



AMSSA

# Cultures West

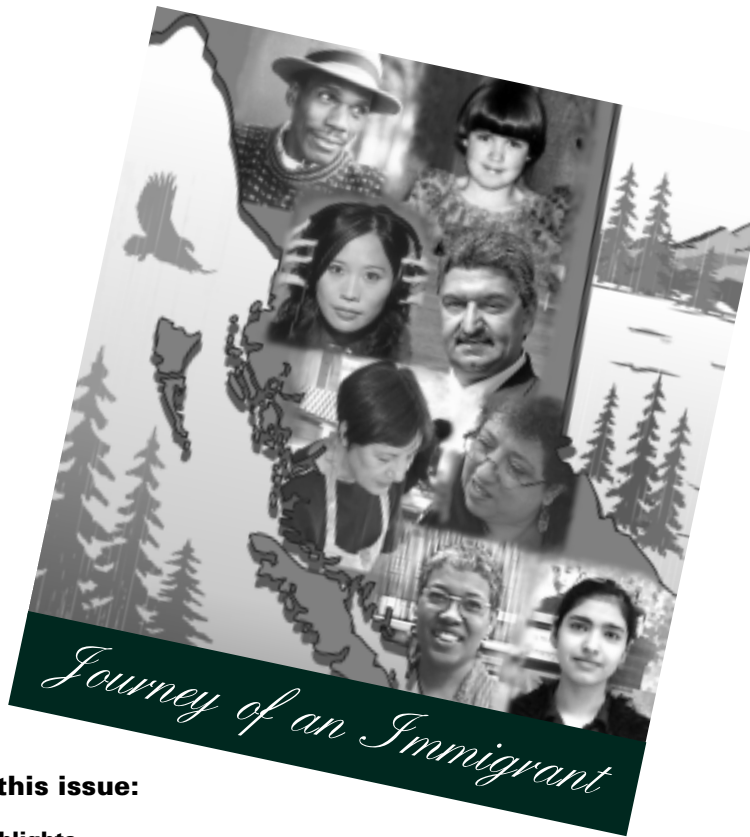
Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC

Vol. 22, No. 1: Spring 2004



COVER ART BY TONY SAMSON

*Journey of an Immigrant*



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AMSSA is an affiliation of member agencies providing immigrant settlement and multicultural programs in communities throughout BC.

### VISION:

AMSSA believes in a just and equitable society which values Canada's cultural diversity.

### MISSION:

AMSSA provides leadership in advocacy and education in British Columbia for anti-racism, human rights, and social justice. AMSSA supports its members in serving immigrants, refugees and culturally diverse communities.

### GOALS:

1. To build Member Agencies' capacity through effective communication, facilitation, and collaboration
2. To advocate for social justice and equity in immigration, multiculturalism, anti-racism, and human rights
3. To increase AMSSA's profile as a provincial organization

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# Living in the Light

by Leslyn V. Johnson

S shafts of sunlight stream through the large windows in the make-shift art studio tucked away on the second floor. Cecelia Boisier moves quietly between the art students in today's class. Here, she stops to answer a student's question about the canvas she is painting. Over in the corner, she takes a more hands on approach, demonstrating a paint technique on another's clay sculpture. Several others work independently, completely engrossed in their own creative worlds.

Cecelia Boisier is a visual artist who was born and raised in Chile, where her father encouraged her interest in art and culture. "Father was an engineer, and as such, an inexhaustible creator, always researching and inventing things that weren't there before. And I suspect this did not exclude artistic talent, for he once painted a full size fairy tale mural in the kids' bedroom," she recalls. "And there were always art books around the house. Their intriguing images were alive, always moving and changing before my eyes." After the military coup in 1973, exile sent Cecelia, her husband and two sons, along with thousands of other Chileans to Argentina and then Germany. She lived there for 10 years, but was lured to Canada by BC's exquisite physical beauty. "Light is my obsession. There's a special quality of light in this place on earth. Nothing like it."

Before moving permanently to Canada, Cecelia researched job options. "First, I spent two years shuffling between Berlin and Vancouver. The legal process took time, and was not easy. I was lucky to count on the support of my sister and family. Irene introduced me to community work, and I soon envisioned plans for my input. I began by opening art spaces for children, eventually creating several programs in different venues."



Cecelia giving personal attention to Soma.

Cecelia's experience is a luxury that few have, but like many immigrants she has had to create a place for herself in Canada's workforce. She has been an artist in residence with the Vancouver School Board and the Board of Parks and Recreation, developing murals in several schools and neighbourhoods. She currently works as a free-lance community development coordinator, and directs the visual art program at Collingwood Neighbourhood House. "Our Saturday mornings bring lots of inspiring creative energy. Participants develop confidence and pride in their work. Several of them are now emerging artists who have joined organized groups and hold shows."

For some it is also a social outlet, explains Cecelia. "Soma is a Senior who understands some English and can't speak a lot. But language fluency is hardly a requirement when she comes to art: here she can freely express herself, enjoy the friendly interaction, and take home nice finished art pieces of her own. And her aching legs and heart feel somewhat relieved." Cecelia's impact is far reaching. "When Vimla



Ann deep in artistic concentration.

first came to volunteer, she was a new immigrant taking ESL. An accomplished artist and art teacher in India, she was soon facilitating her own program for adults with disabilities."

Suitcases. Families. Train stations. Letters from home. These images of dislocation are all recurring themes in Cecelia's work. They are images of her experience as an immigrant that have worked their way into her art. With Cecelia the collision of life and art are seamless. "Art is as essential as air and light. I can't imagine doing without it, personally and humanly," she admits. "I believe it is one of our most meaningful gifts and responsibilities. And the hard work it often involves is always immensely rewarding and compensates for financial tightness." She adds, "the light within art ignites others. There's a special quality of light when I experience another person grasping a new perception for the first time: when after an art session or experience they say: *I got it!* - and then shortly after: *Now I can see the perspective everywhere, the many shades in the sky!*"



## Child of Immigrants Becomes Crossing Guard of Canadian Culture

**S**ook-Yin Lee was born in BC to parents who came to Canada from Hong Kong. Today, she hosts CBC Radio's pop culture show *Definitely Not the Opera*. Her road to fame has been paved with many successes including that of musician, filmmaker and VJ on MuchMusic. *Cultures West* caught up with Sook recently to get her take on becoming Canadian. Here are excerpts of that interview.

**CW:** Sook-Yin, you grew up in North Vancouver in an immigrant family. What was that like?

**SYL:** Wonderful and scary. Perplexing. You know the term "white trash"? I think we were "yellow trash." It was the seventies. We had pink flamingoes on our front lawn for real. And we all wore polyester. There was a painted gold statue of the "blue boy" in front of our fake fireplace. Very John Waters. But then, you throw traditional strict Chinese family into the mix, all daughters, cultural dislocation and my Mom who was battling severe psychological difficulties. We stuck out. I was a TV addict. With a big imagination, and a worry-wart. Usually the only Chinese kid in class. Childhood in Lynn Valley was dream-like and wonderful.

**CW:** And, as a child, what did you dream about being when you grew up?

**SYL:** First I wanted to work as a Safeway check out girl, 'cause that's what my Mom did. Next was a pediatrician because I loved babies and my Mom would approve. But I always loved singing in the shower with the natural reverb from the tiles. My best friend Julie and I would put on elaborate performances and forced the kids in the neighbourhood to watch.

**CW:** Many immigrants or children of immigrants struggle with their sense of identity. Was this ever an issue for you?

**SYL:** My family exploded when I was fourteen. My parents separated and divorced. I left home. While they were so consumed by their battle, I kind of slipped away. I spent a lot of time watching double-bills at the repertory cinemas and my TV addiction was replaced by a love of movies. Classics, art-house and foreign film. I remember seeing Wayne Wang's *Chan is Missing* and it was an epiphany. Until then, I was this weird displaced Chinese Canadian kid caught between cultures, and when I saw *Chan is Missing* I realized, there were others out there, who like me, were well...lost. Now here's the thing...there is no one particular Chinese Canadian experience. That's just more stereotyping. But if you get a room full of outsiders together and they swap stories, you'll find they probably identify with each other.

**CW:** You were the lead singer (among other things) of "Bob's Your Uncle." Tell me about the band.

**SYL:** They were my extended family. After I left home, I quit high school and fell in with a group of artists and musicians. The members of "Bob's Your Uncle" were part of that peer group. They were fabulous and creative people. It was my formative education. We put a lot of passion into performing, recording and touring North America in our painted green bus. We were like a traveling art-rock carnival.

**CW:** Your career has been both progressive and successful – musician, broadcaster, screenwriter, actress. But you took a rather unconventional approach, you left home at 15, have no "formal" training in the business... What's the secret of your success?

**SYL:** I follow my passion. I work hard until it's done right and try my best. I'm very curious.

**CW:** Recently the Toronto Star referred to you as the "crossing guard of Canadian Culture. [You work] the intersection between mainstream and avant-garde." Do you think that's an accurate description of your place in the Canadian cultural scene?

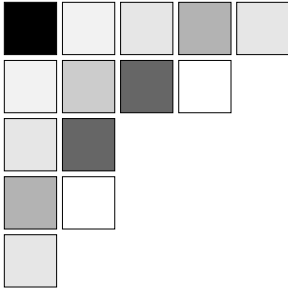
**SYL:** Generally, yes. I'm also inspired to bash away at the surface to reveal the process of our work. It's important to feature everyday people alongside cultural creators so we're not just talking about art for arts sake in a specialized environment, but how it influences our society and vice versa.

**CW:** Given your success, what advice would you give new immigrants to help them adapt to life in Canada?

**SYL:** Your life experience and personal history is key. It makes you unique. Celebrate the struggles and challenges you've overcome or are confronted with. Keep a sense of humour, it'll save your butt. Be curious and observant. Follow your passion. In terms of working in the media, the best in the field have a strong desire to communicate.

**CW:** Sook-Yin thank you so much...

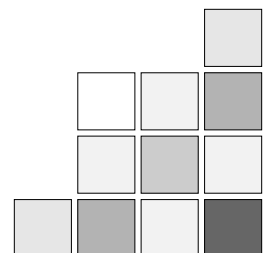
**SYL:** Thanks for asking questions.



# mind buster quiz

1. Scotland and USA both claim this famous inventor as theirs but he is actually Canadian.
  - a) Elijah McCoy
  - b) Alexander Graham Bell
  - c) Arthur Ganong
  - d) Benjamin Franklin Tibbetts
2. Born in Uganda, Senator Mobina Jaffer also made history as?
  - a) The first woman to earn a law degree in BC
  - b) The first immigrant to be presented with the Order of BC
  - c) The first female East Indian lawyer to practice in BC.
  - d) All of the above
3. Morris Schumiatcher, a Russian immigrant, is famous for what?
  - a) Inventing the Smithbilt Cowboy Hat, now a symbol of western hospitality
  - b) Inventing the potato digger
  - c) Inventing the canola plant
  - d) Starting Canada's Dukhobor community.
4. Arthur Balmer-Watt and Alfred Freiherr von Hammerstien were both immigrants, who had what else in common?
  - a) They became Canada's leading piano manufacturers
  - b) Grandfathers of John Deifenbacker, Canada's Prime Minister from 1957-1963
  - c) Received Nobel Peace Prize and established the National Research Council of Canada
  - d) Starting the Edmonton Journal and Alberta Herald respectively
5. Martha Black, a Chicago native represented which province as Canada's 2nd female MP?
  - a) Yukon
  - b) Nova Scotia
  - c) Manitoba
  - d) Ontario
6. She was the first Black woman and first Caribbean woman elected to office in Canada.
  - a) Zanana Akande
  - b) Jean Augustine
  - c) Rosemary Brown
  - d) Hedy Fry
7. Sir James Douglas, often called the father of Victoria, was born in this country.
  - a) Scotland
  - b) England
  - c) Ireland
  - d) British Guiana
8. Which of the following Calgary "Famous Five Women" who fought for Canadian women to be recognized as persons was from the United Kingdom?
  - a) Nellie McLung
  - b) Emily Murphy
  - c) Luise McKinney
  - d) Henrietta Muir Edwards
  - e) Irene Parbly
9. Which BC landmark was named after this German immigrant and one of Canada's best known and widely travelled journalists?
  - a) Strathcona Provincial Park
  - b) Fisgard Lighthouse, Victoria
  - c) Swartz Bay, Victoria
  - d) Swangard Stadium, Burnaby
10. Who is the first Canadian of Chinese origin to be Lieutenant Governor of any province?
  - a) David See-Chai Lam
  - b) Vivienne Poy
  - c) Bob Wong
  - d) Douglas Jung
11. How many of Canada's 21 Prime Ministers were immigrants?
  - a) 2
  - b) 3
  - c) 4
  - d) 5

**For answers to Mind Buster Quiz, see page 26.**



# Immigrant Couple Launch Monthly Magazine

by Leslyn V. Johnson



**N**aem (Nick) Noorani's story begins like that of so many immigrants. In this case, Nick and his wife Sabrina were born in Bombay, India. For years they lived in Dubai, and enjoyed successful careers; Nick in advertising and Sabrina as an executive assistant. Seeking a better life for their two children and with encouragement from his brother who was already living in Canada, the Nooranis became landed immigrants in 1998.

Again, like many immigrants Nick had many questions during their adjustment period. However, finding the answers was not always easy. Nick laughs wryly as he remembers. "I had to go to 16 different places just to get information. There was no one-stop shop. It was really frustrating." In making sense out of the chaos, Nick and Sabrina wrote down information, tips they received and even their experiences. Today he smiles at some of these. Like when he and Sabrina thought they had won a \$500 lottery but were scammed and ended up paying \$95 in phone charges. Or paying the PST for children's clothing because they did not know about the exemption. Or qualifying for a 24% auto loan because they had no Canadian credit rating.

Nick and Sabrina did find jobs, and while the positions they took were lower than those they left in Dubai, they were able to provide for their family. But they found themselves using their notes to advise friends and friends of friends who were moving to Canada, or who were new arrivals. The feedback was incredible and it didn't take Nick long to realize that there was a real need to be met. With his publishing background, he began to compile the ad-hoc notes and *Arrival Survival, A Handbook for New Immigrants* was born.

Nick describes Sabrina as the wind beneath his wings during this time. Often, when he was exhausted and wanted to give up, she encouraged him to write another chapter and in 2001 he published *Arrival Survival*. Nick's goal was to "make it a pre-arrival guide that people can read before coming to Canada."

During the process Nick realized that his passion was helping other immigrants avoid some of the pitfalls he experienced. The Nooranis are now a host family for new arrivals from countries other than their own.

Accessing the job market is a source of stress for many immigrants, even highly credentialed foreign trained immigrants. "Immigrants get enough rejection. They hear that they don't have enough experience or that

they're too qualified," says Nick. A study by the Ontario government reveals that 60% of foreign-trained professionals who take jobs unrelated to their training when they arrive, were still stuck in the same jobs three years later. The uncertain economy and subsequent lack of job security are also major concerns. Nick experienced this when he was laid off in 2003. Drawing on his advertising and publishing experience, and embracing his newly found passion he took on the role of entrepreneur.

Nick's idea was to expand the *Arrival Survival* guide into a magazine that would celebrate the immigrant experience. *The Canadian Immigrant* monthly was launched in April 2004. "Despite all the negatives, the problems, the hardships, immigrants need to know that others are successful in their field. That other people from their country are making it and feel that they can do it too." Referring to a study by Statistics Canada he explains that it takes an immigrant 10 years to settle in their chosen profession. "My goal is to speed up that process by giving them information, education and motivation."

Nick says it is cruel to offer immigrants an opportunity to come to Canada on the basis of their credentials without having coordinated systems to allow them to practice in their chosen professions. He likens the experience of foreign trained professionals to "being sold a Ferrari and then told that you can only drive it at 5 km/hour." With *Arrival Survival* and *The Canadian Immigrant*, Nick's mission is to be a catalyst that provides immigrants with the tools and resources to be successful.

*"... the experience of foreign trained professionals (is like) being sold a Ferrari and then told that you can only drive it at 5 km/hour"*

Nick Noorani's story begins like that of so many immigrants. His own journey has been taken unexpected twists and turns. Along the scenic route he has enjoyed delightful Canadian hospitality. He has also faced many frustrations in his attempt to adapt to life in Canada. And like many immigrants Nick is where he is today, not by luck or by chance, but because he has learned to turn adversity into advantage and setback into success.

# A New Life In Canada

by Mariam Arif \*

**M**y family and I moved to Canada three years ago in search of a better life. My brothers, sisters and I dreamt of becoming doctors, engineers, journalists and scientists, but when the Taliban took over Afghanistan it was impossible to make our dreams a reality. Women and girls were not allowed to go to school and work. That was the biggest factor for us moving to another country.

My father decided to take us to Pakistan where we could continue our education. Even in Pakistan it was hard to go to school because there were only private schools for foreigners and fees are really high. We lived in Pakistan for almost five years. Then we were sponsored by the Canadian Government to come to Canada as immigrants.

When we got here, the language was one of the main problems for my parents. But soon they started taking ESL class and now they don't have as much difficulty as they had before. My brothers and sisters knew how to speak English quite well and that made it really easy to adjust in school. I am pretty sure that everyone experiences a lot of difference in a new school especially when the new school is also in a new country. But the teachers have always been encouraging towards us and we never felt upset about being new to school and in a new environment.

The cultural differences are still difficult to adjust to, since Afghanistan has a totally different culture and tradition. Cultural differences such as lack of respect, alcohol and drugs are the biggest issues for us in Canada. Even very young children know what these are and



*“The cultural differences are still difficult to adjust to since Afghanistan has a totally different culture and tradition.”*

that makes my parents really worry about my younger brothers. They think that it might affect them as well.

But obviously there are a lot of good and a lot of bad opportunities here in Canada that we wouldn't have if we were in Afghanistan or another country. The biggest opportunity is that we can go to school and if we want, we can work. We have more freedom that allows us to do anything we would like to.

Something very hurtful for us is that most people, or I should say, students around the school label us as terrorists sometimes and they act really racist towards us. This doesn't happen to only me, but also to

thousands of students around Canada. This really discourages us and makes us feel very different.

The only thing I ever wished for, is to become a journalist. I think I have access to so many facilities that can make my dream come true. After school I want to go to university where I can get my Bachelors Degree in history and afterwards I can start on my journalism studies. We are very happy and thankful to be here. I already see all my dreams becoming reality. And I am confident that God will fulfill all my wishes.

# The Integration Process is No Fairy Tale

by Leslyn V. Johnson

Imagine that you and your family are leaving Canada, never to return. You are leaving your home, friends, family, everything that is familiar or important to you. The only items that you can take with you are the things you can fit into a suitcase. And your memories. Now imagine that the people in the place you are moving to speak a language you don't understand. They have different customs, eat different foods and even the climate is different. Add to that the fact that you don't even know anyone in this new place.

Welcome to the life of an immigrant. Some of you understand this experience only too well. You know first hand what it is like to adjust to life in a different country. For others, you can only imagine.

Those who have studied patterns of adaptation in immigrants identify five phases in that process. Those phases are theoretically distinct and sequential. In practice however, they might overlap, be experienced in varying intensity or not be experienced at all.



## Honeymoon phase

When newcomers first arrive they often find themselves in what is sometimes called as the "Honeymoon Phase." Excitement and optimism are common feelings. The newcomer feels hopeful and optimistic at the prospect of a new start, or a better life. They put a lot of energy into establishing themselves in the new country, settling in, etc.

Lena is in the Honeymoon Phase. Lena is thrilled to be in Vancouver. For many years she had lived in limbo, waiting on her green card from the United States. When Lena applied to Canada her application was successful. Now she is simply in awe at supernatural BC. Lena is excited at her new lease on life. She is already going out on job interviews and is making plans to find an apartment of her own.

## Culture Shock

During the Culture Shock phase, newcomers might become overwhelmed with life in the new country as many things are done differently from the way they are "back home." These include job seeking practices, social practices and values. One of the biggest frustrations is not being able to communicate in English very well. Newcomers are often aware of their difference, and they don't feel they belong. Racial discrimination, ethnocentrism and ignorance on the part of the mainstream culture contribute to those feelings. Generally, feelings include confusion, frustration, withdrawal, homesickness, sadness, and anger.

For Sayed, the Culture Shock is real. In Pakistan, he had an active social life. It was not uncommon for his friends to pop in whenever they felt like it and he was always happy to entertain them. Here in Nanaimo, he has made some friends but nobody visits him unless he invites them over. If he wants to visit his brother, he has to call first to make sure it's OK. And, whenever his wife's friends invite them for dinner, they say it's "pot-luck" and that they must bring a dish. Sayed is having a hard time adjusting to the new social rules.

## Initial Adaptation or Superficial Adjustment

At this stage of adjustment, the newcomers who are learning language skills are more proficient. They have probably found a job and are getting more familiar with their environment and mainstream Canadian culture. However they still strongly identify with their culture and country of origin.

After some six years in Canada, Winston is in the Superficial Adjustment phase. Every year Winston goes "home." For him home is still in Barbados. His parents and several of his siblings still live there. So do many of his friends and his extended family. In BC, he has a full



*“Newcomers are often aware of their difference, and they don’t feel they belong. ... Generally, feelings include confusion, frustration, withdrawal, homesickness, sadness, and anger.”*

time job that he loves, close friends and a new home in Port Coquitlam. Winston is well-integrated into life here but there is a big part of him that has still not settled on Canadian soil.

### **Mental Isolation, Depression or Frustration**

Newcomers might now have some financial security, but still question their sense of self-worth and their abilities. This happens especially when they work in jobs for which they are overqualified. Sometimes they feel stuck and not able to reach their goals. They continue to miss family, friends, neighbours, language, food, and environment. Language skills might still be limited or the family might be in crisis because the wife is the main breadwinner. In addition, they might continue to face issues, but not be able to share problems because of the absence of an extended family system.

This is exactly what Cristian is going through. Cristian has a Masters degree in Engineering from a reputable Romanian university. He worked for 12 years as an electrical engineer in that country. Since coming to BC prospective employers tell him that his degree and experience are not “Canadian” and that he should go back to school. With a family to support, that’s not an option. At times, Cristian considers himself lucky because he gets regular work as an electrician in Vancouver’s thriving construction industry. However, he suffers from bouts of depression because this not the life that he dreamed his family would enjoy in Canada.

### **Cultural Integration or Acceptance**

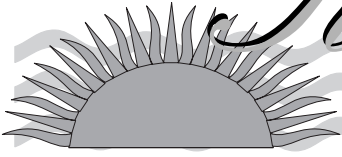
In this phase, newcomers accept mainstream Canadian values, and start changing or adjusting their values to the mainstream Canadian culture. This is particularly so when they have children within the school system, who “teach” the parents what is considered acceptable. Newcomers might make friends outside of their ethnic community, through work or involvement in community or sports

activities. Often, they are now able to express themselves in English quite well, and feel at ease on a cultural level with people from the mainstream culture.

Wang and Kim have generally accepted Canada and its culture. They have been in Canada for 10 years, but relocated from Ontario to BC. Both have University degrees and are well established in their careers. The Chengs live in a new suburban sub-division. Their two kids were born in Canada and participate in typical childhood activities such as swimming, hockey and soccer. Both Kim and Wang are successfully integrating into Canadian culture.

### **Major Issues that Immigrant Families Face During Integration**

- Divorce rates are on the rise because of the extra stress couples experience through dealing with unusual situations.
- High incidence of fraud perpetuated against immigrants because they are not familiar with the new customs and they are not aware of their rights.
- High incidence of alcoholism and spousal abuse often result when the husband is unemployed or underemployed.
- Children often have to work in order to help support the family.
- Discipline at home is often a problem when parents cannot be home to provide the structured lifestyle children are used to. Children also become aware of their rights and parents can be intimidated into not taking the necessary disciplinary action.

**BC**

# Regional Roundup

**Agency: MULTICULTURAL HELPING HOUSE SOCIETY**  
**Project: Multicultural Helping House**

The Multicultural Helping House Society helps newcomers integrate into Canadian society. Formerly the Filipino Canadian Support Services Society, the Society extended its services to all cultural groups in 2000, and recently built the Multicultural Helping House at 4802 Fraser Street. Helping House is a one-stop centre for newly arrived immigrants. The building contains counseling offices, computers for client use, multi-purpose hall for meetings and workshops, and temporary accommodation for newly arrived immigrants or live-in caregivers during their weekends off.



Helping House offers the Bamboo Network Host Mentoring Program to match immigrant professionals with Canadian mentors who coach them on accessing work in their fields. Mentors are from different cultural backgrounds and are practicing or registered professionals in various fields. Partner corporations, like BC Hydro, provide mentors as well as job-shadowing opportunities for immigrants.

For more information call 604-879-3277 or visit [www.helpinghouse.org](http://www.helpinghouse.org).

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### AMSSA is looking for Board members.

We are looking for people with skills in communication, marketing and fundraising and who are willing to give six to eight hours a month to the organization. If you are interested, please put your name forward to Evelyn Silan at [amssa@amssa.org](mailto:amssa@amssa.org), listing your skills and experience.

**Agency: SOUTH VANCOUVER NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE**  
**Project: Grand Opening of New office**

The new South Vancouver Neighbourhood House opened in February at 6470 Victoria Drive. The building is more than twice the size of the old structure. It features three large multipurpose rooms, a commercial kitchen, pre-school, rooftop playground, ESL classroom, community service workers offices, counseling and meeting rooms, community and seniors lounges and main floor atrium. In addition, the South Vancouver Seniors Network, South Vancouver Seniors Council, and building blocks program operate from the new facility.

**Agency: BOUNDARY MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY**  
**Project: Festival of Freedom at the Forks**

In July, Boundary Multicultural Society will host a three-day festival, Festival of Freedom at the Forks. The festival is about art, culture and music. This year's headliner band is 54.40, and there be ethnic food, vendors, crafts, an Aboriginal Tepee raising and a kid's corner called Imagination Station. Participants can also attend workshops, or visit the various trade and non-profit booths.

For more information, check out [www.f3u.com](http://www.f3u.com).

**Agency: MULTICULTURAL HERITAGE SOCIETY**  
**Project: Cultural Communities Legacy Fund**

The Multicultural Heritage Society (MHS) donated \$200,000 to the Prince George Community Foundation (PGCF) to set up a Cultural Communities Legacy Fund. PGCF was chosen because of its motto of Giving Something Back, and its aim of providing the opportunity to make a lasting charitable donation to enhance the community. Both charities and non-profit organizations will be able to access the grant.

MHS is best known in the community for promoting and planning Canada Day celebrations. The endowed fund money comes from the sale of the Multicultural Heritage Centre, which since 1985 was an umbrella organization serving 17 community groups including Greek, German, Italian, Norwegian, Filipino and those from the Atlantic Provinces.

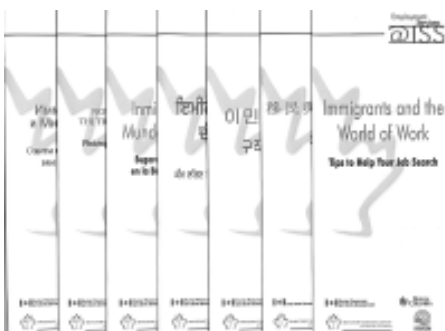
**Agency:** SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL  
**Project:** "For me, accessibility means..."

Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC BC) continues to work with governments, municipalities, communities, and people like you to educate about the importance of inclusive communities in BC. SPARC needs your help to educate others about the importance of accessible, inclusive communities—for everyone. Tell them how accessibility and inclusiveness has made a difference in your life. Complete the sentence "For me, accessibility means..." in 250 words or less, and send us your empowering stories by August 30th 2004.

All submissions will be eligible for prizes. Send your story to SPARC BC at 201-221 East 10th Avenue Vancouver, BC, V5T 4V3 or email: info@sparc.bc.ca (ensure the subject line includes: "For me, accessibility means...").

**Agency:** IMMIGRANT SERVICES SOCIETY OF BC  
**Project:** Immigrants and the World of Work

The *Immigrants and the World of Work* booklet – a handy collection of articles covering common employment issues facing immigrants – was published to benefit immigrant jobseekers who have multiple barriers. The booklet is available in English, Chinese, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Spanish, Korean and Russian. It is being distributed for free by the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS) through community organizations and public venues.



## Senior Immigrant an Inspiration to All

by Carol Lloyd

Starting over in a new country and adjusting to a new and often very different lifestyle is hard, even under the best of circumstances. Most seniors find it particularly difficult to make that transition a smooth one. But, with his quick smile and cheerful character, Mirko was determined to be happy in his new home. In 1996, at the age of 73, he left his homeland to join his two sons in Canada and begin anew.

During his lifetime, Mirko has survived more than most of us will ever face. Born in the former Yugoslavia – one of eight children – he overcame the "Black Cough" as a child and spent 4 months in a Nazi jail during World War II. But he persevered through life's challenges. He became a teacher, married the love of his life and had two children. They had a good life together in a very unstable region of the world.

After his wife of 47 years passed away, Mirko made the difficult decision to leave his home and move to Canada to live with his children, who had fled Bosnia during the war. Despite his age, Mirko was determined to make Vancouver his new home and become a contributing member of the community. He wanted to stay active, volunteer, learn to speak English and make new friends.

Upon his arrival in Canada, Mirko learned of the ESL course available through the 411 Seniors Centre. He took the ESL course, and studied hard to learn English. He also learned of settlement services and connected with an agency that assists immigrants and refugees adjust to their new life in Canada. When Mirko found out about volunteer opportunities available at the centre, he got involved, first in the library, then in the thrift store. Mirko takes the bus to the Seniors Centre every day, and he is quick to point out that he is never late when there is a job to do.

"I like this job very much," says Mirko. "Many people come into the thrift shop, and I listen to how they talk. I'm always learning new words. I'm learning English at work!"

Being socially active is especially important for seniors who want to enjoy a balanced life and the community of seniors at the centre was very welcoming. They made Mirko feel right at home. Now he has many friends and an active social life. He takes a yoga class, plays ping-pong twice a week and drinks tea with a former Iranian general. He also participates in a weekly Walking Club. Every Thursday they set out on a local stroll to places like Stanley Park or the endowment lands at UBC. They also take day trips to farther away locations including Nanaimo and Sechelt.

Through his volunteer work at 411, Mirko is staying healthy and connected to the community and support services. His positive attitude and charming personality are an inspiration to other immigrant seniors who follow his example and are becoming more active in the community.

His life is very full of thanks to his family and his friends at 411 Seniors. When asked what the Centre means to him he says, "The Centre is a very important place in my life – it is my other home."



Mirko (left) socializing with a new friend.

## Doctor's Family Finds Quesnel BIG

by Helen Fine

**M**y family moved to Quesnel in December of 1981, from a small town in England called Catterick. I was three years old and really had no idea what was going on, but my parents were very enthusiastic about the opportunities Canada had to offer. Canada was un-crowded, attractive and presented a pleasing life style. Canada had many economic advantages and work possibilities lacking in the United Kingdom. Also, my mother's sister lived in Montreal and our visits to her had revealed what a beautiful country Canada was. So with a bit of pressure from friends who said, "Go west, go west!", my parents chose Quesnel sight unseen. They thought it would be temporary, six months or so, until something better came up.

Of course the moving process did not go without a hitch. We met some family opposition to us leaving Europe and the immigration process was full of red tape. Moreover, we needed to make many adjustments, for Canada offered an entirely different society from Europe. After exposure to cities like London, Frankfurt, and Paris, the culture and arts scene in Quesnel was certainly unique.

So a young couple with two little girls and a golden retriever arrived in the dead of winter. It was minus 30 degrees when we stepped off the plane in our English winter coats. Coming from a country where minus 10 degrees weather was a big deal, it was quite the shock. So, our first day in town we went shopping for real winter clothes and boots.

Finding a house was not easy. After three weeks in the Fountain Hotel, we finally moved into a nice house on Dragon Lake, and my sister and I soon became firm friends with the kids next door. My parents were amazed by the size of everything in Canada. Houses, cars, food – everything was five to ten times larger than they were used to. Having our own house made Quesnel seem more like home, although some vital adjustments still had to be made. Both my parents remember the dilemma of driving on the "wrong" side of the road and the nightmare of getting in the passenger side of the car and thinking that someone had stolen the steering wheel.

My parents had bribed my sister and me into thinking the move was a good idea. They said we would have our own pony when we moved to Canada. We were certainly excited by this as it was a luxury we could not afford in Catterick. The spring of 1982 came very late but my parents' promise came true. They bought not one but two cute, loveable little ponies. Buying them was the easy part. Getting them home was a little harder. Mine, called Prince, walked without a blink into the back of a U-Haul truck, once he saw there was food in it. Buck, my sister's little devil, refused to go near it so he and my mom walked home, all the way from Richbar to Dragon Lake.

In fall 1993, I started kindergarten at Dragon Lake. My parents were perplexed by the Canadian school system because so little was ex-



Helen with her family on the day they became Canadian citizens.

*"Houses, cars, food - everything was five to ten times larger than they were used to."*

pected of the children. The teachers thought it abnormal that my sister went into Grade 1 with the ability to read better than most fourth graders, and when as a kindergarten student I could complete Grade 2 math sheets with ease. My sister and I were still set apart from the other kids by our distinct accents and word usage. On her first day of school my sister managed to silence an entire classroom of first graders by simply talking. Her accent amazed them. A friend of mine remembers trying to make conversation with me for hours on end simply because she loved the way I talked. And there was, of course, my poor teacher who tried without effect to convince me that in Canada pants were not called trousers.

As the years rolled by, our family interests diversified into many new areas. We became members of the Cariboo Ski Touring Club, Brownies, Guides, 4-H, Quesnel Junior Racers and the Quesnel and District Riding Club. We kept the track setter for the Hallis Lake ski trails, were avid downhill skiers and founded the Quesnel Pony Club. So, nearly 24 years later, my dad still has a practice in Quesnel, even though we were only going to stay six months. And those ponies really got me hooked! Today I manage one of the largest English riding style tack stores in western Canada and I'm still obsessed with horses.

*The original story was published in Quesnel: A Multicultural Tapestry. It was edited with the author's permission and reprinted courtesy of the Quesnel Multicultural Society.*

# Immigrants' Innovative Thinking Vital to Business Success

by Duke Energy Gas Transmission

**D**uke Energy Gas Transmission, formerly Westcoast Energy, is a company that proactively strives to achieve diversity in the workplace and increase opportunities for immigrants to Canada. The company employs Danny Strilchuk as a full-time manager of diversity to ensure that their recruitment net covers as wide a range as possible and that the workplace is accepting of people from a variety of races and cultures.

Based in Vancouver, Strilchuk is responsible for Duke Energy diversity programs across Canada, and compliance with federal employment equity. "We have a wide-range of formal and informal partnerships in Western Canada with organizations that promote employment with diverse groups," explains Strilchuk. "Our partnerships involve sharing job information and postings, and removing barriers and discrimination where we find it."

Where possible Duke Energy tries to work around the issue of "Canadian job experience." In the Calgary offices, there are currently two new immigrants who are working as part of a six-week immigrant placement program that allows them to work in Canada to gain exposure to the work culture and add Canadian work experience to their resume.

"A great deal of our job opportunities are in northern BC where our plant and pipeline operations are centered," Strilchuk continues. "These jobs are mostly in the skilled and semi-skilled categories such as millwrights, electricians, craftspeople, technicians, but also include engineers and finance people."

*"The ability to attract and retain new employees from all over the world will be a vital part of our success."*

Canadian immigrants who have taken up careers at Duke Energy have contributed to the diverse and innovative thinking processes that are so vital to the success of any organization.

Bill Kaufmann, a CGA from Argentina who has been working at Duke Energy since 2000, sees this first hand. "It's about hiring the best person for the job. It doesn't matter if the person is an engineer from India or speaks with an accent. If you're qualified, nobody cares about your ethnic origin."

Turnover among immigrants is low, and the company encourages and supports respect for a variety of cultures with specific policies to accommodate religious and cultural needs. There are also respectful workplace programs that provide mechanisms to resolve issues. Kaufmann says, "There is continuous emphasis by the company about increasing diversity. They sent all the managers to diversity training in Fort St. John and the whole management team in my area was required to attend."

Duke Energy was recently listed in the top 10 of companies for visible minorities to work at in Canada, based on 2002 employment equity data. The ratings were compiled by Canadian Business Magazine and Omni. Of the professional and semi-professional workforce at Duke Energy, 15.4% were from a visible minority, which is well above the norm in Canada.

"We strive to make Duke Energy an employer of choice," Strilchuk added. "There will be skill shortages in the near future which will test many organizations. The ability to attract and retain new employees from all over the world will be a vital part of our success."



# Teacher Gives Special Education New Meaning

by Gail Morong



*“Being from the Caribbean has given me a different frame of reference from many other teachers here. I can empathize with kids who feel alienated in the system.”*

I immigrated to Canada in 1976 with my family and attended the University of Manitoba, where I obtained a Bachelor of Zoology degree. I remember being very disappointed about my rejection by the School of Physiotherapy. I still believe that this happened because Canadian citizens were given first choice and I was an immigrant.

At university, I became involved in a West Indian Students' Association in a yearning to stay connected to my culture. I taught Caribbean dancing to youth in the Black community and became involved in many multicultural initiatives. I returned to Trinidad after university, got married, had 3 daughters, obtained my Education diploma, taught Mathematics and Science and started a Masters of Education there.

In 1993, I returned to Canada with my family and ended up in Prince George, BC, this time. I had to retrain a bit to teach here because my Trinidadian teaching credentials were not considered adequate. I actually had to fight to be exempted from taking a test of English, the only language I've spoken and studied since my birth. I also had to switch my field of expertise to special education in order to increase my chances of obtaining employment. I also completed my Masters in Education here.

I am now employed as a special education teacher at a secondary school. Being from the Caribbean has given me a different frame of reference from many other teachers here. I can empathize with kids who feel alienated in the system. I try to ensure that the education system is meeting the needs of a diverse range of students. I enjoy storytelling about life in the Caribbean. I'm hoping to expand my students' view of the world and to empower them to take a stand against injustice wherever they see it.

My students are motivated when I tell them how education increased the opportunities available to me. I try to get them to realize how privileged they are. They also like when I involve them in extra-curricular activities such as dancing, video making, participation in events such as Black History Month and organizing food drives. I believe that relationships with students, not material things, make all the difference to one's success as a teacher.

At present, I am the co-president and editor of Educators Against Racism. I am a member of the Social Justice Advisory Committee of the BC Teacher's Federation (BCTF), an executive member of the Prince George Black History Society, a Board member of the Multicultural Heritage Society of Prince George and a dance teacher of a Caribbean youth dance group. I also give workshops for the BCTF on social justice issues such as racism and poverty, topics which I can relate to personally. I believe that many Canadian teachers are not aware of how prevalent racism, especially systemic racism, is in our community. They pride themselves on treating everyone as equals, when some kids need some special attention to be successful in school.

I think my being a Baha'i has allowed me to view teaching as more than just a job – it's my contribution to the development of humanity. I go through many rough days in my field of work, but I never think of giving up ... I truly believe that my kids need me and I have lots to offer them, starting with my love.

# Never Give Up: A Personal Story

by Farimah Shakeri



I left Iran with my spouse and three-year-old son in 1985 during the Iran-Iraq war. In 1986, we took refuge in Canada under a Minister's Permit and lived in Canada without status for five years. In 1991, Canada recognized us as "good citizens." Being a "good citizen" meant that we were not involved with the police, did not collect social assistance, and supported ourselves with whatever jobs we could find. After five years of living out of suitcases, we became permanent residents and I gradually started to feel that Canada was my home.

Entry to Canada presented me with a systematic process of personal and professional devaluation. My experiences were discounted and my educational credentials were discredited. I was pushed into the job ghettos that are unacceptable to everyone else. However, I never gave up hope. I made the best out of what I was offered, surviving and trying to adapt to my new environment.

In my struggle to re-root myself in Canadian society, I faced many obstacles. Sometimes I felt defeated, lost, and hopeless, but continued to strive for better status. I found it impossible to understand that my worth in Canada was measured by my skin color or by my accent when I speak English. I was more determined to prove to everyone that I am not different from "others" (people from the dominant culture). "Otherness" was an identity that I never knew before coming to Canada.

I started to seek connections with the other immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds. Yes, we all shared similar feelings of alienation and hurt. The more we talked and listened to each other, the more aware we became of our losses and our marginality. We felt the weight of racism in our lives. However through interacting and working with them, I learned that individuals have an enormous capacity to adapt to new cultural settings. They can also improve their situation if they continue to believe in themselves and to take stands against racism and oppression.

These experiences with people from diverse cultural backgrounds made me realize how much I enjoyed providing assistance and supports to underprivileged and troubled people. I began taking university transferable courses to improve my language proficiency and to gain more knowledge in the area of counseling and social serv-

ices in order to pursue a university degree program. It was very hard to find a full-time and well-paid position without Canadian education and/or work experience. I volunteered for many hours just to prove my capability and knowledge to potential employers. In practice, I learned knowledge was power.

I completed a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and later my Master of Social Work (MSW). Currently, I work as a Palliative Care Social Worker, providing families with emotional supports and practical information. I also offer workshops and lectures on Cross-Cultural Practice to post-secondary students and front-line service providers in various fields.

When I first came to Canada, I believed in equality for all people. Coming from Iran, where I was a member of the dominant culture, I was not familiar with racism and ethnic discrimination. With my training in Social Work I can provide professional assistance to demoralized and underprivileged people. In addition, accessing post-secondary education helped me to gain some of what I lost in the immigration process. I learned that I had the potential to regain my self-esteem, to live a meaningful life, and to help others who face similar discrimination and bigotry as I did. I am now familiar with the culture of my new country Canada, maintain my culture-of-origin, and I am developing skills to function successfully within the social structure of Canadian society. At this stage, I am proud to be a well-educated successful Persian-Canadian. I am motivated to help other minority people to reach the same level of confidence and self-esteem, as I have. As a Social Worker, I am committed to equality, and to working consciously and systematically to eliminate racism and discrimination in our society. I believe in working with people and communities to make the world a better place to live for everyone regardless of an individual's cultural background, age, sex, functional ability or social class.

Coming to Canada was a second chance for my family and I to explore different aspects of life and to seek a better life situation than what we were offered in our own country. However, I had to work hard, face many hardships at different stages, and even sacrifice comforts to be where I am today.



## BC is Home to Internationally Recognized Brazilian Musician

**M**aster of Brazilian rhythms, guitar virtuoso, percussionist and multi-instrumentalist, Celso Machado brings joy to his audiences, with his subtle mixture of musical inspiration, irresistible rhythm and inspired lunacy. As a musician, he travels the world but at the end of the day, it is the quiet seaside village of Gibsons, BC that he calls home. Ladies and Gentlemen ... Celso Machado.

**CW:** After living in Europe for many years, how were you able to make a life for yourself in Canada?

**CM:** Canada was much more open, open-minded when it comes to dealing with immigrants. The first impression was that this was a country I could grow as a musician and as a human being. I've always been treated equally.

**CW:** What was the hardest thing about trying to establish yourself in BC?

**CM:** My life is all about music so I would say the hardest thing then, and now, is the lack of musicians who play Brazilian music with ease. Who are fluent in Brazilian music. There are many who have an interest but it is a struggle. I have become a solo performer out of necessity with vocals, guitar, percussion, my face, and body, anything to establish the right groove. There is a lack of information on the west coast about Brazilian music. In terms of life style here people get enchanted by the mountains and ocean but Vancouver has a way to go in terms of cultural exchange.

**CW:** We hear that it's hard for immigrants to be successful here. Why do you think you're able to do what many only dream about?

**CM:** I have other musician friends from other countries who were also at the peak of their careers in their home countries when they came here with no English and who after struggling with the language are now successful musicians in Canada. I guess I am successful because when I left Brasil back in 1982 I was at the top of my career. The critics said I was "the most important guitarist of the new generation." This opened doors for me in Europe. I continued to build my career in Europe from 1983 to the present day. If I had come straight to Canada I do not know what would have happened. I still depend on Europe for an income and for my reputation as a composer. I have never let anyone redirect my career towards commercialization. I have stayed true to my roots and the fans of the real Brazilian music. I am stubborn but I feel good about what I do. It took me at least ten years to develop a reputation here in Canada.

**CW:** How has Canada measured up to your expectations about living here?

**CM:** I am very pleased to live here but I do not have great expectations as I know how difficult it is to make a living as a musician no

matter where you live. I am just working hard without a lot of expectations. With the language barrier it takes twice as much work to get a positive result. I am lucky that my English Canadian wife helps me so things go a lot faster and smoother.

**CW:** Tell me about Jessica and your family?

**CM:** Having a family means everything. An even better reason to celebrate Canada. When I travel now I feel I am really building a base for the future. Before I had a family I was basically on tour for 30 years without strong roots. Jessica does everything to help me with my career and with my life. My son Caio and daughter Sofia are my life inspiration.

**CW:** You have been described as one of the "pillars of the world-music scene" in Canada. You've been nominated twice for Juno awards, you've collaborated with other Canadian artists and won a Leo award for Best Musical Score for a Documentary. What would you say has been your greatest contribution to Canada so far?

**CM:** All these things are wonderful and important to me but the question is my greatest contribution to Canada, so I would say something I am not widely recognized for. That is bringing my music to some of the most remote communities in Canada. I have played small native towns accessible only by floatplane. I have travelled all across Canada many times to the smallest of towns entertaining school kids. Maybe I have planted a musical seed!

**CW:** What has been Canada's greatest gift to you?

**CM:** Citizenship, a sense of belonging, and the chance to have a home base to build my career from. In Europe I was just living in hotels, no bank account, no status, no rights. It was great for my career as a whole, but I was always foreign, always an outsider. It is a hard life and very difficult to make a living. My brothers who are still in Brasil struggle a lot.

**CW:** Many immigrants struggle with their identity. How do you see yourself... Brazilian, Canadian, Brazilian Canadian?

**CM:** I know it is very difficult to maintain your identity in the world today. But with so much globalization and discrimination it is very important not to be ashamed of your own background and not to forget where you came from. In my heart I still feel Brazilian, in val-

ues and culture, but when I look at my children I am proud of Canada too – they are Canadian with a Brazilian twist. Most of my musical compositions today are Brazilian in style with inspiration from the Canadian landscape.

**CW:** You're obviously still connected to your roots through your music. How connected are you to Brasil in other ways? How often do you go there?

**CM:** I have not been to Brasil in nine years. This is very difficult for me. I feel kind of sad as Brasil is changing, old friends are dying and others I have lost touch with. In Canada I have to work non-stop to stay on top of things so it is hard to gather both enough time and money to go back but I plan to find a way to bring my family there soon. I am in touch with my Brazilian family by phone quite often.

**CW:** Today you play a variety of instruments, but you started off without owning any instruments and with no formal training. Just how did you get started?

**CM:** I actually studied classical guitar in Brasil with a renowned teacher without which I could not do what I do. But as you say I started out poor with no instrument of my own. My eldest brother who was also a musician borrowed a neighbour's guitar and I would watch him while he taught my brother Filo and I would memorize the patterns and sneak the guitar when they went out and play. My father was also a professional guitarist as but he died when I was only three. Five out of six of us brothers are professional musicians. In poor countries people always help each other so my teacher Oscar Magalhães Guerra recognized my talent and offered to teach me without fees as long as I worked hard. I learned percussion in

samba school – this is not an actual school but a community association which rehearses all year for the annual carnival parade. My first instrument as a child was a frying pan and my brother Filo and I led the parade. In Brasil music is everywhere. People on the street are at least whistling and singing. People are connected to music, as there is music for every situation in daily life.

**CW:** Your work involves fusing different cultural traditions. Would you have been able to do as much if you were not in Canada?

**CM:** I travel a lot internationally and meet excellent musicians from all over the world at festivals. ... In terms of multicultural musical access, Canada is much the same as Europe but if I had stayed in Brasil it would be more limited. I have discovered so much since I left Brasil.

My first aim when I play is to play correctly the traditional music of the instrument. But there are connections everywhere between music so I instinctively try to find these. I use these other influences to contribute to the ongoing evolution of Brazilian music. This is not so strange as Brazilian music is a blend of African, Indigenous and Portuguese music.

**CW:** You tour extensively, in fact you just got back from Europe. Tell me about Europe...

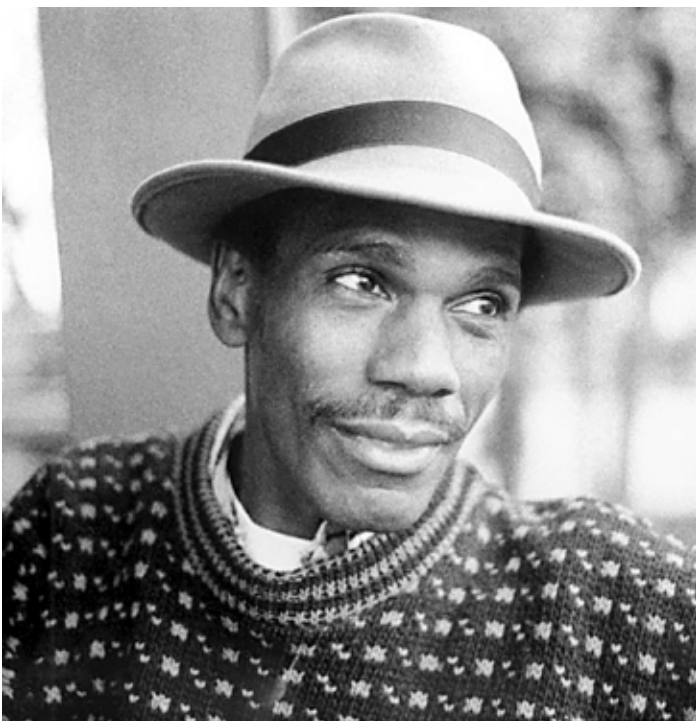
**CM:** I just finished two solo guitar concerts and master classes in France and gave concerts in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. My first time in Scandinavia.

**CW:** And now that you've come back ... what's happening in the future?

**CM:** I will focus on new compositions for guitar ensemble, work on preparing a new album and prepare for my summer tour; Yellowknife, Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, New York, London-Ontario, Finland, Milan and Barcelona in that order. Then a little family time before my fall tours.

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*Editor's note:* Special thanks to Celso for rearranging his schedule, and to Jessica for facilitating this interview under tight time constraints.



# Kudos

## Inter-Cultural Association

Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) was awarded the Victoria Hospitality GEM (Going the Extra Mile) Award for fostering cultural diversity through public events. The award recognized ICA's role in presenting FolkFest and Luminara to the community.

FolkFest and Luminara enjoy significant community support. ICA won "M" Awards for Most Anticipated Annual Event or Festival (FolkFest, 2003), Favourite Free Event (Luminara 2002) and Favourite Outdoor Event (FolkFest, 2002). The "Best of the City" Awards named FolkFest the Best Festival (2001, 2002 and 2003). Luminara placed third in the Best Festival category (2003).

- ICA FolkFest, Victoria's Inter-Cultural Arts Festival, returns to the Inner Harbour and Centennial Square from June 26th to July 4th ([www.icafolkfest.com](http://www.icafolkfest.com)).
- On July 24th, Luminara illuminates the city with a festival of lanterns and entertainment ([www.luminaravictoria.com](http://www.luminaravictoria.com)).
- ICA also presents Open Air in the Square ([www.icavictoria.org](http://www.icavictoria.org)).

Way to go ICA!

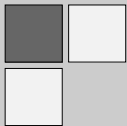
## Chilliwack Community Services

Chilliwack Community Services (CCS) sends a shout out to Milli Butt. Milli was one of twelve women recently honoured at the Ann Davis Transition Society's 18th Annual "Bread & Roses" event.

Milli is "den mother" to students, visitors and staff at the CCS Canadian Centre – in addition to everything else that she does. With a nursing background, her very caring and motherly quality fits well with the Centre's mandate to help newcomers to Canada feel at home. Monday to Thursday, she volunteers as a receptionist and teacher for the conversation class. Both tasks require emphatic listening skills, and an incredible talent to cross language and cultural barriers.

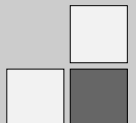
In addition to listening and chatting, Milli greets all visitors to the Centre with a warm and welcoming smile, ensuring they are comfortable and understand the services available.

CCS is very fortunate to have on her on the team!



## answers to mind buster quiz

1. b) Alexander Graham Bell
2. c) The first female East Indian lawyer to practice in BC
3. a) Inventing the Smithbilt Cowboy Hat – symbol of western hospitality. It has become synonymous with the Calgary Stampede and was popularised in the 1988 Olympics in Calgary
4. d) Starting the Edmonton Journal and Alberta Herald respectively
5. a) Yukon
6. c) Rosemary Brown was born in Jamaica. Jean Augustine was born in Grenada, Hedy Fry in Trinidad, and Zanana Akande is Canadian by birth.
7. d) British Guiana (now Guyana). Douglas' mother was a native of Guyana and his father was Scottish.
8. e) Irene Parbly. The efforts of the Famous Five led to Canadian women being able to vote. Parbly was elected to the Alberta Legislature in 1921 and was named to cabinet as a minister without portfolio, becoming the second woman cabinet minister in the British Empire.
9. d) Swangard Stadium, Burnaby
10. a) David See-Chai Lam
11. b) 3 – Sir John Macdonald (Scotland), Alexander MacKenzie (Scotland) and Sir Mackenzie Bowell (England)



# Post Script



## Federal Government Proposes Solutions for Recognition of Foreign Credentials

Post Script is a *Cultures West* tradition. In each edition we bring readers an update on the issues we examined in our previous edition. In this case, we take another look at internationally trained professionals and their access to gainful employment.

**T**he Honourable Jean Augustine, Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Status of Women), recently announced Government of Canada funding of \$977,876 for two projects to help immigrants to Canada, and Canadians trained abroad, find work in their field of expertise. This is an important step to improve the recognition of foreign credentials.

"Canada is one of the most diverse countries in the world. We need to take full advantage of the skills and knowledge that immigrants and foreign-trained Canadians bring to the table," says Minister of State Augustine. "This is not just an issue for immigrants or foreign-trained Canadians; it affects all Canadians. Our entire country suffers when skilled people are prevented from working and participating in our economy and our society."

The British Columbia Internationally Trained Professionals Network (BCITP) and Ontario's Policy Roundtable Accessing Professions and Trades (PROMPT) are two provincial projects that will build networks for internationally trained professionals in provinces across Canada. BCITP Net was initiated almost 2 years ago, and since that time two groups of internationally trained professionals have been formed—one for engineers—SITE BC—and one for physicians and surgeons—AIMD BC. Clifford Bell, of BCITP, explains "the interest shown in the BCITP Net initiative has been very strong, with close to 400 engineers and 200 doctors being involved with the network since its inception."

BCITP and PROMPT will act as facilitators between internationally trained professionals and Canadian regulatory bodies, institutions and governments to develop realistic solutions to foreign credential recognition. The recognition process is a complex one because it involves many different layers of the government and private sector. The provincial bodies will try to improve this situation by linking existing networks together across Canada and facilitating roundtables so workable solutions can be found.

BCITP Net will use the funding to continue supporting groups of internationally trained professional throughout BC and to establish a provincial roundtable of groups and associations. The funding will also allow BCITP Net and PROMPT to collaborate in developing the capacity of associations of internationally trained professionals across Canada. Bell affirms that, "during 2004, we will undertake an environmental scan of activities in other provinces. Based on the results of the scan we will be looking at capacity building in other provinces, which will lead in the long-term to the development of a national roundtable."

The funding for PROMPT and BCITP is provided over a two-year period through the Multiculturalism Program of Canadian Heritage. According to Bell, having the federal government recognize issues relating to internationally trained professionals is important because there are areas where Ottawa can and is showing leadership. "Canadian Heritage's funding of the BCITP Net initiative is an excellent example of the government supporting community capacity building, and the new Liberal government's appointment of Dr. Hedy Fry as Parliamentary Secretary with special emphasis on foreign credentials, is a positive indication of the need for collaboration around issues related to internationally trained professionals."

# AMSSA Member Organizations

Abbotsford Community Services (ACS)	Immigrant & Visible Minority Women (COSIMMW)	Kelowna Community Resources Society	Society for Community Development
Adult Learning Development Association (ALDA)	Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS)	Kiwassa Neighbourhood Services Association	SUCCESS (United Chinese Community Enrichment Services)
Association des Francophones et Francophiles du Nord-Ouest (AFFNO)	Chilliwack Community Services Chimo Crisis Services – Richmond	Langley Family Services Association (LFS)	Surrey-Delta Immigrant Services Society (SDISS)
Association of BC TEAL (Teachers of English as an Additional Language)	City of Richmond – Advisory Committee on Intercultural Relations	Law Courts Education Society (LCES)	Taiwanese Canadian Cultural Society (TCCS)
Association of Neighbourhood Houses of Greater Vancouver (ANH)	Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH)	Legal Services Society of BC (LSS)	Terrace & District Multicultural Association (TDMA)
BC Association of Social Workers (BCASW) – Multiculturalism & Anti-Racism Committee	Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS)	Little Mountain Neighbourhood House Society (LMNHS)	Trail & District Multicultural Society (TDMS)
BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils	Comox Valley Family Services Association (CVFSA)	Mennonite Central Committee of BC – Refugee Assistance Program (MCC- RAP)	Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services (VLMMFSS)
BC Heritage Language Association (BCHLA)	Cowichan Valley Intercultural & Immigrant Aid Society (CVIIAS)	Mission Community Services Society (MCSS)	Vancouver Citizenship Council (VCC)
BC Human Rights Coalition (BCHRC)	Crisis Centre – Vancouver ELSA Net	Multicultural Helping House Society (MHHS)	Vancouver Cross-Cultural Seniors Network Society
BC Settlement and Integration Workers Association (BCSIWA)	Families as Support Teams (FAST)	Multicultural Heritage Society (MHS) – Prince George	Vancouver Multicultural Society (VMS)
BC Teachers Federation – Social Justice Program (BCTF – SJP)	Family Education and Support Centre	Multifaith Action Society (MAS)	Vancouver Women's Health Collective
Big Sisters of BC – Lower Mainland	Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV)	North Shore Multicultural Society (NSMS)	Vernon & District Immigrant Services Society (VDISS)
Boundary Multicultural Society (BMS)	Fraserside Community Services Society (FCSS)	OPTIONS: Services to Communities Society – Surrey	Vernon Multicultural Association
Burnaby Multicultural Society (BMS)	Gay & Lesbian Educators of BC (GALE BC)	Pacific Community Resources Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS)	Volunteer Vancouver
Campbell River & Area Multicultural & Immigrant Services Association (CRMISA)	Immigrant & Multicultural Services Society (IMSS)	Penticton & District Multicultural Society (PDMS)	WATARI
Canadian Cancer Society – BC & Yukon Division	Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS)	Progressive Inter-Cultural Community Services Society (PICS)	West Coast Domestic Workers' Association (WCDWA)
Canadian Hispanic Congress (CHC) – BC Chapter	Inland Refugee Society of BC (IRS)	Public Legal Education Society (People's Law School)	Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre – Multicultural & Diversity Services (WMDS)
Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) – Pacific Region	Institute for Media, Policy & Civil Society (IMPACS)	Quesnel Multicultural Society	YMCA Vancouver International
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – BC Div.	Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA)	Richmond Multicultural Concerns Society (RMCS)	YWCA Vancouver International
Canadian Red Cross	Jewish Family Service Agency (JFSA)	Scouts Canada – Provincial Social Planning & Research Council of BC (SPARC)	
Central Okanagan Society of	Kamloops Cariboo Regional Immigrant Society (KIS)	Social Planning Council – North Okanagan	
	Kamloops Multicultural Society		

