



Valerie Jacober

Valerie Jacober was born in a segregated Houston, Texas, to an US Air Force father and a nurse's aide mother. Although she has experienced many challenges and set-backs, like a Lupus diagnosis that postponed her university studies for 20 years, and experiencing various forms of racism throughout her lifetime, Valerie remains a positive and caring person. In addition to the public school system, Valerie was educated through community-building churches in several American cities. Through them, she learned the importance of helping those in need, regardless of their age, ability, nationality, religion or other differences. Valerie also learned the importance of positive team-building through sports.

Valerie met her Canadian husband, Russell, at a Colorado high school. After moving to North Vancouver to get married in 1978, Valerie spent a lot of time visiting the local libraries. To her shock, she could only find two books about Black people (Sidney Poitier and Paul Robeson) in one library and the resource librarian at another library didn't know that the Underground Railroad was a network of people who assisted runaway slaves and not a physical railroad!

Also, Valerie read a comment in a Chatelaine Magazine where a reader complained about a previous edition's article about inequality and racism that African heritage people faced in Canada. That reader claimed that that article wasn't necessary because Canada never had slavery. Valerie was shocked by that comment, mostly because she realized the reader didn't know their country's history! This was the beginning of her passion for researching the history of African heritage people in Canada.

Because she didn't know many people after moving to North Vancouver, Valerie began volunteering, firstly at a shelter for battered women and later at her oldest daughter school's lunch program. After the principle at Ridgeway Elementary recommended that Valerie apply for a Supervision Aide position she was hired! It was there that Valerie started to share Black History, first by creating a bulletin board display for their first Black History Month and by donating more Afro-centric books to the library. Then, to bolster interest in Black History Month, Valerie created a contest, organized a multi-class field trip to a play about Black inventions, and called upon community members and local celebrities, to share their life experiences with the students. In 2001, Valerie was part of a small group that petitioned the City of North Vancouver, along with Valerie Jerome, to request a place to permanently recognize and honour her brother. Shortly, thereafter, the North Vancouver Recreational Centre was renamed: The Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre!

Currently, Valerie continues to grow Black History awareness at Carson Graham Secondary, where she works, which has influenced more interest and inclusion of Black History across the North Vancouver School District.

She has also been a guest speaker in various classes, invited community members to talk in classes, written and presented Black History Month announcements, written an article for the NVSD newsletter, located free resources for teachers from various sources, created lessons and assembled electronic resources during the COVID-19 shut down and has been featured in the North Shore News. Valerie was invited to participate on the committee that redeveloped of the North Vancouver School District's Anti-Racism Policy in 2022. This all cumulated in the first Black History Month assembly at Carson Graham Secondary in 2023 and the planning for another one for this year. Valerie has been told that her quiet activism has influenced the broadcasting of special announcements for Indigenous, LGBTQAI+ and other school awareness programs.

In addition to work and family responsibilities, Valerie has solicited money for various charities, volunteered at a number of community kitchens, including Carson Graham's Community Initiatives program. When her children were in school, Valerie held several Parent Advisory Committee positions, played the piano for their elementary school, was a chaperone on many field trips and was a member of their high school's music association. For 10 years, Valerie was a member of two Vancouver community choirs that raised awareness and funds for many charitable causes, including Stayed on Freedom (a Black History Month event that raised money for a different local charity each year), a fundraiser for orphans in Africa, Global TV's Christmas Wish Breakfast at the Pan Pacific Hotel, CBC's Make the Season Kind broadcast, a Thailand Tsunami relief fundraiser at Christ Church Cathedral, First United Church Community Ministry Society, Cancer research, to name a few. Most recently, Valerie volunteered for Project Hope, a fundraiser and awareness event for ALS research.

Valerie will continue to find ways to participate in community building activities. After 32 years of working in the North Vancouver School District, Valerie has acquired an abundance of knowledge and experience from supporting the emotional, social and academic development of K-12 students, yet knows there's more she can learn. At the core of Valerie's beliefs is that humans are more alike than they are different and she is always thankful for the kindness and support that others have shown her.