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THE HONOURABLE LILLIAN DYCK

Inspiration for *Café Daughter*

Statement by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

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INSPIRATION FOR *CAFÉ DAUGHTER*

Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, I rise today to pay tribute to our colleague, Senator Lillian Dyck, whose life story inspired the play *Café Daughter*, which premiered at the Gwaandak Theatre in Whitehorse last month. *Café Daughter*, by playwright Kenneth T. Williams, reflects Canada's most appalling historical actions in the treatment of First Nations people and the treatment of Chinese immigrants. The story could have taken place anywhere in rural Canada. It is a story of discrimination and loneliness.

Senator Dyck's Chinese father owned a small cafe in Saskatchewan. The provincial law of the time did not allow Chinese entrepreneurs to employ white women as helpers. Senator Dyck's mother, a Cree, went to work for him and when they subsequently married, she lost her Indian status.

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P. J. Prudat, a Metis, performs the solo performance of Yvette Wong, the fictional character in *Café Daughter*. The director, Yvette Nolan, is also of mixed heritage. In the play, Yvette Wong's Cree mother tells her not to tell anyone that she is part Cree to avoid double discrimination.

Senator Dyck grew up hiding her Aboriginal heritage while overcoming the prejudice directed at Chinese Canadians. In grades 9 and 10, like her brother, she was put in classes for students with low academic proficiency because they were poor and looked different. After winning multiple awards in grade 10, she joined the smart class in grade 11. When Senator Dyck received her doctorate in biological psychiatry and subsequently became a neurochemist, a professor and Associate Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Saskatchewan, Senator Dyck was ready to reveal her true heritage.

Café Daughter covers the universal themes that all young people face — their identity as defined by society in relation to their families and heritage. The theatre's study guide asks students to reflect on their Canadian identity in the context of Canada's broader history of discrimination.

Congratulations to Kenneth T. Williams, P.J. Prudat, Yvette Nolan and the Gwaandak Theatre on this outstanding production, which won multiple awards. Most of all, I wish to acknowledge our colleague, Senator Lillian Dyck, whose perseverance in the face of prejudice and poverty serves as an inspiration to us all.
