

While not a household name outside the Jewish community, Cynthia Ramsay has been, for a generation, the prime force behind British Columbia's voice and mirror – the *Jewish Independent*.

In 1999, Cynthia assumed leadership of the *Jewish Western Bulletin* (founded 1930, now the *Jewish Independent*) and has overseen its place as a respected, courageous, must-read medium that reflects the community it serves and encourages readers to identify ways in which to contribute to their community and the world.

Mirroring Shelley Fralic's commitment to the social causes taken up by her newspaper, Cynthia has put the power of her newspaper behind countless initiatives, sponsoring community events and making space for less-heard voices, mentoring at least a generation of writers, artists, activists and entrepreneurs. In word and deed, the paper models compassion and social justice. It is a solutions-oriented media source, highlighting people within and outside the Jewish community who are promoting humanitarianism through arts, culture, activism, education, business and other endeavours.

At the time Cynthia took over the paper, homosexuality was effectively a banned topic and lifecycle announcements involving intermarried families were not published. Cynthia changed these policies and the *Independent* became a place where the most diverse thinkers, artists, creators and others – from religious to secular – find welcoming coverage. The *Independent* did not do this out of a response to changing norms, but as a leader.

In another instance, a backlash arose when organizers brought to Vancouver a musician critical of Israel's government. The paper firmly supported the organizers, taking the position that, the artist's musical talent notwithstanding, diversity of opinion is a core Jewish value to be celebrated, not boycotted.

There are many examples where the paper has taken difficult positions when popular opinion would have dictated an easier route. While always striving to engage, entertain and inform, Cynthia believes that respect is paramount.

This approach is a large part of why the paper still thrives despite recessions and the decline of print journalism. It also helped when a national Jewish charity and advocacy organization launched a local version of their newspaper in British Columbia because a segment of the community viewed the diversity of opinion in the *Independent* as unacceptable. In preparation, Cynthia met with community leaders and a swath of readers. Buoyed by the community, the *Independent* held to its principles, in contrast to the attack journalism and extreme ideology of the competition. The upstart ceased publication nine months later.

The award-winning *Jewish Independent* is currently produced through the efforts of Cynthia with the equivalent of two full-time staff, two volunteer editorial board members and a small network of freelancers. There may be few entrepreneurial journalists who wear as many hats as does Cynthia, from envelope-stuffer, to sympathetic ear for a homebound senior, to community archivist, to the more visible hats of publisher and editor.

If there is a single individual who embodies in their work the spirit of Shelley Fralic – and the ethics of generations of pioneering journalists – it is Cynthia Ramsay.