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Toronto

## How YWCA honouree Connie Walker discovered she wanted to be a journalist

CBC's Connie Walker is one of 7 women being honoured Thursday as a 2017 'Women of Distinction' by the YWCA

[Alexandra Sienkiewicz](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 18, 2017 5:00 AM ET | Last Updated: May 18, 2017



Connie Walker, an award-winning investigative reporter, focused on reporting on Indigenous issues for CBC, is being honoured by the YWCA as one of their 'Women of Distinction' for 2017. (CBC)

When she was in Grade 11, Connie Walker watched as mainstream media reported on the high profile murder of a young Indigenous mother named Pamela George in Regina.

The lives of the two men convicted of killing her, two white university students, were well known. What was not, was the victim's background.

"I felt the way she was portrayed in the media was so unfair, because there was so much emphasis she was a sex worker," said Walker, who is being honoured by the [YWCA](#) as one of their "Women of Distinction" for 2017.

"They didn't talk about her life, her family, or her children ... and I remember feeling like our voices — as an Indigenous woman myself — were not being heard."

- **INTERACTIVE** | [Missing & Murdered: The Unsolved Cases of Indigenous Women and Girls](#)
- **PODCAST** | [Missing & Murdered: Who Killed Alberta Williams?](#)

That was when Walker says she was compelled to write an editorial for the school paper, and help change how Indigenous voices were being reflected in the media. Since then, she's won multiple awards and has received accolades for her work in Indigenous communities.

Walker is one of seven women being awarded by the YWCA on Thursday evening. It's the first time all the "Women of Distinction" being awarded are from diverse communities — something Walker calls an "incredibly powerful" and "remarkable" message.

The six other women being honoured include:

- Hibaq Gelle, a community development coordinator who works with Somali refugees and mentors young women.
- Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, a former city councillor who has been a social justice advocate her entire life.
- Ishita Aggarwal, a women's rights activist who among her many accomplishments helped create the first national Women In Science and Engineering conference.
- [Dr. Marjorie Dixon](#), a renowned reproductive endocrinologist who has helped families with fertility.
- Denise Dwyer, an well-respected assistant Crown Attorney who was the first black person to hold leadership positions in the Ministry of the Attorney General.
- Janice Fukakusa, the first female CAO and CFO at Royal Bank, who has championed the advancement of women in leadership positions.

## 'Full circle'

Walker says her career has, in a way, "come full circle," since that first article she wrote for her school paper.

As one of the founding members of [CBC's Indigenous unit](#), one of Walker's focuses is the stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

"There wasn't always a recognition that these were important stories to Canadians," she says, but adds that the climate is changing and there is the realization that "their lives, their stories and their voices are important and that Canadians care about this and Canadians want to know more."



Retired RCMP investigator Garry Kerr shows Connie Walker his old police notebooks, which contain details about his work on the case of Alberta Williams. (CBC)

Walker is proud to announce that a second season of her award-nominated podcast, [Missing and Murdered](#), is currently in the works.

## Active online community

The shift to digital programming has been instrumental in bringing Indigenous stories to the forefront, says Walker.

"The biggest barrier has been access, and that's why the shift to digital has been really key to having access to communities that we didn't have access to in the same way," she says.

"Indigenous people in particular have really adapted really quickly to using social media as a tool."

She adds that the ability to receive immediate feedback — on social media particularly — has helped give a voice to those communities who may not have previously been given a space in mainstream media.

"We started to notice because there is this incredibly active community online, and now we know how powerful that community is," said Walker.



Tiar Wilson, left, Kimberly Ivany, centre, and Connie Walker, right, accept the Canadian Screen Award for best cross-platform project - non-fiction for CBC News and CBC Aboriginal's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women interactive. (Tashauna Reid/CBC)

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Giving her community a voice in mainstream media is one of Walker's proudest moments, dating back to 2012, when she worked on a documentary series called [8th Fire](#), produced by CBC.

She recalls how she felt the night it aired.

"I remember seeing and hearing Indigenous people on national television being given this space to tell our own stories, and to hear the voices of people that I recognized back home ... I thought of my grandmother and I thought of how much has changed since she died when I was in high school."

- **DOCUMENTARY | [8th Fire: Aboriginal Peoples, Canada & The Way Forward](#)**

"I remember feeling so proud that finally our stories and our voices were being amplified on this national level," added Walker, who grew up on a reserve in Saskatchewan.

“Our job is not to take people's stories but to help them tell their stories.”

- Connie Walker, CBC journalist

Walker hopes to continue helping people understand the context of the realities that Indigenous people face, an issue that was thrust into the light this week during the controversy surrounding an article that encouraged cultural appropriation.

- **['Emerging Indigenous Voices' award far surpasses fundraising goal](#)**
- **[An emotional Jesse Wenté on the 'remarkable arrogance' of an appropriation prize](#)**

As journalists, "our job is not to take people's stories but to help them tell their stories ... and to amplify voices that we wouldn't necessarily hear and to provide the context that people really need to understand communities that are not always well represented in mainstream media."

Being honoured by the YWCA as one of their "Women of Distinction" is "incredibly humbling," says Walker.

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