. The Canadian embassy in Ankara had been one of Kale's customers, so he felt comfortable in investigating how to immigrate. He found the Canadian immigration officers "unbelievably beautiful people," and applauds their "civilised, polite, and helpful" nature.

Encouraged by their reception at the Canadian embassy, the Gulars followed a friend's advice and joined him in Windsor, Ontario. Finding the cold, Ontario winter unbearable, they followed the friend's further advice and made the trek to North Vancouver. There they found the weather sunny and warm, despite arriving in winter. Kale took one look around and concluded, "This is it!"

Kale spent his first month living at the YMCA, while he looked for a home for his family and for a business opportunity. Life in Canada's far west presented a number of challenges. The family had relatives or friends in British Columbia, and their skills with the English language were severely taxed. The Gulars nonetheless felt welcome, and were treated with courtesy by everyone they met.



On leaving Turkey, the family experienced a sense of loss as a vast expanse of geography separated them from friends and family. In Turkey, they observe, such connections are much stronger than in North America. Over time, the Gulars have built many friendships on the North Shore. Many of these are customers of their Central Lonsdale delicatessen. "People come as customers and leave as friends," Kale declares.

The Gulars are ever adaptable. Their business premises may soon be redeveloped, and the couple are now looking for other business possibilities, including leading tours to Turkey. Kale is very much interested in promoting business connections between Turkey and Canada. He is equally interested in humanitarian causes, including providing relief for the victims of recent earthquakes in Turkey. "We love both countries," he explains.

# Arlette Haboosheh

Arlette Haboosheh is an Iranian-born Jew whose parents came from Iraq. Though Jewish and living in a Farsi-speaking country, Arlette and her family spoke Arabic at home. Arlette was educated in Tehran in an American-run, Presbyterian school, and spent some



enchanted by the beauty of the natural environment. She was pleased by the freedom of speech intrinsic to Canadian life. After living in Tehran, a bustling city of several million, she initially found Vancouver "dead and boring." She was surprised

by the province's "very Victorian" liquor laws. She missed the sights, sounds, and smells of Tehran, and especially missed the sound of the muezzins as they called the faithful to prayer.

Arlette felt welcome when she arrived in Canada, and notes, "I was treated so well." She cannot remember encountering any form of prejudice and experienced no problems during the immigration process. Even so, Arlette recalls being homesick for Iran during her first two years in Canada. After a visit to Iran, however, she couldn't wait to get back to Canada.

Other Iranian immigrants have been less fortunate, she advises. Some had heard that jobs were plentiful and that the streets were all but paved with gold. A few have had trouble living in North Vancouver and have since moved to Coquitlam. Women enjoy a new sense of freedom. Where their husbands have been tradition-bound, tensions have arisen, and many divorces have resulted. Arlette advises that there is no single Iranian-Canadian community. As in any society, there are differences

in wealth, education, politics, and religion. Some Iranians originally came to escape the Shah, others to escape the Ayatollahs.

time in England prior to her arrival in Canada in 1971, eight years prior to the overthrow of the Shah. Arlette's husband is also Jewish and was also born in Iran. The couple chose to live in the Vancouver area partly because Arlette's husband's uncle was already here. Like other Iranian immigrants, they were delighted to find that the area, with its abundant trees and its mountains, had much in common with landscapes they had known at home. Arlette was



## Kitty Hsieh

Immigration to Canada from Taiwan has increased considerably in the last decade. Kitty Hsieh is typical of people who have come from Taiwan to live in North Vancouver. Like over 100 others, she is an active member of the Orchid Club, a benevolent organisation founded in 1991 to assist Taiwanese women to adapt to life in Canada while also raising funds for local charities.

Kitty arrived in Canada in 1993, settling in Edmonton. In June, 1996 the family moved to North Vancouver. They were pleased with what they saw. North Vancouver was far less crowded than where they had lived in Taiwan, nature was close at hand, and there was a better quality of life. Most importantly, the public education system was good, and one that offered its students more spare time than had been the case in Taiwan, where students may spend up to 15 hours at school each day.

Coming to Canada was not entirely easy for the family. It was hard to leave their family and friends while embarking on a new career in a strange, new land. In Taiwan, Kitty had secured a good position with American Airlines, and enjoyed the salary that went along with it. Now, that was a thing of the past. Her children found it especially hard to adapt, and needed plenty of support. On the positive side, there were plenty of other Taiwanese families in the area, and they made it easier for Kitty and her family as they began to put down roots. The family became closer through the process.



Kitty and her family found North Vancouver different from Edmonton. British Columbians seemed more reserved, although they were always polite. Edmonton seemed friendlier. In Edmonton, the family had owned a store and restaurant. In British Columbia, Kitty's husband became a supermarket manager, while she began work as a part time teacher of the Mandarin language. Though she returns to Taiwan for an occasional visit, Canada is now her home. Like many other Taiwanese, Kitty finds that employment opportunities may not be as good as in Taiwan, but she values the greatly superior quality of life she finds in Canada.

## Valerie Jacober

Valerie (Brooks) Jacober came to North Vancouver from the United States in 1978. Valerie was born in Houston, Texas, but her father's career in the United States Air Force resulted in the family moving to New Mexico, California, and finally, to Colorado Springs, Colorado. Black Americans comprise over 50% of Colorado Springs' population, and it was there that Valerie met her future husband, an Albertan of Polish-German descent who had enrolled in a Black Studies class simply because he knew so little of Black American history.

Valerie was in her third year of college, studying social work, when she left Colorado and moved to North Vancouver, where her husband had previously shared a house with a number of other young men. Her adjustment to life in Canada was difficult. Her husband soon became temporarily unemployed, reducing the couple's income. Valerie was not allowed to work, as she had not yet received her landed immigrant papers. Many Canadians seemed less than welcoming, and Valerie had to work hard at developing relationships and making new friends.

Having moved to an area with such a small Black population, Valerie found that products she had formerly considered basic were now considered specialised and were more difficult to find. Skin and hair care products, hosiery, and magazines for Blacks were virtually unavailable in North Vancouver. Valerie looked forward to receiving these and other goods in the mail from family and friends in Colorado, in what she affectionately began to call "CARE packages." These problems were minor compared to the overt racist barbs that Valerie received on the street, and the more subtle discrimination she endured in other situations.

Valerie currently works as a teaching assistant at Ridgeway Elementary School. She is determined to ensure that the children with whom she works do not suffer the discrimination that she has faced throughout her life. Hers is a multicultural school, and its curriculum includes a variety of units designed to promote respect for cultural and racial diversity. Valerie has been an active participant in developing curricula in the area of cultural diversity, bringing in guest speakers and searching out resource

materials from a variety of sources. Valerie's plans for the future include completing a Master's degree in Social Work with an emphasis on race relations in Canada.





## Dr. May Kaan

people seemed more closely knit, and that they were encouraged to express their own cultural backgrounds. There seemed to be little inter-cultural conflict, people mixed well together without having to become the same as their neighbours. Canada, she says, is "the nicest place on earth."

May and her family were glad of their move to the North Shore. It was "absolutely beautiful," and exceeded her expectations. May points to the proximity of nature, the friendliness of the people, and the serenity life on the North Shore affords. "Everything is good," she says, "except the bridge." Though Greater Vancouver and Hong Kong share the similarity of a harbour at the foot of mountains, there are also dif-

ferences. May points to the extreme crowdedness of Hong Kong, to the heat and humidity, and to street life that never seems to stop.

Like other immigrants from Asia, May and her family have not been immune to racial prejudice. Though never of truly

worrisome proportions, the racism they experienced on the North Shore was troubling nonetheless. May's son was subject to abuse at school, where, at the time, he was the only Asian in attendance. May feels the situation has improved during the last ten years as people have become better educated and as an increasingly diverse multicultural population has become more visible. "Once people know each other the barriers disappear," she observes.

The former British Colony of Hong Kong has provided Canada with thousands of talented and eager immigrants during much of the last one and one half centuries. Dr. May Kaan was born in Hong Kong to parents of mainland China origin. She came to Canada in 1969. May had completed her medical degree in 1968, and undertook her internship and residency at hospitals in Ottawa and Montreal. She moved to Vancouver with her husband, a radiologist, in 1992.

May's move to Vancouver was influenced by employment opportunities, by the fact that her sister was already here, and

by a worsening situation in Quebec. The Kaans had seen the FLQ's campaign of terrorism and the threat of separatism was becoming increasingly real. The family settled on the North Shore two years later, within a few minutes' drive of May's general practice on Lonsdale Avenue.

Prior to arriving in Canada, May associated the country with the United States. She found a number of differences once she arrived. Here she found that

*"It is a privilege to be able to live, work, and serve in Canada."*

## Gar Lee

Gar Lee is a Canadian of Chinese descent. His parents arrived from Asia in the days when all Chinese were obliged to pay a head tax prior to entering the country. Gar was born in Vancouver, and raised in the heart of that city's Chinatown. Gar remembers working in his father's restaurant as a dishwasher, and

watching the American sailors lining up to get in during the Second World War. Towards the end of the war, Gar enlisted in the Canadian Army, but was never called overseas.

As a child, Gar was subject to the directives of his strict, "old fashioned" mother. She spoke little English, and worried about the hours that her children kept out of her sight. Gar's father was "more modern." Many of his business associates were Europeans, and he had a good command of English. Gar and his brothers were nonetheless sent to Chinese school at the end of each public school day. There, they were expected to learn to read and write the Chinese language, and to learn something of Chinese history and culture. They hated it: it was simply too much school in a single day.

After the war, Gar's father set him up in business, in

a grocery store that ultimately became the Queensbury Market. The market was far more than a corner store, but much smaller than the supermarkets that we know today. From 1946, it had its own butcher shop, and customers would travel from other North Shore communities simply because of the quality of

its meat. Gar and his staff grew to know many of their customers on a first name basis.

As a second generation Canadian who has visited Asia only once (at the age of 6), Gar has "always felt Canadian." He has never experienced any prejudice. Members of his family, some of whom know little Chinese, have intermarried with members of other racial groups. Gar is protective of Canadian rules and

regulations, and supports the government's deportation of illegal immigrants from China. He has no objection to Canada receiving additional immigrants, however, "just as long as they come in fair and square."







## Mostafa Lemdersi-Filall

Sometime around the age of 15, Mostafa Lemdersi-Filall promised himself that someday he would “live in a green place.” In June, 1986 he achieved his dream. Mostafa came to Canada from Fez, one of the principal cities of Morocco. Though possessed of a rich culture redolent with tradition, Morocco, in Mostafa’s eyes, is a country where that very tradition works against equality, and hampers opportunity.

In Morocco, Mostafa had grown up with foreigners. He had worked as a tour guide and had met a number of Canadians. He was intrigued by Canada and submitted an application for immigrant status. The application proved successful, and



*“You always hope people will like you,  
but you don’t sweat it.”*

Mostafa soon found himself living in Horseshoe Bay. Mostafa’s original intent was to divide his year between the two countries. In time, this proved impractical, and Mostafa elected to stay in Canada.

His initial years were anything but easy as he worked long days, dividing his time between English language classes and work. At first he knew little English, and found it hard to contend with the rain that was required to create the “green place” for which he had longed for so many years. Mostafa had considerable experience working as a men’s and ladies’ hairdresser in Morocco, and re-entered the trade in his new home. He gradually built up a loyal clientele among the North Shore population, and in 1999 was able to realise “a twenty year dream,” opening a shop of his own in Lower Lonsdale.

Mostafa has nothing but compliments for Canada and its citizens. “I wanted to be part of Canada, everywhere we go we are looked at in a good light.” When queried if he can recall any instances of discrimination, he answers, “No, none at all.” Mostafa is philosophical: “You always hope people will like you, but you don’t sweat it.”

With his business in hand in what he refers to as “the new Lonsdale,” Mostafa is happy with his life with his partner, Lena, and their two children: “Every day when I get up I see the light at the end of the tunnel.” Mostafa is optimistic about life and about the general goodness of humanity: “If you’re a good person, you can accomplish anything you want.”

## Daniel Lo

Daniel Lo is a native of Hong Kong. Educated at the prestigious Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, Daniel was recruited by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and moved to Canada in 1972. Daniel was sent to Toronto for training, then posted to Hong Kong to work as a merchant banker, matching investment funds with business opportunities.

Although his work provided Daniel with a large and secure income, the pressures and tedium of merchant banking were not to his liking. Stopping in Vancouver en route to Hong Kong from a reporting session in Toronto, Daniel was intrigued by western Canada’s city by the sea. It, and the neighbouring municipalities, had much in common with Hong Kong, whether natural or man-made. There were mountains and an ocean, abundant opportunities for business, and a population of considerable cultural diversity.

Daniel elected to leave the bank, and entered the field of real estate development, initially representing Hong Kong interests, then going into business for himself. This too left Daniel dissatisfied. In 1998, however, Daniel embarked upon a life-altering venture. It was then that he planned, developed, then opened his Unison Way centre for the martial arts. Daniel’s enthusiasm for the martial arts is contagious. For him,



*“This is  
the perfect  
place to bring  
up kids.”*

“the martial arts are more than just kicking and punching,” they are also a vehicle to connect the three parts of every individual: the physical, the mental, and the spiritual.

When asked about what he misses from Hong Kong, Daniel says, “Nothing.” Although it may be easier to do business there, he notes that the pace of life on the North Shore is

slower, and the pursuit of wealth less pervasive. Hong Kong, in Daniel’s eyes, is a place without culture or tradition. Although there may be pockets of racial prejudice in British Columbia, society is kinder here, and the environment is beautiful. In Daniel’s words, “This is the perfect place to bring up kids.”

## Bertie + Carmen London



Though born in its capital city of Georgetown, Bertie London grew up in the villages of rural Guyana. Like many Guyanans, Bertie's father worked in the sugar industry. Bertie received a good education, and worked first as a teacher, and later, as an administrator in the country's education system. His wife, Carmen, whose father had been active in the country's gold and diamond industries, also worked as a teacher. In time, Carmen became the deputy headmistress of one of the largest Roman Catholic schools in Georgetown, while Bertie assumed responsibility for the schools in one of the country's counties.

Bertie retired at the relatively young age of 58. Two of Bertie's and Carmen's children had moved to Canada, and the couple were anxious to be reunited with them. They applied for immigrant status, and their daughter agreed to act as their sponsor. Upon arriving in Canada, the couple decided to go back to work. Bertie found employment with H.A. Simons Engineering, his wife with the North Vancouver Public Library.

*"North Vancouver has a small town character with big city advantages."*

Bertie and Carmen were surprised by how little Canadians knew about Guyana, many of them not even knowing where it was located. People they encountered often appeared ill at ease, uncertain as to how to deal with a person of colour. Some assumed

an air of superiority, while "others were overly effusive, to create a zone of comfort." Many people displayed preconceived ideas about Black people, unable to distinguish people of Caribbean origin from those of American descent.

According to Bertie, much of this has changed. The couple are now better known and are part of their local community. Increased immigration from a variety of countries has made most Canadians more understanding of people from other countries. Local events such as Folkfest and the Caribbean Carnival have also exerted a positive influence. While racism remains a factor in his life, it is not something that he has to deal with on a daily basis: "I feel more comfortable here in North Vancouver than anywhere else in North America."

## Agnes & Manuel Mendoza

Agnes and Manuel Mendoza came to North Vancouver directly from the Philippines in the mid-1970s. Both were quite familiar with Canada before they decided to immigrate. Agnes had been to Canada to visit her sister, who emigrated in 1965, and had spent time in both Vancouver and Toronto. Manuel, like many Filipinos, had a passion for geography, and had followed Canadian affairs on the international news. Although the decision to emigrate was a joint one, Manuel reflects on it

and smiles, "I go where my wife goes."

In the mid-1970's, the Philippines were under martial law, and the repressive regime of Ferdinand Marcos restricted the freedom of the country's residents. Filipinos were only allowed to leave the country as emigrants, and could take no more than \$500 with them. The Mendozas had to smuggle their money out of the country.

Both Agnes and Manuel found work within three days of arriving in Canada. Agnes got a job as a professional photographer's assistant. Manuel accepted a position as a designer with Janzen's, the well-known clothing manufacturer. Even so, the couple had to start "from scratch." Through long hours and much hard work they were able to purchase a townhouse three months after their arrival.

The Mendozas felt welcome in Canada, and struggle to remember a single instance of discrimination. "Everyone was very civil," Manuel recalls. Manuel and Agnes are both strong advocates of life in North Vancouver. They left to live outside the City briefly, and immediately found themselves homesick for life on the North Shore. The Mendozas appreciate the City's many public amenities, such as its library, schools, and parks. They appreciate North Vancouver's strong sense of community, and even like the weather, noting, "I love it when it rains!"

The couple are also strong supporters of Canada. Manuel recalls that when he received his Canadian citizenship, "The judge made me feel really special." Manuel and Agnes have endeavoured to raise their daughter, Nina, "as Canadian as possible."





## Sigi + Mitzi Muenz

*"We feel really lucky, we are happy here, we feel we are part of the community."*

November 9, 1938 is a date that virtually any adult of Jewish extraction knows as *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken glass, when the windows of shops and houses owned by German Jews were systematically smashed, and their owners arrested and beaten.

Sigi Muenz was aged 17 at the time. He knew what it was to be a member of a hated cultural minority. Sigi was routinely beaten by his contemporaries at school. On *Kristallnacht*, he was taken into custody and not released until the following day. His father was not so lucky. Severely beaten, he was sent to a concentration camp. He died there two weeks later.

In the aftermath of *Kristallnacht*, Sigi knew what he must do. He made his way to England, hoping for freedom, respect, and safety. He planned to immigrate to the United States and had been allowed into England on the condition that he would leave for the America within a year. Sigi's sister followed him to England. His mother also escaped, reaching America after travelling to Lisbon.

Sigi found work in an English factory, but as he was a German citizen, and as the plant's production was linked to Britain's war effort, he was soon compelled to leave. With the fall of France, Sigi's fate was sealed. Sigi and other German Jews in Britain

were considered "enemy aliens." They were all rounded up and within five days Sigi found himself on the *Ettrick*, a ship bound for Canada. The *Ettrick* was full of people the British felt to be a threat to national security. Its passenger manifest included 5 Italians, 785 prisoners of war, and 1,308 internees, including the Kaiser's grandson. Conditions were terrible. The passengers were allowed on deck just twice a day, for two 45 minute exercise periods.

The ship landed at Quebec where the passengers disembarked under an armed escort. Sigi and a number of other internees were put on a train. The windows were sealed and there were no doors on the toilets. The passengers had no idea of where they were bound. After three days' travel, the train arrived at Monteith, a town in northern Ontario. An internment camp had been created nearby, and Sigi and his fellow internees spent the next four months in a city of tents. It was only when the first snow arrived, collapsing the tents, that Sigi and the others were allowed to enter the huts that had been built nearby.

In the months that followed, Sigi was sent to a number of other camps, and ultimately ended up living in a caboose beside a Montreal area factory. There, he was forced to work in the factory, and received payment at the rate of 45 cents per hour. He was



forbidden to leave the area and was directed not to marry. In 1945, Sigi was suddenly released, and despite having previously been considered an enemy alien, he was soon drafted into the Canadian army.

It was in Montreal that Sigi met his future wife, Mitzi. Mitzi had been born in Montreal to Russian Jewish parents. Their family had also been persecuted, simply because they were Jewish. Mitzi recalls her father telling her about the pogroms of the Czar, who sent his Cossack troops into Jewish villages, killing their inhabitants with their swords. Living in Montreal, in a neighbourhood composed of French Canadians, English people, Syrians, and Jews, she found it hard to understand how people could be so hateful of their neighbours.

Despite the unpleasantness of his early reception in Canada, Sigi became a citizen as soon as he was able. He and Mitzi left Quebec in the early 1990s, concerned by the institution of restrictive language laws in the province. The couple are wary of anti-Semitism, feeling that it lies "just below the surface." Sigi and Mitzi enjoy their life in North Vancouver, stating, "We feel we are part of the community. We feel really lucky, we are happy here, we have our children and our grandchildren here." Sigi is a regular visitor to the North Shore Neighbourhood House. He feels "so welcome there."

# Catherine Nadeau

Catherine Nadeau came to Canada from Kinloss, Scotland, shortly after the end of the Second World War, in May, 1946. During the war, Scotland had been home to many foreign servicemen, including Poles, Free French, and Canadians. Catherine had met and eventually married one of these, a Canadian soldier from eastern Quebec.

Although she had lived in a northern climate, the long, cold, Quebec winter, with its six months of snow, came as a great shock to Catherine. Even after thirty years she still hated the extremes of temperature and the silence of the long, cold winters. She missed the skylarks and other birds that had filled the Scottish skies with song.

Catherine also had to adapt to a new cultural environment. The Gaspé region was largely French-Canadian, and although she had studied the French language for five years at school, she had learned Parisian French. It was initially hard for her to understand the patois of rural French Canada. Many of those with whom she attempted to converse with her European French would give her a good-natured teasing, declaring "Oh, you're such a snob!" Interestingly, the French and Scottish families of the area had intermarried, and many of those with Scottish surnames spoke French, while those with French



surnames spoke English. Catherine got on well with both groups, but was concerned to see the French Canadians "held down," unable to climb the economic and social ladder.

Years later, Catherine was still living in Quebec when she received a telephone call from her now-grown son in Vancouver. It was a bleak, snow-filled winter's day in Quebec, and Catherine's son described how he could see the daffodils in bloom in British Columbia. Catherine determined then and there that she would move to Canada's western coast. She had enjoyed her view of the sea in Quebec, and a realtor helped her find an apartment with a similar view in North Vancouver.

When asked about how she views North Vancouver, Catherine unhesitatingly replies, "I love it!" She enjoys

being close to the sea and finds that Lonsdale reminds her of a Scottish "high street," with shops and services close at hand. She proudly notes that North Shore residents are among the healthiest in the country, and attributes it to an outdoor life and constantly climbing the area's hills.



## Derrick + Beverley Norris

Jamaican-made shoes slipping on the ice, and being tempted to go down on all fours to preserve his balance. When reflecting on the North Shore precipitation, Beverley doesn't hesitate, "Rain is better than snow!" When they retire, the couple

would love to divide their time between North Vancouver and Jamaica. They love both countries, but prefer being warm.

Derrick was offered a job soon after arriving in Toronto. Finding employment more difficult for Beverley, who was trained as an accountant. Employers required "Canadian experience," something that a recent immigrant simply could not offer.

Derrick and Beverley Norris both came to Canada from Kingston, Jamaica, in 1968. Neither knew the other at the time. Derrick had been drawn to Canada by his interest in the motion picture industry, hoping to work in its film laboratory component. Beverley was lured by a programme of the Canadian government that encouraged prospective immigrants to visit the country and to learn about potential opportunities.

The couple met and married in Toronto, which was home to a growing population of people from the Caribbean. They remained there for about seven years, after which they moved to the West Coast, having been persuaded to make the move by a friend who was already living here. Derrick and Beverley were delighted by the Lower Mainland. It reminded them of Kingston, a city bordered by mountains and sited by the sea. "Only the weather was different, and I hadn't realised that the mountains would be so beautiful," Derrick recalls.

On first arriving in Toronto, the couple was shocked by the cold Ontario winters. Derrick remembers his



## Santiago + Rosana Obando

In recent years, domestic strife in their homelands has driven many people from Latin America to seek a better life in Canada or the United States. Drug-related crimes and an increase in guerrilla warfare in their native Colombia convinced Bogota residents Santiago and Rosana Obando to leave Colombia in 1980 for a new life in North Vancouver. "We were living in fear," Santiago recalls.

Santiago and Rosana had read about the Vancouver area in a series of newspaper articles by a noted Colombian journalist. Santiago had visited the country before, in his days as a civil engineering student in the United States.

"We had a great admiration and love for Canada," he smiles. Once here, however, Santiago found that his Colombian credentials were not recognised by the engineering profession. He sat a series of examinations, but finally gave up in the face of the obstacles the profession placed in front of him. "It was practically impossible," he states.



Santiago found a solution to his problem by going into business for himself as a designer and general contractor. He takes pride in having hired many newcomers to the construction industry and giving them a chance to improve their qualifications. His wife, Rosana, who was a public relations specialist in Colombia initially found work as a housekeeper, and took a series of courses at community colleges to improve her English and to learn new skills. These ranged from practical nursing to counselling to settlement work.

Today Rosana works for the North Shore Multicultural Society and as a counsellor and settlement worker. The couple have enjoyed their first twenty years in Canada. They point to our health care system, to high standards of quality control, and to Canadians' concern for the environment. They differ on the benefits of cultural diversity. Santiago thinks Canada would be more united as a unilingual country and feels immigrants should embrace Canada more fully. "You cannot have two wives and one foot in each home,"

he jokes. Rosana takes a different view, stating, "With more languages we have a richer country." She feels that "Canada is developing as a multicultural country in a beautiful way."



## Zahra Peyvastegan

*"I like Canadian culture and I want to keep my culture too."*

Known to her customers as "Sarah," and to her friends as "Mahin," Zahra Peyvastegan arrived in Canada with her husband and three children in 1994. The Peyvastegan family was from Tehran, and had come to Canada in search of greater political freedom as well as for better educational opportunities for the children.

In Iran, Zahra had dabbled at hairdressing as a hobby, cutting and styling various family members' hair. She earned her living, however, as a hospital bookkeeper, a field in which she had over 18 years experience. Shortly after arriving in Canada, Zahra was able to put her hairdressing interest to work. Placed in the position of a single parent, Zahra "decided to be strong." She took courses in English at Coquitlam's Winslow Centre, and enrolled in hairdressing school to improve her qualifications in the trade. Eventually, she found and bought the Glamour Styles salon in North Vancouver's Lower Lonsdale district, where she serves a loyal clientele. That there were many Iranian



immigrants living in the area came as a surprise, as she had chosen to buy the business on the basis of having seen a newspaper advertisement.

Zahra has found Canadians both welcoming and caring. Canadians are a generous people, she says, "I like Canada because the people give so much." The elderly and the poor, she says, receive many benefits that they would not receive in other countries.

Our health care system is "better than anywhere else." However, Canadians should be wary of abuses, she notes: "Some people take advantage of the system."

Zahra knew little about Canada prior to her arrival, and was even unsure as to the type of climate she would encounter. She initially found life in Canada mysterious and confus-

ing. With so many Iranians and Iranian shops and restaurants in North Vancouver, she found the transition easier. Like many other new Canadians, she admires Canadians' respect for the concept of cultural diversity: "I like Canadian culture and I want to keep my culture too."

## Barbara Roberts

Barbara Roberts came to Canada in November, 1944 from Kingston, in the English County of Surrey. The Second World War was still raging in Europe, and German submarines were prowling the North Atlantic in search of ships upon which to prey. Barbara had married Frank Roberts, a soldier in the Royal Canadian Engineers. The couple had met at a dance at a private club of which Barbara's father was a member. Frank had been wounded in the war, and expected to be home in Canada long before his newly married wife.

Barbara crossed the Atlantic aboard the *Ile de France*, an ancient vessel used to ship both people and freight. Most of the passengers were wounded Canadian soldiers, or soldiers on leave. "We were packed in like sardines," she recalls. "It was a terrible crossing." The ship landed at Halifax where the Red Cross helped her to her train. Barbara was bound for Timmins, a town about which she knew little, in the wilds of northern Ontario. Though the train trip to Timmins was beautiful, she felt she had "reached the end of the earth."

Frank was not there to greet her, as he had been returned to active service. Upon reaching his home, however, she received a warm greeting from his Scottish-born parents: "Its too bad you're not a wee Scottish lassie, but you're just as sweet." The greeting she had received from the immigration authorities was also warm. The immigration officer had looked at her



recently issued Canadian passport and declared, "Welcome home!"

Like other immigrants to Canada, Barbara missed her blood relations. Her English family missed her too. Her mother went so far as to request the British authorities to have her sent back to England. Barbara also missed the little things, like picking wild bluebells in the English countryside. As she and Frank developed a family of their own, however, Canada seemed more like home.

In the mid-1980s, the couple decided to move to British Columbia. Their children were there, Frank had always wanted to live near salt water, and Barbara felt comforted by the mountains. North Vancouver quickly became their home. Barbara is proud of her "war bride" heritage and continues to be an active member of the North Shore War Brides Association.

## Winifred Rose

Born and raised in Brighton, on England's south coast, Winifred Rose is the proud organiser of the North Shore's local War Brides Association. Winifred is one of over 48,000 British, Dutch, and Belgian women who met and married Canadian servicemen during or after the Second World War.

Winifred's husband, Philip Rose, was a member of the Canadian Scottish Regiment. He had been born and raised in North Vancouver. It therefore seemed only natural that the young couple should settle in the community he called home. Winifred and her husband sailed to Canada, and Philip found work on the

local street car system, later moving to the buses, and then into office work.

Though used to the hilly landscape of southern England, Winifred at first felt "hemmed in" by the local mountains. Although North Vancouver lay on salt water, there were few points where it could readily be accessed. She missed the long seaside walks that had been a regular part of her life in England. Though North Vancouver had its own live theatre, reached on wooden sidewalks, and affectionately known as "the flea pit," she missed the more extensive cultural life available in Brighton. She recalls feeling homesick for over a decade.

Winifred remembers that "Canadian women were mad at the war brides," as their arrival had diminished the stock of eligible bachelors. There was much in Canada that surprised her. She was struck by the vastness of the country, by the squatters' shacks along the waterfront, dwellings that housed the victims of an economic Depression that had not fully passed. Winifred also noted the small things, including the novelty of ice water, something that she had never seen in Scottish restaurants.

Today, Winifred is a confirmed North Vancouverite. "I love all the trees," she observes, and notes that she would truly miss the mountains if forced to move away. Winifred has seen North Vancouver grow from a small town with a largely English and Scottish population into a city with a strong multicultural character. Her own family is reflective of what North Vancouver has become, with her son marrying a Filipino girl and adopting two Romanian orphans.





# Manjeet Sandhu

Manjeet Sandhu and her daughter Poonam are members of North Vancouver's small, but growing community of Indo-Canadians. Manjeet came to North Vancouver directly from Ludhiana, a large city in India's Punjab State, in 1995. Though trained as a registered nurse, Manjeet chose to work with her husband, and



opened the Flavour of India Restaurant on East 3rd Street at St. George's. Sadly, Mr. Sandhu died suddenly shortly thereafter, leaving Manjeet in a strange country, with a small daughter to raise, alone.

Manjeet, who already had a number of close relations living in nearby communities, chose to stay in Canada. Despite needing only a few months of refresher courses to qualify here as a nurse, she



chose to keep the restaurant open.

Like many immigrants from India, Manjeet knew a fair amount about Canada prior to arriving here. Many of her friends had immigrated previously, and had written back with accounts of uncrowded cities and an unspoiled environment. Manjeet's husband had been attracted by North Vancouver, a city with its back toward the mountains and its feet toward the sea.

Manjeet values the clean air and streets she finds in North Vancouver, and has found Canadian society much more democratic than in India, where a traditional caste system interferes with an individual's ability to improve their economic lot. Human life, and human rights are more likely to be respected in Canada than in India, she notes.

Manjeet looks forward to becoming a Canadian citizen, and when her daughter is older, to returning to her career as a nurse.



# Venilal Sisodraker

Venilal Sisodraker arrived in Canada from the Kabermaido in the east African state of Uganda in December, 1970. Veni's father had come to Uganda from India, and had established himself in Kabermaido as a tailor. Veni followed in his father's footsteps, spending much of his time making uniforms for students in the local school. Idi Amin, the Ugandan dictator who became notorious for his persecution of his country's South Asian population, had not yet risen to power, but there was nonetheless some discrimination in the country at the time. Uganda was a poor country, and there seemed to be little opportunity for economic advancement.

Veni had met a number of Canadian teachers during the course of his work, and they had encouraged him to immigrate to Canada. A Canadian immigration officer based in Beirut provided information about the immigration process. Veni scoured the pages of a newspaper published in London, looking for opportunities in Canada. Although tempted by the prospect of opening a business in New Brunswick, Veni was coun-



selling by the immigration officer to go Vancouver.

Veni and his family arrived in Vancouver with \$10,000 and purchased a tailor shop on East Hastings. He knew little about the importance of location and much of the business he hoped to capture went to another tailor nearby. "Within six months," he recalls, "I lost everything." Veni was worried. He and his family were in a strange country and without means. The rent on their home was due. Once again, he turned to the papers to look for opportunities. Seeing that a tailor's shop on Lonsdale was up for sale, he made inquiries of the business's owner, Otto Hansen. Otto was asking \$2,000 for the business, money that Veni did not have. The pair discussed the matter, and to Veni's great surprise, Otto held out his hand and said, "Here is the key for the business. If you make money, pay me. If not, forget it." "It was a miracle," Veni remembers. The business prospered, and Veni paid off his debt six months later.

Coming to a large community from rural Uganda required Veni to make many adjustments. In Africa, Veni had been conscious of a social hierarchy based on race. He had dealt mainly with Africans in Uganda;

the British had kept their distance. He recalled his father rising from his chair "whenever a white man entered the room." In Canada, things were different. He suddenly found himself dealing almost exclusively with Caucasians. He encountered little prejudice. "Only one guy banged the door and went away," he recalls.

Although a practicing Hindu, Veni and his family have adopted a number of traditional Canadian customs. They celebrate Christmas with gift giving, a tree, and a turkey dinner; as well as Diwali, the Hindu Festival

of Light. Veni and his family have felt little pressure to assimilate, and are grateful for Canadians' tolerance for people of many cultures.

# Claus + Ute Stein



Even at the age of 12, Claus Stein knew that he wouldn't be earning his living in his native Germany. The Second World War had only just ended and Claus's country was in a state of reconstruction. His country was divided between the communist East and the democratic West. Times were tough. By the age of 18, Claus was confronted by the prospect of compulsory military service. It didn't suit his temperament and he quickly applied to immigrate to both Canada and Australia. Either country, he felt, afforded a less regulated life and greater freedom of expression.

Claus had been trained as a precision mechanic, a skill apparently in demand in Canada. Accepted as an immigrant, Claus made his way to Montreal in 1957 where he met his future wife, Ute, who had come to Montreal from Germany in order to learn both English and French.

Though happy to be here, Claus and Ute were surprised by a number of things they found in Canada. Claus still shakes his head when he thinks about "the ridiculous liquor laws" he encountered in Quebec. He was equally mystified by the province's jails, which were segregated into Catholic and Protestant facilities. On the positive side, the couple remember how quickly they were accepted and how they were able to live in harmony with people from many countries. Ute recalls travelling across the country and feeling its immensity. She was also impressed by the ready availability of a wide range of consumer goods, something that post-war Germany could not provide. The couple's stay in Montreal was sometimes frightening, as the FLQ mailbox bombings were then underway. The business he had started in Quebec was forced to close when Claus was unable to comply with the

province's new language laws, which required that all services be offered in French.

Claus and Ute have lived in Vancouver and Burnaby, but have lived in North Vancouver since 1979. They are enthusiastic advocates of North Shore living. Seabus makes it easy to commute to the South Shore and the shops and services along Lonsdale are all close at hand. North Vancouver, they note, "enjoys the proximity of the natural environment while still being close to the big city." The community is less stressful, they add, "its more laid back than Vancouver."

The couple became Canadian citizens as soon as they were eligible. Ute has become a member of the City of North Vancouver's Public Art Committee. Neither chose to join the German clubs that operated across the country. When asked about when they first truly felt Canadian, they reply simultaneously, "When I had my first dream in English."

# Jennifer Wang



Like many other immigrants, Jennifer Wang and her family were drawn to North Vancouver by a combination of social and environmental factors. Jennifer's husband's aunt already lived in the area, and the beauty of the mountains, harbour, and trees was very hard to resist. Houses were cheaper than their equivalents in other municipalities, and downtown Vancouver was only a short trip away.

Jennifer and her husband had applied as potential immigrants to both Canada and Australia. In the end they chose Canada because of its multicultural character and because the United Nations had ranked it as the best country in the world in which to live. While it has been difficult to become established, the high quality of life that Canadians enjoy has been a major factor in their decision to stay.

Jennifer's husband works at a number of jobs, augmenting his work as an independent financial analyst with tutoring mathematics and science. Jennifer assists him with his financial work. The couple's main clients are other Taiwanese immigrants, as they find it difficult to attract customers from other cultural groups.

The couple, who have one child, immediately felt welcome on arriving in Canada. They characterise Canadians as being more polite than their neighbours to the south. Though they miss their relatives in Asia and the higher incomes they formerly had, they are impressed by the kindness of people that they have encountered, and by the level of volunteer activity in the community. Jennifer notes that Taiwanese wives in Canada have much more freedom than they do in Asia, a benefit that she seems to enjoy.





## Donna Yamamoto

It was perhaps ironic that Mas ultimately chose to abandon his academic career and went into business for himself. Mas bought three Japan Camera outlets. He subsequently sold them, and used the profits to establish each of his three children, Donna, Naomi, and Brian, in businesses of their own.

During her childhood, Donna experienced little of the overt racism that previous generations of Japanese Canadians were forced to endure. She recalls one school yard bully taunting her with the cry of “Chinaman, Chinaman,” and reacted with a mixture of outrage, hurt, and amusement. The little bigot, his taunts fuelled by ignorance and prejudice, had failed to determine her actual cultural background.

The horrors of the internment, an historical episode that most Canadians now view with both sadness and embarrassment, remain a part of the Yamamoto family history. Donna wrote a play on the subject, which was performed at Vancouver’s Arts Club Theatre. The successful production, entitled *Another Morning*, won her a Jessie award as the “most promising newcomer” to the British Columbian stage. Despite her success in Vancouver, North Vancouver remains her home, its multicultural mix being one of the things she most values about the community.

Donna Yamamoto is the owner and manager of an attractive natural foods store in the Westview Shopping Centre. As a third generation Japanese-Canadian, her experiences are all of this country, but she nonetheless knows what it means to be the victim of inter-racial conflict.

Both sets of Donna’s grandparents arrived in Canada early in the twentieth century. Her parents, Mas and Joan, were both born in British Columbia and never knew what it was like not to be a Canadian citizen. Her father was just 14, her mother just 12, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour in 1941. Suddenly, the Yamamoto family were no longer ordinary Canadians. Many saw them as the enemy. The Yamamotos’ property was seized and the entire family, like every family of Japanese descent then living on the coast, were forced to move inland to internment camps on the other side of the mountains.

When the family returned to the coast several years after the war had ended, Mas was able to go to university. He subsequently became a university professor himself. This was a breakthrough, for non-Caucasians had long been denied the right to enter the professions in British Columbia.

## Raymond Kwok Chu Yau + Chi Ming Lo

*“Canada is the only country in the world that has the potential to become a place where all the different cultures can live together in harmony.”*

Raymond Yau and his wife Ming are the owner-operators of a photographic supply and processing shop in North Vancouver’s Upper Lonsdale area. The couple came to Canada in 1989 from Hong Kong, a place that Raymond describes as a “crowded, busy, rapidly growing city where money dominates society.” In the late 1980s, Raymond and Ming longed for a more balanced life, one that would bring them closer to nature, as well as for a better environment in which to bring up children.

In considering Canada, the couple looked for a place that was close to the mountains, sea, and forest, and for a community that embraced many cultures. Living in Hong Kong, Raymond and Ming grew to know a fair amount about the Vancouver area and its opportunities. They admired Canada’s policy of multiculturalism, contrasting it with the melting pot approach of the United States.

“There you have to conform, you have less freedom,” Raymond observes. “In Canada you can join the main society but keep a little bit of your own culture,” he adds. Canada also possesses a more caring culture, he says, noting that the Italian-Canadian owned sporting goods store next to his had found a job for one of his unemployed relatives, despite the divergence of their cultural backgrounds.

When Raymond and Ming arrived in North Vancouver they were the only Chinese on the block. “It was not a worry,” he says. The couple had a good grounding in English. Although they valued their

friends from Hong Kong, they longed to get into the mainstream of Canadian society. Meeting and making friends with non-Chinese Canadians was difficult. Raymond and Ming also had to learn the small things: the etiquette, customs, and regulations that could only be learned by living in Canada. Raymond recalls that having been accustomed to daily garbage pickup in Hong Kong, he assumed it would be the same in Canada. Friendly, but pointed remarks from his



neighbours soon set him straight.

Raymond and Ming sometimes wonder if the racial discrimination that some immigrants experience is related to a lack of confidence and to a lack of proficiency in English. Neither of them recalls experiencing much overt racism, but agree that racism may lie just below the surface. Raymond encourages everyone to be accepting of others’ differences: “Open your heart and mind to other people and



# from far & wide

cultural diversity in north vancouver

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