



WARM WELCOME

Canada has 10 citizenship judges. They are people who have achieved a lot and are well respected. Their main job is to oversee citizenship ceremonies. They are sometimes called on to decide whether a person meets all the requirements for citizenship. These special judges don't need to have a background in law, although many do. Another important job they have is to help people understand what it means to be a Canadian citizen and why citizenship matters. *Kayak* spoke to two citizenship judges to learn more about what they do.



Rania Sfeir's background is in journalism and public relations. She came to Canada from Lebanon with her husband and kids in 2003. Judge Sfeir and her family live in Montreal.



Suzanne Carrière is Canada's first Métis citizenship judge. Her background in law led her to working with residential school survivors. Judge Carrière lives near Winnipeg with her husband and kids.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT BEING A CITIZENSHIP JUDGE?

RS: I am the first one to announce to these people that they are now Canadian citizens. That is such an immense privilege that I cannot describe it.

SC: It's the best job in the world. Through this role I get to do some public speaking, and I get to talk about reconciliation all the time, the thing I'm so passionate about. Newcomers often have a different perspective — depending on where they come from, they can sympathize. I like to convey that it doesn't matter if you're Indigenous or non-Indigenous, whether you were born here or not. We're all responsible for the future.

WHAT'S IT LIKE PRESIDING OVER CITIZENSHIP CEREMONIES?

SC: It's amazing. It's an honour and a privilege. It's one of the most important days in their lives. They're excited, they're emotional, they're dressed up. It never gets old.

RS: It is beautiful. People feel related in some way. It is an unforgettable day. You let yourself live the emotion, really feel it. I like to watch people's faces to see how they react, how they cheer. And at the moment of the national anthem, they're singing from the bottom of their hearts. They now belong to this country and they are proud to show it.

DESCRIBE YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP.

SC: I'm Red River Métis. I was born here, so I'd never been through the citizenship process. I went to a ceremony once, before I became a citizenship judge, and was so touched by the beautiful ceremony that I got a little teary-eyed!

RS: During ceremonies, I mention the fact that I am myself an immigrant. I was one of the lucky ones who left by choice. I chose Canada. We learned about Canada's reputation — the country of the kindest people on earth. The generosity of Canadians is known all over the world. I felt Canadian the first moment I put my feet on this land. I didn't wait to become an official citizen to feel this sense of belonging. I mention it during ceremonies because I want people to believe in this country. You can become whoever you want to be in this country.

TELL US ABOUT A MEMORABLE CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY YOU'VE BEEN INVOLVED IN.

RS: I was presiding over a ceremony where 350 people were becoming Canadian citizens. We were in a big ballroom in a hotel. Between the candidates and their guests there were probably 600 people there. Before the ceremony started, a gentleman came to the staff and told them, "Today I want to propose to my girlfriend." So of course we helped him. We managed to put his girlfriend the very last on the list to be called. She approached and was facing me, and her boyfriend was behind her on one knee. She turned to him, and suddenly 600 people were cheering.

SC: Once I was presiding on National Indigenous Peoples Day. We made sure the whole platform party, everyone helping with the ceremony, was Indigenous. The clerk was First Nations. The Member of Parliament, Robert-Falcon Ouellette, and the Member of the Legislative Assembly, Wab Kinew, were both Indigenous. The representatives of the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP were both First Nations. We had Elders there, too. It was very powerful.