

Mother Tongue Series

This documentary series explores ethnic women's history in Canada. Each episode tells the story of a notable woman in one of Canada's communities.

Online guide available for each program.



Françoise Marie Jacquelin: Lioness of Acadia (Acadian) (SUPMT01)

Françoise Marie Jacquelin was an aristocratic Frenchwoman who came to Canada in 1640 to marry Charles LaTour, the Governor of Acadia. Françoise had a keen sense of adventure and looked forward to a new life in the New World, but she walked into a war zone. Her husband's rival, Charles D'Aulnay, also claimed to be Governor of Acadia. In 1645, LaTour went to Boston and D'Aulnay attacked their fort. Françoise decided to risk her life and lead her husband's garrison into battle.

Eliza Parker: Fighting for Freedom (African Canadian) (SUPMT02)

16-year-old Toni Parker tells the story of her great-great grandmother Eliza Parker. After escaping slavery in Maryland, Eliza settled in the free state of Christiana, Pennsylvania where she married. In 1851, the young couple were harbouring two runaway slaves when an armed posse, led by a slave-owner, came to claim the men back. Eliza and her husband fought them off with help from their self defence organization. Afterwards they moved to Canada, setting up home in the free Black community, The Elgin Settlement, which is today located in North Buxton, Ontario, where Toni Parker and other descendents still live.

Lydia Charles: Healing Spirit, Embracing Change (Algonquian/Eastern Woodlands) (SUPMT03)

Lydia Charles and her husband Matthew were trappers in their Woodland Cree community in La Ronge, Northern Saskatchewan. Lydia had a special role in her community because of her sacred duties as midwife, medicine-woman, and mortician, but lost her livelihood and her status with the arrival of European culture and economy. She also experienced great personal tragedy. Nevertheless, she taught her children and grandchildren that the only way to cope with change is to embrace it.

Mary Lee Chan: Taking On City Hall (Chinese) (SUPMT04)

Mary Lee Chan's family came from China to Vancouver in 1879. They struggled for generations, but in the 1950s Mary was able to buy a home near Chinatown. Later, she discovered her neighbourhood was to be demolished as part of a controversial urban renewal program. Mary organized her community to form the Strathcona Property Owner and Tenants Association (SPOTA). They were determined to fight for their homes and stand up to City Hall.

Anna Markova: Forgiveness in Exile (Dukhobor) (SUPMT05)

Most of her family had escaped persecution in Russia by coming to Canada but Anna Markova, from three generations of Russian Dukhobor leaders, disappeared into the Soviet Gulag of the 1940s. Innocent of any crime, Anna spent 15 years in a gulag where millions of political prisoners died. When Anna was finally released, she joined her family in Canada. Here she became active organizing women in the community and became a role model for generations to come.

Aina Wilen: Fighting for the Franchise (Finnish) (SUPMT06)

Aina Wilen was 17 when she came to Canada in 1901. Like many Finnish immigrant women at that time, she came to Canada on her own and looked for work as a domestic. Soon she met and married but Aina was frustrated in Canada. Women in Finland enjoyed equal rights, but in Canada women suffered terrible working conditions and were denied the right to vote. Aina became one of many Finnish Canadians to fight for enfranchisement. They would achieve their goal by 1917.

Maria DiZio: Setting a Pattern for Success (Italian) (SUPMT07)

Maria DiZio and her husband, Tommaso, came to Canada in the 1950s to start a new life. They settled in Timmins, Ontario, where many Italians found well-paid but dangerous work in the mines. Italian women in the 1950s were expected to stay home but when Tommaso could not work in the mines because of health

problems Maria had to work to help her family survive. She found work sewing skating costumes in Timmins. With the \$25 that she earned for her first costume, she was able to pay the rent and feed her family for a month. In the decades to come, Maria would develop a thriving business sewing haute couture wedding gowns.

Kimik Murakami: Triumph Over Internment (Japanese) (SUPMT08)

Mary Kitagawa tells the story of her mother Kimiko Murakami. Kimiko and her husband had a successful farm on Salt Spring Island in the 1930s. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbour in 1941 Mary's family was sent to a series of internment camps and beet farms where they lived in dire conditions and worked for meagre wages. Despite 8 years of internment, Kimiko refused to allow the children to lose hope and was determined to return to her farm again

Sarah Mayoff: Enterprising Against the Odds (Jewish) (SUPMT09)

Sarah Mayoff grew up in The Main, Montreal, in the 1930s – where poor Jewish immigrants lived. Jews had their own shops and cultural centres and their main language was Yiddish. They lived together because of discrimination in the non-Jewish world. But young Sarah Mayoff had dreams of leaving The Main and building a career in mainstream Montreal. In the 1940s and 50s, when women were expected to stay at home, Sarah became one of Canada's pioneering career women, providing a model for generations to come.

Roshan Jamal: Faith without Boundaries (Muslim) (SUPMT10)

Roshan Jamal grew up in a traditional Muslim family in India. When she and her husband settled in Toronto she had difficulty finding a mosque where women and men were treated equally. Then Roshan met a philanthropist, Hassanali Lakhani, who yearned to establish an Islamic community centre where Muslims could practice Islam as it was practiced at the time of the Prophet Mohammed – with a stress on justice and gender equality. It was a struggle, but by 2004, the two opened the innovative Noor Cultural Centre in Toronto where women and men could pray and study together in an open and democratic environment. The centre has grown increasingly popular with Muslims of all cultural backgrounds and sects.

Juliet Karugahe: Between Two Worlds (Rwandan) (SUPMT11)

Juliet Karugahe is a 23-year-old student at the University of Toronto, but she has spent most of her life as a refugee in Kenya and Uganda. Juliet's parents, who escaped ethnic strife in Rwanda in the 1950s, always dreamed of returning to their homeland. In 1994, Tutsi refugees were finally allowed to return to Rwanda after a brutal civil war in which over a million Tutsis were massacred. When the Karugahe family returned, it wasn't the happy reunion they had hoped for. Her journey to find a place to call home had only just begun.

Martha Bielish: Giving Rural Women a Voice (Ukrainian) (SUPMT12)

Senator Martha Bielish was the daughter of impoverished immigrants from Ukraine. She grew up in rural Alberta where women in her community suffered from isolation and a lack of education. As an adult, Martha devoted her life to easing the plight of rural women. Her work, first for the Alberta Women's Institute, then for the Associated Countrywomen of the World, would earn her an appointment to the Canadian Senate in 1979. But her involvement with the cause she loved came at a steep price.

May Truong: Coasting on a Dream (Vietnamese) (SUPMT13)

24-year old May Truong was born on a sinking boat in the South China Sea. Her parents were Sino-Vietnamese refugees who risked their lives to escape the communist regime in Vietnam. Since her dramatic birth on turbulent waters, May's life has been an epic journey to discover where she belongs. Is she Vietnamese? Is she Chinese? Is she Canadian? While exploring her parent's story, May learns a lot more about herself.

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