

Celebrate Canada 150 and Culture Days From Far and Wide

Multicultural Creative Writing Collection 2017

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WS Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society

"...The 'From Far and Wide: 2017 Multicultural Creative Writing Festival' provided a wonderful opportunity for participants from various cultural backgrounds to share their unique stories about Canada. I am certain that readers of this book, featuring 150 selected writings from that contest, will be moved by the diverse experiences and perspectives depicted, as well as by the wealth of creative talent on display..." - From the Honourable Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

"...Collaborative projects, such as From Far and Wide, are great containers to house creative writing talents that represent the diverse range of cultures that call British Columbia home. It is a wonderful commemorative project to mark Canada's 150th anniversary..." - From the Honourable Premier John Horgan

"...As Mayor, I take pride in the remarkable multicultural community within the City of Richmond. I believe that it creates mutual respect and generates understanding of the different perspectives and traditions that make up a diverse cultural heritage..." - From the Honourable Mayor Malcolm Brodie

"...In honour of Canada's sesquicentennial anniversary, the selected pieces found in this book highlight the talent and experiences of fellow Canadians. As a senator of Chinese descent, I am pleased that such initiatives invite members of the community to share their special connections with our country in the form of original writing pieces. I am confident that readers will be captivated by the words and artistry of the writers found in this book..." - From the Honourable Senator Victor Oh

"...The Writing Collection provides an opportunity for talented writers to showcase their works and promotes a better understanding and appreciation of different cultures, individuals and points of view...Congratulations to each contributor - your creative vision and talent are truly inspiring..." - From the Honourable Senator Yonah Martin

"...A nation's culture is defined by its participation in the arts, and I am thrilled to see the diversity in language, prose, and verse contained within this book. The written word is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression, and these 150 submissions have not only filled us with awe of the authors' creative talents, but also hopefully inspired all of us to pick up a pen and share our own stories..." - From the Honourable MP Alice Wong

"...Canada's 150th anniversary provides all Canadians with an opportunity to celebrate our accomplishments, our diversity, and our common pride. We are a country made stronger because of our differences, and creative writing provides just another way for us to communicate our common experiences and build a more inclusive society..." - From the Honourable MP Joe Peschisolidi

"...This event provides an important platform for authors and poets to make an impact on people through the written word and to celebrate multiculturalism and diversity..." - From the Honourable MLA John Yap

"...With 150 writings from authors of such a diverse background, this collection truly represents the multiculturalism that makes Canada a wonderful place...This collection promotes multicultural literacy and sharing of cultures, which are so important in our globally connected world..." - From the Honourable MLA Katrina Chen

"The community gathered together at the Richmond Cultural Centre and through the sponsorship of Canada 150, Culture Days, City of Richmond, Richmond Cultural Centre and the Richmond Public Library, the event was a great success. It is organization like the WS Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society, through their Community Service, that makes Richmond the great place it is to live..." - From the Honourable MLA Linda Reid

"...Multiculturalism is one of Canada's greatest strengths. Indeed, I believe that all around the world, we are a shining example of what is possible when diversity is welcomed, protected, and celebrated..." - From the Honourable MLA Michael Lee

"...This event is a wonderful opportunity to connect with diverse communities. I offer my sincere thanks to WS Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society for hosting this important event to build stronger relationships and friendship in our community..." - From the Honourable MLA Teresa Wat

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A MOVIE IN THE MAKING – HOLLYWOOD INTO BOLLYWOOD

Looking back the 16mm projector is running, the screen a white sheet covering the fireplace. The movie starts, I see my mom and dad. He just came home from his night club, the New Delhi Cararet, located on Keefer and Main Street. The laughter is loud, he is entertaining his friends, women friends, cooking curry chicken. He does not bother to check on how my sick mom was feeling, as I lay right beside her. The moment he saw her, he fell in love with her. She was married then to a much older man, an arranged marriage at a very young age. Born in Tibet, high in the mountains, she looked Eurasian. She was beautiful beyond words, tall, slim, light skinned with almond eyes. Beauty, looks, intelligence, she had it all. Men were drawn to her, women were jealous. Walking into a room people would stare, her proud statue created an aura. She had the look of Vogue, a style beyond her years. Not soon after my dad saw her, her husband was crushed under lumber. Suspicious was the word. As an immigrant on her own with no relatives or support the East Indian Community decided it was best for her to marry my dad. His wife died of tb. He was handsome, born in Northern India, 5'11", suave, charismatic, clean shaven, wore exquisite suits, a top hat, spats covering his shoes when it rained, he was westernized. Creative, intelligent, he could make a hundred dollars from a dollar bill. He never worked, he employed, owning trucks, wood businesses, taxi stands, rooming houses, and a night club. Loving big bands, Sinatra, a passion for Hawaiian music he learned to play the ukulele, set up his own studio, registered my brother & sister in guitar lessons. At an early age they became known in Vancouver as the 'bobby soxxers', performing at the Vancouver Hotel, community centres, while auditioning. They were asked to go to Hollywood. Money to be made in the music and movie industry, my dad was now a Hollywood promoter.

1942. It was a cold bitter February morning, the snow was falling along with my mother's tears. The grey maternity room at Vancouver General Hospital seemed even colder. Alone, she shed silent mixed tears of fear, sadness, and joy. Lachhami Shori was born. Her memory floating into the reality of her life, what will happen, how would she live, how can she protect her children. Her husband not at her side, he was in prison. He was a gambler who played high stakes losing a family farm in Chilliwack on a gambling debt. His life was Chinatown playing Majong during the day, running his night club till all hours in the morning. With influential friends in government offices, socializing in high society with judges living the British Properties, he had prominent connections. With night life and gambling came the 'mafia'. He became known as 'the hindu godfather'. As time went by, physical and mental abuse escalated, fear stepped in. There were times he was charming, we all knew why, he won big time in majong.

Living the high life deteriorated, it was now survival. It was around 1947 my mother went into depression, severe depression, being admitted into the psych ward at the Victoria Hospital for

shock treatments. Coming home a changed woman, she showed little emotion, laughter and smiles faded. The most beautiful smile was gone. His mood swings would erupt unknowingly, getting more violent each time. It was then she knew she had no choice, she had to escape. With no money, she started pocketing money he gave her for groceries and clothes and from his winnings, always in a roll, hoping he wouldn't notice. She started building a safety net, he never knew. There were many threats over the years like sending her a telegram while she was vacationing in California at the temple. 'come home, the house burnt down'. He wanted her home, he wanted control.

1949. It happened one summer afternoon in the hallway of our home on 10th Avenue. A fight erupted with my dad threatening her with a gun to sign over the deed to the house for another gambling debt. Refusing, he started beating her. I remember the yelling, the screaming, my sister and brother trying to get him to stop, I remember trying to reach the telephone receiver mounted on the wall in the kitchen, thinking maybe the operator will help, call the police, someone, anyone, to save my mom. It seemed forever for the police to arrive. It is all a blur with her taking us into hiding. Fearing for her life, knowing this was the end, telling no one, we boarded Greyhound bus headed for San Francisco with tickets on the General Gordon War ship, 3rd class, destination, India. Looking for her for days, he knew she wasn't coming back, he lost her and his family.

We lived in Simla, a city high in the Himalayan mountains for a year. It was there she thought of bringing Bollywood to Vancouver. With the Sikh community growing, a love for East Indian films, the vision came.

Bollywood. We used to lie on the bed in our dining room watching 16mm movies our mother imported from India. As much as we hated these movies, Bollywood was now our only source of entertainment, and an escape. And it was our income. Although she was a woman who spoke many languages, her English was minimal. Drafting letters on the Smith Corona typewriter, trying to translate her Punjabi/Hindi into English was lost with our translation. It was funny now. Growing up we understood her, replying in English. We were of Brahmin caste in a Sikh Community, considered outsiders and white washed by our dad in his lifestyle. As I grow older, I am in 'awe' of my mother, what she accomplished on her own, her determination. She negotiated with the major film industries in Pakistan and India, even Hollywood, negotiated with banks getting letters of credit, brokers for clearance, halls, theatres, right across North America. She had a vision to entertain the East Indian community with films and we became her assistants, typing letters, tracing and mailing out flyers, driving her. This was the beginning of Bollywood in Vancouver. It began with my mother dream wanting her children to have a better life, to be a Canadian.

One woman's dream to be independent, becoming the first person, only woman, to entertain the East Indian Community right across North America from 1950 to 1968. Music continued with her son being inducted into the BC Entertainment Hall of Fame.