

THE LIFE STORY OF ROSINA CHRISTIANA (GUADA) GILBERT (DECEMBER 25, 1926 – JUNE 26, 2026)



Chris Gilbert was born in Guaico, Trinidad, in 1926. She moved to San Fernando at the age of thirteen to go to high school. As a nineteen-year-old nurse, Chris migrated to London, England in 1945, where she became a senior nurse, married Peter Gilbert in 1954 and started a family in 1956. The family migrated to Regina, Canada in 1958 and to Vancouver in 1975. As a former head nurse at St Paul's hospital and Instructor at Vancouver Community College, Chris received an award of excellence from the Registered Nurses Association of BC in 1989. Chris died peacefully in bed, early in the morning on June 26, 2026, at her apartment in North Vancouver.

By Richard Gilbert

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1 Chris Gilbert: Instrumental to nursing excellence in BC



Rosina Christiana (Guada) Gilbert died peacefully in bed, early in the morning, on June 26, 2026, at her apartment, in North Vancouver. She was known by family and friends as Chris, for most of her adult life.

Chris, who was born in Guaico, Trinidad, on December 25, 1926, was one of the oldest Trinidadians in the Lower Mainland and possibly BC. She was ninety-nine and a half years old.

“May you find a few moments of reflection that allows you to celebrate the wealth of knowledge and insights that you have built from your life experience,” said Surrey Mayor Brenda Locke on a certificate awarded to Chris to recognize her upcoming 99th birthday on Christmas day in 2025 (see left).

Chris was dressed and ready to go to a banquet held by the Trinidad and Tobago Cultural Society of BC. She wanted to be awarded a certificate and medal from Mayor Locke on behalf of Surrey City council. However, Chris was too tired to get out of bed and travel to the event in Surrey. Chris celebrated her upcoming 99th birthday at home, with a glass of wine and the beautiful cake she was given, by the TT Cultural Society of BC (see below).

When Chris bought her apartment in North Vancouver in 1988, she had a plan to age in place, until she died. In 1987, Chris retired from her position as the Head Nurse of the Central Supply Department (CSD) at St. Paul's hospital in Vancouver.

Chris managed a team, who cleaned, decontaminated, sterilized and distributed medical devices and surgical instruments. CSD was vital hub for the operation of St Paul's.

In 1975, when Chris started the job, she observed the staff at work and learned their responsibilities. She completed training on sterilization, produced a manual of procedures and restructured the department.





Upon retirement in 1987, Chris turned the CSD manual into a textbook to teach an original course for nurses at Vancouver Community College (VCC). Chris was presented with an award of excellence in 1989 from the Registered Nurses Association of BC.

Chris was recognized for her work in enhancing the quality of the department through staff training. She developed a six-week training program at St. Paul's hospital, which is credited with being the core of a similar course at VCC.

The award was presented in Vancouver at a special banquet, held in conjunction with the annual convention of the BC nurses' association. Chris is holding the plaque she was awarded for excellence in nursing on the left.

1.1 Rosina Christiana Guada was born in the British colony of Trinidad

Rosina Christiana Guada was born to Peter Guada and Gladys (Montenegro) Guada, on December 25, 1926, in Guaico, Trinidad. As a Christmas baby, Rosina was given the Spanish name Christiana.

"I was born in Guaico. I remember we lived in a place called Damarie Hill", said Chris. "I remember when I was four and all this stuff was being packed up on a horse cart. We moved to Guaico, which is in Sangre Grande."

In the 1920s, Guaico was a small, rural village in the Sangre Grande region of northeast Trinidad. The economy was dependent on cocoa, which surpassed sugar as the most valuable export crop. The road network was developing, while the community relied on the Trinidad Government Railway for transportation.



Sangre Grande was the main market town for the cocoa industry. After slavery was abolished in the British empire in 1834, more than 140,000 Indians indentured labourers migrated to Trinidad to fill a shortage of labour.

2 Gladys Montenegro marries Peter Guada

Gladys Montenegro's father was a driver on a sugar plantation in Sangre Grande. Her mother Issabella looked after the children of the Indian indentured labourers. Issabella arranged for her daughters Gladys, Irene and Ineze to be educated, by renting a room next to a school. The girls lived by themselves, in the room, during the week. A godmother of one of the girls came to visit. She invited the Montenegro sisters to go to school and live at her home in San Fernando.

When Gladys was 17 years-old, she was having constant disagreements with her godmother. Gladys decided to move back to Issabella's house in Sande Grande.



"My grandmother Issabella arranged for Irene to become a nurse at the hospital. My mom didn't want to be a nurse. Somehow, she arranged to get married, before the day came for her to go to the hospital," said Chris.

"Her mother had arranged to take a kid to the hospital on that day. Irene was two years younger than Gladys and was only 16 years old. Issabella took Irene to the hospital anyway, and that worked perfectly."

Shortly after Gladys returned to Sangre Grande, she met Peter Guada, a tailor and wayside preacher. Born in Venezuela, Peter grew up in a Venezuelan community in Trinidad, called Sadoo River. Peter did not speak English, when he went to school for the first time at age 12.

"He (Peter) used to preach by the wayside at night. My mother used to go listen to him preach. That's how my mother met my father," said Chris.

"I don't know how often he would do it. Perhaps on weekends. He was not a wayside preacher, when we were children. My mother would not let him do it, since it was a crime to practice."

A wayside preacher refers is a street evangelist or religious figure, who spreads a spiritual message in public spaces like sidewalks, parks or transit hubs. The Spiritual Baptist faith was banned in Trinidad, under British rule. The loud sounds of shouting, singing and clapping were a threat to colonial order. The image above shows Peter and his daughter Chris, who was 13 years.



The image of Peter and Chris above and on the left below come from a photo that was taken at the wedding of Chris' oldest sister Matilda and Desmond Hoyte, on May 6, in 1939.



"Tilly got married at 17 years old. She married Ulrich Hoyte, who was a policeman," said Chris. "The people, who came to the wedding from Port of Spain, had a camera. We didn't have a photographer."

The family from Port of Spain, were the Windsors. They owned a taxi business and were from Sande Grande. In the 1930s, Peter was a tailor in Sangre Grande.

"Apparently, when he (Peter) did his apprenticeship, they showed him how to do everything except put the sleeves in. They didn't want him to go out on his own," said Chris. "So, one day, he decided to put the sleeves in by himself and he did it wrong. The tailor who was training my dad ripped out the sleeves and showed him how to do it."

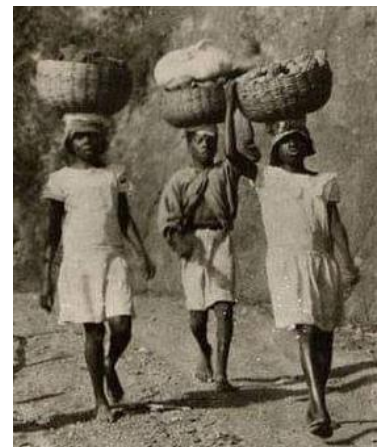
In the 1920s, people in Trinidad used household sewing machines to make their own clothes. By the 1930s, commercial tailors began to supply custom clothes like uniforms, business wear, and casual apparel.

3 Chris Guada's family life and early childhood in Guaico

Most people living in Trinidad faced hardships during the period between World War I (1914-1918) and the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and lasted until the start of World War II in 1939.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, Chris grew up with her siblings Matilda, Hannah, Donald and Orina. Peter Guada owned a house in Guaico, but he rented the land. His dream was to own a house, while being able to use his own land.

According to Chris, Gladys and Peter owned another piece of land, but they lost it somehow.



"When we had the land, we used to have to cross the river. They planted yams and banana. They always talked about having land and then they lost it," said Chris. "When I got older, I realized they must have had a mortgage and couldn't pay it back. So, they lost their land. The land was a couple of miles from the house."

Chris said the children would walk from the house to the land to get some vegetables, bananas, yam and dasheen. “We all went and each kid would bring back what they could carry,” said Chris. “There was a river in the area called Turure. We didn’t do that long, since they lost the land.”



The Guada family house in Guaico had no electricity, no running water and no indoor plumbing. Children and women had the daily responsibility of "toting" water in heavy containers.

“We used to moan and groan in the morning. We had to make sure everything was full and the house had water, before we went to school,” said Chris.

“Ma used to always say, we were lucky, because the standpipe was right across the street. All the kids had to make sure mom had enough water, especially if it was a washing day.”

In Trinidad during the 1920s and 1930s, the village standpipe served as the main source of clean water. It was also a communal hub for rural and working-class families to talk and get information. The Guada’s house was across the street from the standpipe, in Guaico. Some people walked for more than a mile to get water.

Food was cooked using a coal pot and bread was baked in a clay oven in the backyard. The kitchen was built separate to the main house to avoid the risk of fires. People used an outhouse or a pit latrine to go to the toilet, which was also outside the house.

Using a latrine was an unpleasant experience. As a child, Chris was worried about falling in the pit. She would ask her older sister Hannah to accompany her to the outhouse.

At night, the trip to the outhouse was difficult, so people would use a chamber pot, known in Trinidad as a “po”. According to Chris, one night someone used the “po” and the smell in the house was overwhelming. Gladys got up to empty the “po” in the pit latrine.



As Gladys walked out of the house into the back yard, she noticed the clay oven was on fire. It was about to catch the house on fire. To avoid the pending disaster, she doused the fire with the contents of the chamber pot. The first thing Gladys said after putting out the fire was “God bless de chile dat use de po.”

Parang music has its roots in the folk tradition brought to Trinidad from Venezuela, by cocoa panyols, who were migrants that worked on cocoa plantations from the 1870s to the 1920s. The music was an intimate community ritual, performed as house-to-house serenades, during the Christmas season.



“Christmas eve at five or five-thirty in the morning they would come to the house and start to sing and play music at the door. I guess our family and their friends went from house to house playing parang music,” said Chris.

“They would stay there, do a little singing and have a drink. I guess they would eat and drink whatever is there, and move on to the next house.”

Chris said the children were lucky to get one thing for Christmas, like a toy or fruit. “You might get just a piece of apple or a few grapes,” she said. “They were imported at Christmas, so it was a big deal,”

4 Chris attends a Canadian Presbyterian school in Guaico

Chris Guada began her formal education, at the age of four, at the Canadian Mission Presbyterian school in Guaico. The mission spread Christianity, by establishing schools in smaller villages for the children of Indian labourers. The ringing of the bell at the Canadian Mission school, often set the daily schedule for the surrounding estate labourers.

Afro-Trinidadians also attended these missionary schools. The school in Guaico was a five-minute walk from the Guada’s home. Gladys took Chris to school at the age of four.



“Oh god. You know, in Trinidad at that time, they didn’t have an age limit when you can go to school,” said Chris. “When you got too chatty and carrying on at home, your mom took you to school.”

On her first day at school in 1931, Chris was okay in the morning. However, in the afternoon, she fell asleep. “At first the teacher got someone to run me around the school to wake me up”, said Chris. “The teacher said if I keep falling asleep, I’ll get whopped, to keep me awake. So, after a while you stay awake, so you don’t have to get hit.”

At the missionary school, one of the first things Chris learned was to print letters and then join the letters together. Chris was learning cursive handwriting.



“You had to hold the pen in a certain way to make your letters. The page had three lines. For a capital you had to go to the top, and for lower case letter, you had to use the middle line,” said Chris. “You had to hold the pen a certain way, or else they would rap your fingers with a ruler.”

The first aircraft landed in Trinidad at Piarco airport on January 8, 1931. The aircraft was owned by Compagnie Générale Aéropostale, a French aviation company, which expanded into South America in 1929.

Initially, Piarco was a simple aerodrome and airfield, which was unused for several years. However, the company established commercial air routes connecting Venezuela to the Caribbean region.



“We must have known about airplanes, but we just had not seen it”, said Chris.

“We were in class and this airplane came over and somebody shouted aeroplane.”

Chris said the students bolted outside to see the airplane and were running around in circles. The headmaster told the students about airplanes. He said there will be more airplanes. So, they can’t run outside every time one goes by.

“He was just giving that speech when the plane went by again. The kids ran out. This time he clearly stated that was it,” said Chris.



“At that moment, the plane went by again. The third time, there were only a few hardy ones, brave ones, who went out. I think Hannah was one of them. I didn’t go. I was always chicken.”



At school one day, Chris found out a young girl she didn't know was also a Guada. Chris and her sisters were mad. They said the girl was lying, since all their sisters live at their home.

"We went home and asked Ma about this girl. She said to ask your father," said Chris. "Ma went away to look after a family member, who was sick. We were quite little and a neighbour said she would look after things, while Ma was away. But, she didn't look after us alone. She looked after Pa too". Ma did not want to live by this neighbour. So, the family moved.

5 Chris moves to San Fernando to attend high school

Gladys and Peter exhausted their remaining financial resources to prepare Chris' sister Hannah to win a scholarship to attend Bishops High School. This was a major achievement for the family, since there were only twelve island scholarships awarded each year. Gladys' sisters Irene (on the right) and Ineze (below) read about the scholarship in the newspaper. The Montenegro sisters arrived unannounced, on the train from San Fernando to Gauico, to visit the Guada family.



"They all said to Pa, you can't educate one and not the others," said Chris. The Aunties invited Chris to live with them in San Fernando to attend high school.

One year later, Irene and Ineze arranged for Chris to attend Naparima Girls' High School, which was founded by Canadian Presbyterian missionaries.



For Chris, life with the Montenegro sisters was difficult. She had to do housework and focus on her studies. It was stressful living with her Aunties, but Chirs could handle it.

"I was getting ready to go to school one day, when Pa died. They (Irene and Ineze) said you are not going to school today," said Chris.

"Your Dad is dead and we are going to the funeral. Aunt Irene and Ineze arranged for a driver to take us to the funeral. After the funeral, they said (to Gladys) your husband is dead and you don't have a job."

Irene and Ineze said to Gladys, “You can look after the boy. We don’t know anything about boys. We are taking the girl. So, they just took Orina, who hated them terribly.” Orina was about five years old and Donald was eight years old. Donald stayed with Gladys in Guaico.

Chris was depressed by Peter’s death and the breakup of her family. Eventually, Chris had a nervous breakdown and was found at the San Fernando railway station, trying to get to Guaico.

“Gladys didn’t work until pa died. The Canadians in charge of the Church were the Mortons. When Pa died, she worked for them,” said Chris. “Donald had lunch there on school days. He went home with Ma after school. Our house, the school and the church were located close together.”



Gladys finished building the house. She also earned extra income by renting half the house and living in the other half. In addition, Gladys worked on road construction projects and selling charcoal, which was used as fuel for a portable stove called a coal pot.

Canadian Presbyterian missionary Rev. Dr. John Morton established Guaico church in 1898 for indentured Indian labourers. The all-wooden church building was built in 1812 and is a national heritage site today.



When Peter died, Hannah (near left) lived in San Fernando. She graduated from Bishops and taught for about a year at Naparima Girls High School. Hannah decided to attend teacher training college for primary school children in San Fernando.

Elaine (far left) was the youngest Montenegro sister. Irene and Ineze did not approve of Elaine, since she lived on Coffee Street and was a sex trade worker.

“The aunties didn’t want anything to do with her. I would sneak to her house to see her after school. She was kind to me,” said Chris. “She used to meet me at the bottom of the hill from Naparima Girl’s School with an OH Henry Bar at lunch time.”

Ineze worked at Imperial stores in San Fernando. “She was one of the main clerks,” said Chris. “Any body of importance who came to do shopping, Ineze took care of them. Ineze was into religion and used to do local preaching at the Methodist church.”

6 Chris trains to be a nurse at San Fernando Hospital

Chris was determined to stay with the Montenegro sisters and finish high school.

The photo on the right shows (second from the right in the front row) Chris graduating from Naparima Girls High School in 1944. Immediately, Aunt Irene got Chris a job as a nurse at the Colonial Hospital in San Fernando.

Irene was the head nurse or Matron of the hospital. “I knew I wanted to be a nurse, so I went to San Fernando Hospital,” said Chris.



“I was only there a year, when after the war, they wanted nurses to come to England to be trained, because they were short of nurses. If you had a high school education and a good reputation, they would pay for you to go to England.”



In her position, Irene played a vital role in the development of health care in Trinidad. She was a cofounder of the Certified Nurses Association of Trinidad and Tobago in 1930. Irene was one of the nurses at the hospital, who actively lobbied for better training standards and regulations.

The newly formed nurses' associations gave evidence to a Royal Commission from England in 1933. They advocated for improved working conditions and standardized, structured training.

By 1934, medical officers began organizing courses in Public Health Nursing, adapting syllabuses from the Royal Sanitary Institute. Irene was honored as an officer of the Order of the British Empire, which is the medal in the photo above on the left.

“When I first said I wanted to be a nurse, I finished school on a Friday and started work on Monday. Fortunately, I went to a very small unit, which was surgical,” said Chris. “In those days, they hand you over to a senior nurse and told you do whatever she asks you to do. You must do what ever she does”.

During the 1930s and 1940's, the Colonial Hospital in San Fernando relied on a hospital-based apprenticeship system. Student nurses learned by doing. They worked demanding ward hours alongside their studies. Apprentices provided essential ward care, while taking lectures from medical officers to meet basic qualification requirements.

“The practical test involved making beds, getting people in and out of bed, and what to do when you give people a bath. I passed that in the first three months,” said Chris.

“When I did the test after one year, I was able to go to England. They were looking for people of good repute to go to England. So of course, Irene picked me.”

Chris worked for one year in San Fernando hospital and gained experience in an operating ward and a medical ward. Irene arranged for Chris to emigrate to England in 1945, as a young 19-year-old nurse, with a good reference and work experience in a hospital in the British Colony of Trinidad. The London County Council paid for Chris' passage to England.



7 Chris migrates to work as a nurse in London, England



“We sailed to England on a French boat called the SS Columbie. At the time, they were closing a prison colony called Devils Island, off the coast of South America, near Guiana,” said Chris.

“They were closing that, so the prisoners were going back to France on the same boat. We didn't see them, we just knew they were on the boat.”

The SS Columbie was a French ocean liner built in 1931 for the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (the French Line). Devil's Island was the most notorious part of the penal colony in French Guiana, which began operation in 1852. Transportation of prisoners ended in 1938, and the penal colony was closed in 1953.

7.1 Mile End Hospital



“When I got to England, I went straight to Mile End hospital, which was in the East End of London,” said Chris. “Not a posh hospital.”

At Mile End hospital, training to be a nurse was very difficult. For the first three months Chris worked in the sluice room, which is an area used for the disposal of human waste. This was essential for preventing infection and controlling disease.

“We washed patients and dead bodies, emptied and washed bed pans, cleaned, prepared dirty clothes to go to the laundry and made beds. When the clothes and laundry come back, you check it in. The first three months were awful”, said Chris.

“So, I wrote to Aunt Irene and said this is terrible. I want to come home.” Irene didn’t write to Chris. She wrote straight to the Matron of Mile End hospital. Irene said Chris was unhappy. What is going on?”

One day during her training at Mile End Hospital, Chris was asked to come to the Matrons office.

“I changed my uniform and went to the office. She said I have a letter here from your aunt, who said you are very unhappy,” said Chris. “Why are you unhappy? We did everything to make your training possible.”

Chris thought “Oh my God, I am really in trouble here. You can’t say I am fed up of cleaning bed pans”. So, Chris apologized. And said, “I was home sick”.

From that day on, Chris never complained. Whatever task or responsibility Chris was given, she did it.



“Everything worked out after 3 or 4 years, you had a special dinning room with a table clothe to eat and you didn’t have to wait for your lunch, which was served by a maid”, said Chris. “It was worth it in the end, but you had to do a lot of suffering to get to that stage.”

7.2 Call the midwife



Chris' favourite TV show was *Call the Midwife*, a British period drama. The show was about a group of nurse midwives, who work in the East End of London in the late 1950s. In real life, Chris did this work in the mid 1940s.

"When you train to become a midwife, you observe ten babies being delivered. Next, you deliver ten babies in the hospital. Then the nurses lived in a house and went on the district in the Kings Cross St Pancreas area," said Chris.

"When I started delivering babies at home, I had to learn to ride a bicycle. I didn't know how to ride a bicycle." Chris bought a bike, when she began to work as a midwife on the district. Chris lived in a little cul de sac, where she learned to ride the bike.

"The children would say come on Nursie you can do it. I had a basket in front and back, so I had two hands to control the bike," said Chris.

"I did that until I got too tired. They had tramlines and when you rode your bike the wheels would get stuck. The kids would help me get out."

Most women having their first baby were asked to come into the hospital, since they don't have a history and something could happen. However, some women with their first baby delivered from home, if they have their mother or someone to help them and the house has running water.



"The first birth I had on the district was a breach birth and this leg came out. The baby knew what to do," said Chris. "First the leg came out and then the shoulder. Fortunately, the head came out. They thought I was very clever to deliver a breach baby, but the baby knew what to do."

"I did general nursing and then I did midwifery. Six of us lived in a house with a maid, who answered calls. When a call came in to go and deliver a baby you went out," said Chris. "But, that was so stressful, because sometimes you came back from delivering a baby and you had to go out again. I decided I had to do a job, where I don't get so worn out."

Chris found the work to be very difficult. She had to deliver a baby, go back to the hospital to sleep for one hour, and then deliver another baby. In addition, she had to visit each mother every day for seven days after they gave birth. Eventually, Chris was exhausted and wanted a job, where she didn't have to be up at all hours of the night.

7.3 Chris meets Peter Gilbert at Royal Eye Hospital



“So, I went to Moorfield’s hospital to do a year of eye training,” said Chris. “I figured with eyes, you won’t get called out at all hours of the night.”

Chris trained for one year at Moorfield’s Eye hospital in Finsbury. After that, she got a job at a small eye hospital near St Georges Circus, which was part of Kings College.

Peter John Valentine Gilbert (February 12, 1932 – June 26, 2021) was young law student at King’s College. The Bureau of Labour sent Peter to work at Paddington station. He did not like sweeping and carrying bags. So, Peter told the supervisor he had some dirt in his eyes and went to the Royal Eye Hospital.

“I was in charge of the emergency for a while at the Royal Eye Hospital. Dad (Peter) came to the hospital with something in his eye,” said Chris. “He was on vacation from university and working at Paddington station.”



Chris told Peter “I don’t think there is anything wrong with your eye, but you could wait to see the doctor.” Peter wanted an excuse to leave his job at Paddington Station.

“I guess he liked the look of me,” said Chris. Later, Peter phoned the eye hospital and said his eye was okay. He asked Chris for a date. Chris did not know when she would have time off, so she told him to call back in four or five weeks. To her surprise, he phoned back.

8 The Gilbert family migrates to Regina and Vancouver

Peter and Chris got married in 1954 and lived with his parents John and Ida in London. Soon after, Clifford and Frances, were born on July 29, 1956, and November 2, 1957, respectively. Despite his qualifications as both a barrister and solicitor, Peter had great difficulty finding a job as a lawyer in London.

As a result, Peter started looking for work in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Peter decided to take a job in Regina, with the Saskatchewan Government Insurance Office (SGIO). Peter arrived at the airport in Regina in 1958 and went directly to SGIO for his first day of work.



Once Peter was established in Regina as a lawyer, he sent for Chris, Clifford and Frances. After migrating to Regina, Chris and her family had to adjust to Canadian culture and cold weather. Peter and Chris had two more children. Chris decided to go home to Trinidad, so Gladys could help her with the birth of Valerie. She was born in Trinidad on April 30, 1961. Richard was born in Regina on September 5, 1964.

Once the children were old enough, Chris went back to her career as a nurse. Based on her British experience, she accepted a position as the Head Nurse of the Childrens' Ward, at Grey Nuns (Pasqua) Hospital. The Hospital served the health care needs of southern Saskatchewan.



On her first day, Chris asked anybody who did want a Black woman as their boss to transfer out of the department. Several nurses decided to work somewhere else in the hospital. Chris worked closely with doctors to update and improve nursing practices. She initiated progressive policies which treated patients as children.

Chris was active in the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association (SNRA). In the photo on the left, Chris is speaking at an SNRA conference.

The SRNA included nurses in management roles, so it was deemed ineligible to act as an official collective bargaining agent. This led to a movement that created the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) in January 1974.

The Gilbert family moved to Vancouver and Chris was hired to run the Children's Ward at St. Paul's hospital. However, St. Paul's decided to close the department. As a result, Chris was given a position as the Head Nurse of the Central Supply Department (CSD) in 1975. Peter was a partner in a private law firm called Blakeney, Griffin and Gilbert in Regina. He decided to take a job with the City of Vancouver in the Civil Litigation department in 1974.

9 Chris personified patience, resilience and persistence

Chris Gilbert personified the values of patience, resilience and persistence. She believed prayer provides the strength to endure hardships and overcome adversity. In her everyday life, Chris used wit, humour and personal self-help to bounce back from difficult experiences. The following humorous stories explain how Chris learned to swim, drive a car and figure skate, as well as win a contest to appear on a local TV show in Vancouver.

9.1 Chris learned to swim in her mid forties after a holiday in Tobago

Chris learned to swim after she took Valerie and Richard to Trinidad for Carnival and a holiday in 1972. They stayed with Aunt Irene and Ineze in San Fernando. Irene paid for them to go to Tobago for two weeks. They stayed at the state-owned Crown Reef Hotel, which had just opened. The hotel had a pool and was near the beach.



"We were staying at the hotel. I got in the pool, but I couldn't swim," said Chris. "And I said help, help, I've gone in too deep. And Richard and Valerie said when you go down three times we will come and save you."

Valerie and Richard were treading water in the deep part of the pool. Mom got in the water. She was assured by the children that it wasn't deep. The children thought this was funny until they had to rescue her. Afterward, Chris was able to laugh about this experience.

On another occasion, at the beach, Chris was standing in a shallow section of water. Valerie and Richard saw a large rogue wave approaching. They waved at their mom and she waved back. Then suddenly, Chris was knocked down by the wave and rolled up onto the beach.

In response, Chris was motivated to take swimming lessons at the YWCA, when they returned home to Regina. Chris continued to swim after she retired from work. In her late 60s, Chris was an extremely strong swimmer. She could do one-hundred lengths in an Olympic sized pool.

9.2 Chris learned to drive and bought a car in her mid-fifties



An important achievement for Chris, which required resilience and persistence, was learning to drive a car in Vancouver. “In Regina, it was okay. You buy your groceries and get a taxi. It was so good, they would even bring the bags right into the house,” said Chris.

“But, when we got to Vancouver, I took a cab one day. The taxi driver said he didn’t feel like going down the driveway to deliver the groceries to the house. I said, if you’re feeling so mean about it, why don’t you put all the groceries on the side of the road? He did and then took off.”

This event took place on a Friday after work, on a day when it had snowed. The house had a very steep driveway. This taxi driver motivated Chris to take a driving course, which included theory and practical lessons.

Chris completed the driver’s education classes, but she failed the practical test. After returning home, Chris was extremely deflated and disappointed. “I hit the curb and went up on the sidewalk. I said to the instructor that man is in my way,” said Chris. The examiner replied, “I hope you will go around him.”



However, Chris bounced back and had the drive to finally pass the practical test on her third attempt. Chris had a license, but the Gilbert family didn’t have a car.



Peter didn’t drive, due to trauma from a military truck accident.

However, Peter agreed to place a large down payment on a car for Chris. Under pressure from colleagues at work,

Peter found a Ford Fairmont demonstration car at a dealership in Vancouver on Broadway and Cambie.

Mom went to the dealership with her friend Eva Chan and her husband. Chris went for a test drive, with the salesman, Eva and her husband in the car. As a new driver, Chris was nervous on the narrow streets of the west side, with cars parked on both sides of the street.

Then suddenly, someone in a parked car opened their door. The parked car door was smashed up. The Fairmont was dented and badly scratched.



“I was so nervous,” said Chris. “Eva Chan’s husband said don’t worry. Now, we can go back and deal on a damaged car. We negotiated a good price on the car. We had to wait a few weeks for the car to be fixed by the dealer, before we could pick it up. I had a lot of accidents the first few times I went out.”

For example, Chris drove the car into a wheelbarrow in the garage and damaged the grill. She also ripped the trim off the opening to the garage, which shook the house. She was not sure how it happened. Chris found out later that the Fairmont had a recall for a transmission that drops into reverse from park.

9.3 Chris wins contest to appear on local Vancouver TV station

Chris and her staff in the Central Supply Department were going through a tough period, when they were moved to a new building at St. Paul’s hospital. So many things went wrong with the transition, that staff were calling in sick and Chris was working double shifts.



“One day, I came home late and was watching CKVU-TV,” said Chris.

“They said if there is anybody out there that can do this job, please send us a letter.”

Immediately, Chris wrote a very long letter, which said, “I have had many dreams in my life. First, I wanted to be a ballet dancer, but with weak knees that did not work out. Then, I wanted to be a belly dancer. But I had too many trips to the hospital with heavy handed surgeons, so that I couldn’t do that anymore.”

Finally, Chris said “I wanted to play the piano. That didn’t work, since I had arthritis in my hands. But, I can still talk. So, I am sure I can do your job, especially after the day I had at work today. I could do your show standing on my head, with my knickers off.”

Chris mailed the letter to CKVU-TV. After receiving the letter, the staff was in shock. The staff had fun with the letter all day long. They couldn’t believe it. So, they called Chris. “Eventually, I was on the show. I was a famous person for about a week,” said Chris. “People would say that’s the lady on TV.”

CKVU-TV was launched on September 5, 1976. The most popular show on the new station was "The Vancouver Show", which was a two-hour live program hosted by Mike Winlaw and Pia Shandel. The program featured a contest called "So you think you are a star." Chris was calm and cool while answering questions during the broadcast. Chris’ composure surprised and unnerved both Mike and Pia. Based on her performance, Chris really could have done their job.

9.4 Chris learned to figure skate in her early sixties

Another achievement, which required resilience and persistence, was when Chris learned to figure skate. To get started, Chris went to buy a pair of skates at a sporting goods store in North Vancouver.

“I went to the store to get a pair of skates. The man said what size is he (Richard) wearing now,” said Chris. She replied “It’s not for him its for me. The man rolled his eyes at me. I bought the skates.” Chris arrived at the rink for her first lesson in an outfit, with a toque and sweatpants.



“We had just got onto the ice. She (the instructor) said that people who are on the ice for the first time to learn how to skate should meet her at the other end of the rink,” said Chris, who replied “How am I going to get there? She said do your best. So, by the time I struggled to get there, the class was half over.”

Chris learned quickly and started taking private lessons. She found a male skating partner, who was kind and helpful. He thought mom was brave. After a few years, Chris was a better skater than people who could skate, when she started lessons.

“I never got great at it, but I really enjoyed it. I used to go regular for two or three times a week,” said Chris. “I did it for quite a while. Then one day I thought, perhaps you are tempting fate.” Chris was worried about how fast people were skating around at the open ice sessions. She did not want to get knocked down.

10 Matilda's wedding photo and other family photos

The biography of Chris Gilbert is based on interviews conducted by Richard Gilbert in 2024, as well as family photos displayed on the walls of her apartment for almost forty years.

Chris would tell stories about her life for any guests to the apartment, who asked questions about the photos.



The most important historical photo was taken at the wedding of Matilda Guada and Desmond Hoyte on May 6, 1939. Matilda is Chris' oldest sister. Other members of the Guada family in this photo are Chris' father Peter, and her sisters Hannah and Orina. This is the earliest known photo of Chris and the only photo of her father Peter.

Chris' aunts Irene, Ineze and Elaine are in the photo, as well as Auntie Jane and her children, Uncle Dado Guada, Aunt Cleo Guada and Aunt Octavia Windsor. Beatrice, who is Chris' half sister is one of the children in the first row. Perhaps this is why, Gladys is not in the picture. Or maybe she was preparing food for the guests. Donald is also not in the photo.

The photos in Chris' apartment explain her early life and the struggle of Peter and Gladys to sustain the Guada household. In these early years, Chris' personal growth was influenced by the culture, race, class and living conditions in Trinidad under British colonialism. The trajectory of Chris' professional development was shaped by Aunt Irene, who arranged for her to move to San Fernando for high school, train to be a nurse and then migrate to London.



Chris and the Guada family had a world view, which has its origin in Trinidad, and was a blend of Christianity and African traditions.

Chris and her siblings Matilda, Hannah, Donald and Orina are from a generation of Afro-Trinidadians, who had incredible

patience, resilience and persistence. The Spiritual Baptist religion provided Afro-Trinidadians with a worldview and communal solidarity to resist, endure, and survive slavery.

Chris personified patience. She was not a preacher. However, she was an excellent singer, who had a gift for turning ideas into concrete, practical, everyday actions. Chris believed prayer provides the strength to endure hardships and overcome adversity. Her success in life was based on the capacity to be resilient or bounce back from difficult experiences.

This biography highlights and celebrates Chris' beautiful and inspiring life, by telling the family story in her own words. These stories are a testament to Chris' faith and ability to guide the Gilbert family through the ups and downs of everyday life in England and Canada.

