

## **Essay Contest 2016/17**

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### **Spracherwerb**

#### **Canadian Immigrants: The Honourable Dr. Vivienne Poy**

“Canadians of different heritage and background can come together to celebrate our differences, enjoy each other's foods and cultures, and appreciate that we live in a country that welcomes people from all over the world.” – Dr. Vivienne Poy, entrepreneur, author, (former) first Canadian senator of Asian descent, upon being asked if she had any advice to give to Canadians wanting to mark Asian Heritage Month.

It is with great finesse that Dr. Vivienne Poy has managed to combine the traditionally rather delicate art of fashion design with a steadfast and in its essence unwavering career in the, to this day, male-dominated fields of entrepreneurship and politics. Her success, which could be said to have defied all odds, for Dr. Poy has had to overcome the still omnipresent obstacle most likely known to all career women by the name of sexism, makes her a popular representative of extraordinary female achievement within the international feminist community.

She is also widely renowned as the first Canadian senator of Asian heritage, so it is fair to say that Dr. Vivienne Poy can serve as one of the most significant examples of what could be achieved if we, as a society, were to overcome prejudice and suppression of minorities. Clearly, the present-day would hold the stories of many more outstanding people with careers just as awe-inspiring as that of the Honourable Dr. Vivienne Poy's.

But what I want to achieve by dint of this essay is not just an analysis of Dr. Poy's career path. I would like to lay bare the woman behind this unbelievably impressive curriculum vitae, and the factors which have driven her to set, pursue, and consequently achieve all of her professional and political goals.

Vivienne Poy (née Lee) was born on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1941 in Hong Kong, today's China. Her father, Richard Charles Lee, a prominent Hong Kong business man, was the son of trade-mogul

Hysan Lee, famously nicknamed “The Opium King”. Due to her grandfather’s legacy, Dr. Poy’s family was extremely powerful and a highly regarded force in business. However, her childhood did not end up being as glamorous as one might anticipate upon hearing of her obviously quite successful family. She was yet to turn one year old when the Lees, together with their servants, had to seek refuge in mainland China to escape the Japanese occupation. In an interview about her undoubtedly most influential book, *Passage to Promise Land: Voices of Chinese Immigrant Women to Canada*, Dr. Poy talks of her earliest childhood memories being riding on cargo trucks that carried refugees. Her family had to survive on a diet consisting exclusively of hard-boiled eggs. “To this day I hate them. Because I’ll always remember the smell, the taste – I used to throw up because of the motion sickness,” she recounts.

There is little information available regarding Dr. Poy’s early youth, and her family’s state after the escape from the occupation, except for the fact that Dr. Poy attended primary and middle school in England and Hong Kong. Then, in 1959, when the former Vivienne Lee was eighteen years old, she came to Canada to study History at McGill University, Montréal. It was there that she met Neville Poy, the man who would later become her husband and father of her children. At the age of 21, Vivienne Lee did not only graduate, but also got married, thus becoming Vivienne Poy, a Canadian citizen. It was the joy of motherhood that caused her to defer her professional goals and dedicate herself to raising her three sons. It would certainly have come as no surprise if she had remained a stay-at-home mother and wife, as so many other women choose to do; but not Vivienne Poy. At the age of 38, she went back to University to acquire a fashion diploma at Seneca College, Toronto, Ontario.

In 1981, Mrs. Poy founded her very own fashion design company, *Vivienne Poy Mode*, the president of which she remained for 14 years. She additionally acted as proprietor of *Vivienne Poy Beauty Products* from 1990 to 2001. Her entrepreneurial accomplishments during that period led to her being selected as Chancellor of the University of Toronto in 2002. That same year, Dr. Poy published her first work focusing on Canadian immigration, *Citizenship and Immigration : The Chinese - Canadian Experience*, in collaboration with the University of Wollongong, Australia.

Upon ending her era as the president of her business imperium, Mrs. Poy, at the incredible age of 54, decided to get her Master's in History at McGill University. She later enrolled at the University of Toronto, from which she then graduated with a PhD.

However, while the above might already seem like a rather sufficient amount of accomplishments and actively pursued projects, Vivienne Poy did not stop there, and simultaneously launched her political career. In the year 1998, Dr. Poy was appointed as the first member of Asian heritage to the Canadian Senate, proving that one can, given the blessing of dreams and a true dedication to realise them, accomplish anything.

From this point in her impressive life onwards, Vivienne Poy practically submerged herself in Canadian politics, also by being an advocate for acceptance and intercultural peace. Thus, she gave way to many immigrants, especially women, to come forth and tell their stories of loss, hope, and, ultimately, peace, found in the warm welcome by Canadian citizens open to the idea of forging a culture consisting of not one, but many ethnicities.

By means of her publishing, her dedicated work as a true politician of the people, her compassion, and, at the core of it all, her own experiences of war, poverty, fear, and discrimination, The Honourable Dr. Vivienne Poy has managed to open up a kind of guided heart-to-heart between immigrants and citizens. A discourse that has not only educated the people of Canada, but one that has truly allowed them to grow. Together.

#### My sources

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