

## Her Story: Women in Whistler

By Kerry Clark and Alex Chu

October is Women's History month. This year's theme is "Yes, Women are Persons". While the fact that women are people may seem obvious to us now, it wasn't long ago that women fought to be recognized as equals.

Although women in most provinces were allowed to vote by 1929, they weren't eligible for appointment to the Senate. Looking to assert women's rights, a group of women known as the Famous Five asked the Supreme Court of Canada a simple question: Does the word "person" in Section 24 of the B.N.A Act include female persons? After five weeks of debate, the courts decided that it did not include women. Although shocked, the Famous Five did not give up their fight.

They took the Persons Case to the Privy Council of England, which in those days was Canada's highest court. On October 18, 1929, Lord Sankey announced, "The exclusion of women from all public offices is a relic of days more barbarous than ours. And to those who would ask why the word "person" should include females, the obvious answer is why should it not?" The Famous Five achieved not only the right for women to serve in the Senate, but paved the way for women to participate in other aspects of public life.

Women's History Month was established in 1992 as an opportunity to learn more about women's historic accomplishments and contributions to Canadian society, such as the Famous Five. But why always look to the past for women to honour? What is it about our understanding of the word "history" that causes us to instinctively look backwards? In fact, there are other ways to look at history.

In Western culture, history is associated with our concepts of space and time, which tend to be lineal. Hence, we envision the past as a series of events that happen one after another in a sequential arrangement. This tendency to order ideas in a linear

sequence can also be seen in the fact that information is often arranged and stored chronologically or alphabetically. But the past isn't always understood in linear terms of time and space.

For example, in the early 1930's an anthropologist named E. E. Evans-Pritchard studied a group of people called the Nuer living in the desert of north-eastern Africa. The Nuer lived a simple life splitting their time between communal villages during the wet season of the year and individual family camps during the dry season. Evans-Pritchard soon realized that the Nuer did not conceive of time in linear terms, rather they saw time as cyclical – alternating between social events based on seasonal changes. When asked about the past, the Nuer conceived of time gone by in terms of how far back they could trace their family relations – usually a few generations. Anything further back than this had no bearing on their life. Hence, for the Nuer, the past was not based on a series of events; it was based on social relations and annual events.

Similarly, social economist Eric Wolf looks at concepts of time in his book “Europe and the People without History”. In this account, Wolf calls for a re-examination of European contact with indigenous people around the world in the period from 1400 to 1914. Wolf argues that our understanding of history tends to be one-sided. It is based on Western accounts of capitalist expansion, accounts that provide little agency to the role of indigenous people. Wolf advocates a history that merges the East and the West, the European and the Indigenous, the Modern and the Traditional, and the First and the Third World. Wolf proposes that history should be viewed as a series of interconnected experiences and narratives. History then becomes a myriad of entities that connect, disconnect and then reconnect in a different fashion.

Since history doesn't always need to involve looking at people or events in the past, we have decided to celebrate Women's History Month in Whistler by looking at the contributions of five local women. These women aren't from the past. They are current

residents who work to make Whistler a great place to live right now. Their contributions will definitely be remembered in the future, but more importantly, their stories contribute to the contemporary fabric of our community. Each portrait illustrates the contribution that these women make to Whistler, their thoughts on change in the community, as well as their hopes for the future.

### Lillian Goldsmid

Lillian first came to Whistler in 1967 when she and her husband purchased a unit in Creekside. Her family enjoyed skiing and felt that the valley would be a nice place to have a cabin. Three years later they bought a piece of property in Alta Vista and built the house that they live in today. While raising her family, Lillian split her time between Whistler and Vancouver but is now happily retired full-time in Whistler.

Lillian has generously contributed countless hours to important projects for the community and over the years has fondly become known as Whistler's Nana. For example, when Whistler hosted its first World Cup in 1982, Lillian and her husband prepared all the food for the volunteers at the event. They used their own home to make the food for this large group of hardworking individuals. More recently, Lillian can be found volunteering at the Re-Use-It Centre in Function Junction, the Whistler Food Bank, and the community greenhouse project. The greenhouse is used to produce fresh organic vegetables for the food bank. Extra vegetables are taken to the Fairmont Chateau Hotel where staff in the kitchen process and freeze them for use in the winter. Lillian has also dedicated many hours to sorting books and preparing for the Whistler Public Library sale to raise money for new books.

Lillian's greatest concern for the future is that that young people in Whistler will not be able to settle permanently. She notes that even Squamish and Pemberton are becoming quite expensive. On a more positive note, Lillian believes that Whistler has a

lot going for it. There are wonderful facilities for young families such as Meadow Park Sports Centre and the wonderful schools.

Lillian has lived in the valley for over 35 years and has witnessed changes that she describes as “beyond anything we could have imagined”. While she has known people who have been disappointed with the changes and have decided to leave Whistler, Lillian feels that it is important to adapt to change and appreciate what we are given. Living in Whistler fills Lillian with joy and she cannot imagine living anywhere else.

### Britt Janyk

As a member of the Canadian Alpine Ski Team for the past five years, Britt Janyk has garnered a reputation as one of the valley’s most promising young athletes. She has five national titles to her name, a North American Cup title (1999) and several World Cup top-ten finishes. Furthermore, she is training to compete in the 2006 Winter Olympics. However, Britt will not be defined simply by her sport. As she says, “Ski racing is what I do and part of what I am, but not who I am. Yes, I am a ski racer but I am also just Britt”.

Britt first began skiing at the age of two. Each weekend her family would drive up from Vancouver to stay in their cabin and ski the mountains. By virtue of her participation in a sport that is in the public spotlight, Britt has become a role model for young athletes in the valley. She writes a newspaper column for Whistler’s Pique Newsmagazine in which she tells stories of her experiences as an athlete, team member and competitor. In these ways she is an example for other young athletes who can learn from her ability to set and meet goals, create new challenges, and persevere in the face of adversity.

Britt is happy that Whistler is still growing and is excited about the new opportunities that this growth will bring for Whistlerites. However, she hopes that this growth will not harm but strengthen the valley's community. Britt's main concern is for the locals. She hopes that there will still be good events and activities for locals and that Whistler remains a place where locals can live year round and enjoy it.

While Britt is predominantly known as an athlete, she is also an ordinary young woman who enjoys activities such as going to the beach and spending time with friends and family when she is not training. When she retires from racing she plans to finish her education and start a family.

### Joan Richoz

Joan first came to Whistler in the summer of 1972 to help her husband build a summer cabin in Alpine Meadows. Joan and her husband felt that Whistler would be a peaceful place to live and a nice place to raise a family. Over the years she has become well known for her contributions as a member of the Whistler Arts Council and her name has become synonymous with the Whistler Public Library.

Joan is proud to have served on the Board of the Whistler Arts Council since 1983. Her first project with the Arts Council was the Children's Art Festival. At the time the local schools were not teaching any fine arts. Joan believes that the fine arts are an integral part of life and education and therefore saw the project as a wonderful opportunity to enrich the lives of Whistler's next generation. Over the years the festival has grown into a successful event, widely anticipated by local families each year.

Joan is probably best known for her involvement with the Whistler Public Library. In 1985, a group of dedicated citizens formed a subcommittee of the Whistler Community Arts Council with the purpose of establishing a local library. Joan played a

primary role in this committee and when the library opened on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1986, accepted the great responsibility of becoming the community's librarian.

Joan currently holds the position of Director at the library where she works to ensure that the facility meets community needs. In recent years, much of this task has been occupied with plans for a new building. The building is slated to open for the Library's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006 and Joan hopes that it will serve the community for at least another twenty years.

Joan's concerns for the future include the decline of affordability. High rents have lead to the loss of independent businesses and for Joan, it is these businesses that give Whistler its distinctive atmosphere. High prices also mean that it is not easy for young couples to get established like she and her husband did years ago.

However, Joan believes that Whistler has not lost its small community feel. Joan still has most of the same neighbours who over the years have made the community a wonderful place to live. Joan hopes that in the future Whistler will not be known solely for recreation but also for the arts.

### Anna Fraser Sproule

Anna first visited Whistler at the age of three when her family began the tradition of taking weekend ski trips to their small cabin in Alpine Meadows. Many years later in 1998, Anna and her own family decided to settle in Whistler permanently. During the 1980s, Anna's career as a freestyle skier made her one of Canada's great athletes. Her athletic accomplishments include eight Canadian National Titles, a 1986 World Cup Aerial title, 37 World Cup medals, and 4<sup>th</sup> place finish at the 1988 Winter Olympics.

Hosting the Olympics has been a dream for Whistler since the 1960's and Anna has done her part to help make this dream become a reality. She was part of the group that presented the Whistler-Vancouver bid to the Canadian Olympic Committee in 1998

and was a member of the Board of Directors for the Vancouver Bid Corporation from 1999 to July of 2003. Anna feels that she had an incredible experience through her sport and this was one way for her to give back.

While Anna works for Whistler Blackcomb, she is also a proud mother. Anna does her best to help out at her daughter's school and with other activities for local children. Like most of the parents in Whistler, she works to ensure that there are special events and activities for Whistler's next generation.

Raising a family and having a supportive community in which to do so are of great importance to Anna. However, she fears that in the near future Whistler will lose many of its families due to the rising cost of living. Anna also recognizes that the seniors are an important part of the community's strength but is fearful that they might not have a place in Whistler's future unless steps are taken to ensure their continued participation in the community.

Anna especially appreciates the people in Whistler; "One of the things I love about this community, because it's relatively new, is that everybody comes from somewhere else. There is no standard or norm. I feel lucky to be in a place where you can be who you are".

### Cathy Jewett

Back in 1976, Cathy was like many of Whistler's young population today: she journeyed from her home in Ontario to ski in Whistler for the winter. That winter turned into a summer, and then another winter, and soon enough Whistler was home. Cathy established herself in Whistler beginning in 1980 when she was hired as a ski patroller on the newly opened Blackcomb Mountain. At that time there were few women on the patrol, although this did not deter Cathy's ambition. Her job allowed her to enjoy all that the mountains had to offer.

Cathy came to the valley during a period of great transition. When she first arrived there were still people here that operated trap-lines year round, yet the Resort Municipality had been incorporated. Municipal elections were creating excitement but the population was only around 700 and there were few shops and no bank. The first summer she was here Rainbow Lodge burnt down. Cathy saw 'old time Whistler' gradually come to an end. Cathy knew that when she arrived there would be change; however, her philosophy is that we need to adapt to changes and appreciate what we have.

Cathy Jewett has always been involved in the community on some level and in this way believes she is representative of the average woman in the community. As she explains, in a small community like Whistler every person can make a difference. She began participating in community life by attending important events such as the first Official Community Plan meeting. More recently she has dedicated time to Myrtle Philip Elementary School, serving on the Executive of the Parent Advisory Committee for the past five years and as its Chair for the past two years.

Many locals fear that Whistler will become too big. Cathy says that it is definitely scary to see Whistler get bigger but urges Whistlerites to view growth with a positive frame of mind. Development has brought bigger crowds but it has also brought essential services such as a medical centre, dentists, physiotherapists, grocery stores, pharmacies, a laundromat and several banks.

Cathy considers herself fortunate to have been able to make a permanent life for herself here in Whistler. Her profession as a ski patroller gives her a different lifestyle that some people view as glamorous. However, Cathy says she's a pretty normal person that most women can identify with. In her own words: "I'm just a gal from Ontario that managed to make a great life here!"

Yes, Cathy is just a gal who managed to make a life here. In fact, all five women are members of our community who have managed to make a life here - and that isn't an easy task for anybody. It is also important to recognize that there are many other women in the area who work to make Whistler a great community. They are mothers, sisters, friends, co-workers, bosses, nurses... the list goes on.

So October is Women's history month. Why honour women for just one of the twelve months? Does that mean that men are unintentionally honoured for the remaining eleven? No, it means women's stories deserve to be recognized and woven into the everyday fabric of history. After all, history is about stories. But those stories need to be told in meaningful and integrated ways. While much of Women's History Month will look back to see how history might be rewritten for a more complete account, it is also useful to look at how history is being written today. Who are the women in your life that participate in your story? Who do you look up to? Sometimes the past isn't about looking back. It is about looking around you right now and recognizing how our lives meet and mix in different ways. So maybe this month, maybe next month – it really doesn't matter what time of year – take a moment to look around you and honour the women that are characters in your story.