

CREATIVE EMPOWERMENT

“Doorless Home”

By **Zehra Abrar**



They say home is not always a structure made of walls and windows. It can be a number of people who are your shelter, your walls, and windows- who not only protect you but also give you a sense of belongingness. Isn't belongingness what we all crave??

For me, one such human was my grandfather; WAS doesn't sound nice. They tell me that when I was born, he was in prison for standing against the atrocities of the state. One day he had a dream that some tall figure handed him a baby wrapped in a green cloth. The next day I was born, and that was the day he was let go from prison. He came home to this child from his dream, named her, and loved her for the rest of his life. I remained that special grandkid all through my childhood and beyond.

He was a figurehead, a community leader, a reformist, and an orator, but for me, he was my ABAHAZoor, one who would make French fries for me, someone who would write birthday cards for me, and also one who got pretty dresses from his overseas trips.

Years passed, and his love grew, but not his memory. His memory, if personified, would imagine like a person robbing you and leaving you without everything you held dear to your heart. As a religious cleric, he used to recite sermons every year for 40 years of his life. Thousands of people will flock only to hear his beautiful words, and on that unfaithful day, he forgot the story that he had repeated for so many nights.

He stopped recognizing people around him, and one day he didn't know who I was. ME?? I was his Zehra. They would ask him who she was, and he would say "*aasi kahn pan'ni*". That broke my heart, and I couldn't stop those tears from flowing from my eyes. That day he called me near him, and I could see the pain of not knowing me in his eyes. He kissed me and went back to his bed.

I always feared losing him to death. I would wake up from nightmares and go to him running. But that day, it felt like dementia was scarier than death. He was there, but he was not. And alas, last year, he left this world, and my only regret is that, as an immigrant who came to Canada for a better life, I couldn't see him for the last time. He left, but I feel like some part of me became numb to his leaving. I couldn't run 7000 miles to him for a last hug, a last kiss, or a last touch. They buried him while opening a deep wound in my heart. He loved me from the time I opened my eyes until he closed his- leaving my home broken.

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“Limbo”

By Sana’a Jaber



My father traveled the world for much of my childhood. For those brief moments when he actually was home, the first thing he would do upon arrival from one exotic destination or another was to lay out his clothes on the bed for my mother to wash. Then, a few days later, that same scene would repeat itself before his next flight. My mother would lay out his freshly cleaned and perfectly ironed clothes on their large and often solitary bed before packing his suitcase, and my father would disappear all over again.

My little girl brain would hound me with thoughts like will he return this time? How long till you see him again Sana’a? You must try to remember his face and how he smells, just in case! That scene caused me immense heartache for most of my childhood and well into my adult life. But, his absence, as well as the many wars that raged around me, propelled me into the safety of books and never-ending stories. I searched for a term that would relay the enormity of the pain I felt, the inability to move forward or even go back, and having no control over my own life: Limbo.

lim·bo

an uncertain period of awaiting a decision or resolution; an intermediate state or condition.

Fast forward to September 2019, soon after I crossed over to Quebec from America with my one-and-a-half-year-old daughter and my husband (well, ex-husband now, but that’s another story), we were housed in this makeshift encampment. That space was made up of identical rooms with identical beds and no doors. While that offered me an intimate glimpse into the countless lives of refugees, each fleeing their own monsters on journeys that may never be told, it provided little privacy or control. There were no dryers in that part of Quebec, so I would wash our clothes over the sink and set them out on the bunk bed to dry.

For 10 nights and 11 days, every day, I would pack the clothes back into that one suitcase we had to cram our entire lives into, I would feel hopeful that today was the day our names would be called, and we would be escorted to that red bus many others have sat in before us and be on our way to the promised land. But every morning, after having not heard our names echo in the maze of hallways, I would wash the clothes and lay them back on the bed again to dry and be brutally reminded of that little girl watching her father lay out his clothes on the bed only to pack them up again not to be seen for quite some time. In more ways than one, I am still that little girl, stuck in a state of Limbo, not knowing whether this was my new home, in the land of many freedoms, or if my home was that tiny war-torn land I left behind.

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By Mercedes Concepcion (Metztli)



My name is Mercedes Concepcion. My Indigenous name is Metztli, Luna in Spanish and moon in English. When I was a child people called me Conchita, short for Concepcion. Concepcion is who I was. All until one day at age seventeen I decided to change my name. I felt it was too long. I dropped Concepcion and left Mercedes because it was my first name.

Some time passed and I met the love of my life. He was an artist like me! He was a singer and an actor. We were both so happy to meet one another and very much in love. Everything changed when a year into our relationship, I felt an ache in my stomach. I went to the hospital and I was told that I had miscarried. I didn't even know that I was pregnant! My boyfriend and I waited for the results to see what went wrong. As we sipped our tea a bird landed on the table she looked in my eyes and then she flew away. I felt that this bird had a special message for us. The doctor then came and

informed us that I lost my baby as a result of bleeding too much. I was heartbroken! I had the feeling that she would have been a girl. I named her Sophia. Two days later, I had a dream with Sophia in it. She told me that I need to focus on my art. She asked me to paint with her and we went to paint. She put her hands in the green paint and she said that she loves the green colour and that her hands are her art. I saw an angel in my dream. I saw a large Eagle flying and I felt that this was her spirit. I was so heartbroken at the loss that I went through a deep depression. I am an activist working around human rights. I have done this for over ten years. I held exhibits where many people came. I presented workshops on natural dyes and recycled paper. We went through persecution in Mexico and so my husband and I decided to escape to Canada. While in Canada, I had another two miscarriages. I felt they would have been boys and I named them Mathew and David.

When I was pregnant with Mathew my friend Laurie saw two hummingbirds by her window. This was a sign to me that a hummingbird is his spirit animal. Later I saw three stuffed owls in a tree house. After

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miscarrying David, I dreamed that I was on the beach and saw three owls together and another bird. The owl looked deep in my eyes before they all flew away together.

I was so depressed because I kept miscarrying and I really wanted to be a mother. In February 2021, I decided to go to therapy both for my emotional wellbeing but also to discover why this was happening to me when I wanted a child so much. When I spoke to my beautiful therapist, I was so happy! We spoke about my inner child. She asked me about my name. When I told her that my name was “conception” she told me that it is important that I go back to using my true name. One day I saw a stork with a nest and I knew that I must be pregnant. On April 15, 2021, shortly after I honored my name “conception” I found out I was pregnant with Mateo. I now have a healthy and beautiful son. He is seventeen months and we are so happy with him! With each pregnancy and pregnancy loss I was guided by birds; they were all around me both in my dreaming and waking life. After Mateo was born an Indigenous healer told me that Mateo’s Blackfoot name is Kiayo (pronounced Giayo) meaning bear!

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“My Immigration Story”

By Muzhgan Adib



My husband and I worked in the previous government of Afghanistan. When the Afghan government fell, and the Taliban terrorist group came to power, I left Afghanistan with my husband and two children. We left everything we had there, like, our house, family members, and friends. After leaving Afghanistan, we were in Greece for seven months, where we lived temporarily in a hotel for four months and in a small apartment for three months. Life there was good, but we suffered from our lack of destiny. When the Canadian government accepted our asylum case, we received our Canadian visas and entered Canada in May 2022.

For 5 months, we lived in a small hotel room far from the city. The hotel room was very small and boring, in which we slept and ate, and the children played. For us, this hotel room was like a prison with an open gate, but we had nowhere else to go. After this period, we were trying to get a house for rent. We found several houses and apartments in different areas. But since we were newcomers with no background living in Canada and lacked credit and jobs, the owners did not rent us their places. In fact, we experienced the difficult conditions of immigration until our Canadian friends found an apartment and became our guarantors to rent it. Now, we have been living in our house for 6 months.

Migration means losing the homeland, living facilities, efforts, and achievements, being away from all family and friends, losing education, becoming homeless, accepting torture and mental injuries, not having credibility in the new society, and starting a new life from scratch.

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“Hugging Myself”

By Maliheh Deyhim



When I was leaving my country to come to Canada, one of my friends asked me how I felt about leaving. Of course, I was feeling many things, but I responded quickly and without much thinking: “I feel that I am going to hug myself in Canada.” Living in a male-centered society had gradually killed my confidence through the years. I felt so empty and scared of a future in which I had to inevitably accept my inferior position as a woman.

I arrived in Canada on my birthday, and a journey of discoveries about myself and others started, much like a rebirth. Knowing oneself is never easy. There is shock, there is fear, and there can be shame. But I went through it all despite the pain.

Getting settled in a completely new environment was difficult. Studying and living in a new language was extremely challenging. But I tried, failed, tried, and felt more and more comfortable. Now, English is the language of my confidence, as I gained back the confidence I lost once through learning to be myself in an English context. By knowing myself better and feeling more at home in Canada, I was able to also heal my relationship with my country.

How do I feel now? Still trying, but I did hug myself in Canada!

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“A Rainy Day in My Workplace”

By Israt Jahan Ayesha



I am standing on my apartment balcony. It's evening now. Toronto skyline is at twilight. But the sky is gloomy. There is a heavy rain forecast, but I have to go to work tonight. I stepped into my workplace at 11:30 am. It's a food factory. It's raining crazy outside.

I pick, collect, and package boxes.
Again, I pick, collect, and package boxes.
Again, I pick, collect, and package boxes.
Continually ... again ... and ... again!

Suddenly, I feel unwell, talked with my supervisor, and left the workplace around 1:30 am. It's raining crazy outside! I have to take the TTC to reach home. I am lost in the middle of the night in an intersection. I look here, look there! Trying to figure out which way I have to stand to catch my bus. In the middle of the night, I am all wet! My glasses are wet! I am sweating.

Allah! আমি যেন বাসটা ধরতে পারি (I don't want to miss the bus).

I have to catch that bus to reach home. Finally, I see the bus, but it's right on the opposite side. I crossed the road carefully, full of joy, and all wet! Yes, my bus is here. I am all wet! I am home safe. Alhamdulillah! On my bed in a cozy way. I did it!

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“My Happy Place, or Is It?”

By **Novlette Evans**



Born in the wild! Yes, the wilderness, no hospital bed, just an organic setting with birds and bees, flowers and trees; that is Jamaica - my happy place!

The sound of chirping birds every morning wakes me up to tunes that I could not comprehend but rhyming blends to a sweet melody as if we flavored tea. And speaking of tea, what did we buy to make it? Nothing but the sweet aroma of leaves in our garden! What did we sell? Nothing from our fields, just an exchange of healthy food and nothing branded!

We frolic to school with the willows in tune and rivers and streams trickling through the seams of great giant trees with sunshine caressing their leaves! We learned in school like it was the ending of our days with a poem every night consisting of melodious verses, went to bed with every word on our pillow, and woke up excited to run and bellow!

When the rain trickled down, we had barefooted toes that screamed and twiggled like a great big giggle wanting more of dirt and stones crushing nails, but we threw away our shoes and muddled in the puddle!

Coming to Canada so excited with huge planes like we dreamt of and gazed up when we were kids, thinking of opportunities that would make us ponder and wonder when? Then excited to discover, we landed, and everything around us felt so magnificent, but the laughter faded and jerked us into pondering why did we come to what is here to discover?

Well, white mounds of snow like mountain peaks and the jobs we envision, not even a peep!

Lost in wonder, shoving on the subway, rushing in buses that changed directions, and everything looks funny when the hues differ. I look for the yellow tree, which now shed its leaves, and I miss my stop because I am now lost. I smile and ask where am I?

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By Maseeha Faizi



Once upon a time, there was a girl who came to Canada in 2022. She struggled with language barriers; she could not understand people so well or talk to them in English because where she comes from, Afghanistan, people do not speak English, and they only speak Persian and Pashto. Thus she decides to learn English because she notices that people here mostly don't speak either of her languages. She starts watching English movies and reading English novels to improve her English skills. A few months later, she was supposed to go to school after a while because when she came to Canada, it was the summer break for students, but now she had to start going to school because her summer break ended.

At first, she was afraid of going to a new school with a whole bunch of different people from different societies. Then, her younger brother, who is going to go to the same school as her, comes to her and says: "Don't worry sis, we are both going to be ok. I am sure that you will make hundreds of friends in school, and I also think that the whole school will think you are the coolest of them all." what his brother said to her was a motivational speech that she did not expect to hear from him. Then she said to herself my brother is right; I will do great in school, and I will make a lot of friends. When she goes to school, she says to herself: "You are great, you look great, and you will do great." Even though she is an ESL student, she gets straight As on her first report card, and she continues like that, and now she is the favorite student of all her teachers.

Also, she did not just do good in school. She started attending different kinds of programs to complete her community hours or graduation, experience new things, make new friends, and get involved in the community. Right now, she takes a program (Creative Empowerment) once a week every Saturday, and she is learning a lot from it, like how to tell a story, write a story, and even make a good story. Thanks to this program, she could frame one of her experiences as an immigrant in Canada into a good story.

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“Tupananchiskama”

“Without Saying Goodbye”

By Romy Alza



I remember the last time when I said goodbye to my husband, and it was at Jorge Chavez Airport. Also, I remember what he told me as he boarded the plane to leave Peru: "This will be the last time we part." Edwin is lovely and grumpy, sweet, and angry too, but the best way to describe him is to say: He is hardworking. I am proud of him.

It had been a long wait of eighteen months for Edwin and me to reunite, which finally happened when my visitor visa got approved. The mix of emotions was overwhelming, ranging from excitement and gratitude to a tinge of sadness due to my inability to control my feelings. As I prepared to leave my hometown, I felt a surge of emotions, and time seemed to fly quickly. On my way to the airport, I couldn't help but notice the happy faces of people walking on the streets, the houses, and the noise that defines my country, which also boasts the most delicious food in the world.

I cherish my roots and cultural heritage, just as the lyrics of a Peruvian singer say: I cherish my roots and cultural heritage, just as the lyrics of a Peruvian singer say, "Sobre mi pecho llevo tus colores y estan mis amores contigo Peru, somos tus hijos y ns uniremos y asi triunfaremos contigo Peru." (I carry your colours on my chest, and my loves are with you, Peru. We are your children and will unite and triumph with you, Peru.)

Edwin is a clear example of courage, persistence, and bravery. Witnessing his steadfast dedication to his work, even after sleepless nights due to our crying child or his insomnia, has been truly inspiring. Although it hasn't been easy since our child's autism diagnosis, we are determined to remain strong, patient, optimistic, and hopeful.

In 2019, when I came to Canada, Edwin and I decided to build a life filled with love and affordability. So, we have constructed together Canada our new home. Now we have enough. Sometimes life is hard, but finally, life is beautiful.

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How is it living in Canada? Experiencing Canada via a small screen

By **Minju Kim**



“How is it living in Canada?” People who I have met in Canada often ask me this question when they know I am an immigrant woman. With this question, people are looking forward to my answer with expectant faces, sparkling eyes, and big smiles. When I get this question, I become a robot and say: “Great! Good!” However, there are many feelings hiding behind positive words.

I remember arriving in Canada with many expectations of learning new cultures, getting new careers, and making new relationships. However, I was

stuck in a small square room. I met people through a square screen because all classes were online. I saw colorful leaves through a square window because I had no friends, language barriers, and different school cultures. I was even scared to go out after the experience when one lady yelled at me: “Go to your country with the virus, you dirty Chinese.” Just because I have yellow skin (I am actually South Korean). All my experiences in the early period were via small square frames. I really wanted to go back to a familiar space, but in order to keep my visa, I had to stay in this small room in Canada. My room was getting smaller and darker even when it was morning time.

After the first semester was done, I had to talk to the chair of my department because I had decided to quit my degree. Starting new life during the pandemic made me exhausted to continue school life in Canada. The biggest reason that I wanted to quit everything was loneliness. The meeting with the professor was my first request to ask for help in Canada, and it made me want to stay here more. I finally found a person who listened to me, and I realized that there are many services for international students and immigrants around.

Now, I still don't feel I am stable. But I feel I took a step outside of my small square frame. All classes went back in person, and I have friends I can share my life with and hang out with. I am getting to know where and who can listen to me.

I am still on my journey to belong to Canada, and people also still ask me, “How is it living in Canada so far?” I wish I could answer: “I am enjoying living in Canada” from now.

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“Cubs”

By **Basma Abouasaf**



Once upon a time, in a dense forest, there was Cubs, who was very playful and curious. She loved to explore the forest and discover new places. One day, Cubs decided to venture further into the forest than she ever had before and wanted to see what lay beyond the trees. She set out early in the morning, excited to discover new places.

As she walked, she saw many new things--strange trees, colorful flowers, and glistening streams. She played and explored for hours, but as the sun began to set, she realized she had wandered too far from home. Suddenly, the sky turned dark, and the wind started to howl. Cubs looked up and saw a dark cloud approaching. It was a storm!

Cubs knew she had to find shelter quickly. She looked around and heard the wind saying: “I am the stooooorm. I am stronger than you, baby bear!” She said: “No, please be kind to me. I wanna still live. I will be responsible for surviving.” Cubs tried step by step. The wind retraced her steps. But she continued step by step. She found a small cave and ran inside, scared but safe.

She had a dream to see her mother again. The storm raged on for hours, with lightning striking the ground and thunder booming so loudly that Cubs could feel the ground shake. As the storm subsided, Cubs peeked outside and saw that the forest had been transformed. Trees were knocked down, and the once-glistening streams had become raging rivers.

Cubs knew she had to find her way back home, but everything looked different now. She tried to retrace her steps, but the forest was unrecognizable. She wandered for hours, trying to find her way, but she was lost.

She started searching and discovering. She met friends. She became stronger, knowing a lot of ways.

She walked step by step ... step by step. Ohhh, she knows this place. Yees! She was close to home.

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“My Story”

By Celi Chavez



My name is Celi, and I come from Ecuador. I am happily married to a man who was born in Canada but has Ecuadorian roots. We hit it off right away and spent hours talking during the few days we had together before he had to leave for Canada. Despite the distance between us, we kept in touch every day, and our connection only grew stronger over time. A year later, when he returned to Ecuador, we knew we had something special and decided to give a long-distance relationship a try. Despite the challenges, we've managed to make it work, and our love for each other has only deepened with each passing day. We went to the immigration office, and they gave me permission to enter the country. Sometime later, I went to visit my husband in Canada.

It was in 2017 when I first arrived, and we got married that same year. Over the years, I've returned to Canada three more times, but it wasn't until June 8, 2019, that I traveled with

my daughter. The trip was going well until just four days before our return flight when I suddenly felt overwhelming anguish. Without knowing why, I began to pray, placing my life in God's hands and asking for guidance. Despite my fear, I found comfort in my faith and trust that everything would work out in the end. I was feeling fine until one night when my husband and I went out to eat as part of a farewell celebration. Suddenly, I experienced excruciating pain. It turned out that I was six weeks pregnant and needed emergency medical attention. After rushing to the hospital, we found out that he had a gallstone and needed surgery within three days. Despite feeling weak and scared, I had surgery, but the doctors warned me that there was a high risk of losing the baby. This news weighed heavily on my mind as I thought about the implications of my daughter missing school in our country.

Despite my efforts, I still feel weak and am struggling with the aftermath of my illness. I consulted with my doctors about the possibility of traveling, and although they gave me the green light, they also cautioned that they could not be held responsible if something went wrong during or after the trip. The thought of jeopardizing the health of my unborn child filled me with fear and apprehension. Eventually,

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my husband and I decided to enroll our daughter in school, despite my concerns that I lacked the necessary documentation. Thanks to the sponsorship process, we were able to secure her enrollment, and I continued to focus on my recovery. After two months, my husband received an email stating that he was not eligible to sponsor me. I felt devastated, as during my pregnancy, I had no access to medical care or assistance. My sponsor was my only hope, and now that hope had been shattered by the application's rejection. I felt like a piece of my life had been torn away, leaving me stranded and alone.

Initially, they assured me that if there were any issues with the sponsorship, I could proceed with the process on my own, but at an additional cost. I agreed to this arrangement, and we patiently waited for months. Finally, one day we received a notification informing us of an upcoming interview with the judge to present our case. Unfortunately, this coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which threw everything into chaos. At the same time, my son (Jared) was born, and I was overwhelmed with anxiety and worried that we would not survive this pandemic. It had been six months since we last heard from him, but then they sent a message saying that in a week, we would have a Zoom meeting with the judges since everything was closed due to the pandemic. On the day of the meeting, we were bombarded with question after question and had to provide evidence to support our case. That day I felt immense happiness knowing that God was actively involved in my life. My plan was to return to Ecuador so that my daughter could study, and my son was born there. Also, it was an opportunity for my husband to meet us since the paperwork was finally completed, and we could come without any problem. Our ultimate goal was to move to Canada from there. However, four years have passed since that day, and I have not been able to return to Ecuador. Despite the setbacks, I am hopeful that one day, I will be able to revisit the place that holds so many precious memories for my family.

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By Ghizlane Ez-zarrad



It has not been easy to settle in Canada. My life is completely changed, and I'm getting used to it. My husband decided to leave our country in search of a better life. We had a perfect life! He probably was looking for other options and opportunities. We began to build our settlement from scratch, using the resources that we could find in this new land.

I was excited about the new experiences that awaited me, but I was also nervous about the challenges I could face. I pushed myself to try new things and take risks.

One day, I wanted to start a new challenge in winter and be out of my comfort zone. It was skating! I knew it would be difficult, but it deserves a try. Our first time playing it was similar to our month in Canada. We struggled to communicate with others and to understand the new culture. It was like trying to balance on skates for the first time. We faced new challenges like finding a job and a place to live. It was like trying to learn new skating tricks.

The stress of settling into a new country began to take a toll on my health. I became ill and had to take a break from my new life. It was like getting injured while skating, needing to rest and recover before getting back on the ice.

Sometimes I fell, but I always got back up and tried again. It wasn't easy to learn it, but I succeeded. I kept practicing and learning, slowly but surely improving my skills. It's true that I'm still struggling here, but this is not my first day in skating. In the end, I realized that settling in a new country was like learning how to skate: it was difficult and at times overwhelming, but with practice, perseverance, and support, I'm able to achieve my goals and build a new life in my new home.

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By Homa Hedayat



Once upon a time, there was a young woman who immigrated to Canada from a far-off land. She came to Canada with a dream of pursuing her academic career and making a name for herself in her field of expertise. She worked hard day and night, studying diligently and putting in endless hours of effort to prove herself to others and secure a job in her field.

But even with all her hard work, she often felt invisible and overlooked because of the cultural difference and languages. Despite her best efforts, she struggled to make meaningful connections with people and to be accepted. But she never gave up on her dream and kept pushing forward, determined to succeed no matter what obstacles she faced. As time passed, the world was struck by a pandemic, and the young woman found herself feeling more isolated than ever before. But she refused to let this setback defeat her. She looked for new ways to build a connection with herself, increase her knowledge in different areas, and connect with others through social media to build relationships and find new opportunities.

With time, the young woman began to feel more confident and accepted by society through accomplishments in her study and work. She found that her hard work and dedication had paid off, and she was finally being recognized for her talents and contributions.

She found supportive friends and mentors that showed her the way to success, which brought her more sense of confidence and belonging to Canada. Canada became her home, and she was proud to be a part of its rich and diverse community. Through it all, the young woman never lost sight of her dreams or determination to succeed. She faced many challenges along the way but overcame them with resilience and hard work.

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“Stories of light: part of my life mission”

By **Laura Aidee**



Most people I know always talked to me about the “mission of life” as something that fulfills you, makes you feel you are on the right path, and fills your heart. There I was at my new University having to decide what I would do with the rest of my life. Of course, that was not an easy choice, and I didn’t have a clue. On that day, I only remember that I closed my eyes, and the very first scene that came into my mind was me surrounded by people from different parts of the world, and then the UN. That was a dream, but at least it put my feet on the ground and led me to choose to start an International Relations Bachelor program.

Life took a different path afterward, and I ended up in Foreign Trade, working for companies expanding business in different parts of the world. I was all about business. Having that experience, I decided to open my own company called Mucho Gusto Mexico, with a butterfly as my logo, dedicated to the distribution of Mexican food. But there was always that peculiar feeling that something was missing in my purpose in life.

One day I received a call from my actual employee, my always guardian angel (as I call her), offering me a job here in Canada as her trade consultant. With my husband’s support, I accepted the offer with no hesitation, mainly due to the lack of security in my country, especially for women—more than 1,227 women and girls were reported missing just in the first months of 2019. So, we took a plane to Canada, bringing our lovely cat, Mishka, with us.

Then, Covid appeared in everyone’s life, and my boss began struggling with my payroll, so I also found a job in a Mexican restaurant (take-offs only). Suddenly the magic started to lean out. As rare as it may seem, working in a kitchen opened a different door in my life. Women from my own country started to tell me their life stories. I heard truly touching stories that I used to think belonged only in the news. Most girls came to Canada to escape cartel threats against their families or small businesses. Also, even in a First World Country such as Canada, they faced racism and labor abuse, regardless of our employee being a Mexican woman. By helping these women defend themselves against the discrimination they were experiencing, I started to remember my life purpose, the one I thought about that first day of university. Then, I was called to work at the airport, welcoming and supporting the Temporary Foreign Workers (TFOs), and more stories came into my life, stories of light and hope. Somehow, those stories connect me to the reality we sometimes take for granted. But it was there, revealed as a part of a person with dreams, hopes, and fears. My story continues growing with all these people’s stories that ultimately bring me back to my life mission. Researching and studying immigrant rights fulfill my expectations for my career and life. I would like to merge Mucho Gusto Mexico and my support for immigrants to achieve their dreams.

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By **Maria Garcia**



I arrived in Canada on January 31, 2023, as my husband has been residing in this country for several years. My arrival was in winter, which was tedious for me since this was the first time I experienced so much cold and had to use many layers of clothes and heavy boots. At first, I missed the streets of my city, even the smell of wet earth when it rained. The coldness of many people seemed typically related to the cold climate. On two occasions, my girls and I even had bad experiences with various racist people, and I actually got really scared being helpless with my two girls. In my country, we are used to greeting people even if we don't know them, and here most people even avoid looking at you.

Thinking about getting a job when you have small children, and you don't have the support of a family member is like a broken dream because you prefer to stay at home and take care of the children until they reach the appropriate age of study. Daycare centers are extremely expensive, and I think that the competent authorities should think about that so there would be more economically productive people, precisely in these times when the prices of the family basket go through the roof. This, I think, is a basic necessity.

But not everything is gray. I thank God for giving my husband the strength to keep his job and that we live with dignity. I thank God for allowing me to be part of the Newcomer Women Services Toronto, where I have had the opportunity to meet wonderful people. I am amazed by the landscapes of Canada, and the streets full of flowers everywhere are totally magical for me.

CREATIVE EMPOWERMENT

“My Little Big Story in Canada”

By **Marisol Sandoval Viveros**



I arrived in Canada together with my family, husband, and children because we fled the violence in our country. It has been one of the most difficult decisions of my life. But as it was for safety, we had no choice. When we stepped on Canadian soil, I felt calm and tranquility but also a huge emptiness. Because I left my parents in my country, my job that I loved so much, and my friends. We arrived with the hope of feeling alone for a while. But my husband was meeting people. He told some of them about why we had left our country, and someone told him about seeking refuge here. We made the decision to do so, and we requested it. Thank God we were accepted, given our situation in Mexico.

Canada has not only given us shelter, but it has also given us countless beautiful experiences. It has been very hard to arrive here with nothing or nobody, having a language barrier, and facing a totally unknown world. We had to sleep on the floor for the first few days with my one-year-old baby.

There wasn't much money; we tried to organize our expenses so as not to run out of money. But we didn't give that much importance because we felt completely certain we were safe here. That was what was really important. Since having a comfortable bed in our country did not give us the peace of mind that we feel here. But despite the fact that it was a mixture of mixed feelings. I am grateful to have found very good people who trusted us and offered us their hand. It has been one of my most wonderful experiences in this country to receive help from people, see the great union that exists, experience the hospitality, and discover the great human beings from different cultures and countries who live here. It is a great satisfaction.

I have been in this beautiful country for three years. But I still have many goals to accomplish, a long way to go, and a lot to learn. I think that I am just starting the flight. Unfortunately, with the pandemic, almost nothing could be advanced. I have mainly been learning English to obtain a job later and be able to offer a better quality of life to my children. I know that I need time. But I also know that everything is possible here. Because Canada is a country full of opportunities for professional and personal growth and learning with good people and lots of support. For that and more, I know that I am going to achieve it. I can say that everything I have lived has been worth it. I have been enriched by both positive and negative experiences, but they have become lessons learned. In my country, they say: “what does not kill you, makes you stronger,” and here I am and will be, putting effort into the language, willing to support whoever needs me, contributing to this country, and thinking about all the support I have received. But I always carry my country and everything I left there in my heart.

CREATIVE EMPOWERMENT

By **Nehal Gamal Mohamed**



It's the 22nd of September 2021, I am standing inside my empty apartment in Abu Dhabi. Looking around, it's only my son, my husband, our luggage, and me. We are leaving for Canada tomorrow. I ask my husband: "do you think we are making the right decision?" Comforting me, he replies: "all will be ok, as long as the three of us are together."

The airplane takes me from a place I call home where it is more than +40 degrees and leave me at a totally new place with -20 degrees. Two months later, I saw white coming from the sky. All the people in the street waiting for it, the ..., even on the TV news every morning cheering for it except me. I'm the only one crying.

It's 6 months now in Canada. My husband still walks my son to nursery in the worst winter passed by Canada since the 70s. I came to Canada for a better me. I came to Canada with the confidence of "I got it all." I am a skilled migrant. I wish someone had told me more about real Canada and that it was the opposite of what I aimed for.

It has been a year and a half in Canada now and I'm still asking my husband that same question: "Do you think that we made the right decision?" I am really glad that his answer didn't change: "All will be ok, as long as the three of us are together."

CREATIVE EMPOWERMENT

By **Vaish Sada**



I packed my bags happily to move to Canada. I was an excited young girl with many hopes and dreams. We left our country in a suitcase and landed in Canada, hoping to make our wonderful little home. However, I soon realized that settling in was not as easy as I thought it would be. I started searching for homes and was imagining how I would set up my beautiful cozy little home. It did not take long for me to realize that it was not I who would be choosing a home; rather, it would be moving into the home that would choose me. Life became tough. There were endless nights when I felt cold and nervous. I was getting tired of living in Airbnbs. I started wondering what was wrong and why I was not given a home.

I walked across the city from region to region. It did not matter where I lived. I only needed a home. I remember the day I found the home we live in very well. I got a call from the building manager after 2 days of submitting my application. I cried out in joy when I heard the news. She said I got the apartment. That night was the first night I had slept peacefully after arriving in Canada. But it took me 3 months to sleep peacefully. It is a beautiful home. The place means a lot to us.

CREATIVE EMPOWERMENT

By Saadia Elattare



This is my story when I was moving to Toronto. I was worried it was mostly about cold weather, a new language, and new people. They're nice or mean, helpful or not. My sons were worried about school and friends because they spoke French only when we arrived in Toronto. During this time, I met nice neighbors; they tried to help me and help my sons.

It took us time to settle into the different weather, place, and environment. However, it didn't take us as long as we thought. We had help from the Scarborough community and Multicultural Association. They also helped us with our banking, taxing, and school. I found the people simple, friendly, and cooperative. My children found a good school and friends. We feel like we are in our second home.

CREATIVE EMPOWERMENT

By **Emel Gurbuzel**



I came to Canada 10 months ago. My immigration story started with my marriage. My husband grew up in Canada, but when his mother and father were sick, he returned to Turkey. We met in Turkey. I was a sales manager at a textile company. Before we got married, his mother passed away. After we got married, his father passed away as well. We happily lived in Turkey for two years. Not only were we newlyweds, but also, we had so many family and friends around. We would go to dinner, travel and enjoy weekend trips. It was like heaven, but then he wanted to return to Canada, so he left Turkey in 2020. After he came to Canada, he also sponsored me to come here. But the process took a long time because of Covid-19.

Since I came to Canada, my challenges are the language, missing my family, and homesickness. When I was 21 years old, my father passed away, so I was responsible for my family. Even when I got married, my husband and I had a back street in my family's house, so it was very difficult for me to come here. After arriving in Canada, one month was spent crying. I was always strong because I always did everything by myself. But I can't do it here because I don't speak English well. Normally, I am a very talkative person in my country, but I am very shy here. When I cannot speak English, I want to return to my country. I drive a car in my country, but I have to take a driving test to get a license here. As a result, I believe I am a very lucky person when I hear the newcomers' stories here. I hope I will adjust to Canada fast.