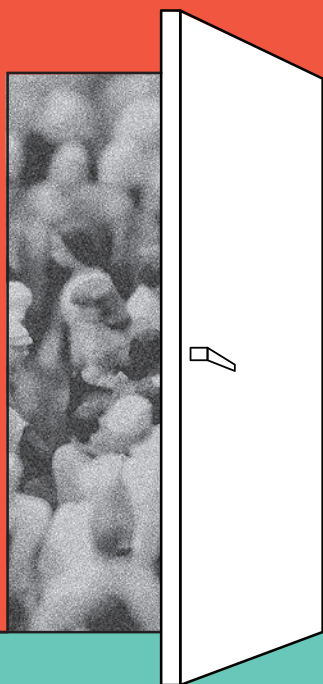


# Opening Doors Through Stories

WRITING FROM NEWCOMERS TO REGINA



A project of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild and the  
Regina Open Door Society

During November 2018, a group of newcomers to Canada met every Saturday at the Regina Open Door Society (RODS) to work with Regina writer Gail Bowen to develop their creative writing skills. These newcomers, from very diverse countries of origin and backgrounds, found common-ground in sharing their stories of what brought them to Canada, and the new world of opportunities and challenges they found. The RODS' Welcoming Community for Newcomers program, along with its partners, is proud to share some of these stories. We want to thank the Opening Doors through Stories participants for their hard work and dedication, and for their courage in opening a door to their lives for others to see inside. We hope that while reading you learn, smile, laugh, tear up, and gain a better understanding of the newcomer experience. Enjoy!

—The Regina Open Door Society's  
Welcoming Community for Newcomers program

During an especially beautiful Saskatchewan Fall, participants worked alongside author Gail Bowen to cultivate stories that reflected their diverse experiences. In five sessions, participants explored their own histories and discussed creative writing while expanding their English literacy skills. As reader of this chapbook, you become a witness to their courage and this collective celebration. You are holding their history in your hands. Read it and let it inspire you to find your place in community, in your own history and let it inspire your own story telling. This book is an anthology of their hard work, and above all, a testament to the utter resiliency of the human spirit.

—Cat Abenstein  
SWG Program Coordinator

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## INTRODUCTION

The chapbook you are holding contains stories that are as extraordinary as the people who wrote them. The personal histories of our writers are very different, but they share a love for their countries of origin, and they share the pain of having to sever links to their heritage and their culture. However, these are not dark stories. They are stories bright with humour, hope and gratitude, written by people who know that in becoming part of Canada, they have become part of a nation where they and their children will be valued not just for their skills and talents but simply for being the people they are. Thank you to all our writers for opening the door to their stories.

—Gail Bowen



## SOME OF MY FIRST EXPERIENCES IN CANADA

David Mamani

My family (wife and two daughters) and I arrived in Canada in mid-December, very late one evening after a long trip on a plane from Bolivia, South America. We went straight to bed in a hotel. The next day when we woke up and came down for breakfast, we all saw white covered snow on the ground. We stared at it through the window and said, “Wow! What a wonderful view!” There were no words to describe it. We were mute in admiration.

After a few weeks, I went to the immigration office to take a short test, and they told me I was in level one. “The Open Door Society of Regina will call you when you are able to come and study English in their classes” she told me. Meanwhile, after a few weeks I got a job detailing, cleaning cars at Dilawri Company. I used the city transit bus and walked three blocks on many wintery, windy, snowy blowing mornings to get to my job. My excitement and admiration of my first impression of snow turned into depressing walks in wintertime for many months.

After a couple of months of work, the Regina Open Door Society reached me by phone and invited me to attend the English learning Class. I was very happy to be in class learning English.

I joined one of many classes. In my class there were about fifteen students from different countries. Some students had refugee status. Others had immigrant status, and some were international students.

My teacher said “This morning we have a new student and I will ask him to please introduce himself to the class.”

“My name is David Mamani, I am from Bolivia and I am happy to be here,” I said with my strong Spanish accent. I didn’t have enough vocabulary to say anything more. Each of the students introduced themselves to me, one by one. Of course this was part of our English practice.

In my class, there were students from China, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Afghanistan, Africa, India, Iraq, Karen, Philippines, Vietnam, Russia, Montenegro and others. It was very nice to be in an English class where the spirit was inter-cultural, not trans cultural, where people could share experiences and learn a common language in which to communicate and be prepared for jobs and interact in a student community.

Learning English at school demanded memorization of a lot of new vocabulary. English grammar and its structure were different from my mother tongue. Some expressions seemed funny and there were a lot of misunderstandings. For newcomers, the popular English ex-

pression like “What’s up,” suggested something that is in heaven or on the ceiling. So, the answer to the question “what’s up?” could come from a very different perspective of understanding.

English pronunciation sometimes would be hard and cause me to convey a different meaning than I intended. One day I said when someone was using his mini tablet, “Is that your electronic sheet?” “Don’t say my device is shit!” he said, I didn’t pronounce the word correctly “sheet.” When you don’t pronounced properly and what I said sounded awful. We started laughing.

One day at my work, my boss asked me to sign some papers and also he signed above his name, Doug. I knew how to spell his name - Doug. But every morning I used to greet him saying “Good Morning, Doug.” But in Spanish pronunciation, it sounds like dog. So I was greeting him saying, “Good morning, Dog.” But he never complained nor corrected my pronunciation. This happened every morning, but one day someone asked me, “What is your boss’ name?” “His name is Dog,” I said. But, she corrected me, “Don’t say Dog any more, say Doug. If you say Dog to him, it’s awful”. It was embarrassing to know I was calling him “Dog”.

When you are immersed in a new culture or new society, at first, you are excited. As you are learning and knowing more and more, it is easy to get confused sometimes and that can lead to embarrassing moments. You have to learn different ways of being polite. Especially the English idioms have puzzled me. Many times I have thought I was improving in my English and speaking very well, but when I am talking to English speaking people, they don’t understand me, then I realize my English is not good yet. That is frustrating. Some time it leads you into a depression. The cultural shock can hit you badly. Sometimes I asked myself, when are you going to be able to work and support yourself? This is a cruel situation for a lot of newcomers.

This newcomer experience, reminded me about when I was in high school in Bolivia. In my home village school was only up to grade five, so in grade six I had to go far away to another bigger village where they had high school. On Friday’s, I had to ride my bike back to my home village . It was a seventy kilometer trip. I left right after

school at 5:30 PM because it was far and the night would fall fast. I went home every weekend in order to help my parents on the ranch and get some staples for the coming week. On one of my trips, I was surrounded by a darkness so complete I couldn't see even one meter in front of me.

The bike path that I usually followed disappeared. I couldn't see it any more. The rain was spitting down hard. I could feel it and hear the raindrops. It is cold at night in the highlands of my country. Scared and threatened I waited, and suddenly I saw a little light the size of a match top from far away, in the direction I was going. It seemed that the light was coming through the window of a house. This light in the horizon gave me the direction and gave me some hope. I continued walking and dragging my bike between the bushes that were blocking my way and over the obstacles. It was impossible to see my way.

Being in a new country is like being in a dark situation. One where you don't know the language, customs or how to behave properly. Housing and jobs are really uncertain, it is like being in a dark situation. But, The Regina Open Door Society was a light in dark moments, which gave me hope and a horizon of light for my life. In the midst of a scary dark situation, the teachers and friends helped me overcome my discouragement. The multicultural environment of the Open Door classes was for me a positive way of learning. Learning from each other and respecting the differences and being tolerant are ways that ultimately leads to success.

I am very thankful to be at the Regina Open Door Society where I can learn, be encouraged, feel supported. This has helped me to face the future and keep working to overcome my struggles. How wonderful it is to be walking together in the process of learning and being part of the Canadian multicultural society.



# RITA AND METEORITE

Tokiko Nakagawa

Throughout our life, we interact with people. We meet some people, and some people move out of our lives—just like the wave reaches shore and then washes offshore. Some people stay in the same area their whole life, while some people move from one place to another.

Birds migrate following their amazing second nature map. They know when and where to go. I am amazed to see them making a beautiful V-shape and flying across the sky. They don't take suitcases, they don't need passports.

Well, I have moved to many places in some countries by now. It was so stressful for me to think about what to prepare. However, one of the most unforgettable moves, a kind of moving, was when Hurricane Rita hit. In 2005, I was living in Texas with my family. When Rita was created, we were checking the weather forecast several times every day. She was wandering around the Gulf of Mexico towards Texas. It was unpredictable exactly where she was going to land.

When my husband and I made up our minds to evacuate from Rita, we didn't have much time left for packing as she was so close to Texas. Our children were too small to understand or help. Adding to that, already the chaos had started around us. All gas stations were already closed; supermarkets had run out of food, and you couldn't use ATMs. So many cars were stuck on the road, it looked like ants making lines for their food on the ground. We brought most of the food and drink we kept in the pantry with us. I also grabbed some of our photo albums, some clothes, toys, and diapers for the children. We just drove west; we were playing 'tag' with Rita. We just had to escape from her as far as possible. It was no certain destination, no period setting, very mystified moving.

On the way, we tried to stay at many hotels; many times we thought of stopping for gas; many times we wanted to shop to get food. However all hotels were booked up, most gas stations were closed, or had extremely long line-ups. It would have taken half a day or so to get your turn. Even when it was your turn, there was no guarantee you could actually get gas. And Rita might have been even closer to you. The food situation was just as difficult as gas. It was summer time, so the temperature outside was nearly 40 degrees. On top of that, mosquitos were everywhere. We had to save gas in our car as much as we could, so we had to open the car window and survive the mosquitos, hot and sticky wind.

After one night staying in the car, we finally stopped to have a short break in a small town. My eldest daughter particularly wanted to go to a toy shop that we found. And then, we learned that the toy shop owner had extra accommodation! We deeply appreciated that we could sleep stretching our body straight that night. After that, we

were welcomed warmly by local people. They totally understood our difficult situation, and our stress was gone. After staying in the town for two nights, we saw on the news that Rita had gone somewhere else. It was time to say goodbye to that little town. We packed our stuff again, filled up our gas tank, and said goodbye to all the people we had come to know there.

We drove and drove, but this time we were much happier even though we had to stop in the middle of nowhere to fix a flat tire. Around midnight, we were driving surrounded by stardust. Suddenly, my husband and I saw a strong orange paint brush-like strong light ... it was a Meteorite creating a small shooting star pattern. It happened out of blue. And it was so beautiful. Life is just like that. It's so random, chaotic, sometimes it makes us crazy; sometimes it's beautiful. We didn't bring many things for this trip. Some money, some food, some clothes, some photo albums and our passports. But we were so thankful that we stayed together and we could return to our house safely. To live happily, what we need are not so many things.

Now, I would like to ask you. What are you packing in your suitcase for your trip? What have you found? What makes you happy?



## DRIVE IT AWAY

Isaac Abram Ghebreslasie

It was a couple of weeks ago, my wife and I were going towards home. In fact she gave me a ride. She is experienced in driving but I was a learner. At that moment, although we want to go for shopping, we thought we wouldn't want to go because there was almost no money in our bank account.

My wife's telephone rang! It was our little daughter, Sesen.

"Hello mom, I want really a canned food. Can you bring me tonight?"

My wife said, "I am not sure of that matter."

"Please mom, do your best."

The phone was on speaker, so that I replied, soon. "You know Sesen, today we don't get our salary. So...."

Our little princess interrupted me. "Please, can you try?"

At last we agreed. What we can do? It is our beloved daughter's request and who never asks for much. My wife drove fast until we reached our destination-Save on food! You know my wife is good at shopping, hence she found the variety of canned food easily.

"How can we pay?" I asked and she smiled. "By credit visa."

"I am nervous about the visa, because its amount of credit is increasing-beyond the limit we can pay."

But this matters much to Sesen.

Anyway, she already makes the shopping and gets the right cans. The beans, juice, pasta and sauce were some of the items.

After we completed our assignment, my wife seemed content but I was still worried about Sesen's idea to buy and off course about the visa. When my wife and I reached home, the daughter was delighted.

"Thank you mom and dad."

I asked her as simple as "Why is the canned food urgent, I don't understand!"

My wife supported me, "We have some food, and how can it be so urgent?"

The little kid glanced towards us and makes a reply.

"Because, this is our school's desire. It is needed to drive hunger away."

At last we got her idea. She wanted to become a part of her classes at school to drive hunger away.

"Someone in the community needed the food indeed!"

My wife and I understood that we have to share as far as we can.



## MY LIFE AND CHALLENGES IN CANADA

Olenka Santoyo Sokolowski

**M**y husband had come to Regina one year before me. The plan was that he would go to Peru for me because he spoke English well, but this was not possible. Consequently, I started my trip alone.

In the morning at 1 o'clock on the 5th of September, 2014, I started my trip very nervously. I felt intimidated because I did not speak English. My English language at this time was limited to: "Yes, no, please, excuse me, I no speaking English, and thank you". Furthermore, it was my first time leaving my home country, Peru.

To make my trip even more difficult, I had to travel with three large suitcases, a small cabin suitcase, a medium backpack, and a large travel bag—in total, six suitcases. In the suitcases, I brought many

things—gifts and items people had asked me to bring. For example, I brought fourteen uniforms for a football team. Each uniform consisted of two t-shirts, shorts and a pair of socks. I also brought seven 750 ml bottles of Pisco, Peruvian liquor, Peruvian condiments such as Panca Pepper Paste, Panca Pepper Powder, yellow hot pepper paste, Palillo (Peruvian Curcuma), Peruvian Purple Corn powder, and more, to last a year. There were also souvenirs, clothes and shoes for me and for my husband too. I paid overweight charges, but I did not know that I should declare the liquor I brought and some other things that I brought. I was too overwhelmed to remember! Now when I see the TV show, *Border Canada*, and I remember everything I brought in my suitcases—I am amazed because I did not have trouble at the Toronto airport.

When I was in the Toronto airport in front of the immigration police, I said, "I no speaking English." She shrugged her shoulders, and I felt intimidated again because I felt that she did not understand me. I did not understand her either, so I followed a group of people who were going through security for check-on bags. After that, I waited for eight hours for the next plane; therefore, I was hungry. But I felt bad because I did not know how to order food in the cafeteria, so I drank water only. Finally, I arrived in Regina and I felt better and happy to see my husband with a small basket with my favorite flowers.

Before I got to Regina, my husband told me that Regina was a small city and that soon I would learn to move in it without problems. So, when I arrived on September 5th at 6 pm, after the airport, the first thing I knew was Wascana Park. I thought it was very big and very beautiful. In the following weeks we went several times to see other places in the city, but we always went in the car.

September 18, was my birthday, and I did not want to be alone at home while my husband was working, so I decided to get to Wascana Park and to walk a bit. When I was ready to go home, I got lost and did not know how to ask to people for directions to my house. I walked around the lake and walked through every road I found. I was fascinated to see things I had not seen in the visit with my husband such as statues of two nuns, many geese, and small bridges to



move from one area to another. I walked for an hour and decided to return my home, but I could not find the exit. I decided to follow a girl who ran with her big dog. I ran behind her at a slower pace, so she would not see that I was following her, but I saw that she was going through places that I had not seen. Then I saw a couple walking in the opposite direction of me, so I decided to turn around and follow them.

I am very afraid of the dogs, so I felt more confident to walk behind the couple because they looked like they were married. They walked, they did not run, and they did not have a dog. I came to a place where there were many boys with skateboards and the couple walked towards a house near there. That's when I decided to call my husband and ask him for help, but he could not help me because he did not know where I was. I returned by the same route that I had followed with the couple, I saw a sign that said Cornwall Street and I remembered that my husband told me that bus routes 7 and 9 passed near our house and that all buses arrive at the Cornwall Centre. I walked twenty or twenty-five minutes down Cornwall Street. to the Cornwall Centre.

In front of the Cornwall Centre there was a bus that went along route 7. I waited for someone to get on the bus so I could repeat what he did, then I got on the bus and put my coin of \$ 2.00 and the driver told me something I did not understand. I just smiled and sat down. Now, I think he told me that the cost was only \$ 1.75.

I did not know if that bus was going to my house or returning from the route of my house. I just hoped to get to an area I knew. I know I recognized a 7-11, The Milky Way ice cream stand and The Petro Canada. The bus took one hour to get to that area. Now I know I took the wrong route because the bus went first to the south, returned to the Cornwall Centre and then came to the area of Milky Way ice cream stand and finally arrived at my house, four hours later. Now it's fun to know that my house was ten minutes away from Wascana Park. But, in that time, it took me almost four hours to return home.

After that, I understood that I urgently needed to learn English. So, in November of 2014, I started in the second level English classes

in the Broad United Church. My husband took me to my English classes, but I walked around fifteen or twenty minutes to return to my house every Tuesday to Friday.

I remember that before my first winter, I prepared my clothes and shoes with the help of my husband, so I anxiously awaited. The first snow fall I expected to see a lot of snow. In my home city it never snows. I remember a weekend when it snowed too much that when I returned from my English class I was walking with the snow up to my knees! I saw many cars covered in snow and the city looked like a ghost city because it had fog and very few cars travelling on the streets. I was cold too much, but I enjoyed the moment.

One day it took thirty-five minutes to return to my house. When I opened the door to my house, I felt bad. I felt hot, saw all dark and I felt a loud sound in my ears, then I fell to the bed with a bad headache. I called my husband and explained the situation. He smiled and tried to calm me down and he told me to drink warm water and rest because it would soon pass. So, I fell to sleep until he came home.

Little by little I have learned the English language, but I feel that I still need to improve my English skills. To avoid a conversation in English, I learned to say, "Sorry, but my first language isn't English. Please for any information send me an email and I will respond because is easier for me. Thank you." Many times I responded the same way while I improved little my listening skills. I remember one call from a woman selling the insurance. The seller spoke very fast, and she had a Hindu accent. As I did not understand her, I said the speech that I learned to avoid a conversation in English, but she insisted that I respond, "I accept", so I said, "No." I repeated my speech and as she insisted. I said, "Sorry," and I ended the call. I think that was a good answer at that moment, but not in the next story. I did not handle the situation as well.

I was applying to some companies for a job. By this time, I registered in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program of the Sask Polytech for their English classes. I hoped that they would call, although I preferred that they'd send me an email to

make an appointment.

After that, I received a call and I did not respond well with my speech. I did not understand well but I captured some words, like “SIAST” and “work”. So I responded, “I was registered for the English classes in the morning because I don’t work. I want not to work, I need to study.” The speaker said to me “Ok, thank you,” and ended the call. After, I went to the Sask Polytech to confirm that they had called. They said that they did not call me yet because I was on the waiting list. Then, I understood that I made a big mistake because the call was about the opportunity for a job. Now, I have learned to pay attention and listen carefully to a telephone call.

Finally, The Sask Polytech called me and today I study in the six-level. Also, I continued to apply for a job until I got it and I feel happy because I was able to accept that opportunity over the phone. Although getting to Canada was really a challenge and my first birthday in Regina was a great adventure for me, I can say it was worth it because now I live happily here in Regina, Canada, facing new challenges every day and becoming proud of my growing ability to handle those challenges.

# WE

Tokiko Nakagawa

He says No.  
I say Yes!

He likes outdoors.  
I have a sun allergy.

He likes coffee and beer.  
I love tea.

When he is shouting while watching ‘Match of the Day’,  
I’m singing self-Karaoke on Youtube.

One day, somehow we met on this planet,  
even though we are so very different.  
Just like a magnet, we are together.

When I get so emotional, he becomes so logical.  
And, that makes me even more intense.  
We are just like ‘Zigeunerweisen’ and ‘Boléro’.  
Haha, however for both masterpieces, towards the end, they  
become so intense!

If he were the Sun, I would be definitely the Moon.

When he was enjoying beer-miles at university in Canada, I was  
having chocolate challenging at the college in Japan.

Maybe, maybe we are similar in some ways.  
Just like the dressing is made from oil and water.  
Just like lovely chocolate cake need both salt and sugar.

Somehow, we met and still together.

## FROM STRUGGLE TO HAPPINESS

Narek Harutyunyan

The sun is slowly rising and washing the silk leaves of grapes with its warm and pleasant light. In the darkness, the lines of the highest mountains are becoming more and more visible. This is the landscape I'm so familiar with. In the silence the aroma of an awakening wine yard flies towards me. I'm home, I'm in Armenia, a country with a centuries old culture, a country of traditions, a country I was never able to be myself in.

I used to be a happy child who was always smiling and joking, but as you know clowns usually are the saddest people. I was sad because of being different.

I grew up with strong stereotypes about 'Real Men'.

Real men never cry.

Real men should be serious

Real men are strong.

Real men...

But what if I'm different? What if I'm soft and emotional? What if I don't want to be strong? Do I have the right of existence? Are there other men like me? Am I sick? I want to die... God let me give you my life back... This was the main idea I used to end up with at the end of every single day of struggle and fight at school, after every single nightmare I experienced facing 'Real Men'. I was terrified of my difference and of the way 'Real men' were reacting to it or of the way they were slowly and steadily poisoning my life. The continuous bullying almost washed away the usual smile on my face. I was surrounded by my family and many other people but I still felt as if I was the loneliest person in the world. I was changing, I was no longer smiling that much and the difference was obvious to my parents but they had no idea what the matter was. I never talked about my feelings and what I was going through. I only knew that I was different, that I didn't have any space under the sun and that I was all alone in that struggle.

Years passed and more information was disclosed to me. I finally found out that there were a lot of people around the world just like me, I knew exactly who I was and I knew that no one except me really knew who I was. I was an actor who was playing the role of a "Real man", doing whatever I was expected to do never letting the real 'me' burst out and shout loudly, 'Hey, I'm here, come and face me, I'm still the same person you admire'. I was only trying to protect myself and was too scared of losing everything and everyone. Soon like everyone else around me I was denying the existence of people who were different and, I was ignoring my real personality.

At the age of 24 I had a university degree, and had started a successful career in a fashionable field, but I was absolutely miserable. I needed more, I needed love, I needed intimate relations. It was certain that I was interested in the same sex, and that it was "wrong and unacceptable" and I decided to die being virgin. But I was only a human with no super powers and one day I burst. That one certain day was one of the happiest in my life.

I was a bird in a cage and the cage was becoming smaller and smaller and there were only two ways out. I could either kill my personality,

and stay inside or escape and accept who I was and what I really needed. I felt as if my heart was exactly like one of a small bird and it wouldn't be able to survive the feelings I was experiencing. On one hand I wanted to do the right thing, to be 'normal' but on the other hand if I was given this life maybe I deserved to live and enjoy it as it was. One day I could no longer bear myself and I told myself, 'Either die and stop driving me mad or admit it'. I appeared not to be strong enough to resist and met a stranger I only knew in the virtual reality. Everything went surprisingly smoothly, everything happened at once, the EVERYTHING I had avoided for years. Then, all of a sudden, my head seemed to be too small to survive all the thoughts swirling in it.

Why had I been so stupid?

Why had I been avoiding things that could have made me so happy?

I wasn't walking home that evening, I'm sure I was flying high up in the sky with a wide smile on my face. It felt as if everyone I was meeting on my way home knew what I had done and was blaming me but this time I didn't really care. Now I was struggling to stop smiling, I looked insane. I saw my eyes in the mirror that day. They were alive as they hadn't been for a long time. I was happy.

After that I felt free enough to have some short relationships. I fell in love but soon my heart was broken and I decided I would no longer look for love.

I was communicating with other gay men in a special application and there was one particular man I was interested in. I never dared to write to him but was talking to him in my imagination asking him to write me first. That worked and he soon wrote to me. The simple 'Hi' grew into a long lasting and warm conversation. It felt as if we had known each other for ages. On the first date he invited me to the screening of a movie called 'Listen To Me'. He was one of the 10 brave people who openly spoke about their sexuality and orientation in that movie. His story was so touching. He had gone through difficulties and challenges no one would wish his enemy to go through, but he was so strong and he was sitting next to me, and

we were holding hands my eyes filled with tears. It was considered to be just a night of pleasure but now I knew more about him and I knew things that were personal. I wanted to run away. He was going to a café after the screening with his friends and invited me too. We took 2 different taxis to the café and I got there sooner, I wanted to run away but still a stronger force was keeping me away from doing that, than I went to an ATM to take some cash. When I entered the café he was sitting with his friends with a sad expression on his face but he couldn't hide his smile when he saw me. I found out later that he felt I was thinking of running away and was afraid I had. I spent the night at his apartment which was full of Pride, there were many rainbow flags and stickers, he was obviously fighting for our rights.

Next morning when I was leaving he asked me what we would do next. I answered, \_ "Nothing, I admire you, but I'm not looking for love and relations, I'm afraid we can only be good friends". He said \_ "We are going to be more than friends. I felt that the moment I met you". He was right. We were meeting almost every day, chatting every time there was a possibility. I was happy, I was smiling again. But still something was distracting us from our happiness. We were living in a country where most people hated the ones who were different, where my parents didn't know I was gay and that my "best friend" who they loved already as if he was their own son was in fact the love of my life. We were in a country where we couldn't be a family and couldn't have children so the decision was made, we would leave the country. We chose Canada, a country where human rights protection is on a high level and where same sex marriage is legal. While the immigration process was going on, we went through a lot of happy and sad days together and he was next to me when I experienced the strongest shock in my life. My father passed away unexpectedly not knowing the face I was hiding so intensely. Time mended my wounds to some degree and finally we were confirmed for immigration and here we are. We are now in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, in a sweet wedding commissioner's pretty house, where the fireplace is making us forget of the cold that stands outside, where we are facing friends we've managed to find in our new city. We are happy. After two years of being 'best friends' we'll soon be husbands, partners or whatever you name it. We're just two ordinary men who love each other and wish to be happy, to have children, who wish to be accepted...



I was passing by the hallway when I saw my mother staring through the window at the snow-covered yard. Immediately, two questions arose in my mind. Did she ever imagine living without her garden, without her flowers in Venezuela? and did she think that all her children must move out of the country? My brother, my sister and I left the country along with more than four million people to search for opportunities, safety and a better quality of life for our families.

Twenty years ago, Venezuela, despite all the deficiencies of a developing country, was a good place to live. There were plenty of opportunities for those who wanted to study and work hard. Our country was blessed with a vast amount of natural resources such as gas, oil, fresh water, gold, coasts and fertile lands. Vivid childhood memories flood my mind as I picture the landscape of my home country: weekends on the blue beaches with my friends, hunting excursions in the mountains with my grandpa and the aroma of fresh coffee brewed by mom in the morning.

Thanks to Mother Nature, the Venezuelans had everything, but we lacked something crucial: the concept of self-accountability. This idea encompasses the character of country, differentiates the mean-

ing between citizen and people and describes our identity as a nation. Self-accountability is a fundamental piece to create wellness and sense of belonging in any society and it was, and still is our greatest weakness.

In 1992, this weakness was exploited by a group of leftist militaries and communist sympathizers to undercut the society's foundations. At dawn on February 4, a rebel military group initiated a coup d'état using the guns that were given to them by the National Army Force to protect democracy.

A week before that event, my wife and I bought our first 13" Color TV. It never crossed our minds that we would be watching a live broadcast of the coup against the president Carlos Andres Perez.

That assault against democracy in Venezuela was halted by a loyal military which defended the constitution and the laws. The leaders of the attack were taken prisoner and sent to jail. However, the democracy was lethally wounded, and darkness started to cover our beautiful nation.

Unfortunately, most people in the country, not only the common persons, but intellectuals, professionals, media owners and business people believed or at least took advantage of the message given by Hugo Chavez, the leader of the intended coup.

That morning in February, my wife was with me when I turned on the TV and realized that all stations were showing the ongoing events; injured and dead people were laying in the streets, politicians gave explanations supporting or opposing the rebels military group. The climax of that terrible spectacle was when Chavez gave his famous "For Now!" speech. "That guy is a bluffer," I told my wife. "Why?" she asked. "It's very easy to me decipher him because I grew up in a community where most of my mates spoke the same language that Chavez did," I said.

When I was a young boy, perhaps thirteen or fourteen years old, I walked home from school every day -- it was a six-kilometres walk, each direction. It was a refreshing and nice routine in the morning,

but it wasn't the same experience when I came back home in the afternoon. At 2:00 PM in my home town the temperature could be over 30oC. After six hours in school, I was tired and hungry, and having to walk those six kilometers with the scorching sun in my face was unpleasant.

One of those days when I was heading back home, I encountered Boris, a guy from our neighborhood. "Hi little bourgeois," he shouted and then asked me: "Are you still wasting your time going to school instead of finding a real job?" Although I didn't understand what he was talking about, I replied: "Hi man, uh... you know this just is a temporary thing to please the old man (my dad) until Pablito can give me a chance in the car repair shop."

Sociological studies have demonstrated that teenagers seek acceptance, self-identity and are vulnerable. Somehow Boris knew that; I wanted to be accepted by "the bad guys of the block" and during that ten minutes walking chat, the bad guys' leader offered to make me part of his group: "see you on Friday at the Buche's garage and don't forget to bring something strong to drink, silly boy," he said.

Every Friday, when Boris and the oil refinery workers received their paychecks, they spent most of it on rum, beer and other pleasures. By Monday "the bad guys of the block" hadn't a single penny in their pockets.

I have had many crucial conversations in my life, but that conversation with Boris in my early adolescence allowed me to better understand Venezuelan aspirations and dreams. And even I, as a naïve kid, realized our country needed to walk away from that mindset, characterized by lack of responsibility and minimal efforts.

Chavez was keenly aware of Venezuelan idiosyncrasies and took advantage of that. His speeches created envy for others' fortune, bullied good students, and criticized those who succeeded in any business ventures. Something that he really mastered was making people feel they needed him to survive.

The crisis caused by the events of 1992 in conjunction with hiding

interests of politicians and entrepreneurs led to the fall of Carlos Andres Perez on May of 1993. After the temporary presidency of Rafael J. Velazquez, Rafael Caldera won the election on December 1993. Four months later, in March 1994, president Rafael Caldera gave amnesty to the military group involved in the attempted coup and Hugo Chavez was released from jail.

Believe it or not, in March 1994, the military that caused the death of many and the aggression against the democratic institutions was set free and the former president, was taken under house arrest and accused of embezzlement. I can't be certain whether or not Carlos Andres Perez was guilty of embezzlement, but there is no doubt that Chavez was the leader of criminal acts against the nation. In retrospect it is possible that the country had missed the sense of justice and common wellness; everything was handled according to the interests of individuals and economic groups. However, the final thrust had not happened yet.

In December 1998, Chavez, wearing his sheep's clothing, won the election. Now, the cards were dealt; Chavez and his pack of wolves were stalking Venezuela. When the results of the elections were announced, I cried, but I was crying alone. It was the start of a nightmare for a few of us that were awoken enough to realize what was coming.

From the beginning, I knew that Hugo Chavez was not the honest person that he pretended to be. He was the type of man that always hid his actual intentions in seductive words in order to prepare an attack from behind. Not surprisingly, Chavez's time came, and it came with the fury of social resentment from those that never took care of themselves and their families.

Most people who participated in the 1998 election, didn't know that voting for Chavez meant voting for the hammer to nail the coffin of their future. I asked myself why people didn't understand or visualize the consequences of their actions for the future. I didn't recall it, but the answer to this uncertainty was revealed by Boris 30 years ago in that walking chat when he asked me: Are you still wasting your time going to school?

The table was set, and many important leaders had their own parade to congratulate the new democratic president. But Chavez held a different understanding of democracy framed in the same idea that Fidel Castro had for Cuba.

In one of many conversations with my best friend, “El Flaco”, about how the situation in Venezuela was getting worse every day, he confirmed my inner fears: “This is a real communist project,” he said. Also, he explained that this kind of regime pursued three main objectives: get rid of all the democratic institutions, keep power indefinitely and make the people completely dependent on government charity. We had that discussion on December 31, 2004 when the social and economical situation in Venezuela was not too bad, and he was damn right.

As if he was a wizard, “El Flaco” predicted that for many people in Venezuela, regardless of whether they were for or against Chavez, if the president wanted something they had, sooner or later he would take it. And that happened: entrepreneurs lost factories, social media was closed, supermarkets, bakeries and many small and medium business were swallowed by the government.

Many wanted a picture with Chavez and many lined up at the Government Palace to meet him. It’s true that the line was long, but it isn’t comparable to the line of Venezuelans who are walking today from their homes to other places in south America.

According to The United Nations refugee agency, around 5,000 people are leaving the country every day fleeing hunger and poverty, most of them walking across the border of Brazil, Colombia and Guyana. Sadly, many of them were in those pictures with Chavez. That number doesn’t include the politicians, artists, business people and many others who sold their soul to the devil. All of them fled to other countries, but none of them immigrated to “the sea of happiness,” which is how Chavez usually conceptualized Cuba. Most of those socialist sympathizers chose destinations within the United States and Europe where they might enjoy the facilities of capitalist countries.

Every day, the destruction of Venezuela became more evident: grocery stores were empty, there was no gas at the gas stations, no medicine in the drugstores, no potable water, power outages lasted for more than ten hours every day, there was no cash in the ATM, etc. The degree of suffering among the Venezuelan people was incalculable. No one can estimate how many dreams were lost? How many family bonds were broken? How much pain...!

After fourteen years of violence, expropriations, massive corruption and lies, Chavez passed away on March 5, 2013, leaving his legacy of destruction to Nicolas Maduro. I’m a believer, I have faith in God over everything, so I believe that God intervened to lead Venezuela out of the darkness. But, also, I do believe that as men and women of our motherland, we must act to recover our nation.

It’s a shame that many of the more capable Venezuelans decided to do nothing. Wherever we are, we need to mobilize our intelligence, energy and courage to defeat the legacy of ignorance and immorality Chavez left behind. Never truer was the statement of Edmund Burke: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

We must do something, we must act now, because if we keep waiting for divine intervention we might regret it forever. For our children and ourselves, we have to setup an achievable plan to rebuild the country from its foundations. Starting with family values and discipline, we need to allow the concept of self-accountability to flourish and shift the people into citizens with national pride.

I still believe in a better future for Venezuela. I hope that we, the good ones, can do something to create a better future. I’m certain that the best talents will come back home. I visualize all Venezuelans working together to make our country a model for the world, I want to smell the roses in my mother’s garden and I definitely dream every single day of walking with my grandsons, speaking Spanish with a Venezuelan accent on our blue beaches.

# MY FIRST EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL IN BOLIVIA

David Mamani



One dark night, an Aymara woman, an Indigenous group in Bolivia, wearing a typical green homespun wool pollera (skirt) and a discolored old aguayo (a kind of handmade colorful blanket made by ladies) around her shoulders, was moving anxiously as she was preparing the evening meal. She was helped by her three daughters and three boys. Her chapped cracked hands were peeling about five dozen potatoes for supper. The fire burning in the clay oven was the only light in the room. As the light flickered, I could tell by her sunburned face how hard life was for her.

She seemed worried when she would serve the meal to her family, as it was already around nine or ten in the evening. That lady was Angelica Quispe Choque, my mother.

The clay fire pit in the center of the room was burning and three big pottery pots were boiling on top. An old man was sitting in the corner twisting the llama wool into a rope and telling stories. The walls of the room were black from the smoke of the fire, so the old man who wore black pants and a dark brown sweater was hard to see as he told the old Aymara stories with a smile on his sunburned face. His mind seems clear and sharp enough to allow us to participate or ask questions. His name was Benedicto Mamani Mollo. He was my father.

My mother and my father usually told my four brothers, four sisters and I stories and offered good advice. They often repeated the traditional Andean moral trilogy to us. “Ama llulla, ama qella, ama sua” or in Aymara language: “Jan k’arisimti, jan jayrasimti, jan lunthatampti” which in English means, “Do not lie, do not be lazy, and do not rob.”

Many nights my parents used to discuss whether their children were going to attend school. The new federal law made school compulsory for children six or seven years old, but my parents couldn’t seem to agree on whether to send their sons to school.

My father feared we would learn different values and that we would not be respectful. He worried we would learn to compete, to leave others behind; to be careless and self-centered. My mother feared we would learn foreign ideas and be lazy with no interest in wool spinning, or in making everything needed for our Aymara way of living. They feared we would only value money and things we could buy. These are not considered good values for us.

One afternoon a man came while my mother and I were looking after our four hundred llamas and six hundred sheep in the semi-desert open country on the west side of Bolivia where we lived. This man talked to my mother for about a half hour. When he left, my mother told me that he said I had to go to school. My mother asked me, “Do you want to go?” “I don’t know” I replied. I was seven years old. My mother told me that the man who was the “Jilaqata,” in English meaning “He who walks alongside the community”, said that I had to go to school in order to fulfill the national education law. If I didn’t go, we would have to pay a fine. That’s what my parents were discussing almost every night around the kitchen fire.

If they decided not to send me to school, my parents had to pay a fine of one sheep for every year I failed to attend. One day my father told me that I had to go to school, so I knew that my parents had already decided to send me. So I went to school in place of a sheep. My parents loved their sheep and were afraid to lose one, so I went instead.



Speaking and teaching in the Aymara language, which is my mother tongue, was prohibited in government schools. One morning my father asked me “when you get to school, how are you going to greet your teacher in Spanish?” I answered, “I don’t have any idea, how to say anything in Spanish.” Then he taught the first phrase I learned in Spanish. “Buenos días Señor, buenas tardes Señor”, meaning good morning my Lord, good afternoon my Lord.

The day I went to school, we got up around 4:00 or 5:00 AM as we did every morning. My mother and sisters prepared a breakfast meal and after eating, my mother gave me a bit of dry toasted corn for my lunch, and my father and I went off to school. My father walked with me a distance of seven kilometers from my ranch to the village. We had to get there before 8:00 AM. Walking along a dusty path in this big vast semi-desert land that was car-free. My mother, weeks before had made me some handmade knitted black pants from sheep wool, so I wore them and also I wore my old hand-knitted sweater, my hand knit hat (Ch’ullu) and sandals made from old car tires, which are commonly worn by our people.

Between the big Andes Mountains, under the open full moon sky, we used to walk every single day with the wind as our friend. While walking barefoot with my poncho (Aymara coat) and my ch’ullu (hat), I would listen to the melancholic melodious harmony of the wind’s music echoing between the mountains as if it blew from the throat of time. Our hunger and thirst were so overwhelming that my sister taught me to drink my own urine or hers to quench our thirst.

When we walked, I could feel the breeze like a breath coming from the eternal white snow-capped mountains far away that surrounded us. It was summertime, that early morning the road that leads us to the school smelled of dusty earth. When we got to the little town called Villa Esperanza, our cracked and calloused feet and tire sandals were covered in dust.

In the town of about fifty houses, I saw a lot of children, walking, talking and playing near the school building. It was a two room schoolhouse.

When the school bell rang, everybody ran to line up. My father commanded me “You must run with them”, so I ran with them all flustered, without knowing where I was running, I even forgot to greet my teacher in Spanish. There were about six lines of children. I didn’t know which line I was supposed to go to. There were several big lines, one line for boys and another small line for the girls for each grade. I think there were only grade one, grade two and grade three. When I was lining up someone told me this is not your line, go over to that line. So I moved over to the correct line. Meanwhile, my father talked to the teacher for a few minutes.

Then, the teacher said in a loud voice to all the children. “Buenos días alumnos!” meaning “good morning students”. All the students answered in one loud voice: “Buenos días Señor!” meaning “good morning my Lord”. The teacher talked for a few minutes but I didn’t understand it at all. After, he asked us to show our handkerchief, pañuelo in Spanish, which was supposed to be white and clean, if not, we would receive a punishment.

When we got inside the school room, my teacher (my Lord) made me sit beside another boy. Our seat and desks were made from mud and adobe blocks (not Adobe Photoshop, ha!, ha!). Of course, the seat was hard and cold, especially during the winter time.

The entire school was made from adobe blocks and mud. I can still hear the whistling of the straw roof of the school when it was windy. The floor was just a natural dirt floor. The only luxurious and modern thing was the blackboard and the chalk that the teacher used for writing on the board. The blackboard erasers, which were like tiny pillows, were made by the students who were late for school.

The teacher made us pair up with other students to clean the classroom every morning for a week. We used to take turns. When we cleaned the classroom, we sprinkled a bit of water all over and then swept the floor with a broom. I can still smell the fresh earth as it reacted with the water and dust of the classroom floor.

The teacher spoke almost all the time, but I never understood him. I don’t know how I managed to pass my first grade, but I remember

when I was in grade two I was struggling with writing (almost in the same way I am struggling with English today). For me, It was hard to believe that I had actually passed the first grade of elementary school by myself.

I don't remember much about my first year of school, but I can remember some scenes with my teacher in my second year. He would stand beside me bending toward my mud desk where my notebooks were, telling me how to draw the words and to write nice and neatly. He told me "if you don't write these words neatly and nicely, you are going to be sent back to grade one again." I tried my best. When I finished my task, my teacher looked at it and he told me "you have to go back to grade one again. Come to this side and sit with this group where all the students are in grade one." I sat in the grade one group, and the teacher said, "you are now in grade one again!" And then he gave me first-grade writing and some math exercises. That was when I realized that the class was divided into two groups.

When I finished my first-grade tasks, my teacher looked at my papers and said: "You are doing very well! I will switch you again to the second grade." In spite of the different levels of groups, I didn't care what grade I belonged to. The word "grade" seemed empty to me. When my teacher put me in second grade again, he told me, "Do your task nicely and beautifully and be better than the other students, beat them. You have to be the best student in the class and leave the others behind." At that moment I felt very bad and sad. How could I leave behind the other students? That seemed mean to me. At that moment I remembered why my parents had trouble deciding to send me to school because they knew that in school I would learn different values than those of the Aymara people. The concept of individualism is not an ethical value in Aymara culture. We are supposed to help each other, not compete or leave others behind.

I remember playing at recess. Somebody made a ball from pieces of old rags sewn together. It was a little bit heavy, but you could kick it. I had never seen any kind of ball before. It was fun to play with this old rag ball. I saw my fellow students kicking, so I started to kick it too. My teacher was also kicking, but he told me to kick only to one side. This did not make sense to me. He was telling us in Spanish, so

I didn't really understand what he was saying. I didn't understand the rules of this game. My teacher told me again and again in Spanish and I still didn't understand. I was kind of guessing what my teacher was trying to say to me. I was still kicking everywhere. I was not the only child kicking in every direction, there were many children kicking like me.

Finally, during another recess, my teacher divided us into two groups, and he very slowly and carefully explained the rules, which I didn't get at all. Probably, some students understood but not all of us.

Again we started playing and I was doing same as before, kicking the ball everywhere. I was just enjoying kicking the ball.

Then my teacher stopped me and tried to make me understand. His voice was gentle as he put his warm hand on my shoulder and pointed with his finger, "kick only to that side and kick it into the goal. We have to win. Don't let the other group beat us." Again, that explanation sounded very rude to me. Win!, Win! Win! Beat!, Beat! Beat the others!?! What kind of education is this? I asked myself. This is not right. I was taught as humans, living collectively and communally, we are supposed to help each other. I reflected, "I am only a child and maybe I am mistaken."

Reflecting back on the years of my education, my traditional Aymara education and western education are very different. In my years of schooling, I learned that western culture places a high emphasis on individualism. The concept that you and you alone are more important than others is very different from Aymara culture. Competition, individualism, leaving others behind are not positive values in the Aymara culture. Being immersed in western education, today I can understand the anthropocentrism, the importance of human beings; the androcentrism, the importance of being male; even the egocentrism, the superiority of someone, created the exploitations of human beings, the exploitation of women and the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, by the few.

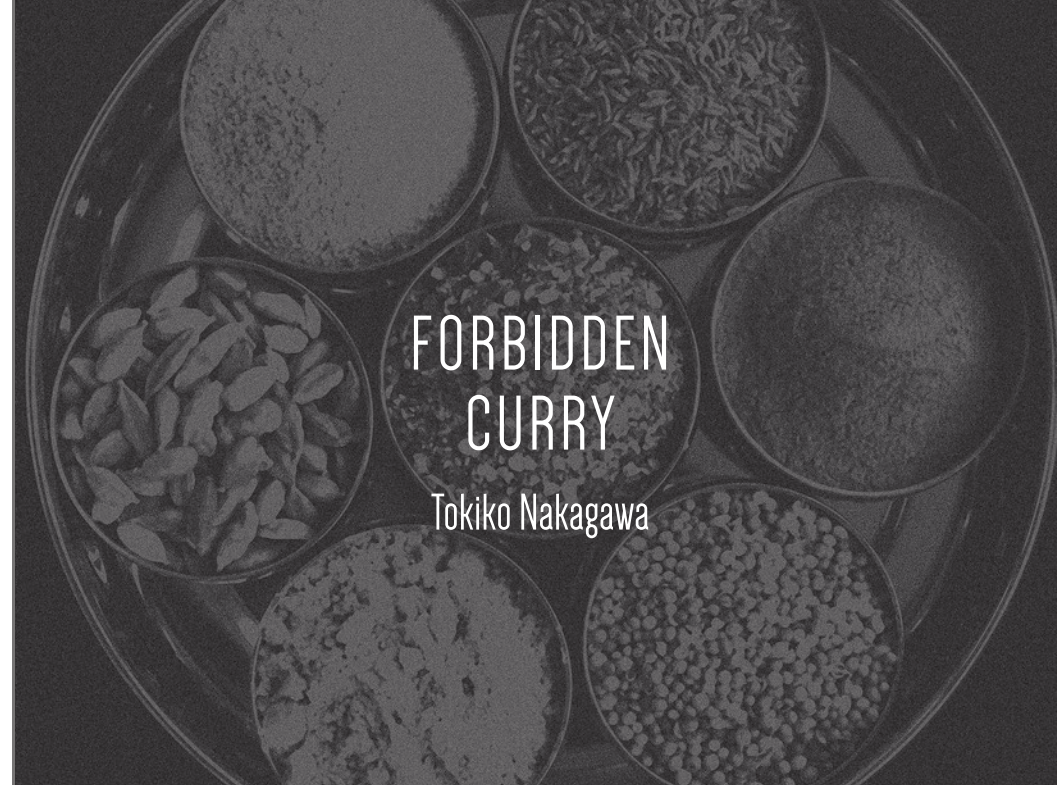
In my school years, we used to organize mock political parties and make promises and pretend that we would fulfill our promises even

when we were aware that would not have any economic resources to back them up. We tried very hard to convince all the students with our false promises. We used to say, “Vote for me, I am the best. I am the only one. I am the solution to solve the problems we have.” Later in life I saw this same pattern when political parties were running at election time on a national level. The goal is to win in order to gain profit, set up businesses for a few people and leave others behind. These ideas are all opposed to the values of the Aymara culture.

Helping each other is an important value in Aymara culture. Today for you, and tomorrow for me is not only a saying but has been practiced for centuries in Aymara communities. Economic, social and political justice are high values for Aymara people. The Aymara educational system has been focused on holistic living and practices on a daily basis for all communities of Andean people.

An individual person is nothing unless the other people exist and are recognized. Your community and your extended family are more important than yourself. Also, your community is nothing unless the mother earth and its relationship with the cosmic matters are balanced, then you exist. There is no subjugation of things or of nature or humans. There is no room for any kind of exploitation in the Aymara culture. If someone or some family has some difficulty, the community elder, that we call “Jilaqata” (which means walker alongside the brothers in the community) has to help and all the community has a right and obligation to help. Education for life, not for profit, neither for development. Not education for a better life but education for the well-being of all, not only for few.

To end my story, I would like to say that we all know, if in the world that we live in—people practice peace, justice, respect, and love in daily life, individually and collectively as well—this could be a little piece of heaven. A place where the lion and a lamb get along. A place where there are not just a few who are exploiting and practicing mass destruction, like war. If this were a reality—it could be for all of us a true smile forever. No tears to wipe or children crying anymore. This might be just a utopian dream, but the dream could be real if everybody puts good values into practice. Let's make an effort! We can make it! Wanting it is powerful! One day our dream will be real, and we will live in it.



Curry is one of the most well-known and popular foods in the world. There are thousands or millions of curry restaurants everywhere. When you think about curry, you would probably think that's an Indian dish. That's true, however, there is 'Japanese Curry'. This Japanese curry is extremely popular as one of the National Foods. The Japanese eat curry frequently, just like Italian people enjoy pasta or pizza.

I don't remember my first day of eating this Japanese curry. But I can say that my body is partly made of Japanese Curry. I grew up with it. When I was a teenager, I used to make my 'secret curry' in my room while working on my school homework. This 'secret curry' is not really a proper way to cook. This recipe is a short-cut and also a forbidden recipe. Firstly, I sneakily went into our kitchen. I looked for the curry bar—this curry bar is a big key to complete curry. This curry bar is concentrated essence of curry. It's made of all kinds of spices, including traditional Indian spices such as nutmeg, coriander, turmeric, fruits, starch and some flour. This specific starch and flour make Japanese curry thicken nicely. But this curry bar is so very con-

centrated, you really have to add it into a big pot with boiling hot water and seasonal vegetables dancing together.

Well, going back to my memory, I became so addicted to this curry flavour. I used to go to the kitchen late when I was sure no one in my family was around. And I started curry-bar hunting. After finding them, I simply broke one small piece of curry bar into my mug. Next, I poured hot water on top of the block. The nice aroma of spices started spreading when I stirred the curry bar with the spoon. When I smelt the familiar and friendly spices, it made my stomach shrink.

“Oh, how happy this smell is! “

After stirring this magical brown instant soup for a half minute or so, I went back to my room so quietly. That way my family wouldn't have noticed that I was in the kitchen. In my room, I enjoyed sipping this forbidden soup while working on my homework.

Next morning. When eating breakfast with my parents, they asked me suspiciously. “So, Tokiko, you came to the kitchen last night, didn't you?”

I became nervous, but tried to pretend that I was innocent. ”Ha? Such a nonsense. I never came. Why do you ask me such a silly question?”

My mother said, “Tokiko, we know that you are telling us a lie. You ate curry bar last night, didn't you?”

I started sweating and my heart started pounding so fast. How do they know that? I came to the kitchen so quietly last night. I said, “No..., actually maybe I came to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. But that's about it, Mom.”

But, after I said that, my father started laughing hard and said, “Tokiko, we all know that you ate that curry bar. We can smell the curry so strongly everywhere in the kitchen and inside your room! This curry bar is not your snack!”



I always knew that Canada would be my destination country. I valued its diversity, cultural values and welcoming environment for newcomers. Before immigrating to Canada, my husband, I and my two daughters (age 7 & 4) lived in Takjistan. Republic of Tajikistan is a mountainous, landlocked country in Central Asia . It is bordered by Afghanistan to the south, Uzbekistan to the west, Kyrgyzstan to the north, and China to the east. My husband worked in a bank and I worked with several Community Development Organizations during our nine year's stay in Tajikistan.

Deciding to move to Canada was exciting for us. I went to Pakistan with my children on a vacation in June, 2016 while my husband decided to join us in July. One day I received a text message from my husband “Congratulations, our application has been accepted by the provincial nomination program.” Our application process was quite unique, we received the visa within three months after we received the invitation.

The departure to Canada was also remarkable. We decided to spend a few days in Dubai on our way and enjoyed the warm days because, we knew that the snow would be welcoming us in Regina. We landed in Toronto on March 3, 2017 and my husband's cousins received us at the airport .This was the first time when I had Tim Horton's Coffee, “double double.” After five hours' layover at the Toronto airport, we continued our journey to Regina. We reached Regina on March 3, 2017 at 11:30 p.m., and a family from Pakistan received us at the airport and took us to their home. I got connected to this family

through Facebook. They helped us find an apartment and settle in Regina the first month. The next morning, we were taken to service Canada to get our SIN number and also to open a bank account. The bank was located very close to our home, and we decided to walk home from the bank. There was a huge blizzard, and my hands and feet were frozen when I reached home.

After a month and half of our stay in Regina, my husband went back to Tajikistan to complete his notice period from his previous job. After he left, I realized that it was hard to settle, because, I was preparing for my driver's exam, taking care of my two children and looking for employment opportunities.

However, that challenge turned into an opportunity, shortly after landing in March 2017 I found employment in July, 2017. I applied for several jobs at the Regina Open Door Society and other organizations. My husband arrived in July, and I decided to volunteer with Regina Open Door Society. One day I received a phone call from RODS to appear for an interview. I was offered a position for two months. Working in a new country, new environment, with diverse people was quite challenging. However, I took part in pre-arrival employment program which helped me integrate into the work environment. Not only that, I received very clear directions and support from my supervisor about my work, and his door was always open to me for any question or help I needed. Thank you Getachew Woldey-sus for your support. I really enjoyed working with you. One of my first projects was to provide leadership a workshop to the newcomers. The success of this project led to the extension of my contract with Regina Open Door Society, and it has been a year and half since I became part of this organization.

Canada feels like home, especially when the wind blows in the summer. This reminds me of my hometown in Pakistan. Something I also appreciate about Canadians is that they work hard, they are punctual, and sometimes they say sorry for no reason. I feel happy to live in Canada. I have started playing chess with my daughter. I am addicted to the Tim Horton's coffee and I am following the Roughrider's games.

## CONTRIBUTORS

### *Isaac Abram Ghebreslasie*

arrived in Canada on April 13, 2017. Originally from Eritrea, Isaac would like to see more immigration-based stories written and published and to be shared with the public.

### *Narek Harutyunyan*

is from Armenia, a small but proud country in mountainous Caucasus region between Asia and Europe. Narek immigrated to Canada on August 17, 2018. He hopes to find his freedom – a freedom you'll understand after reading his story, "From Struggle to Happiness." Welcome to Narek's world.

### *Antonio LaRocca*

is a pseudonym for one of the millions of Venezuelans who were forced to leave the country because of the oppressive regimes of Chavez and Nicolas Maduro, but infinitely grateful to Canada for having welcomed us.

### *David Mamani*

is from the Aymara nation, which is one of thirty-six nations of Plurinational State of Bolivia. David grew up in the country side close to the Chile border with llamas and sheep. He finished grade twelve and didn't end up studying for professional career but tries to help people as a service to his original country. David, his wife Debbie, and daughters Alaya and Samara, moved to Canada ten years ago. David learned English at Regina Open Door Society and Sask Polytechnic. David works as a truck driver and is happy to be in Canada.

### *Tokiko Nakagawa*

Tokiko Nakagawa was a dreamy and shy child and grew up in a small city surrounded by green rice fields and mountains in Japan. She has lived in Regina for three years with her family. Tokiko enjoys singing, baking, watching comedy and laughing hard.

### *Mussarat Parveen*

works with the Welcoming Community for Newcomers Program at the Regina Open Door Society. She completed her master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Pakistan and perused a diploma in Change Management from Germany in 2007. She worked with the Aga Khan Development Network for six years in Pakistan and Tajikistan and also she worked with the United States Agency for International Development for five years.

Mussarat moved to Canada with her husband and two daughters in March, 2017 and works with Regina Open Door Society since July, 2017. In her free time she enjoys playing, reading and doing craft works with her daughters.

### *Olenka Santoyo Sokolowski*

Olenka Santoyo Sokolowski was born in Chiclayo on the North Coast of Peru. She has held many roles in her life, like teacher and office manager, and enjoys hand crafts, photography, writing and research. She is currently studying English at Sask Polytechnic. She now lives in Regina with her husband, Daniel. She is grateful that their lives in Canada allow them to spend more time together than ever before.

## EDITOR

### *Gail Bowen*

has spent her professional life helping new writers develop their craft and unique voices. She has been a Writer-in-Residence at libraries in Regina, Calgary, and Toronto, and has presented courses at numerous writers' festivals and retreats across Canada. In addition, she taught literature in the English Department of the First Nations University of Canada for 22 years, serving six years as department head.

*A Darkness of the Heart* is the 18th book in Bowen's Joanne Kilbourn Shreve mystery series. Bowen has also written four Charlie Dowhauik novellas for Orca books. *Sleuth: Gail Bowen on Writing Mysteries* was published in March, 2018. Bowen has written plays for CBC Radio and for theatrical production across Canada. She lives in Regina with her husband Ted.



Thank you to all of the staff, volunteers, and participants of the 2019 Regina Open Door Society Creative Writing Class:  
 Back row (left to right): Alberto Ortiz (WCN Team Lead), Ifeoma Tony-Osondu (RODS volunteer), Narek Harutyunyan, Olenka Santoyo Sokolowski, Isaac Abram Ghebreslasie, Mussarat Parveen  
 Front row: (left to right) Tokiko Nakagawa, Gail Bowen, David Mamani

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