



Heather Stewart

(1937 -)

Without knowledge the world is bereft of culture. And so we must be educators and students both. Roberta Bondar (1945-) - Canada's first woman in space.

An innovative educator, Heather Mary Stewart, was born on April 25th, 1937 in Winnipeg. Heather has “two pretty great kids”, a son and daughter, along with 4 grandchildren, and is married to Henry DeBrunner, who continues to support her community commitment.

After a few years of teaching school, plus a year of social work, Heather taught an academic upgrading and orientation program for aboriginal students at Vancouver Community College for seven years until 1974. She then moved to the Valley to become one of the Fraser Valley College's first instructors in adult basic education. She was located at the Coqualeetza Centre for five years. She then taught on the Chilliwack and Abbotsford campuses, and finally in Mission until retirement in 1996.

Heather also coordinated classroom instruction in five local prisons for five years and in 1990, she became the founding Director of the Toti:lthet Centre on the former site of Saint Mary's residential school in Mission. The purpose was to prepare Aboriginal students for college entry. After retirement, Heather founded Four Directions College because she thought Toti:lthet was a great concept that she could take a step farther.

Heather feels that volunteering is giving back and learning at the same time. “When volunteering with Aboriginal people, I learned a lot about their on-reserve and off-reserve experiences, and the difference between. When I joined the Historical Society, I learned so much about the community through people who had lived here all their lives.

Her first volunteer experience in Mission was feeding volunteers in the Folk Festival kitchen. She was involved with the Women's Resource Society, and continued membership in the Valley Women's Network, whose 1981 inaugural meeting she had attended in Chilliwack. She has been a member of the Historical Society, Literacy Association, Rotary Club, Farmers Market Society, and was the founding organizer of Communities in Bloom. These activities have provided her with valuable perspectives as she performs her duties as city councillor.

Heather has received the Paul Harris award for service to Rotary, BC commemorative medal (1992), a nomination for the Myrtle Everett Woman-of-the Year (1997), Mission Citizen of the Year (2004) for her work to establish Communities in Bloom, and the Ruby Award from the Abbotsford Mission Soroptimist Club (2010), recognizing her service to women.

Heather thinks that the most significant event in her life was the death of her mother at 52. Heather was 22 and had just graduated from university and got married. “She wasn't there when my children were born, when there were significant career choices to make and other lifestyle choices, but she was a real model for positivity and courage and generosity. So, who could ask for anything more?”

by Lisa Kenney, Eagle Eye Editing
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