

The Shelley Fralic Award Jury

6209 Angus Drive
Vancouver, BC V6M 3P2

June 21, 2022

Re: Letter of Support for Cynthia Ramsay - Shelley Fralic Award

Dear Lori, Peg, Robin, Nancy, Gillian and Juggy,

As a young child growing up in Vancouver, picking up a copy of the latest Jewish Independent off someone's coffee table was as common as finding a PB&J sandwich in my lunchbox. It was always there, and continues to be there despite existing in a world that has mostly forgotten the smell of freshly printed ink and the act of turning a page. The Jewish Independent has chronicled my proudest achievements since I was a tween, not just for my community to celebrate, and not just for my very proud mother (who would ask me for at least 4 crisp copies for safe-keeping), but, more importantly, for me to return to as an adult to know that my voice—my queer neurodivergent “Jewpanese” woman of colour voice—mattered then and still matters today. Cynthia Ramsay of the Jewish Independent is the reason.

It is tricky business being the scribe of one's own community, and Cynthia performs this role with expert acrobatic skills. She was and continues to be my role model, a real-life strong, independent, opinionated, one-woman show of all trades, who also has a heart and a great sense of humour (albeit dark and twisty, like mine). Woven into the mainstream, and often conservative, Jewish community news, Cynthia amplifies the voices of countless folk, who are often on the periphery. Specifically, community members who are queer, neurodivergent, disabled, patrilineal, secular, multiracial, multifait, and others. Representation is so vital and often life-affirming, and Cynthia has made sure that her newspaper reflects the diversity of our entire community. It is brave, brazen and requires a great deal of *chutzpah!*

I first met the face behind the paper in a Hebrew class at the Jewish Community Centre run by a friend's mother, not realizing that the super-cool person across the table from me is THE Jewish Independent. We would eventually be seated also at Shabbat dinners at our Hebrew teacher's home, becoming regular fixtures at Jewish holidays. Cynthia has always treated me like an equal and been a trustworthy confidant. I have appreciated her friendship immensely and, honestly, if it weren't for her, I don't think I'd be where I am today.

In addition to being featured in the paper over the years, Cynthia also gave me my first opportunity to write an article, which would be one of many to come—both in the JI and elsewhere. Being able to voice my opinion skillfully has paid for groceries and helped me sleep at night, knowing that I have stood up for what I think is right. I would write for the paper about

the work I was doing in Victoria's Jewish community, which helped remind Vancouver's Jewish community that there is a world beyond the Lower Mainland. In time, I would grow into my current career—a community engagement professional—and Cynthia has been there every step of the way. When I was getting JQT Vancouver (Canada's only homegrown Jewish LGBTQ2SIA+ nonprofit) off the ground, she was one of my biggest cheerleaders and sits today on our board. Around the same time, I was establishing the award-winning Cross Cultural Walking Tours, which highlight the contributions of Indigenous and early immigrant communities from the richly layered history of Vancouver's downtown eastside neighbourhoods, in celebration of Asian and Jewish Heritage Months. And who is there, sitting on the walking tours' advisory committee? Cynthia.

Cynthia understands the need to build bridges across siloed communities and to support voices that have been systematically oppressed and silenced. JQT recently conducted a needs assessment on the Jewish LGBTQ2SIA+ community. Results show a dire need for Jewish organizations to do better, and none of our calls to action really apply to the Jewish Independent because Cynthia has been doing them the whole time. A point of interest is that there are only three openly queer people in Jewish executive leadership positions in Vancouver; Cynthia and I make up two of the three. Cynthia is my chosen family and, clearly, I have not fallen far from her rainbow tree. I have learned to push through with very little means because, if Cynthia can do it, so can I. The difference between us is that I'm extremely extroverted and Cynthia is not. She definitely does not get the accolades and financial support she deserves, and it is mind-boggling how she has been able to keep the paper going (pandemic or no pandemic). Sheer determination is a large part of her success, no doubt, as she maintains her high threshold for quality journalism and continues to put her community's needs before her own.

We have chuckled at the ridiculousness of being community professionals. It's hard, time-consuming, self-sacrificing, and, truthfully, thankless work, but Cynthia wouldn't have it any other way. I know there are Cynthia-equivalents in every community, but there is only one Cynthia to me.

Thank you for considering Cynthia Ramsay as recipient of the Shelley Fralic Award. She is most deserving.

Carmel Tanaka

Founder & Executive Director, JQT Vancouver

Founder & Program Coordinator, Cross Cultural Walking Tours

Founder, Genocide Prevention BC

ADL Collaborative for Change Fellow, Jewpanese Project

carmelayatanaka@gmail.com • 650-448-9625 • www.carmeltanaka.ca