

SPRING 2026

ROSE

MAGAZINE

CASSANDRA BACHOR

A conversation with the
heavy metal maiden of
holistic coaching.

MEET THE TEAM

Ruby Cole-Ellis
Co-Founder / Editor-in-Chief

Ruby Cole-Ellis is a Guatemalan-born businesswoman, designer, business coach, and financial advisor who has called Canada home since 2013. As Editor-in-Chief and Co-Founder of ROSE Magazine, she brings over a decade of experience in entrepreneurship and creative direction, championing bold, ambitious, heart-led women everywhere.



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Rachel Stewart is from Calgary, Alberta. With a background in program evaluation and project management, her work connects strategic planning with data-driven decision-making and storytelling. As Content Director and Co-Founder of ROSE Magazine, she supports contributors in crafting pieces that inspire action while staying true to themselves.



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Ashley King
Photography Partner

Ashley was born and raised in Florida for 14 years and has called Alberta home for two decades. She is a mom of two boys, wife, and fur mom to a dog and cat. A passionate photographer and certified makeup artist, she captures real, raw, radiant beauty and tells stories.



Thank you Matt for always holding down the fort while I chased countless projects and now this dream.

Thank you Rachel for believing in me and jumping into this project wholeheartedly.

Thank you to Luci, for standing beside me through years of projects and crazy ideas.. I truly could not do this without you.

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And for Mike, Joanne, Jessie, CJ, and Phoebe - for letting us crash at your place whenever ROSE brought Chris and I to Central Alberta.

To my family and friends, thank you for your endless support and belief in me.

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CONTENTS



6
Letter From the Editor

8
Cassandra Bachor
A conversation with the heavy metal maiden of holistic coaching

16
Your Personal Shopper for Life's Biggest Purchase
What mortgage broker Tanya Rogalczyk wants every woman to know before she buys her next home

22
The Colour of My Skin is Not My Dictionary
A Dominican woman's search for self in black and white

26
Rising Through Fire
How I survived war, displacement, and cancer and learned to rebuild after disruption

30
The Gift of Freude
What Zona Screery's mother passed down and what she's built with it



33

ROSE's Picks

Not sponsored - just what we're loving right now

34

Self-Advocacy is a Funding Strategy

Funding is not a reward for exhaustion - it is infrastructure for impact

38

Want to Dream With Me?

My vision for those of us staying in Edmonton

42

How to Be the Heroine of Your Career Story

Discover and share your career value to take you to your next chapter

48

Final Note

The Story of ROSE

50

Business Directory

A curated selection of brands, creatives, and businesses we love

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

What began as a dream shared between Rachel, Luci, and me has been years in the making. So many conversations, risks, setbacks, and leaps of faith had to align to bring us here, which makes this debut issue feel even more meaningful.

This issue, our inaugural Spring edition, marks the beginning of what we hope will become a powerful platform for the stories of Canadian millennial women: stories of resilience, originality, savviness, and empowerment. Throughout, we have carefully curated stories centered around spring... seasons of rebirth, growth, renewal, and overcoming the long winter. Nature reminds us that transformation is never instant, but it is always possible. Just as the seasons don't rush themselves, we hope this issue gives you permission to slow down, breathe, and let yourself bloom at your own pace.

We could not have imagined a more fitting cover woman than Cassandra Bachor. Cassandra embodies everything we envision ROSE to be: multifaceted, grounded, powerful, and deeply authentic. From her love of heavy metal and motorbikes to the tenderness she pours into homemaking, motherhood, and caring for her family, she reminds us that women do not need to fit neatly into one box to be extraordinary. As both a client and admirer, I have witnessed firsthand how she empowers women to heal, love themselves, and shine from the inside out.

We also invite you to explore our Business Directory, featuring incredible women-led businesses we are proud to support and recommend. Every business included has been thoughtfully selected and vetted by ROSE Magazine, and we hope you will continue helping us build a community where women uplift and champion one another.

This magazine is only the beginning, and community is at the center of everything we hope to create. Please stay connected with us, follow along on social media, and never hesitate to reach out, my inbox is always open.

Welcome to the very first issue of ROSE Magazine Canada. We hope you love it as much as we loved creating it.

With love,



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Cassandra Bachor

A conversation with the heavy metal maiden of holistic coaching.

Interview by Rachel Stewart, Content Director & Co-Founder.

The first thing Cassandra Bachor ever owned that was entirely hers was a piano. Gifted by her grandmother when she was nine years old, it became the one constant in a life that was rarely simple. As life grew more complicated, classical piano found its counterpart in heavy metal. Where she had trained on the architecture of Beethoven and Bach – the scales, the precision, the emotional discipline required to make something technically demanding feel inevitable – she found the same qualities in bands like Nevermore; layered, compositionally complex, unapologetically intense. She found two forms that looked nothing alike yet shared everything underneath.

Today, Cassandra is, depending on how you find her, a holistic lifestyle coach, a piano teacher, and a mother of three. She developed the Luxe Method TM, a four-pillar framework addressing the mental, emotional, physical, and energetic layers of health, out of necessity, after years of chronic, relentless post-concussion symptoms that were minimized by doctors and left for her to solve herself. We first spoke with her earlier this year, when she walked us through the origins of that practice. That conversation told us what she had made of her life. This one goes earlier – to the girl on the farm who felt everything deeply, who found structure, complexity, and discipline in music, and who understood, long before she had the language for it, that the only person who was ever going to figure out her body was her.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.





RACHEL: Let's start before the coaching, before even the concussions as a teenager. What was life like for you as a kid?

CASSANDRA: I grew up on a farm. I spent most days outside playing, quadding, being in the garden.. it was a pretty simple life. I was always very driven, a straight-A student. I always pressured myself to do things to the best of my ability. I was a pretty quiet kid, and looking back, I was very observant. I felt everything really deeply, which probably plays a huge role in why I chose the practice I'm in and why I seek to connect with people how I do.

On the other hand, I also grew up in a completely different world on my dad's side. I travelled internationally with him from a young age and was exposed to his luxury business world. Having separated parents meant I grew up balancing two very different environments at the same time. That contrast, from a very simple farm life to that intense business environment, probably shaped who I am today and made me want to build something meaningful and my own.

RACHEL: Where did piano come into this?

CASSANDRA: When I was nine, my grandma gifted me her piano. It was the main constant in my life. I had weekly piano lessons no matter what was happening – school, life changes, relationships, events. Piano was always there. It was something that belonged entirely to me, no matter what else was going on around me.

RACHEL: And you're classically trained?

CASSANDRA: Yes. I studied classical music, like the real conservatory curriculum and classical pieces all the way through. I learned the scales, the technique, the theory, it's the foundational structure behind piano and where so much of musical training originates. That's what I practised my whole life.

RACHEL: Where did metal music come into the picture?

CASSANDRA: I always listened to the radio growing up, so rock and roll was a huge part of my life. But metal really found me during my teenage years, when a lot of difficult things unfolded. I think I naturally leaned toward music that matched the intensity I was feeling internally. It helped me become more in tune with my innermost feelings.

My love of music eventually turned into my first major entrepreneurial venture. At sixteen, I had a dream of opening a record shop, and we built it from the ground up, including the shelves themselves. More than a decade later, it's still serving the community today.

Music, metal and classical, have definitely carried me through different seasons, in one way or another. It was always constant. It kept that drive in me going. And it wires your brain differently – the discipline, the structure, the complexity. It's like learning a new language. It rewires everything and I guess you could say, rewires me, too.

RACHEL: What does a classically trained pianist hear in metal?

CASSANDRA: What drew me in was how much it related to classical music. A lot of metal is compositionally complex – it's layered, emotional, theatrical. Being classically trained, my brain was naturally drawn to that. The heaviness and rawness of metal gave me an intensity that classical music didn't.

A lot of metal is compositionally complex – it's layered, emotional, theatrical. Being classically trained, my brain was naturally drawn to that. The heaviness and rawness of metal gave me an intensity that classical music didn't.

It's almost chaotic, the way classical music actually is. Metal is just the intense version of that. It's raw. It's real. The lyrics are relatable. It takes your mind to those extremes that you sometimes need. I can't explain it beyond that and I think that's the point. That's why so many people find it therapeutic. Scientifically, metal can actually help regulate emotions, release built-up tension, and rewire the brain because of its intensity and complexity.

RACHEL: Looking back at your experience with concussions as a teenager, what do you think that younger version of you was figuring out about herself, even before she had the language for it?

CASSANDRA: Going through the trauma of the concussions and then dealing with years of symptoms and indescribable feelings forced me to become stronger mentally, whether I realized it or not. I spent a long time carrying physical and emotional weight that I didn't even know I was carrying, because when you're young, you assume what you're experiencing is normal. But over the years it builds up, it layers.

What I found very early was that the mind and body are deeply interconnected. Movement, exercise, nutrition, stress, environment, mindset – all of it affects your ability to function as a whole. Exercise became more about survival. I had to do it in order to function, to manage the pain. It helped me maintain not only physical strength but mental strength as well.

I learned firsthand that mindset shapes your reality, including how your body responds and heals. The energy you carry, the thoughts you repeat, the environment you choose, it all matters more than people realize, including physically. That's what pushed me toward holistic healing. I became fascinated with how interconnected everything really was. I didn't have the language for any of it at the time, but I knew there had to be more than chasing pills and being told it was all in my head.

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RACHEL: How about when you were older? You had three children in under three years, all by C-section. What did that season teach you about yourself?

CASSANDRA: Those years really proved to me that the systems I'd built through my debilitating injury recovery were real and powerful. Motherhood shows you how far the body can be pushed in every possible way: physically, mentally, emotionally, energetically. But it also shows you how you can bring your body and mind back to ground zero just by creating a stable, non-negotiable daily routine. The body heals and stabilizes best when you properly support it.

It also taught me that these habits don't just affect you anymore. They get passed down to your kids through the environment you create, the energy you carry, the way you handle life. Strength is as simple as continuing to show up for yourself every day. And that bleeds into every other area of your life.

RACHEL: How did you stay connected to yourself during that time?

CASSANDRA: Motherhood can be a very disconnecting experience, but also very grounding. Through pregnancy, birth, postpartum, breastfeeding... there's nothing light about any of it. Your body is changing constantly. Your identity changes. Your priorities change. There are moments where you almost forget who you are completely, because you pour everything into everyone else.

What kept me grounded was maintaining a basic, non-negotiable routine that was for me and only me. Not for my appearance. Not primarily to bounce back – though that was part of my mindset – but because I knew it was necessary to keep myself functioning at my best, mentally and physically. Clean eating, the mental work, continuing to prioritize the basics even when life doesn't give you time. But yet, there's always time, it's just about making your health a priority.

RACHEL: When did you first realize that what you'd been through could actually help other people?

CASSANDRA: I think it really hit me when I was 18, dealing with the hardest aftermath of my injuries becoming chronic. I couldn't live in that physical state anymore. So I began studying herbalism and got my herbalist diploma. I even worked in a health store part time, alongside my two other jobs, to completely immerse myself in that world.



That changed how I viewed the body and health entirely. I realized how interconnected everything was... the nutrition, the stress, the nervous system, gut health, all of it. The body is constantly communicating with you, and modern life has really disconnected people from being in tune with what it actually needs.

The deeper I got into herbalism and holistic health, the more I started questioning what had become normal in society, like the constant state of hustle culture, the lack of movement, the real dependence on convenience... People are functioning far below what their body is truly capable of, but it's become so normalized that nobody questions it anymore.

That's what pushed me toward coaching. I didn't just want to be an herbalist. I wanted to address all the layers because everything is connected. I don't believe I have all the answers, but I know what it feels like to live in a body that's struggling.

RACHEL: Has a client's story ever moved you in a way that deepened your understanding of your practice?

CASSANDRA: There hasn't been one specific story, but there's definitely been a common denominator. With a lot of the women I've worked with, though I think this applies to men too, it comes down to some sort of loss – loss of confidence, loss of control, loss of a relationship, or even a version of themselves they used to know. Everyone's story is different, but that underlying feeling is typically the same: a deep disconnection they're trying to find their way back from.

What's powerful is realizing that healing isn't just external. It's actually mostly internal. It happens when someone reaches a point where they can't continue living as disconnected as they have been. Most women aren't just looking for weight loss or routines or motivation, even though they think they are. They're looking to feel like themselves again, to feel connected, to operate at the level they know they're truly meant to. When people feel truly at ease in that space, it creates room for change.

RACHEL: If you were speaking to a woman who is ready to start understanding her own body – at any age and stage or life – where would you tell her to start?

CASSANDRA: Don't ignore what your body is telling you. Practically-speaking, you have to get in tune with your body to figure out where the issue is stemming from, and then you have to accept that only you can fix it. No one else can do it for you. It all starts with mindset. If you flip your mindset and challenge your negative thoughts, and begin removing limiting blocks, you start shifting your energy. It really does begin there.

RACHEL: The wellness industry has a complicated relationship with women's bodies. What do you think it's getting right, and where do you hope it grows?

CASSANDRA: It's evolving, but in both the right and wrong ways. The wrong ways are the endless expensive trends, the quick fixes, the overcomplicated things that make people feel like real health is only reachable if you're extreme or spending a fortune. But in the right ways, more people are becoming aware that they need to take better care of themselves mentally and physically.

From my perspective, fitness is becoming more realistic and approachable and this is one of the biggest positive shifts. People are walking more, hitting their steps, doing strength training, prioritizing sleep, and getting outside. More women are going to the gym. You mainly need consistency with the basics for change and I like that this message is resonating with people.

RACHEL: Beyond your coaching practice, what do you hope people understand about who you are?

CASSANDRA: More than anything, I want people to understand that I genuinely want to see others reach their full potential. Your mind and body can reach levels that are almost inexplicable, and you can get there with the most basic practices. People are more capable – mentally, physically, creatively, professionally – than they realize. I see that in them, and I want them to see that in themselves.

People are more capable – mentally, physically, creatively, professionally – than they realize. I see that in them, and I want them to see that in themselves.

Beyond the work, I deeply value meaningful connection within yourself and with others. Simplicity. Everyone's uniqueness. Discipline. I don't believe success is built on perfection. It's built through doing something whether you're ready or not. Through it all, I'm a mother, a business owner, a music teacher, and I'm just a person navigating life like everyone else. But I strongly believe that the energy you carry is the energy you live. You decide the work you put in. You decide the outcome. And I think that personal responsibility is one of the most empowering things you can have for yourself.



Coach Cass is a holistic lifestyle strategist helping women rewire their body, rebuild their energy, and reclaim themselves through her 15-Minute Mastery Method™. Her work focuses on sustainable transformation through mindset, habits, nervous system stability, and the standards required to operate at higher levels.



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Your Personal Shopper For Life's Biggest Purchase

What mortgage broker Tanya Rogalczyk wants every woman to know before she buys her next home.

Interview by Rachel Stewart, Content Director & Co-Founder.



It's 10:00 AM on a rainy Friday morning, and Tanya Rogalczyk and I are already laughing. Unplanned, we've both shown up makeup-free, in comfy clothes, and cradling oversized mugs. We're on Google Meet, and already, our meeting feels less like an interview and more like catching up with a friend. It was the kind of conversation where you lose track of time, and forget you had an agenda.

Tanya is a mortgage broker and founder of Simply Mortgages with Dominion Lending Centres Maximal Mortgages, which means she spends her days helping people navigate one of the most loaded, emotionally charged financial decisions of their lives. But talking to her, you'd never feel the weight of that. She has a rare ability to make a fixed-rate versus variable conversation feel like something you'd actually want to have – preferably over a cup of tea.

We came together to talk about the current housing market, mortgage myths, and why getting a mortgage might be simpler than you think.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



RACHEL: You've been in the financial industry for over 20 years, moved from Ontario, are raising two boys, and are running your own business in Central Alberta. How'd you get here?

TANYA: When I moved to Alberta, I got into the banking industry, working my way up through customer service management before pivoting into lending after a move from Calgary to Innisfail. When I was pregnant with our youngest, we were looking for our first home and I heard an ad for mortgage brokers. Something clicked. I wanted things to be less black and white. Just because the bank said no didn't mean it made sense. By that time, I had learned more about how different files work, so I became a Mortgage Broker, and eventually built Simply Mortgages, and never looked back. The goal from day one was to be home for my kids, and it's worked out perfectly.

RACHEL: What made you go all-in on mortgages specifically?

TANYA: I just love problem solving and finding solutions that make numbers work for people – making their payments more affordable or helping them get out of a situation that doesn't feel like a fit for them. I could have stayed at the bank, but I knew there were more ways to help, more options, and more flexibility. That's what the mortgage broker side gave me.

RACHEL: How do people know that it's the right time to buy their first (or second!) property?

TANYA: It really depends on the person. No two clients or two mortgages are alike. I think about housing as something that shifts with wherever you are in life. You might dream of a \$600,000 home, but right now, a \$300,000 starter home might be the smarter move because it gets your foot in the door, and builds equity that you can use to make your next purchase. On the flip side, I have clients who are ready to downsize now that the kids are gone and want less space and financial weight. That's just as valid. That's why every introduction call I have with a client starts with the same questions: what are your goals, and where do you see yourself in the next couple of years? Their answers shape everything, even which rate we choose.

RACHEL: In your view, what's happening in Alberta's real estate market right now that people might not know about?

TANYA: Home values have gone up considerably over the last couple of years, which means a lot of homeowners are sitting on equity they might not realize they have. I'm seeing clients who are locked in at 2% who are now worried about their renewal payments, but when we look at their equity, refinancing can be a smart strategy.



We can lower their monthly payments and use that equity to pay off high-stress debt. And for buyers? It's still a great time to get in, because values should keep growing.

RACHEL: I imagine affordability comes up in almost every conversation. How do you navigate that?

TANYA: I collect all the paperwork upfront, and from there we have a really open conversation about what's realistic. The calculation is based on what income is coming in and what expenses are going out. I always ask clients what they feel they can comfortably afford, because just because the numbers say you qualify for a \$600,000 mortgage doesn't mean that's the right mortgage for you. If your goal is to travel and not be tied to a big payment every month, we need to know that. We always strategize to find options for each situation, even if it means revisiting the mortgage conversation in six months to a year.

RACHEL: This takes me back to when I bought my Calgary apartment in 2018. I was just turning 30, single, and not entirely sure I could pull it off. Hearing my broker confirm I qualified on my own income was a very proud moment. (The man I'd marry showed up and moved in a few months later, but that's another story).

So many people are loyal to their bank, likely having had a checking account at the same place since they were teenagers. Why should they call you instead?

TANYA: Think of me as your personal Mortgage shopper. I'm comparing rates across 50 lenders so you don't have to go bank to bank. But it's not always just about the rate, either. Different lenders have different guidelines, It's about finding the lender that actually fits the client's full financial picture. And beyond that, accessibility matters. Brokers don't keep the stereotypical "9 to 5" hours that a bank does, and the whole process can be handled completely remotely if that's what works for you.

RACHEL: If your best friend texted you tomorrow and said "I think I want to buy a house, I have no idea where to start," what would you say?

TANYA: No problem, let's get your paperwork together and get you prequalified. That first step matters more than people realize. There's nothing more heartbreaking than a client who comes in thinking they make \$100,000 a year, and when we run the actual numbers, it's closer to \$80,000. It happens more than you'd think. Getting an accurate preapproval number means you know exactly what your budget is so you can shop with confidence.

RACHEL: What mortgage myth makes you want to flip a table?

TANYA: One of the biggest misconceptions I hear is that you automatically need 20% down to buy a second property. In reality, if the new property will be owner occupied, there are situations where buyers may qualify with as little as 5% down, even if they already own another home.

A lot of homeowners use this as a long term real estate strategy. Rather than selling their current home, they may choose to keep it as a rental and purchase their next home as their new primary residence. Over time, this can help them build equity and grow their real estate holdings gradually.

It's also something first time buyers should think about early. Starting with a smaller starter home can create opportunities later on to move into a larger property while potentially keeping the original home as an investment, depending on their financial position and qualification at the time.

RACHEL: That's the goal for this apartment, actually. My husband and I dream of a detached house with a guest room, a bigger kitchen, and a dog. He wants a Saint Bernard, so we'd like a yard, too. We'll get there...

TANYA: And that's exactly what I love about this job — hearing people's goals and their dreams, and being able to say: let's make it happen. When a dream is tied to finances, it can feel so much further away than it really is.

I also talk to clients about how even when you get a bigger home, like a three-level split with a bedroom upstairs and a basement downstairs, you're likely going to spend most of your time in the main area, so bigger isn't necessarily better. At least that's been my experience! Every home I've lived in, most of my time is spent on the main floor with my family.

RACHEL: What about the myth that you have to use the mortgage broker that your realtor recommends?



TANYA: You don't, but clients do feel that pressure. What I'd caution against is switching brokers mid-process without a good reason. If I've been working with a client and they suddenly move to a different broker, that new broker doesn't know what we've already done, and now there are multiple people pulling their credit, which can actually hurt them. So: you have every right to choose your own broker, but choose early and stay consistent.

RACHEL: And debt – do you need to be debt-free to qualify?

TANYA: No. We factor all your payments into the equation. Sometimes if someone has a loan at \$400 a month and it's almost paid off, I'll suggest taking a few months to clear it because it significantly increases their buying power. But sometimes carrying that debt alongside a mortgage is desired, and we figure out how to make it work. It's always case by case.

I find people assume getting a mortgage, especially when you have debt, is harder than it is. The subject overall feels intimidating, so they avoid it altogether. But any property, whether you're a landlord or not, is an investment. Everything I've been reading lately points to real estate as one of the best ways to build a legacy: as you pay it down, the value goes up, and there's more money to be gained on the property.

RACHEL: I'll admit, I'm one of those intimidated people. Every time my mortgage comes up for renewal, I over-prepare, and the moment someone asks me something I don't immediately know, I freeze. Why do you think it feels so daunting?

TANYA: I think it comes down to the fact that we just don't talk about money in Canadian culture. So when a mortgage, new or renewed, comes up, this big, high-cost transaction, it feels like you're supposed to already know everything, and you don't. But that's what I'm here for. You should be able to trust your mortgage broker the way you trust any other professional in your life. I wouldn't be able to do your job, so why should you feel pressured to do mine?

And if you forgot something, you could just text me and I'd remind you!

RACHEL: For the reader whose mortgage renewal is coming up, what do they need to know that they probably don't?

TANYA: Start earlier than you think you need to. At Simply Mortgages, we reach out to our clients seven months before their renewal, and the worst thing they can do is let those emails sit. Rates can shift dramatically in that window. No one expected the war in Iran earlier this year, and fixed rates went from 3.79% to 4.44% practically overnight. It can work the other way too and we might lock in at a higher rate, and then rates drop. We're watching their file the entire time. No one can predict the future, but we can think about it.

RACHEL: Imagine someone is reading ROSE Magazine over their morning coffee, and they think, "okay, I'm ready to take that next step". What do you want her to know?

TANYA: I'd want her to know that the first step is just a conversation. Reach out to me in whatever way feels comfortable. We have remote and in-person options, whatever works. I call it the introductory call: we get to know each other, talk through her goals, and take it from there. Simple as that.



Tanya brings over 20 years of experience in the financial industry and a strong track record of success. Originally from Ontario, she now proudly calls Alberta home, where she and her husband stay busy raising their two boys. The family is active year-round — chasing their boys in golf.

Tanya's career is marked by excellence, including recognition as one of the Top 50 Mortgage Professionals in Canada (Monthly Funded Mortgages, 2025), Top 2% Nationwide in 2025, and a DLC Hall of Fame Award Recipient in 2024. Known for her in-depth knowledge of the mortgage market and client-first approach, Tanya is committed to making the mortgage process smooth, clear, and stress-free for every client.

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The Colour of My Skin is Not My Dictionary

A Dominican woman's search for self in black and white.

Patrevian Javier-Gomez



My identity was a riddle no one in Canada cared to solve. People thought they already had the answer, as if it sat plainly on the surface of my skin. One quick glance, and the question, always blunt, always confident, would land: “You’re Black, right?” It followed me everywhere, not like curiosity but like a shadow, like a stamp that someone else pressed onto my forehead before I could speak for myself.

What they didn’t understand was that long before I learned to introduce myself in English, I was already unriddling the definitions they forced onto me. They tried to translate me with a single word, as if my skin could tell the whole story of who I am, where I come from, and what shaped me. Before I had the language to explain myself, I was already pushing against the dictionary handed to me, one I had never agreed to, one that erased more than it revealed.

I grew up trying to find my reflection in the space between Black and Latina, in the gap between how I was seen and who I knew myself to be. While I secretly listened to Simon and Garfunkel on tinny headphones and ate granola bars in the cafeteria, the world had already decided where I belonged and what that belonging meant. There was nothing wrong with being Black, what was wrong was how the word was used to cage me, to file me, to close the book on me before the first chapter was even read. It left no room for my mangú mornings or merengue nights, for the Caribbean breeze drifting across my grandmother’s courtyard in Samaná, for the soft, rapid Spanish of my tías, for the smell of sofrito that wrapped me like a second heartbeat.

Instead of a tapestry, they saw a flat label. Instead of a culture, a checkbox.

I became a walking contradiction, a constant correction of my own existence.

“You’re Latina? But you have dark skin.”

“But you don’t have an accent.”

“But you’re really from there?”

Every assumption felt like someone slowly peeling away my truth, trying to expose something that wasn't there. I was molded from mofongo and raised on bachata and merengue. I spent my earliest years with my abuela, my first language, Spanish, I later lost and had to painfully reclaim. Every sentence I relearned as an adult felt like stitching my tongue back to the place it belonged.

Yet here, in Canada, the fullness of that identity, the layered history of a Dominican diaspora shaped by Taino roots, Spanish colonialism, African resistance, and European migration was flattened into a single shade. My compass pointed to Samaná and Loma de Cabrera, but the world insisted on redirecting me to places I revered but did not call home.

In school, I lived in a quiet borderland.

Too light-skinned with a Spanish name to fit comfortably into the Black circles formed around a shared North American history I didn't fully understand.

Too dark to be embraced without hesitation in some Latino groups, where a whispered "pero ella es morena" could feel like a velvet rope quietly blocking the door.

Not Black enough to be Black.

Too dark to be Latina.

A ghost in two houses, haunting both thresholds.

Assimilation felt less like an invitation and more like a demand. If I wanted to belong, I had to break myself into pieces and hide the ones that didn't fit. So I starved my Spanish on purpose, letting it shrink inside me until the words felt foreign in my own mouth. I ironed my curls into submission with chemicals and heat, believing that "professional" meant "straighter, smoother, smaller." Now that curls are celebrated and commodified, I think of every burn and sting I endured trying to erase the parts of me that were actually beautiful.

"Now that curls are celebrated and commodified, I think of every burn and sting I endured trying to erase the parts of me that were actually beautiful."

And the world didn't hesitate to reinforce what box it believed I fit into. I remember a teacher, an adult who should have nurtured instead of wounded, telling me I was a "bad seed," that girls like me didn't grow into much. A racialized child with a learning disability? The ceiling was low, they said, and I should know my place beneath it.

Yet here I stand, older now, softer in some ways, stronger in others, working in a field where I support the very educators who shape young minds. I know teachers today who champion their students, who celebrate diversity, who see each child's unique brilliance. My journey was different, but it taught me to recognize the educators who do the work with intention, compassion, and courage.

The racism thrown at me throughout my life, sometimes subtle, sometimes sharp, was never innate or organic. It was learned, taught, absorbed. Children do not arrive in this world knowing how to hate. They learn it from the people who hand them the same narrow dictionary that was once forced on me.

So I began asking myself questions others demanded of me:

Am I Black or Latina?

Why do I have to choose?

Why can't I be both and still be wholly myself?

My Blackness, some might argue, sits at the surface.

My culture runs deeper, rooted in my Dominican soul.

DEI—Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, often tries to address these tensions. But DEI is not a ladder for people of colour to climb out of disadvantage; it is a recognition that the ground was uneven long before we arrived. It attempts to expand the dictionary, yet often still wants to write the entries for us. A checkbox cannot hold the complexity of a people, a culture, or a lived experience.

At one point, I tried on the label the world kept handing me. If this is how I'm seen, I thought, then this must be what I am. But wearing an identity that doesn't quite fit feels like a coat that's both too tight and strangely empty. Friends who identify as Black told me the pragmatic truth: "You're Black here because that's how you're treated." And I've met many African immigrants who said they "became Black" only after arriving in Canada. A country that prides itself on multiculturalism still clings to a racial binary that flattens everything in its path.

But I am not a symbol. I am not a demographic. I am not a simplified story packaged for consumption.

I am a layered identity.

I am a living history.

I am my ancestors' resilience made flesh.

My family heritage is a braid of migrations and mixtures of Spanish, Italian, African, Indigenous woven into the distinct identity of being Dominican. My name itself carries the spirit of grandmothers, distant lands, and family histories that survived oceans.

My journey through these in-between spaces taught me that institutions will always try to hand you a dictionary. But you must write your own glossary.

So does my skin dictate that I am Afro-Caribbean? It is part of my truth, but not the title of my story.

Do I need to justify or adjust my identity to make sense to others? I refuse.

I am brown.

I am of colour.

I am Latina.

I am Dominican.

I am all the things my skin hints at and all the things it cannot possibly contain.

My skin is not my dictionary, it is simply the beautiful, melanated cover of a far richer text. And finally, I am learning to read my story in my own voice, on my own terms, with no one else holding the pen.

“My skin is not my dictionary,
it is simply the beautiful,
melanated cover of a far richer
text.”



Patrievan (Patty) Javier Gomez is a Dominican-Canadian HR Advisor at a Canadian University. She is completing her undergraduate degree in Human Resources and Labour Relations and working toward her Chartered Professional in Human Resources (CPHR) designation. Driven by a deep commitment to helping people see their own potential, Patrievan uses her writing as a space for self-expression, reflection, and uplifting others to become the best version of themselves.



Rising Through Fire

How I Survived War, Displacement, and Cancer
and Learned to Rebuild After Disruption.

Rana Mustafa

The first major disruption in my life did not begin with war or illness. It began with absence.

When I left Syria to pursue my PhD in France, my daughter was only one year old. Because of family circumstances and government restrictions, I could not keep her with me for most of my studies. I was separated from my baby, separated from my husband at the time, trying to complete demanding academic work while my heart lived somewhere else.

I was young and determined. I thought discipline could carry me through anything. I could not. Those years sent me into one of the darkest emotional periods of my life. My health suffered. I failed at things I thought I should manage easily. I began asking questions that would return to me again and again: What gives life meaning? How do we stay whole when life no longer resembles what we imagined?

Still, I held onto one goal. Finish the PhD. Go home. Rebuild.

I did finish. And when I returned to Syria, I carried with me an early lesson about disruption: when life breaks your rhythm, survival is not only practical, it is emotional, spiritual, deeply tied to identity.

I did not know then how much I would need that lesson.

“Rebuilding after disruption begins long before life becomes stable again.”

When War Shattered Everything

When the Syrian war began, it destroyed whatever remained of the illusion that life can be controlled.

I was a university professor by then, with a PhD from France and a growing academic career. Then the war reached our city. The college where I worked was destroyed. Heavy fighting spread. Our home was destroyed. My family and I fled to save our lives and never returned.

I moved my children to another city for safety. But universities were ordered to remain open, so I kept traveling to teach. Every trip carried risk. Tanks lined the roads. Every morning, I left home aware I might not come back.

I remembered what I had learned during my PhD years. If I did not find a way to care for my emotional world, stress would swallow me whole.

So, I made a decision that may have seemed impractical in wartime: music mattered almost as much as food.

Food keeps the body alive. Music keeps the soul alive.

Electricity was often gone. News only fed fear. I invested in music lessons for my children and myself. We chose instruments that did not require electricity: guitar, oud, violin. We learned different instruments on purpose, to challenge our brains and keep our minds busy with something larger than fear.

Slowly, in the middle of war, our home filled with sound, scales, repetition, mistakes, improvement, and discipline.

Music gave us structure when the world outside had lost its shape. It gave my children a goal beyond survival. That period taught me: rebuilding begins the moment you decide not to let chaos define your inner life.

The Hidden Cost of Starting Over

When I eventually came to Canada, I thought the hardest part was over. I was wrong.

Displacement does not end when you reach safety. That is when a different kind of rebuilding begins.

In Syria, I had been a professor for ten years. By the standards of my country and available resources, I had done very well. But in Canada I quickly realized I was being measured against scholars who had spent years in a system with far more funding, infrastructure, and research tools.

The comparison was not fair. But it was real.

I was no longer seen first as the accomplished professor I had been. I was a newcomer. A displaced scientist proving herself all over again.

That kind of transition shakes identity in quiet ways. You begin to ask: if the world no longer recognizes who I used to be, who am I now?

I was still trying to answer that question when another disruption came.

“If the world no longer recognizes who I used to be, who am I now?”

When Cancer Stripped Away the Last Illusion

I learned that I had aggressive breast cancer on March 21. In Syrian culture, that date carries deep meaning. It is Mother's Day, a day traditionally filled with flowers, gratitude, and celebration. It is also the spring equinox, when day and night stand in perfect balance. In the ancient traditions of Mesopotamia and the Levant, this moment symbolized renewal and rebirth and was associated with Ishtar, the goddess of fertility and life. All my life, March 21 had been a day of joy. That year, instead of celebrating, I sat my children down and told them, “I have cancer.”

They started crying immediately. And I heard myself say, before I had fully absorbed the reality, “Don't cry. As long as we are together, we will face this.”

It was something I needed to tell them, but also something I needed to tell myself.

Cancer stripped away another layer of identity. It was not only about losing hair, strength, or certainty. It was about confronting the limits of achievement. What does it mean to spend your whole life building credentials, working, striving, only to find yourself in a hospital bed unsure of tomorrow?

That question changed me.

During treatment, I reflected on my life in a way I never had before. I realized I had spent most of my life moving from one responsibility to another, rarely stopping to ask what kind of life I truly wanted beyond duty and survival.

Something became very clear: the moments that had given my life the most meaning were never the titles I held or recognition I received. They were the moments when I helped someone else move forward. Long before I called it coaching, helping others rebuild their sense of possibility was what I was meant to do.

And as I began sharing my story, I discovered something else.

Stories are powerful when shared.

When I spoke honestly about war, displacement, illness, fear, and rebuilding, people responded.

Women reached out. Displaced scientists reached out. People who felt invisible, stuck, or exhausted told me, “I thought I was the only one.”

That is what helping others means to me now. It means making struggle speakable. It means turning isolation into connection. It means using my story not as proof of strength, but as an invitation for someone else to believe rebuilding is possible.

“Helping others means using my story not as proof of strength, but as an invitation to believe rebuilding is possible.”

What Rebuilding Really Means

I survived war.

I survived displacement.

I survived cancer.

But survival was never the final goal.

The real work was learning how to rebuild. Rebuild identity. Rebuild purpose. Rebuild a life based not only on what was lost, but also on what remains possible.

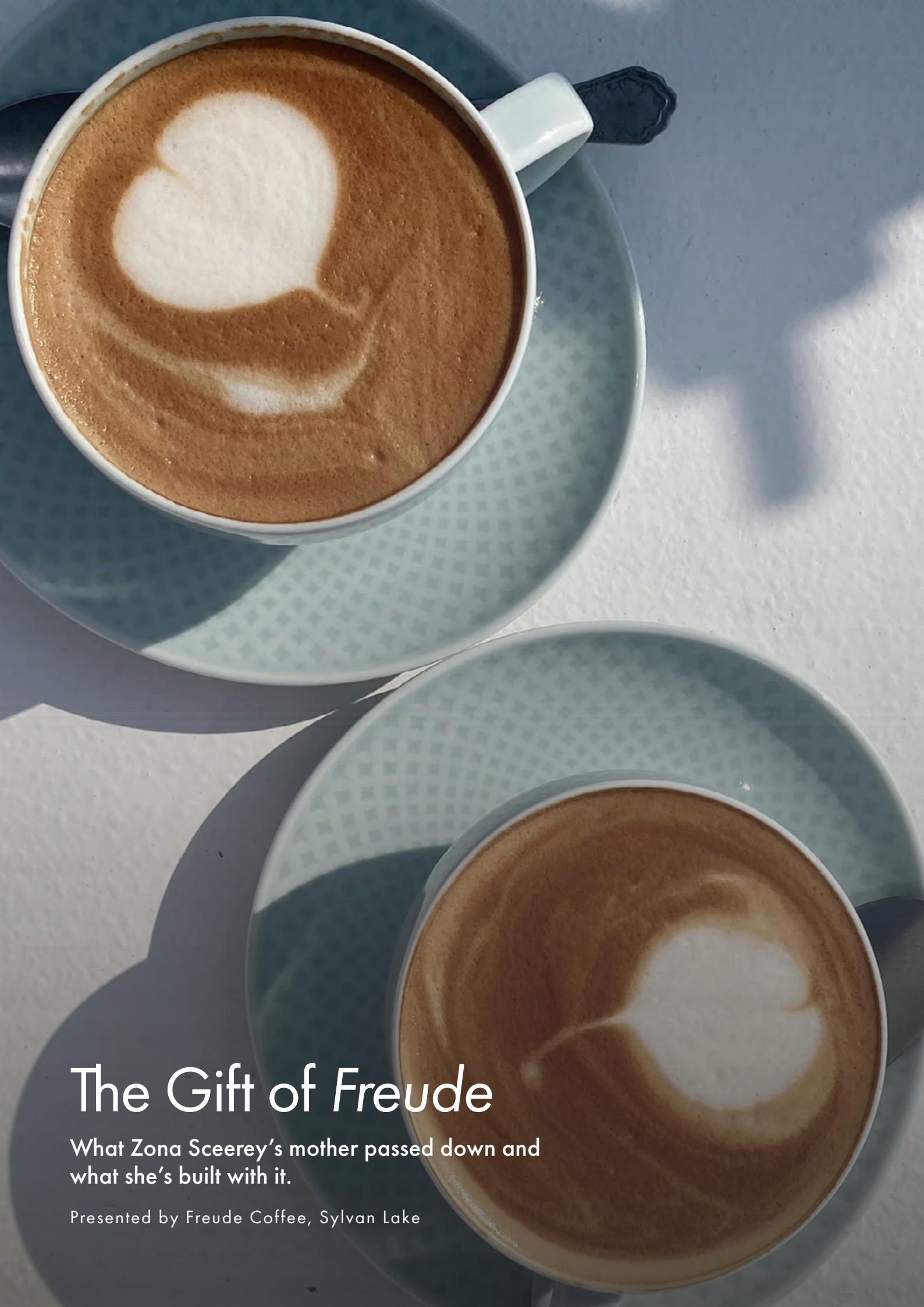


If life has disrupted your plans, career, health, or sense of self, I want to say this clearly: rebuilding does not begin when everything is fixed. It begins when you decide that even now, even here, your life still deserves meaning.

This is a JUST chapter, Not the whole book.



Dr. Rana Mustafa is a scientist, research and partnership facilitator, and leadership coach who supports women and displaced scientists as they rebuild their identities and careers after major life disruption. A survivor of war, displacement, and breast cancer, she brings together scientific thinking, lived experience, and deep compassion in her work on resilience, purpose, and leadership.



The Gift of *Freude*

What Zona Sceerey's mother passed down and what she's built with it.

Presented by Freude Coffee, Sylvan Lake

Zona Sceerey , the heart behind Freude Coffee, has built something rooted in more than hospitality; it is a reflection of where she came from, who raised her, and what she believes people deserve to feel when they walk through a door.

The space Zona is currently working in is still unfinished, something in the process of becoming. She has almost no digital footprint to speak of: no carefully curated Instagram, no website, and no trail of quotes. In many ways, that absence says something. Zona's story is not one that has been packaged or broadcast. It is one she tells herself, at her own pace, in the way she lives and works – with Freude, meaning joy.

Zona was raised by a strong and resilient mother – a woman who instilled in her the values of independence, discipline, and unwavering hospitality. The family's guiding belief was straightforward: there is always room for one more. For Zona, that phrase never left her. It became more than a family value. It evolved into the very foundation of her approach to business, leadership, and community.



Through the development of Freude Coffee, and future hospitality ventures, Zona has created spaces centred not simply around service, but around human connection. The name itself speaks to that vision. Freude is the German word for joy and for Zona, joy is not an afterthought. It is the driving force behind every aspect of her work. For Zona, creating environments where guests, staff, and community members feel welcomed, valued, and empowered to be fully themselves.

“My legacy is foundational. The commitment to everything at one hundred percent. Even when the path is difficult, if you can find joy in the process, then it is worth doing.” Zona shares. Her leadership style reflects the same warmth. Zona leads with humility and purpose, working alongside her team when it is needed, encouraging them through challenging moments, and ensuring that every guest who walks through her doors feels welcomed, valued, and free to be fully themselves. For Zona, great hospitality begins with genuine care for people, and that belief shows up in everything she does.

Motherhood, entrepreneurship, and legacy are not separate threads in her story, they are woven together. She speaks openly about what success means to her: not recognition, not financial achievement alone, but the positive impact she has on others and the sense of connection, belonging, and joy she creates along the way.

“I truly believe we are meant to find fulfillment through connection, purpose, and the people we share our lives with — not simply to move through life without joy. In the end, I hope to be remembered for Freude — for joy.”



ROSE'S PICKS

Not sponsored - just what we're loving right now.



Music

Raye. *This Music May Contain Hope*. (2026)

Scissor Sisters. *Ta-Dah*. (2006)

Florence + The Machine. *Lungs*. (2008)

Podcasts

Kendra Adachi. *The Lazy Genius Podcast*.

The History Chicks. *The History Chicks: A Women's History Podcast*.

Julia Louis-Dreyfus. *Wiser Than Me*.



Andy Weir. *Project Hail Mary*. (2021).

Jessica Janzen. *Bring the Joy*. (2020)

Lauren F. Klein & Catherine D'Ignazio. *Data Feminism*. (2020).

Mary Kay Ash. *Miracles Happen: The Life and Timeless Principles of the Founder of Mary Kay Inc.* (2003)

Matt Dinniman. *Dungeon Crawler Carl*. (2020).

Rachel Ekstrom Courage. *Death on the Lanai* (2026)



The Golden Girls. Disney+

The Home Edit. Netflix.

Love on the Spectrum. Netflix.

The Mandalorian. Disney+.

Younger. Netflix.



Instagram:

Jyoti Nanra. @thepurplecupcake_

Holly Nichols. @hnicolsillustration

India Rose Crawford. Sceerey. @indiarosecrawford

TikTok:

Nicholas Fairford @nicolasfairford

Ashley S Mixon @ashleymixon

The Quinn Edit @thequinnedit_

A woman with dark hair, wearing a bright red coat and sunglasses on her head, is looking upwards and to the right. She is standing outdoors in a park-like setting with bare trees and a street lamp in the background. The lighting is soft, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

Self-Advocacy is a Funding Strategy

Funding is not a reward for exhaustion - it is infrastructure for impact.

Nichole Yamchuk



The night I broke down, nothing dramatic had actually happened. No big failure. No explosion. Just the weight of everything landing at once.

My son was asleep. The house was quiet in that fragile way where you know you should be resting too. I had been working 60+ hours a week running Advocate Fundraising. I was sitting on a board. I was juggling extracurriculars, pet care, finances, emails, self-care, day-to-day expectations. I kept telling myself this is what strong women do. I had built a career teaching organizations to ask for what they needed. It would take much longer to apply that to myself. We carry it. We stretch. We handle it. Or that's what I thought.

And then I sat on my couch and cried. Not the quiet kind. The kind where your chest hurts and you're praying for something, anything, to give because you can't keep holding all of it up. We are not octopuses. We don't have eight arms. And yet somewhere along the way many of us were taught that if we drop a ball we've failed.

So I dropped some. On purpose.

I stepped off the board. I capped my hours at forty. I chose sleep over proving myself. I let go of the constant hum of "do more, be more, carry more."

What surprised me was not the relief. It was the result.

When I was exhausted, even though I was working twice as much, the quality of my work was lower. I was foggy. Reactive. Surviving. I thought I was demonstrating commitment with long hours, but really I was operating from depletion. When I worked less, my strategy sharpened. My creativity came back. Conversations felt clearer. I remembered my "why." And that clarity led to something uncomfortable.

I built Advocate Fundraising on the belief that fundraising is advocacy. That asking for money is not about greed, it's about naming the value of work that serves people. That funding is fuel. That resourcing is a responsibility.

Yet, I had never really fundraised for myself.

I was helping organizations build sustainable funding systems while quietly accepting scarcity in my own business. Teaching clients to write honest budgets and ask for what they needed, while overextending my own capacity and underpricing my time.

In 2025, on a completely unplanned Saturday, I applied for an entrepreneur grant for Advocate Fundraising.

I had woken up at 5:00 AM to two sleepy cats demanding cuddles before coffee. I then went for a long walk and got caught in a full rainstorm. I came home drenched and laughing, hoodie soaked, hair dripping. I made an iced coffee and opened my inbox.

There was a business grant link.

Somewhere between the rain, cats, and the caffeine I decided to apply.

As I worked through the questions, something shifted. The application felt like a mirror. It forced me to say out loud what I had built. Why I built it. Who it was for. It reminded me that traditional nonprofit and business systems were not designed with women like me in mind. Women who live with invisible disabilities. Women who carry caregiving roles. Women who see structural problems and can't unsee them.

I didn't win. But I placed in the Top 10 out of 710 applicants.

That mattered more than I expected. At the time I was tired in a way that goes beyond normal burnout. Ready to give up. Being named in that Top 10 didn't just validate my business. It restored belief. Not because I had won, but because it showed me that the value was already there. It reminded me that investing in myself was not indulgent. That I had already built proof of impact from scratch. That I was allowed to want more than just survival.

And that is where advocacy and fundraising meet in a way we don't talk about enough.



Advocacy is not only standing up for others. It is standing up for the sustainability of your own work. Fundraising is not just writing grants or asking donors for support. It is declaring that what you are building deserves to exist with structure, stability and growth.

“Advocacy is not only standing up for others. It is standing up for the sustainability of your own work.”

What I experienced is not unique. It reflects a much broader pattern in how women carry work, both seen and unseen. Women are already carrying more than their share. Globally, women perform nearly three times as much unpaid care work as men. In professional spaces we absorb the invisible labor that keeps everything functioning. Research consistently shows that women score higher in empathy and emotional intelligence. We anticipate needs. We hold space. We fix what is fraying before anyone else notices.

And then we hesitate to ask for proper compensation. We discount our services. Shrink our budgets. Tell ourselves we'll increase our rates next year. That we just need to push through this season. Burnout is not always a time management problem. Often, it's a resourcing problem.

When we underfund our ideas, we do not prove humility. We create instability. When women burn out, communities lose capacity. When we refuse to advocate for proper funding for ourselves, we reinforce the very systems that exhaust us.

“When we underfund our ideas, we do not prove humility. We create instability. When women burn out, communities lose capacity.”



Self-advocacy is a funding strategy because if you do not believe your work deserves to be resourced, no one else will either. The way you price your work. The way you write your budget. The way you structure your time. That is advocacy in action.

Funding is not a reward for exhaustion. It is infrastructure for impact.

We deserve more than the bare minimum. More than scraps. More than proving our worth through depletion. We deserve stability. Support. Excess.

Overflow in our finances. Overflow in our creativity. Overflow in our rest.

Our lives are not meant to be a constant act of barely making it. They are meant to expand.

If you are building something that matters, whether it's a business, a nonprofit, a creative project, or a new chapter of your life, let this be the reframe.

Advocating for funding is advocating for yourself. Fundraising is not just about money. It is about alignment between your values and your resources. It is about ensuring that your empathy is matched with infrastructure. It is about believing that you are not only enough, you are worth investment.

We are not here to survive on scraps. We are here to build with intention, stability, and abundance.

And that starts with treating your own voice as something worth advocating for and worth funding.

Nichole Yamchuk (she/her) is the Founder & CEO of Advocate Fundraising, a Canadian fundraising consultancy rooted in ethics, inclusion, transparency, and advocacy. With nearly two decades of experience in the non-profit sector, her work focuses on sustainable fundraising systems, accessibility, and helping organizations build stronger community impact through intentional funding strategies. Based in Edmonton, Alberta, Nichole is also a passionate advocate for disability inclusion, ethical leadership, and animal welfare.



Want to Dream With Me?

My vision for those of us staying in Edmonton.

Mika Haykowsky

OPEN CALL to adventurers, creative storytellers, magpies, lost ones, map-makers, dreamers who wish to find grounded community together in newfound gathering spaces. Who aren't "Still in Edmonton" but who are "Staying in Edmonton." Putting down roots to grow deeper and further into each other's tendrils, nourishing the ground we share.

Who wonder what happened to the underground scene; has it been gentrified out of existence? Edmonton has lost several iconic art spaces over the years... What will it take to build anew, without institutional support, but with each other hand in hand? There is a lot that could be said on this topic, but that's not what I'm here to do... That's where YOU come in.

Imagine drawing Edmonton... Start from the river and follow its flowing curves. Keep drawing concentric lines until it forms a circle. In the middle of that circle, caregivers gather around the elders and the young. These life-givers are granted a safe and sacred space. Keep drawing. A hybrid living space, school, and place of healing. Keep drawing. Spiraling outwards from here, build play spaces, makerspaces, studios, and workshops for creation, experimentation, and discovery. Keep drawing. Outward from there: community gardens and their tenders, hubs for sharing our creations beyond these imagined borders. Homes are communal, multigenerational spaces of cohabitation, joy, and safety. Keep imagining until you feel full.

"Still in Edmonton?" Me too. I'm surrounded by spring birds, new buds, charming, sparkling ideas, and a dream: to transform Edmonton into a creative utopia. To create a place worth staying in. A place to share, be heard, supported, and encouraged in the struggle of being an artist in this day and age. A place to give and receive freely. I dream of an Edmonton that nurtures its creative people deeply through gathering spaces that provide warmth, connection, and creative resources. Through events that bring people together for lasting connection, not one-night-stands or little shots of togetherness.

When I first started branching my tendrils of care outward towards the larger community, I started a business. While maintaining my ceramic and music practice, I started offering grant writing, event planning, and consulting services under the name The Mika Method. I even took an intensive course that resulted in creating a business plan and finding clients. Which I did. But the business world says, Find a problem and try to solve it.

Is a dream a problem? Or is it the solution? Is it a problem I'm meant to solve?

There it is again: "I" this pillar of individualism and authority. I don't want to be "I" – I want to be "we."

Want to come with me?

“We” gather in unexpected places. We make the familiar strange and unexpected. We carve out safe space to express new ideas. We draw together, connecting through-lines of possible futures, art projects, collaborations, in a glorious mind-map of red threads and common dreams. Some of us revel in the visioning stage, and some of us know how to take steps into realizing these dreams.

In an effort to infuse creativity and play into the everyday lives of Edmontonians, we are hosting a series of community events at Bleeding Heart Art Space ~ “Care Core” is running from May 23 - June 12, featuring a collaborative art installation, drone music jam, artisan market, and a concert of local musicians, [\(including myself!\)](#)



We are starting an audio-visual transmission (podcast) with the working title, C.A.E.R. (Constellation of Artists Expanding Resources). Caer, from Old Welsh, meaning Stronghold or Fortress. A place to be safe and defend. A place of refuge, to catch the creatives falling through the cracks of institutional support; art schools, grant funding, even the mysterious “representation” by a gallery. We will find a way to define ourselves in our differing abilities, our queerness, our outsider nature, and find a way inside. We will build our own art scene – our own stronghold, our own fortress – from the underground.

I’m a dreamer. That doesn’t mean I don’t pay attention. It means I let all the light into the cracks and crevices of my subconscious, and let the creepy crawlies come out to play. I let them breathe and bask. Let’s do that together.

Breathe in: flood your dusty forgotten with light. Breathe out. Did you leave something behind years and years ago? Breathe in. Did play and creativity slip away in favour of productivity and discipline? What’s resting deep in your soft muscles? Breathe out.

Staying in Edmonton? Me too.

Do you have a dream for Edmonton? Let’s talk about it.

Submit your dream in the form here:

<https://tinyurl.com/m3ubcd7um>

“ I’m a dreamer. That doesn’t mean I don’t pay attention. It means I let all the light into the cracks and crevices of my subconscious, and let the creepy crawlies come out to play. “



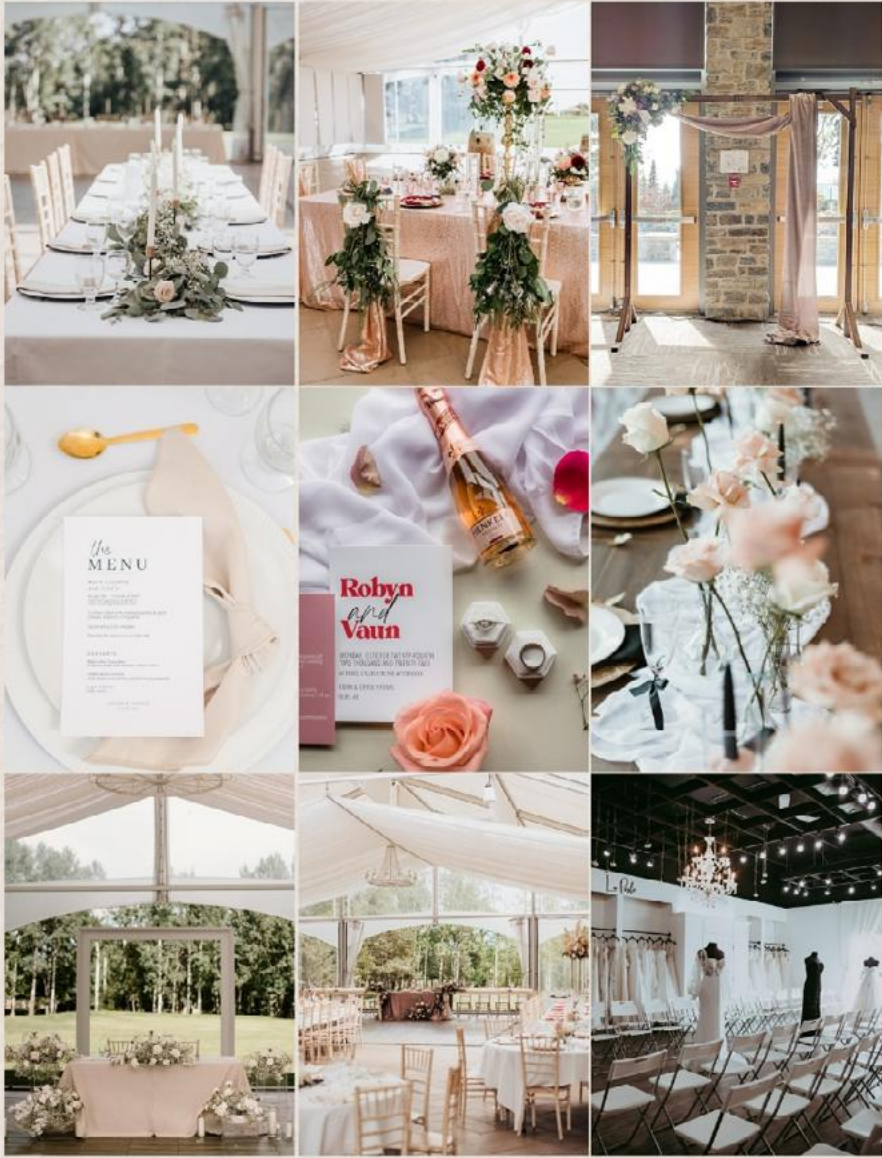
Mika Haykowsky (She/they/fae) is a multimedia artist, event producer, and singer/songwriter based in Amiskwaciwâskahikan (so-called Edmonton, AB). Mika creates through playful, multidisciplinary projects involving community engagement, intuitive sculpture, and textures of the body. Her current collaboration with Bleeding Heart Space is an opportunity to weave the community into her practice through co-creation and participatory art-making. Mika received an MFA in from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and a BFA from the University of Alberta. You can also catch Mika’s work at The Works Festival coming up in June/July 2026.



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How to Be the Heroine of Your Career Story

Discover and share your career value to take you to your next chapter.

Stephanie Horner

When I graduated from Mount Royal University (MRU) ten years ago, I was one of roughly 600 graduates in Calgary entering the workforce with the exact same degree. Because we all looked similar on paper and the economy was still recovering from the last recession, there was fierce competition in finding a role.

The number one question I had to figure out was: why should an employer choose me over someone else? I had no corporate experience, no influential peers or leaders who could refer me, and no roadmap to follow. In the end, it took six months to land my first corporate role, and during that time, I learned something that changed my career trajectory: the people who grow the fastest aren't always the most qualified or the most experienced – they are often the people who wrote themselves as the heroine of their own career story.

Since 2018, I've been helping people navigate career pivots like my own. We use social leveraging strategies to build visibility and credibility in the desired industry. To illustrate this in practice, I will take you through three stages of a heroine's journey: Departure, Initiation, and Return. At each stage, I'll share the hard-won, relatable lessons I've learned from my own career journey. I hope you will write yourself as the heroine of your career story, wherever your adventures take you.

Departure: Our Heroine Hears the Call of Adventure

Every heroine starts at this moment: her departure, the threshold between the life she knows and the one she's capable of living. For most of us, that threshold looks less like a dragon to slay and more like a job posting we almost don't apply for, a salary negotiation we almost don't have, or a career pivot we almost talk ourselves out of. But the truth is, the professional world won't always be the first to validate your potential, skillset or strengths.

Instead, it takes radical self-advocacy and self-reflection to validate yourself – to claim your story before anyone else sees your application. Both of which will take courage... and time, which may not always feel on your side. But when we know what truly makes us happy and driven in our career pursuits, it's easier to say “no” to roles that aren't in alignment with what we're looking for. This opens space for the right opportunities to present themselves.

After graduating from MRU, I went back to my “why” of studying business. I remember in early elementary school spending hours making colourful pipe-cleaner creations and setting up a storefront on my parents' living room floor. I tried out different signage, sales promotions, and even made myself a “We are Open” sign. To me, it was an innate curiosity about how companies worked – why some succeeded while others failed. Once I knew this, roles supporting entrepreneurs and business owners became my compass to set me on my professional career path.

Create your personalized career compass

Define your strengths, skillset and what's most important to you. Books like *What Color Is Your Parachute?* (updated annually, originally published in 1970) by Richard N. Bolles and *Designing Your Life* (2016) by Bill Burnett & Dave Evans are great resources to begin the self-reflection process of what you really want in your career, regardless of skillset or industry.

Articulate your unique vision of success – defined by your life, not societal norms. This may not always be about salary or a prestigious title. This is about defining what works for you – your working hours, environment (hybrid or in-person), commute time, or alignment with your personal values.

Focus on roles you are excited about. The “take anything, apply everywhere” mentality can be tempting, especially after months of applications.

However, applying indiscriminately makes it harder to tailor your materials, drains your momentum, and means you can't speak with genuine enthusiasm about why this role, at this company, is the one you want.

Don't sell yourself short. If you can do 80% of the role description independently from the start, apply for it. As the saying goes, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take" – and the key is knowing where your goal is before you take the shot. Even rejection at this stage provides useful data to bring into your next conversation with a recruiter or hiring manager.

Once you clearly define – and unapologetically own – your strengths, skills, and vision, they become the compass that moves your career forward. Pursuing opportunities feels more intentional, and communicating your value to employers becomes more natural than forced.

Research has found that the most career-confident people are those who have defined a trajectory for themselves – not as a fixed title or industry, but as a direction rooted in their vision, strengths, and interests. The heroine doesn't always know where the road leads. She simply knows enough about herself to take the next step.

Initiation: Our Heroine's Journey Begins

Taking the first step with the compass in hand, now pointing in the direction of intrinsic curiosity and fulfillment – rather than where she "should" go – the heroine is rarely fully confident. She doubts herself, compares herself to others, and wonders whether she belongs in the room at all. This is not a personal failing – it is one of the most common and quietly career-limiting experiences I hear about from the people I work with. Imposter syndrome doesn't discriminate by age, credential, or years of experience. It shows up at every new threshold just past our comfort zone.

Know how to showcase your skillset

Tailor your résumé and cover letter to each role.

Every bullet point in your résumé should articulate how your skills, whether directly relevant or transferable, apply to the role and reflect the values of the prospective company. While asking ChatGPT to do this for you is speedy, you lose the ability to articulate your career value in your own words, which is essential when speaking to prospective employers.

When I've helped select candidates for corporate roles, the first elimination of candidates occurs when there's no effort to translate current experience to the job posting itself; basically, when it's a copy-and-paste level of effort. With the rise of AI-generated résumés and cover letters, which are beginning to be embedded in the scanning software Human Resources departments use, it is all the more important to show your humanness, your genuine interest, and readiness to join the team from the first step in your application

Practice answering interview questions out loud.

According to Indeed's 2024 Workforce Insights Report, just over half (54%) of candidates research the company before they walk into an interview. If you're already doing this, you're ahead of nearly half the field. Practicing out loud with a friend to simulate the visceral experience of the interview itself will set you apart, and will make the application process less daunting each time.

Continue to be curious and ask follow-up questions.

Come prepared with thoughtful questions about the company, team, or project. Ramit Sethi's Briefcase Technique (a helpful method for demonstrating your value proactively in interviews) is a helpful prompt to get started. This tip is underutilized but well worth the effort because you'll further communicate your excitement about the role and for the team's mission.



Return: She Mobilizes Her Queen-dom

Success doesn't happen in a vacuum. The heroine knows that working smarter means building a village of allies – people who know her value and will recommend, refer, and sponsor her for roles that may never be publicly posted. This is the practice of sharing the career story you've written with the community that will carry it forward.

Here's the truth about career growth that no résumé fully captures: the opportunities that change your trajectory come from people. From the colleague who thinks of you when a role opens up. From the mentor who passes your name to a hiring manager over coffee. From the connection you made at an industry event two years ago who now works at the company you've been watching. This is the hidden job market – and the way in.

Cultivate your network like a garden

Nurture your relationships. Consistency and care are what make both plants and professional communities thrive. The relationships you tend – even casually, even imperfectly – are the ones that will bear fruit, and this is precisely where the hidden job market lives.

Practice networking as genuine community building, not transaction. This is what creating your Queen-dom means: showing up with real curiosity about the people in your industry, not just what they can do for you. It also means knowing how your values connect to the work. My own guiding statement, for example, is “helping tech entrepreneurs succeed so they can solve real problems at a global scale” – a north star that makes authentic conversation easier.

Embrace career coffee chats. If you're pursuing a role within your current company, invite the hiring manager or a team member for a brief, informal conversation and stay genuinely curious about what the team is working on. That way, when a role opens up, you're already a trusted name – and your application rises to the top of the pile naturally.

Always follow up. A sincere thank you, or a brief update on how someone's advice or introduction made a difference, builds real goodwill. People remember those who close the loop, and they'll think of you when the right opportunity crosses their path. By the time you reach the application and interview stage, ideally several people in your network will know you're interested – and the hiring manager will be aware of those relationships too.

A peer of mine recently landed a highly competitive role with the City of Calgary. She distinguished herself by submitting multiple recommendation letters from clients and key stakeholders alongside her application.



This kind of social leveraging – built through the steps above – signals to employers that you already have rapport in the field, that others vouch for you, and that your interest in the role is genuine. The result: stronger trust, greater credibility, and a far lower chance of being left without a response.

Don't feel like you have a network? You have more than you think. Start with the people who already know you – family, industry peers, professors – and ask them for introductions to their networks. A genuine, personalised LinkedIn message can also open doors. Attend free industry events; if an event is ticketed, consider reaching out to a sponsor for a complimentary pass, noting your interest in building a career in the field. Vanessa Van Edwards' *Captivate: The Science of Succeeding With People* (2017) is also worth reading, whether you're a recent graduate still discovering your strengths or a mid-career professional looking to sharpen your community-building skills.

Our Heroine is Forever Transformed

The heroine who completes her journey doesn't return the same person who left. She returns knowing her unshakable value, having built the relationships that will carry her forward, and perhaps most importantly, trusting herself to do it all again. These small and big actions build trust: not only with prospective employers, but trust within yourself.

You are doing the hard, honest work of reflecting on what matters to you, and claiming it. This way, you become more confident in your strengths, recognize your adaptability, and can more easily share your career value with the professional world.

And it's never too late to start. The best time to start building your career story may have been years ago. The second best time is now.



Stephanie Horner has earned senior commercial banking roles at both RBC Royal Bank and ATB Financial. She is a two-time business accelerator manager and lends her entrepreneurial expertise at several institutions including Momentum, University of Calgary Hunter Hub for Entrepreneurial Thinking, Platform Calgary, and Startup TNT. Today, she works as Vice-President at RBCx supporting high-growth tech entrepreneurs across the prairies. Stephanie loves her growing family, and is a passionate Swiftie.

Final Note

The Story of ROSE.



Some of the best things begin at a girls night. The buzz of conversation. The shine of too many appetizer plates for the size of the table. The bubble of sparkling beverages. The evening takes on a special shimmer all its own.

It was autumn 2024 when two long-distance collaborators, women who had spent years pouring their talents into someone else's vision, sat across from each other and finally asked the question that had been quietly waiting: What if we made something entirely our own?

The idea came quickly. The conviction came even faster.

A magazine. By millennial women, for millennial women. Modern, feminine, empowering. Built from scratch, from friendship, from years of knowing exactly what was missing in the spaces we'd always loved.

A few days later, our team of three raised tumblers over a video call; perhaps not the most glamorous of toasts, but one we meant with our whole hearts. With that, ROSE Magazine was born.

What started as a girls' night and an idea has grown into something we are deeply, genuinely proud of. Every page you hold represents not just a publication, but a promise: that women's voices, creativity, and collaboration can build something that truly lasts.

Looking back at how far we've come from that autumn evening makes us all the more excited for what's ahead. Each issue is a chance to do more, say more, and connect more deeply with the women who make our communities what they are. We're in this for the long run, and we are so grateful to be on this journey with you.

Ready? Let's go.

XOXO,

Ruby, Luci & Rachel

Co-Founders of ROSE Magazine Canada



BUSINESS DIRECTORY

A curated selection of brands, creatives, and business we love.



The ROSE Business Directory is a curated collection of women-founded and women-led businesses across Alberta — created to celebrate entrepreneurship, connection, and community. More than a directory, it is a space where brands, creatives, and industry leaders come together to inspire, collaborate, and support one another through visibility and meaningful networking.

Within these pages, you'll discover a diverse selection of businesses and services, each contributing to the growth of our local communities and the evolving landscape of women in business.

Every feature has been thoughtfully selected to reflect the vision and values of ROSE Magazine: empowering women, supporting local, and creating opportunities for connection and growth.

Interested in being featured in an upcoming edition of the ROSE Business Directory?

Apply here:



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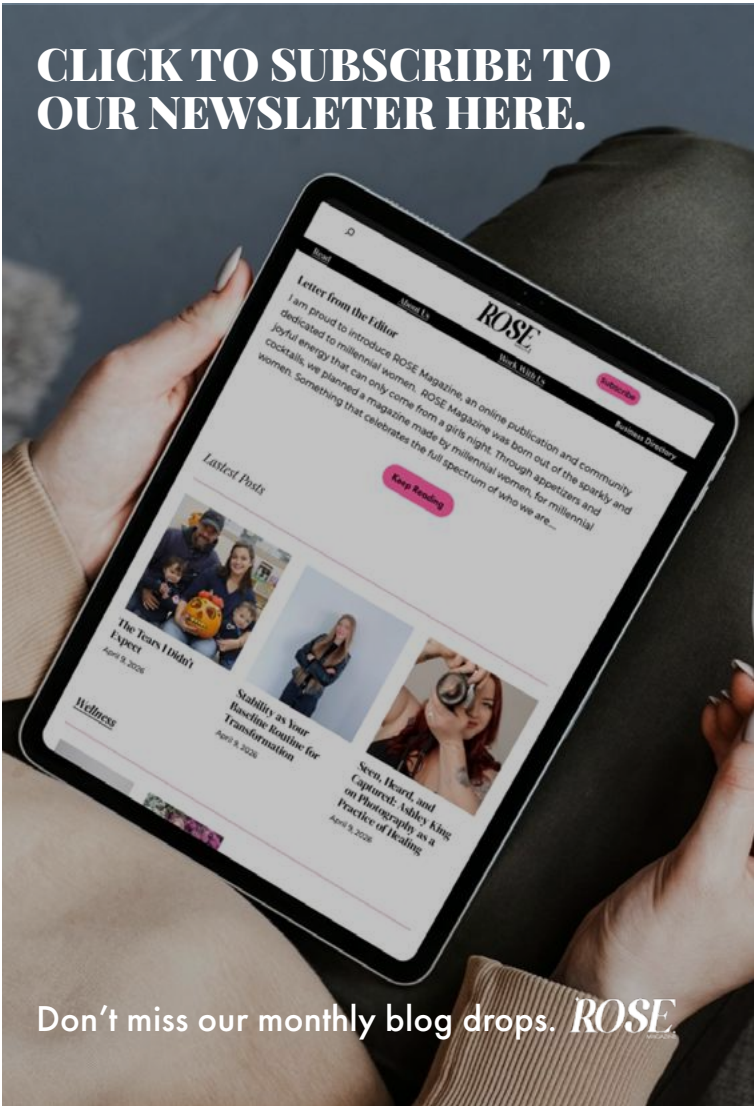


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