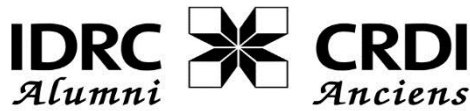




Osez! Rejoignez les anciens du CRDI sur  
Facebook:  
groupe « [IDRC Alumni](#) » ou page  
« [IDRC](#) ».



[alumni@idrc.ca](mailto:alumni@idrc.ca) / [anciens@crdi.ca](mailto:anciens@crdi.ca)



Don't be shy? Join IDRC Alumni on  
Facebook:  
at "[IDRC Alumni](#)" group and / or "[IDRC](#)"  
page.




---

*The IDRC Alumni provides opportunities for former IDRC employees to maintain personal and professional links, and supports continuing dialogue on development issues.*

---

## ***Bulletin***

No. 50  
April 2017

### **In This Issue**

**From the Chair**  
Rob Robertson

**Searching for *Le Mot Juste***

**Alumni News**

**The Hopper Bhatia Fund:  
Supporting Development and Honouring a Friendship**

**Where are The Now?**

Shafika Isaacs / Steve Song

**Gallery**

John Woolston / Ed Brandon / David Hopper / James Pfeifer

**Letters to the Editor**

Chris Smart

**IN MEMORIAM**

Bert St-Amand

**The IN MEMORIAM Book on line**

**IDRC Alumni Bulletin Archive on line**

Thanks to Michèle Wilson for Translation

---

Wish to support the IDRC Alumni Association? Contributions can be made annually or over a three-year period:

1 year	\$20
2 years	\$35
3 years	\$50

Cheques payable to the **IDRC Alumni Association**.

**Return to:** Donna Bickford, 1195 Priory Lane, Ottawa, ON, Canada. K1C 1Z8

**Electronic transfer** is also possible for Alumni across Canada and in other parts of the world who have Canadian accounts. For details contact Gerald Bourrier <[bici@sympatico.ca](mailto:bici@sympatico.ca)>

---

## From the Chair

Rob Robertson

### Searching for *Le Mot Juste*

For most of us who emerged without immersion from Ontario or Nova Scotia or Alberta public schools in the 1960's, only English was not a foreign language. This wasn't the end of world at IDRC; people at CIDA said we were all English-speaking anyway. Still, we envied others. There were those from the Outaouais and Northern Ontario and New Brunswick who apparently imbibed both French and English with their mothers' milk. And there was the international cohort of polyglots, reared in a swirl of different countries, who could order lunch in Spanish and dinner in Swahili. What was the solution to this problem...just ask Pierre Trudeau. It was language training. Lots of it.



Learning another language at an advancing age was a grind, even with the tottery base of what you learned in high school. However, for some the experience included a few pleasures. Before settling in Canada, Chris Smart "... spent three months in Tourette sur Loup, a village north of Nice, where I got to the point where I conquered the fear of actually starting a conversation. In my first job with WUSC I was given a month of immersion French in Jonquière and enjoyed being with all the Air Canada Stewardesses (as they were labeled then) who spoke like Brigitte Bardot when reading but had a hard time with the *plus que parfait!* And I welcomed the language training at IDRC. I found all the teachers worthwhile and most pleasantly serious about making us improve. I felt it important to show French Canadian colleagues that I agreed with bilingualism and other colleagues that Centre policy had to be respected. And I found the hour away from the desk fun thanks mainly to the colleagues who made up the groups. I got the CCC proficiency levels but as importantly I learned how kind most of the French Canadian colleagues were. If I made the effort they put up with me and coached me through the gaps."

Shaun Bona faced the double challenge of French and Spanish. He says, "Born and raised in the bilingual province of New Brunswick, my earliest French language training was fairly laudable. But...if someone were to jump me in a dark alley and demand that I conjugate an irregular verb, I'd be distraught. In Ottawa, with the new Official Languages Act, IDRC and Alliance Française were the saving graces, with certificates to boot. Nevertheless, despite memorising hundreds of words, dozens of forms of dozens of verbs, and quite a few grammar rules, my ability to actually speak French was limited. Meeting a French speaker now, I'll say 'Moi, je parle en français mais pas couramment'. Had I known where my career would be directed, how I wish I'd chosen Spanish! When I moved to LACRO, it was abruptly apparent there was no way I could function without it. The summer months were spent with an incredibly patient tutor and soon I was able to perform in a restaurant, supermercado, and farmacia (with heaps of pointing); I could pay bills, converse with the portero, and indispensably order a drink. Still, the foot-dragging to speak Spanish persisted. My propitious Regional Director solved that. Out to the field I went, to Peru, to districts a mere 4,000 metres above sea level, with Program staff, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, and some basics of the Spanish language. Spanish did not prepare me for the region's Quechua language. Unaware that eye contact was inadvisable, twelve Cholas promoting alpaca sweaters chased me to an airport entrance; no Spanish language usage gain, only a vicious headache. Back on terra firma, i.e. Montevideo, an intensive Spanish training regimen was in order, under the direction of a tutor who loved to giggle and correct my grammar. Perseverance led to the translation of IDRC's Institutional Risk Assessment Visit Workbook and a diploma from Instituto Cervantes. The former introduced me to the affability of Latin

Americans and the professional institutions with which IDRC collaborated. The latter is proudly framed and most assuredly contributed to a loss of hair. I could fumble through an occasional witticism and finally grasp to a degree that Rioplatense Spanish spoken mainly in and around the Río de la Plata Basin of Argentina and Uruguay that was dissimilar to anywhere else. Thanks to IDRC for immeasurable opportunities, one being to recognise the beauty of languages that I strove not to degrade.”

For Ed Brandon, the subjunctive tense was a serious problem, especially with an instructor who seemed unable to explain its rationale. There is a rationale? And Carl Chambers thought verb tenses and genders were two of his principal challenges. He says, “In my early years with the Centre I participated in semi-private sessions with a French language instructor and a colleague named Robertson. Later on, I attended twice weekly sessions with several other colleagues in a classroom setting geared towards preparing the participants for language proficiency testing. I was pleased to receive exemptions for oral comprehension and reading. My results for oral expression and writing skills, however, were rated at the intermediate level.” Carl also confirms that, like me, the “r’s” never really rolled off the tongue, definitely a hindrance with a name like mine.

In an effort to take from the classroom what we learned and implement it on the shop floor, Linda MacWillie and I decided to speak French to each other on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. This may have been good for language but wasn’t the greatest for law. We eventually decided to speak of complicated issues on Tuesdays and Thursdays only.



After years of semi-dedication, I felt that I could more than “get by” in a second language and had a decent accent. But there were always those little experiences that brought me back to earth, a reminder I was not from Montpellier or Montreal, Reims or Rimouski. Once on a flight from Paris to Dakar sitting beside a Frenchman, we fluently discussed his life, his work and his family in the language of Moliere. But after about 15 minutes he stopped, considered me for a minute, and asked “Vous êtes allemand, monsieur?” C’est la vie.

§

## Alumni News

### **The Hopper Bhatia Fund: Supporting Development and Honouring a Friendship**

The tradition of Alumni support for the mission of IDRC has been greatly enhanced with the establishment of the *David and Ruth Hopper & Ramesh and Pilar Bhatia Canada Fund*. Thanks to the generosity of Ramesh and Pilar, and paired with the existing Rachel DesRosiers Fund, this initiative will provide a tangible means of expressing that support well into the future.

A tripartite agreement between the Bhatias, the Centre and the Alumni provides for a series of awards averaging around \$15,000: one award alternating annually between young Canadian and Indian researchers; one annually to a young Filipino researcher; and, one annually to another developing regional researcher. The contribution to the program by Ramesh and Pilar will total \$115,000 by the end of 2017, of which \$100,000 is as a one-time capital contribution for the said fund. Subsequent

contributions starting in 2018 are set at \$15,000 per year for the remainder of Ramesh's lifetime and, after Ramesh, contributions of \$6,000 per annum will be continued by Pilar for her lifetime. The Centre will also make substantial contributions to the Fund.



Ramesh and Pilar are both well-known to Centre staff from the early days. Following eight years of service with the Rockefeller Foundation in India, Ramesh joined the Centre shortly after one of his superiors from India, David Hopper, was named as President. Working in a variety of administrative roles over the next eleven years at head office and in the field, Ramesh reached the position of Associate Director of Administration. He oversaw everything from general services to office space, field support, procurement, shipping, and travel. He also met Pilar! who worked initially in Administration and subsequently in Communications.

In 1982 Ramesh accepted a position with the Asian Development Bank in Manila. First as Executive Officer in Administrative Services, he worked up to supervisory and line responsibility for all areas of the Benefits function for both professional (expatriate) and supporting (local) staff. Meantime, Pilar had become a full-time mother who later earned a Master's degree from the Asian Institute of Management. Pilar became involved in a small cottage industry business and other profit-making small ventures.

In 1986, the family began thinking long term about the education of their children and returned to North America – this time to Washington, DC, where Pilar was offered a consultancy at the World Bank headquarters. This consultancy and subsequent regular staff appointments in the Asia Region led to other interesting assignments, travel and learning opportunities in South and East Asia in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal. By the time she concluded her service in 2007 Pilar was the Senior Resource Manager for the Operations Evaluations Vice-Presidency.

Ramesh joined the World Bank headquarters staff in October 1989 with the Corporate Planning and Budgeting Vice Presidency and held numerous Washington-based positions including Program Coordinator (Principal Financial Manager) and Senior Projects Manager for day-to-day functioning of the World Bank Group's core front-line operations both at HQ and in the field – visiting over 30 country offices in Eastern Europe, Middle East, South and East Asia, aside from other overseas travel. Following his retirement from the Bank in January 2001, he worked as Senior Projects Officer in the Facilities Management Division of the International Monetary Fund for three years and, subsequently, as a consultant with the World Bank till the latter half of 2005.

Ramesh and Pilar are now happily retired in Manila, though their two children are Canadian residents. Amar is an Assistant Professor at Osgoode Law School and Maya is engaged in post-doctoral studies at UBC and will join the University of Alberta's Earth and Atmospheric Sciences department as an Assistant Professor this autumn. They have four grandchildren.

Throughout their long careers, Ramesh and Pilar never forgot the pleasure and excitement of working at IDRC nor their warm friendship with David and Ruth Hopper. A number of tributes by the Bhatias to them are footnoted for further reading. The establishment of this Fund honours that much cherished friendship and expresses the values both couples maintained throughout their professional careers.

For the Alumni Association, it has been a great pleasure to work with Ramesh, Pilar and IDRC in taking this big step to further enhance the co-operation between the Centre and the people who helped to make it special. Look for periodic reports in the Bulletin in the years to come on the difference the Fund is making in people's careers and lives.



**Ramesh remembers:**<sup>1</sup> “Davidji was a caring man of bold vision -- he inspired those around him to high goals and help built the bridges needed to achieve them as well. As you all well know, he was a man possessing high intellect, compassion and caring – always employing his energies to improve the lives of the poor people around the globe.”

**Pilar remembers:**<sup>2</sup> “A quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, in my view, is most appropriate in describing my own experiences while working for Dr. Hopper over the years at the World Bank as well as the IDRC.”

“Death comes to all, but great achievements build a monument which shall endure until the sun grows cold.”

This is so true of Dr. Hopper as, I feel, he built not one monument but many in his lifetime – monuments of great achievements in several fields and, above all, a monument of love and friendship with his own family and countless friends around the globe.”

Dr. Hopper was remembered in the [IDRC Alumni Bulletin No 26 December 2011](#)

§

## Where are they now?

Shafika Isaacs

In March, alumna Shafika Isaacs was recognized as both *Woman of the Year in Education* and *Woman of Stature 2017 Woman of the Year*, which ranks amongst the most prestigious awards in South Africa for women.

From 1999 to 2001, Shafika was a Senior Programme Officer in the Centre's Acacia Programme exploring ways in which information and communication technologies (ICT) could enable community empowerment across Africa. She credits this experience with catapulting her into the world of digital technologies and human development in Africa, with support for her role in establishing, with her peers, a pan-African NGO, [SchoolNet Africa](#), working with local organisations in sixteen African countries to promote universal access to affordable digital technologies that enable better learning and teaching.



Shafika served on the leadership team of the [World Summit on the Information Society Gender Caucus](#) which fought successfully for the inclusion of gender equity clauses in its 2003 *Declaration of Principles and Platform for Action*. Later she worked with a number of local and international

---

<sup>1</sup> [A Tribute to W. David Hopper: Funeral Service on Sunday, November 27, 2011](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Remembering W. David Hopper: Memorial Service – February 10, 2012](#)

development agencies on the research, design and implementation of digital learning programmes to help reach the development community's *Education for All* goals which are now included in the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015.

Currently Shafika is on assignment with [UNICEF](#) to provide technical support to the [Department of Basic Education](#) in South Africa on digital learning, the [Commonwealth of Learning](#) to support their global TVET programme and [Takalani Sesame](#) and the [Lego Foundation](#) to support teachers to integrate creative play in their classroom practice. She serves on the governing boards of a number of local and global organisations including [GreenMatter](#), [The Lewis Foundation](#), [Telkom Foundation](#), [Bridge HundrED](#), [UNESCO's Mobile Learning Expert Group](#), [Horizon K-12 Panel of Experts](#) and [Online Educa Berlin](#).

Shafika's professional life is about growing firstly as a constantly-improving practitioner in order to work more effectively with children, youth, teachers, principals and policy-makers and build better organizations. She is a PhD candidate at the [University of Johannesburg](#)'s Soweto Campus where she also serves as Research Associate at the [Centre for Education Practice Research](#).

The [Woman of Stature Woman of the Year Award](#) recognizes that with professional dedication and scholarship Shafika achieves the balanced life where she is also wife, mother, and personal coach who loves yoga, nature, home-made roti and curry and [Cape Malay koeksisters](#).

§

## Steve Song

Steve writes from Nova Scotia:



I joined IDRC in 1997 to lead a connectivity project for Robert Valentin and Zbig Mikolajuk. I had a budget of 2 million dollars with the remit of figuring out how to connect IDRC-funded researchers all around the world. This was a dream job for me: a host of interesting technological challenges that involved meeting fascinating people in unusual places. When the project expired, I joined the Bellanet International Secretariat working for David Balson where we explored the nature of knowledge, how and where it is stored and

how it flows from person to person and organisation to organisation. A key challenge was understanding the role of the Internet in sharing knowledge. I enjoyed helping organisations think through the challenges of organisational knowledge in the Internet age.

I moved into Rich Fuchs ICT4D division to head up a Government of Canada-funded project called Connectivity Africa. This merged with the Acacia program, IDRC's internal African ICTs for development research program where for four years I led a fantastic team of people.

I really appreciated the sense of community and identity that was a part of working for IDRC. It was a privilege to work with so many genuinely passionate and smart people. From a career perspective, I have most appreciated watching those researchers in the Global South whose work IDRC supported grow into leadership roles in their respective countries.

I will never forget my first Christmas party at IDRC in 1997. Having joined the Centre from the private sector, I was unprepared for the familial, dare I say homespun, nature of Christmas

festivities. The skits, the music, it was all quite mortifying. I fought the urge to slink away. Needless to say, a year later I was in the thick of it, hamming it up with the best of them. For me those events spoke volumes about the way that IDRC embraced its people with all of their idiosyncrasies. I feel privileged to have experienced that and to have been a part of that community.

I miss the Mayflower pub in the late '90s - early 2000s where it was home to a lovely bunch of post-work IDRC folk. I think most of what I know about organisational management, I learned at the Mayflower.

I left IDRC to take up a fellowship at the Shuttleworth Foundation in South Africa. That launched a new phase in my career, from civil servant to entrepreneur, founding a social enterprise called Village Telco that manufactures low-cost WiFi equipment for affordable rural communication. Although this hasn't yet taken off as a sustainable business it has led me deeper into the world of affordable access to communication in Africa, a field in which I am now alternately a researcher, a writer, an activist, and a consultant.

After 5 years in Cape Town, our family moved to Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Last year we bought a lovely old house overlooking the sea just outside the town where we raise chickens and I get to exercise my passion for renovation; at least when I am not travelling on business. Most of my work is still in Sub-Saharan Africa so I am on the road a lot. Katherine and I have three boys: Dylan, Nathan, and Alasdair who are 11, 11, and 10 years old.

I have to come clean and say that I always felt like something of a busker at IDRC: a university drop-out (something I never revealed unless questioned directly) among a sea of PhDs. In hindsight, I recognise that we're all buskers in life. I am more comfortable in my own skin these days and wish I could transport back in time to give that advice to my younger self.



Steve doesn't mention the [TED Global](#) he gave in Brazil in 2014 nor a wonderful After Action report, [Failure to Ted](#), on his blog, [manypossibilities.net](#).

Ed

§

## Gallery



John Woolston with Ed and Sheila Brandon in BC 2006

§

James Pfeifer and David Hopper at a dinner hosted by Ramesh and Pilar Bhatia in Ottawa in 2003



§

## Letters to the Editor

I was pleased to read Rob's feature on the NGOs. There are libraries of writing on the how, what, why, where, when, of NGOs. Canadian researchers have been fecund contributors to such, the Dean being Ian Smiley. Although Red Cross, Amnesty, Oxfam, Save the Children, the Student Christian Movement for example have deep histories it has long been my sense that in Canada the 'NGO working in international development' can be attributed to CIDA and in particular to its erstwhile *Public Participation Programme* (PPP) set up by the late Louis Perinbaum. That PPP factor says much about what, for Canadians, an NGO is...a vehicle for public participation in solving / resolving existential dilemmas...poverty, paganism, pestilence, plutocrats....



Within that frame of reference, when a player I thought of NGOs as a category separate from other 'official / state categories'. Ideally NGOs arose from people organizing to overcome shared experience / hardship / disadvantage. One had to hope that the leadership that all such initiatives / movements needed were to be trusted. In an ideal world, NGOs find each other to deal with the question *What is to be done?*

A main function of an NGO in a developed country is to be a megaphone for the issues allying it with the colleague NGO in the underdeveloped country. Eventually the news and stories that come through that megaphone raise funds to cover the costs of 'being', sustain the plea, and with vehicles like CIDA, IDRC, DfID etc. channel resources (people, knowledge, funds,...) to where remediation is needed.

Recent banausic policy to defund NGOs is primary evidence of just how effective they are at identifying the problems that the politicians perpetually promise to alleviate and perpetually never can. That action also underscored how irksome the current state of NGO evolution was for government when they have formed coalitions... CCIC, AUCC (Universities Canada),...and to turn up the volume of the megaphone and recruit citizens / voters to their point of view and programmes of action.



As a crown corporation, IDRC is a hybrid sort of state / (sort of) NGO entity. It was my experience that the researcher cohort we were empowered to find and work with treated IDRC as an NGO. As a programme officer coming from three years at WUSC working with students, faculty, academia, I thought and operated as though IDRC were more NGO than not as I met the same actors and settings under very different funding / power/ discretion parameters.

Final thoughts; trying, from the news, to understand what international development is now and where NGOs work, I find flak jackets and blue helmets as part of the orientation and kit for Canadian volunteers, implementers, Hobbits, Samaritans...and I wonder why my generation didn't do better.



§

## In Memoriam



Albert “Bert” St-Amand,  
1934 – 2017

Bert died on January 6<sup>th</sup>. His successful career in the Civil Service led him to I.D.R.C. where was Director of Administrative Services from 1983 to 1996. Click for the full [obituary](#).

Colleagues remember Bert:

I will always remember Bert with smile on his face. He taught me everything there was to know about property management, construction and dealing with people regardless of their level within IDRC. His guidance and experience helped us to relocate IDRC from 60 Queen to 250 Albert with ease. And Carl and I used the same methods to successfully move the organization to 150 Kent. No matter the situation Bert always had your back. He was truly “old school “.

He was a great story teller and had lots of them about life and all its ups and downs. If you treated him with respect, he showed you a loyalty like no other. It is fitting that I am in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina on his passing as it was a place that he loved to vacation to and play golf.

Bernie McDonald

When he arrived at the Centre, one of Bert's first challenges was planning and coordinating the move of our headquarters from 60 Queen Street to 250 Albert. Bert had a wealth of administrative experience gained from previous assignments within the Public Service. Those of us who worked alongside him during that project, as well as many other assignments for which he was responsible during his career with the Centre, were fortunate to have learned a great deal from him.

Bert totally loved his work, and carried out his responsibilities with confidence and enthusiasm. One of his strengths was the ability to find ways to get things done, in spite of the many obstacles that often presented themselves to him. Bert realized the importance of his staff, and knew both when to delegate, and when to roll up his sleeves and pitch in where help was needed.

On a personal level he was very sociable, loved the interaction with staff and colleagues, and was indeed a lot of fun to work with.

Carl Chambers

Bert was very helpful to me during the International AIDS Conference in Montreal. We put him in charge of liaison with the various police departments who were in charge of security - and he was a real team player who made IDRC look good in hosting the event.

Did we not move the IDRC Office to Albert Street in his honour?

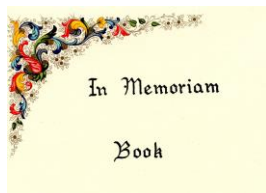
Claude Paul Boivin

Bert was one of a kind...lots of fun and very proud of IDRC.

Rob Robertson

§

## The IN MEMORIAM book on line



At early annual gatherings of the IDRC Alumni one question was perennial. ‘Have you heard from ... lately?’ often answered with word that the alumnus/alumna had died.

It was James ‘Jim’ Pfeiffer, first Chair of the IDRC Alumni, who proposed an appropriate and elegant way to remember IDRC colleagues who have died; an Alumni IN MEMORIAM book with calligraphy that would be displayed each year when we gather.

With Jim’s spouse, Jennifer, offering to do the calligraphy, the Album was ready for the Alumni gathering in 2005 and has been updated and displayed at subsequent events.

Click for the [IDRC Alumni IN MEMORIAM album](#)

§

## Bulletin Archive on Line



Past issues of the IDRC Alumni Bulletin, from the first edition in January 2003, are now available in the [ARCHIVE folder](#). The ARCHIVE folder has subfolders for each year, starting in 2003, and each year folder has a subfolder for English and another for Français. Bilingual bulletins are copied under each of the language folders.

Bulletins for 1 to 26 are either English or French. From 27-39 they are bilingual and from 40 on, either English or French.



*Don't be shy? Join IDRC Alumni on Facebook:  
at "IDRC Alumni" group and / or "IDRC" page.*



<https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/556623107712593/>