

“STRONG BLACK WOMEN” - UNsung CONTRIBUTORS

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THIRD PLACE:
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Canada has a diverse heritage, culture and identity that was and continues to be shaped by women of African descent. There are many well known African Women, who have impacted Canadian society, such as; Michaelle Jean and Rosemary Brown, however, there are others who quietly influence and define Canadian society.

In the Province of Nova Scotia, African women are active, committed but often silent contributors to the development of the Province and Canada as a whole. For many years the contributions of African women in Canada has been overlooked, under-appreciated and under estimated. The first woman of African descent to open my eyes to the integrity, achievements and quiet work of African women was my mother, Ngena Bernard.

Ngena was born on May 31, 1978, Nova Scotia. She grew up in the African community of Lake Loon, surrounded by her immediate and extended family. At the young age of 11 years old, she dealt with the death of her mother.

Despite the obstacles in life, she maintained a very strong positive attitude.

Ngena was an educator, an unpublished poet, a student of Dalhousie University, as well as a single mother of four children, all under the age of 18 years old. My mother, passed away on January 6, 2015 at the age of 36. Although her life was short, she made a significant impact on her children as a parent and in her work as an educator. She taught me at a young age to be strong, positive and to love the skin I am in no matter what obstacles I might encounter and pursue my goals.

Her poetry was unpublished, however when she recited a poem it impressed members of our family and community. Her poem, “Strong Black Woman” inspired me to examine the achievements of other strong black women from the African Nova Scotian community of Lake Loon, and how their achievements quietly shaped history and added to the diversity of Canada.

Women of African descent are quiet but powerful contributors to change. The two inspirational African Nova Scotian women I have chosen to highlight from the Lake Loon community are; Judge Corrine E. Sparks, and Delvina E. Bernard.

Judge Corrine E. Sparks, a woman of African descent grew up in Lake Loon, which was a segregated community, until the 1990's. She began her education in a segregated school. She continued on to obtain a BA, economics, from Mount Saint Vincent University, and a LLB and LLM, from Dalhousie University.

In 1987, Corrine Sparks became the first African Nova Scotian to be appointed a Judge and she continues to serve on the bench today. She supports judicial education, developing educational programs and lecturing on gender, racial discrimination and the courts. As an African Nova Scotian woman, Judge Sparks brings a very distinctive cultural and legal perspective to the judiciary and her volunteer work. Her specific cultural knowledge changed Canadian society when her decision in the “*The Queen vs RDS*” matter set a precedent in Canadian law.

Delvina E. Bernard, a woman of African descent, grew up Lake Loon. She holds a Bachelor of Commerce Degree (Finance) from Saint Mary's University, a Diploma in Adult Education from George Brown College, as well as a Masters of Education from Mount Saint Vincent University. As a university student in 1982, Delvina co-founded ‘*Four the Moment*’ a powerful and inspiring all women a Capella quartet. Four the Moment toured across Canada, and made appearances in Europe, the Caribbean and the United States.

Delvina was instrumental in the development and implementation of a Master of Education in Studies in Lifelong Learning with a focus on Africentric Leadership. In partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University, the goals of this degree addresses the under representation of African Nova Scotian educators in leadership roles, and to prepare a critical mass of qualified educators who can help to guide Africentric Learning.

With all the barriers in society to hold back women from succeeding and contributing to society, these courageous and strong African Nova Scotian women, with their skills, knowledge and determination succeeded and changed the history of Nova Scotia. They are unsung contributors to Canada's diverse heritage and identity.

As I look at my peers and see young black women, I can only imagine the wonderful things that they will accomplish in life. The quiet, focussed and determination of strong Black Women in Nova Scotia has definitely contributed to the shaping of Nova Scotian history, and culture and ultimately Canada's identity, and heritage.

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