

## International Women's Day



Women in Quesnel celebrated International Women's Day in 2010 by holding an awareness march through the city.

International Women's Day (8 March) is a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future.

The day was first celebrated in North America in 1911, and in the decades since has grown in strength and popularity. In some

countries such as China, Russia, Vietnam and Bulgaria, IWD is a national holiday. Wherever it is celebrated throughout the world, events are held to inspire women and celebrate their achievements. IWD has been celebrated in Quesnel through the Women's Resource Centre for almost 30 years.

### UN Chief Urges Gender Equality on International Women's Day

While International Women's Day may be a day of global celebration, there is no room for complacency as women still struggle on many fronts. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon marked 2010 International Women's Day calling for gender equality and the empowerment of women, saying that until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, peace, security and sustainable development stand in jeopardy

The unfortunate fact is that women are still not paid equally to that of their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics, and globally women's education, health and the violence against them is worse than that of men.

However, great improvements have been made. We do have female astronauts and prime ministers, school girls are welcomed into university, women can work and have a family, women have real choices. And so the tone and nature of IWD has, for the past few years, moved from being a reminder about the negatives to a celebration of the positives.

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## International Women's Day EVENT

**Potluck Cultural Lunch**

**Indo-Canadian Dancers  
Music & Slide-show**

**March 8th  
11:30—1:30  
New Child Development Center  
488 MacLean St.**

## Women of Distinction

On this International Women's Day, it seems fitting that we honour women in our community who have made a significant contribution to the rights of Quesnel women. First, a story of the original coordinator of the Women's Centre, Francis McLean, written by her granddaughter. Then, the amazing story of Vinder Lalli who was the longest-serving coordinator of the QWRC.

### Sarah Francis McLean

*By Jennifer Boudreau*



Sarah was born in 1921, and has lived in various communities in Canada coast to coast. She and her late husband Berton had 12 children and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren. Residing in Quesnel for most of her life, she has become well-known in our community. She was instrumental in the development of programs and services for those individuals with developmental disabilities. As well, she could be found teaching ESL and in programs for persons with disabilities.

She was on the executive committees for numerous community organizations, and her children

remember her always writing up meeting minutes and typing up letters for social change. Not one to be in the back row, Sarah was passionately outspoken. She could be found at town hall meetings and open-mike opportunities on the local radio station advocating for others and for social change. She was a columnist for a local paper, speaking her mind regarding current government policies and local challenges which hindered equality and which were discriminating.

Sarah was quite naturally the first employee of the Quesnel Women's Resource Centre. She brought a compassion and strength in which she used to support the women in her community with dignity and respect. With her motivation and natural helping abilities, it was easy to see how she provided a friendly helping environment where women could feel safe and supported. She points out that the WRC's existence was not without controversy and resistance which they had to continually work against to provide services for women. Sarah has tremendous respect for those women who worked hard to bring the WRC into existence, namely Maureen Trotter and Kay Freeman saying, "They provided a much needed support which fostered continued strides in women's rights in Quesnel."

Sarah is an accomplished writer with six publications of poetry and still remains part of her local writers' group today. She enjoys reading, travel and receiving guests. Having a cup of tea with her could be an invitation into the life stories of an incredible woman with rich experiences which can't help but inspire you to become a better person. She lives each day for the day and stops to smell every rose. She sees the good in everyone and brings out the good in everyone. "She is such a powerhouse with kindness and joy," says one of her daughters.

When asked what she would say to the women of the world she answered, "You have so much more than we did. Aim high. The sky is the limit."

## Vinder Lalli

*By Maureen Trotter*

Vinder Lalli was the coordinator at the Quesnel Women's Center for over 20 years. For all those years, she was the rock around which the Centre existed. She provided support and encouragement to all who came through the door. Vinder's her kindness and empathy, her openness, her positive acceptance of all women, and her quiet competence were appreciated by many women. This is her extraordinary story.

Vinder was the oldest of five children born to small farmers in the fertile Punjab area of India. Her mother had health problems and at 5 years old, after her grandmother died, Vinder became an adult, responsible for caring for the younger children, for milking buffalo and oxen, churning butter, cooking and cleaning. Without modern labour-saving devices, the work was hard and never ending.



In 1974, Vinder and her family left their friends and their extended family and followed her father to Quesnel where he had a job in a mill. Vinder was 14 and knew no English.

At school, racism was everywhere. "Our books would get thrown into the yard, we would get shoved around going through doors; there was name calling. My parents used to wonder why we would always race home from school but we were running from the bullying, trying to get away as fast as possible. Even our parents thought we must have done something to cause the problems so we got no support to deal with the racism."

In the summers, Vinder and her younger brothers and sisters would go with their mother to work in the berry-picking fields in Abbotsford. They lived in sheds and all of them worked long hours, leaving for the fields at 6am and working till 9 at night. In spite of the grueling work, at least it was break from the miserable school experience.

In keeping with her tradition, Vinder was married while still in grade 11 in an arranged marriage. Avtar moved in with her family and went to work at a mill and Vinder finished grade 12. "That's how things were done. I never questioned it."

Soon Vinder and Avtar had two boys and Avtar's parents and sister and brother had moved from India to live with them in a small house in West Quesnel. For 10 years, up to 10 extended family moved in and out of the tiny house. "It was hard," Vinder reflected. After they moved into a bigger place, they adopted a teenage daughter. "It was good for my sons to have a sister. I wish she had come earlier." It took a few years to get her here. "It seemed like she became westernized overnight. It was a shock. She was very independent and spoke her mind loudly and clearly. I learned to be more assertive from her!"

Vinder was the most fluent in English of all her large extended family and consequently, had a lot of responsibility for translating and negotiating the mainstream institutions on their behalf.

*Continued on page 4*

## Quesnel Women's Resource Centre Welcomes Our New *Stopping the Violence* Counsellor

Sherry Harper is our new *Stopping the Violence* counsellor. She has a Bachelor of Social Work degree from the University of Northern BC and other related training including Children who witness abuse, First Nations and Mental Health courses.

Sherry has 14 years experience working with women escaping violence at the Amata Transition house as well as experience working with youth and families in crisis. We welcome Sherry and all her many connections to the Women's Centre.



### **Vinder's Story** *continued from page 3*

She provided emotional support to them all and was central to resolving the inevitable conflict that occurs in families. "Communication was key. I learned to give feedback in a kind and respectful way."

While her children were growing and Vinder was also working, she was often attending school as well. But all the responsibility she had been shouldering since childhood became too heavy a load and in 1999 Vinder burned out. She was forced to take a year off work. Then, in 2001, she had a nervous breakdown.

On reflecting on her life, Vinder lived by the code of social workers and her Sikh cultural traditions that both emphasized the importance of helping others and treating others with respect. "I felt responsible not just for myself but for the rest of the world so I was always tired and doing too much."

Vinder realizes that she needs to listen to her feelings and take time for herself for her well-being and health. "Self-care has become my passion." She is learning to "do what feels right" rather than what others expect her to do. "We are like a vehicle with four tires, physical, emotional, spiritual and mental tires. They all need to be in good shape for the vehicle to make a good journey."

In 2004, Vinder graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work from UNBC. After this, Quesnel had to say goodbye when she moved to Vancouver to be closer to family members who have gradually moved to the coast. She now works as a social worker, still helping others, at the Surrey Memorial hospital. We miss her.

Vinder would like to say that she is grateful for her teachers and for the women at the QWRC who have helped her become the person she is today.

# Update on the Women's Memorial Monument

*By Melanie MacDonald*

In September of 2007, a group of women from the Quesnel Women's Resource Centre came together to work towards getting a memorial monument built in Quesnel that would honour local missing and murdered women as well as all women who have been victims of violence in our community. Eight women from our community have lost their lives to violence and an additional five are still missing under suspicious circumstances.

In September, 2008, the group approached the City of Quesnel to request that this monument be erected at the end of Bowron Avenue along the Riverfront Trail Walk. City Council approved this request and gave the committee a donation of \$500 towards their project. Since then, a number of different donors have come forward including the following:

- City of Quesnel - \$500
- Cariboo Pulp and Paper Employees - \$2400
- Cariboo Pulp and Paper Company - \$1100
- Jody Oakley - \$1000
- United Concrete and Gravel – donation of gravel and concrete needed for the project
- Amata Transition House Society - \$1000
- The Mclean Foundation - \$2500
- The Quesnel Community Foundation - \$1000
- Integris Credit Union - \$500
- Raffle - \$699
- Other donations - \$90

Total Costs – \$13,072.50

Funds raised to date - \$ 10,789.

Funds still needed - \$2,283.50

Any donations are greatly appreciated and can be accepted at the Women's Resource Centre or go directly to the Women's Memorial Monument Account / Women's Resource Centre at Integris Credit Union. Charitable tax receipts can be provided upon request.

Most importantly, we are requesting that any family members who have lost a woman to violence contact us as soon as possible if they are interested in having their loved ones name on the monument. **We will not engrave names into the monument without the families' consent.** Please contact Melanie MacDonald at the Quesnel Women's Resource Centre: 250-992-8472. Families are welcome to drop by the Women's Resource Centre and view the design of the monument as well as have any questions or concerns answered.



Drop In Hours: 9:00—4:00,  
Tuesday—Friday  
690 McLean Street  
Quesnel, BC  
250-992-8472

We're on the Web:  
[www.qwrc.ca](http://www.qwrc.ca)



## Luna Women's Wellness Clinic

"A woman centred clinic where you get the time to ask questions related to your health"

**Thursdays 12pm-4pm**

*Services offered include:*

- Pap Exams •Birth control •Pregnancy Testing
- Emergency Contraceptive •STI Testing
- Breast Self -Exams

**Free and Confidential. No appointment necessary**  
Childminding available

Located in the  
**Women's Resource Centre**  
690 McLean Street  
250-992-8472  
<http://www.qwrc.ca>

## What's happening at the Women's Centre?

### Self-esteem group:

To begin in April or early May. Call 250-992-8472 to join.

### Anger Management group:

Already underway.

### Girls' group:

A weekly group of girls from QSS currently underway.

### General Collective meeting:

Third Thursday of every month, 3:00. All women welcome. Call the Women's Centre for more information.



Sherry Harper is replacing Sherry McMillan as our counsellor for this year. We thank Sherry McMillan for her years of dedicated work for the Women's Center. She has assisted many women in our community.