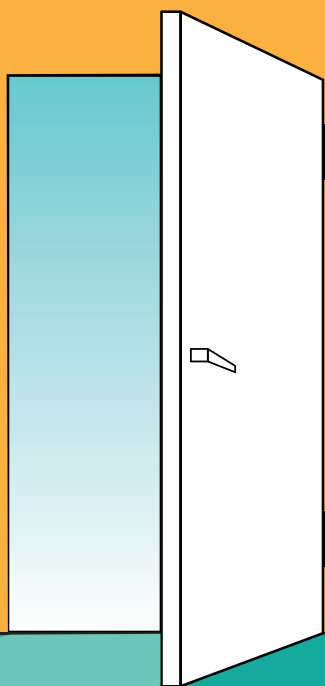


# Opening Doors Through Stories: Becoming

WRITING FROM NEWCOMERS TO REGINA



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

A new decade! 2020 is here and with it a second iteration of our *Opening Doors through Stories: Becoming*. A group of newcomer youth and adults remind us that the Regina Open Door Society (RODS) exists to create a welcoming community enriched by the diversity and strength of newcomers to Canada. In June and November 2019, a group of newcomers met with local author, Gail Bowen, to develop their creative writing skills and to tell their stories. The RODS' Welcoming Community for Newcomers (WCN) program, along with its partners, is proud to share these stories. We want to thank the participants for their hard work and dedication, and for opening a door into their new beginnings, and their process of becoming who they want to be in Canada. It is our hope that *Becoming* will open your hearts to learn, smile, laugh and tear-up, and your arms to welcome and encourage newcomers to Canada, making Regina and surrounding area their new home. Enjoy!

The Regina Open Door Society's  
Welcoming Community for Newcomers Program

If you write, you are a writer. As an advocate for the art and craft of writing, the vision of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild is to continually support and promote all writers and their vital contributions to a healthy and vibrant society. Through two workshop series in 2019 -- a youth-centered series in June and an adult-centered series in November -- writers of diverse backgrounds and experiences converged to work with author Gail Bowen through creative writing. What they accomplished in a short time is true magic -- none of what you will read has existed before this telling. Together, their work gives insight into the unique experiences of newcomers to Canada and contributes to the growing cultural landscape of Saskatchewan. Happy Reading!

Cat Abenstein  
SWG Program Coordinator

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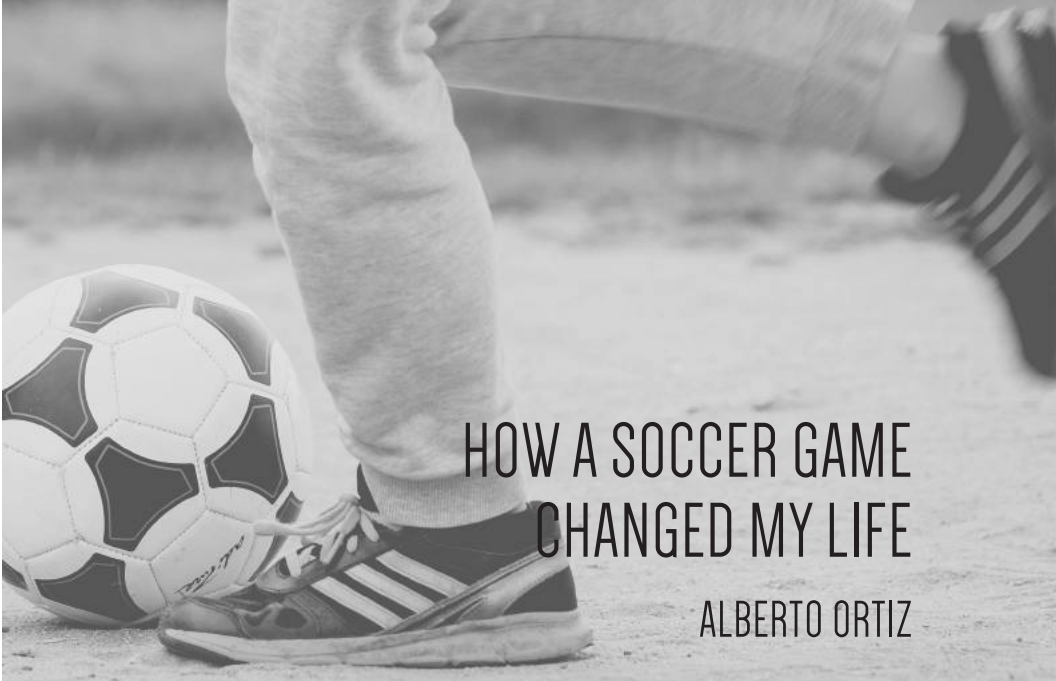
# INTRODUCTION

A wise reader once said that a story without a beating heart at its centre is not a story worth reading. There is a beating heart at the centre of each story contained in the chapbook you are holding.

The age of our writers ranges from thirteen to several decades past thirteen. Our contributors' reasons for coming to Canada are as varied as their countries of origin and the cultures that shaped them, but the theme that unites their stories is universal.

That theme is eloquently expressed in the words of actress Sophia Loren with which one of our writers chose to conclude his chapbook submission. "Often when we lose hope, and think this is the end ... God smiles from above and says 'Relax, it's just a bend, not the end.'" Thank you to all our writers for sharing their stories about embracing the challenges of moving to Canada.

Gail Bowen



## HOW A SOCCER GAME CHANGED MY LIFE

ALBERTO ORTIZ

Life takes through unexpected paths that only make sense when you look back. I had dreams of changing the world from the top, working with the United Nations (UN), or the International Labour Organization (ILO) since I was very young. For years, I worked towards those goals, and I feel I was very close to achieving them -- and don't get me wrong -- I know that door hasn't closed, but I feel my path has changed. In 2015, while doing my Masters in Public Administration at the University of Regina, I had the chance to participate in an exchange program at the United Nations University in the Netherlands. I had the opportunity to meet people at very high levels in different international organizations, like the International Monetary Fund, the Organization of American States, the UN, and the ILO.

One of the main global issues I was interested in was Indigenous Peoples. The former ILO Director, who was one of my professors, put me in contact with a regional director in Chile working on projects with the Mapuche people in Chile and Argentina.

“With your English, Spanish and French, you would be the perfect candidate,” he said.

Life had different plans for me. Europe was experiencing a huge wave of refugees from Syria --you may remember the media coverage. The University had a volunteer group that spent time with refugees doing fun activities. Around that time a Canadian guy I met there invited me to volunteer. He liked to play soccer, so he and many other students would get together and play against the Syrians. It took some convincing, but I decided to join the soccer game. I enjoyed it so much, I thought volunteering and even working with refugees would be an interesting career path.

At the end of the exchange program, when I returned to Regina I started to volunteer with the Regina Open Door Society (RODS). Canada had just accepted 25,000 refugees, and the need for help was significant. I was matched with a family to be a friend, to support them in their daily lives, to introduce them to Regina, and to Canada's ways of living. Arabic was not a language I spoke so communicating wasn't easy, but getting to know these people, and slowly realizing we had so many things in common, convinced me that this was my path. I suddenly didn't want to go to the top to try to change lives, I wanted to work one on one with immigrants and refugees, and help.

A few months later, with a Masters degree under my belt, and having completed a practicum placement with the City of Regina, I landed my first job with RODS. I travelled around the province, meeting newcomers, hearing their needs, and trying to find supports for them. In early 2018 I became the Team Lead for the Welcoming Community for Newcomers program, working with youth, recruiting volunteers, and teaching leadership classes--amongst many other activities from the "other duties as assigned" category that's very common in the Non-Profit sector. Almost two years later, I'm uncertain of what the future holds for me, but I'm excited. And looking back, I am delighted to see that a soccer game changed my life, and that I'm doing what I like, in an unexpected place, far away from the dreams I had when I was nineteen years old, but still helping one person at a time to make sure we live in a better world. So take a chance to look back and see the turns your lives have taken, and consider volunteering, because it can change your life.



# BIRDS AND HUMANS

ANGAD PATOLE

Birds do not have boundaries, then why do humans need them?  
Birds do not need passports and visas, why do humans require them?  
For birds, everything is available at no cost: food, skies and trees.  
Humans have to earn everything; for them, nothing is free.  
From one continent to another birds can easily fly.  
But for humans, even settling in another country is difficult.  
Sometimes, I feel it would have been better if humans were birds, with the whole world open to them.

Then I think, so what if birds have the freedom to live anywhere and to fly?  
Humans have free air and the freedom to cry.  
Humans are equipped with the ability to hope,  
To think, and to change the world.  
So I decided to use my ability to fight ...  
'Till my last breath or until I get everything right.



# THE HUMAN NEED FOR LOVE, CARE AND SUPPORT

ANGAD PATOLE

I was living in small city called Wardha, where the greats like Mr. K. Gandhi lived for a considerable period of his life. This city witnessed the critical events of the Indian Freedom Struggle notably the Quit India Movement of 1942.

This beautiful city, situated between the plains of two rivers, the Warda and the Dham, is a silent and pleasant place to live. I relocated to this city in 2007 to work as an assistant professor. Because I was new to the city, I had to live as a tenant. After a long search, I found a suitable place to live. The owners of the property were an elderly couple residing on the first floor, and I lived upstairs.

The lady was a school teacher who was about to retire and the old gentleman was retired, and stayed mostly at home. They had a son



who was working abroad as engineer. This family was well to do, and apparently without problems.

One cold December night, the old gentleman came running down the hall, and began knocking at my door. It was past midnight, and I was a little surprised, but I opened the door to see what had happened. I was shocked to see the old gentleman frightened and asking for the help. I asked him to come in. I assured him I would help and told him not to worry about anything. I offered him a glass of water and a chair to sit upon.

I said, "What is the matter? Please tell me what is bothering you? I will definitely do what I can to make you feel safe."

He sighed with relief and said, "The police have come to arrest me. Can you hear the loud noise of the police van siren? They are calling my name repeatedly. A young lady from my workplace has falsely implicated me in sexual harassment charges and complained to the police. The Superintendent of police has come to arrest me. Please hide me. I am innocent. I have not done anything that lady wrote in her complaint. It is so painful and stressful to me. It is conspiracy of neighbours to falsely implicate me in this issue because they are jealous of my position, and of the wealth that I possess."

I listened carefully to what he said, and I said, "I am here to help you."

He calmed down a bit at my words, but he was still restless. I peeked out of my window once, and opened my door a little to check who was outside. I made strong coffee for him, and he drank it slowly, still giving attention to sounds that were coming from outside. He was speaking non-stop, but finally he cooled down. I assured him I would look into the matter and helped him go downstairs to his bedroom.

His wife came, and I left him with her. The days passed; I collected information relating to the incidents, and life went on as if nothing had happened. Then, one fine evening, I saw the old gentleman doing something near the big flower pot just outside my hall. I moved nearer to him and asked him what he was doing at the flower pot in the darkness?

He was reluctant to open up and tell me what he was doing. I brought him into my confidence by recalling the last incident and reminding him how I had helped and protected him then. I convinced him that I wished him well.

After much deliberation, he started to reveal what he was thinking and what he believed he was facing. I was again listening carefully to him.

He said, "I came here to bury the medicines my wife gives me. She gives me this medicine daily to make me go crazy. Every day after dinner she gives me this medicine, and I come upstairs to bury it, because I know my wife is conspiring to kill me and take away my property. She took my son away. My son doesn't love me or care about me because my wife poisoned him against me. I am alone and lonely. There is no one to love or care for me."

I was shocked to hear this. He was about to cry, and I listened to him carefully and asked a few questions. I again offered to lend him a helping hand, saying don't worry everything will be all right. I offered him water and tea and listened to what he was saying. It was stressful to see his emotional pain. I helped him into the bedroom so he could take a rest.

I said whenever you feel stress, come to me and we will talk. Then I remembered the last incident, the time when he said a young woman at his workplace had accused him of sexual harassment. I analyzed the information that I had collected, and realized there was no van, no policeman and no sound of a siren. The old man had suffered auditory and visual hallucinations.

He was a retired person. He no longer went to a workplace. There was no young woman making accusations against him. He was just connecting stories he had read in the newspaper to his past life. Nothing he reported was real; he simply perceived it as real. His delusion that his wife wanted to make him crazy or kill him was unfounded.

There might be differences but not of the kind the old gentleman felt. He had a lot of money and property, facts that also might have

triggered this delusion. His wife was a working woman. She did as much as she could for him, but the gentleman was home alone thinking about many things. The son was miles away building a successful career.

I got to the root of the problem and discussed it with his wife. I asked permission to counsel him, and I took him to hospital by saying I am like your son. Doctors diagnosed his medical condition, counselled him and prescribed appropriate medications to bring him back to normal.

I concluded that just earning and gathering property is of no use for a happy life. True companionship is the key to a happy and fruitful life. Loneliness is painful and can lead to mental disorders. Love, care and the company of good relatives and friends are even more important than the wealth that you earn. It is not money that matters the most; it is the people surrounding you. Humans are social animals. Being loved and loving others are vital to the very existence of human life.



# ANTICIPATIONS

BHOOMIKA DONGOL

The cacophony of the flight's engines debilitated her. During those hours of weightlessness, the voices inside Mikha's head got louder than the noises outside. Strangers continuing their small talks, little children wailing in vain and the constant whooshing of the spinning propeller, they all started to become inaudible. Only an obscure repetitive monologue inside her head was all that Mikha heard. "What if he is already declared dead by the time I reach the airport? Will he ever know...?"

Mikha checked the seatback screen once again for the estimated time of arrival. Nine more hours felt like a lifetime. The unsettling voices got louder again. She closed her eyes to mute the chaos. But all she could think of was her father's gloomy face. Wrinkled, warped and

wrought by years and years of subjugation to alcohol and cigarettes, with the consumption spiking up as he grew old. She had somehow managed to avoid this visualization of her father for the last six years since she had been away from her home. “Home is just a mirage”, Mikha had always thought, “It never exists, and it shouldn’t, people must keep moving”.

“The thing about leaving your roots behind and moving to a new place is that it is a strange bargain. Once you move, you figure out that there is nowhere in the world you truly belong. Once you uproot yourself, you cannot ground or cocoon yourself back to the shoots or branches . . . .” The discerning voice in Mikha’s head got deafening again. She often used that voice as a writing tool to maneuver her plots ahead, but the voice had often been a nuisance than a mentor.

Mikha scanned the faces of strangers in the flight. Half of them were Nepali, perhaps heading back home after a brief reunion with their quasi-American families. She weighed the vulnerability in their faces, deeply contemplating if they projected the same wavelength of frailty as her. For Mikha, six years away from home had been pulverizing, her heart split between staying and leaving. And so, she decided that she should keep moving farthest until that relentless fire in her soul was extinguished.

“To be able to love your roots, you have to go astray, chop your shoots off from the trunk and nestle yourself in a distant hemisphere. And then you’ll gasp for a snuggly breeze from home, oh good gust . . . . Yes, to be able to arrive home, you must first learn to depart . . . .”, Mikha started scribbling in her yellow journal when a thought about Baa (Father) distracted her again.

The last time Mikha talked to Baa, she knew that her father was still in his regular self. He was still complaining that Maa (Mother) had not bought enough batteries for his radio. Baa was always hooked to his good old radio. He was very fond of listening to Narayan Gopal’s songs. The black radio against the backdrop of a three-inched whisky glass. That was how Mikha remembered Baa. Yes, that was how Mikha recalled Baa, not for his sharp masculine features, not for his sturdy venous palms and not even for the thick black mole on

his left cheek that gleamed against the strobing brightness of the old tube light. Baa was never abusive nor violent, nor was he ever “there”. “Mikhuu ...” Baa used to call her name, addressing to an eleven-year old Mikha dressed in an oversized-jumpsuit trouser that made her look more like a schoolboy than a pretty princess.

“Go and fetch a pack of Yak churros (cigarettes) from the Sauni downstairs.” The tenant downstairs had a small grocery store where they sold colorful lollipops and stacks and stacks of Wai-Wai noodles. Mikha did not have any other elaborate recollection about the shop but she vividly remembered the orange cigarette packaging that sheltered 12 perfectly aligned Yak churros, Baa’s favorite brand of cigarettes.

She once tried taking a puff when she reached thirteen. She had carefully slotted one of those nicotine-rich cigarettes between her two fingers and had allowed the carbon monoxide to slowly dissolve into her bloodstream. She did it like a pro, but that was the first and the last time she ever smoked. Second-hand smoking was more liberating, Mikha concluded. She never told anyone, but Mikha secretly wished for Baa to gulp more pegs of whisky. The more the intoxication, the more conjectural anecdotes and narratives followed. Upon pouring his third peg, Baa would be outpouring his heart, opening the very book of his life one leaf upon another. Newari myths, folklores and tales about rain-god, chariot-pullers, hysteric carnivals spilled through Baa’s parched mouth. Mikha sometimes wondered if Baa lived in a different dimension, his gaze affixed in a state of trance, indifferent to Maa’s random ranting and rumbling. Nevertheless, she was always fascinated with all his stories. Perhaps, that was why she decided to write her own stories too? In fact, she had told no one about it, but her own collection of short stories had been selected by a publisher in Toronto. Of course, she had to “embellish” and “politically” correct certain sections so that it fits the mass. She knew that Baa would never consent of those edits and so, she decided not telling him. “Would he die without knowing this?” the lamenting voice in her head got the loudest. All those stories that Baa used to write and recite were somehow sacred. Mikha knew this. All his characters encompassed an enchanting depth to them that it was almost unfathomable. She could never comprehend the good

and evil in them. Baa's tranced talks haunt her again, "Demons and deities reign simultaneously inside a man's head ..."

Mikha closed her eyes again to calm the chaos and teleported herself to a shady nook of an old house in Kathmandu where her father was still pouring his "third peg" and was about to share a new story. All the noises in the world mumbled down once her father started a story in his husky voice. Sometimes, when his favorite Narayan Gopal song played in the radio, Baa used to turn up the volume and would immerse into the song's melancholy instead. Perhaps that was why Mikha was never a fan of Narayan Gopal Gurubacharya, the "Vocal Emperor" of Nepali music. He was always the biggest interruption in Baa's recitations. Baa had always been a great storyteller, Mikha knew. The voice in her head resonated, "His stories are way too candid and outstanding than my superfluous stories."

"What are you reading?", the girl sitting next to Mikha finally inquired. She seemed to be in her late 20s, probably the same age as Mikha, and was one of the few non-Nepali boarding the flight. Mikha was holding the book that her father wrote many-many years ago, but she was hardly reading. She was only trying to hush the demons in her head, the repeated monologues that vexed her.

The book was a compilation of Newari stories about Lakhey, Pulukisi and Jatra, but Mikha was in no mood of explaining about her rich and "proud" culture she inherits. She had been six thousand miles away from 'it' for almost six years and she had her own fair share of pride and prejudices. And the anticipations in the air had crippled her, all she knew was that someone in one cold corner of Kathmandu was waiting for her. Or perhaps not??

"It is a collection of folklores from Nepal," Mikha briefed. "Wow, that sounds interesting. I will be in Nepal for the next 2 years as the Peace Corps volunteer and I would love to learn more about the local culture..." the girl tried introducing herself. "Great", was all that Mikha could utter, but it lacked even a slightest tinge of excitement. The girl could sense the fragility in Mikha's tone. Without even knowing, at a stranger's mercy, Mikha could feel a drop of tear trickling down the most unexpected corner of her eyes. Her brain

had not signaled any such stimuli, a drop shed and before she knew it, a few more rolled down. "Are you alright?", the girl whom Mikha hardly even knew, dared to ask.

"Yes ...", Mikha sighed and wondered if she should vent it all out to this stranger? She had not told a single living soul about her first book being published, perhaps this stranger must know? Her little secret should be out. But of course, there were many other secrets that would live and die with her. A man she would never be able to love, a child she would never be able to conceive. Her own beasts in her head that she would never be able to tame ... the lies that were buried inside her yellow journal ... Spikes of emotions that subsided a little as she took some of her happy pills.

Baa had once vented out, "A man's thought process is very linear, but a woman's thought ascends and descends in crests and troughs, spikes of emotions! I pray I am never reborn as a woman; it will be too hard to handle." And then Baa suddenly paused because one of the Vocal Emperor's song played on the radio. The song pulled him into that abyss of melancholia again.

Perhaps, Baa would reincarnate as a pigeon in his next life just to listen to some of her stories or maybe he as something inanimate - a radio perhaps! A radio. That way, some of his misogyny would stay frozen in its chest. But Mikha decided not to utter a word to the girl sitting next to her. She kept glancing outside the flight window to let an ephemeral secret bury inside her fiery soul. The seatback screen displayed the estimated time of arrival to be 5 more hours, Mikha hoped her father would save some more breaths until then. "Perhaps it is not too late to sensibly listen to Narayan Gopal Gurubacharya and join the fandom ..." Mikha sighed ...

"Malai chhodi mero chhaaya ... ." – My shadow has abandoned me ... Narayan Gopal's voice echoes in a distant radio. The song melts like blended scotch on the rocks, deliberately, submissively and pain-by-pain until the intoxication can empower the vein. Grief meanders among heartaches, evanesces and shines!



# NESTLED DARKNESS

BHOOMIKA DONGOL

Ever had that feeling?  
When you get so used to the darkness  
even a benign ray of sun beam  
can pierce your eyes?

After 78 days in the cusp of darkness,  
the sunlight strangely peeked into my room today.

But I did not want the rays  
to penetrate through my windows.  
I kept the blinds shut.  
In darkness, I have found a nest.

The light can maliciously bare my skin.  
“Change is good”, the light luminates.  
But that light fancies  
shredding off my layers one by one.  
I then look like a morbid statue  
made of dead skin and frozen flesh.

Maybe it was just a storm in my head  
or maybe the darkness has found its nest in me.

# MOVE ON

BHOOMIKA DONGOL



They told me to move on.

“Leave all that baggage behind and move on ...”

Instead of meandering around in vicious cycles,  
should I keep walking in an endless line  
sprinkling splinters of my heart wherever I go?  
These splinters like confetti—as they ridicule  
reflections they see in these broken pieces.

“Moving on” would be coming to terms with a fictionalized past  
only shows its face in darkness. And in darkness, there are no shadows!  
Just a presence of something indestructible, like the demons in my head.

Sure, I will move on.

Reclusive as I am, when I have “moved-on” enough,  
I will write them a happy song.



# THREE GIRLS WHO SHARED A DREAM

ERIKA-NESTORY MHOZYA

When I was three years old my mother found out that I loved dancing. She bought a small radio which often played dance music, and she told me if I worked hard at dancing, I might win a prize. My mother's friend also told me that I was a good dancer, but I was so young that I didn't believe her.

When I was six years old, my mom moved to a big city, leaving me with my grandmother. My mom told my grandmother everything about me especially that I liked dancing. My grandmother was so proud of me. When I started elementary school, I had a bad time because people found out that I could dance well. My grandmother and I had a bad time because she didn't want me to be upset about what people were saying about me. They said that I would end up on the street and my life would be useless, but I didn't give up, I keep dancing, and one day I became successful.

Suddenly, many people knew that I could dance, and I became successful in my grandmother's eyes. Finally, I met someone who loved dancing too. Her name is Happiness. She was a huge fan of dancing and we became friends and started to dance in wedding

ceremonies and graduations. We made people laugh and enjoy themselves. When we were in grade six, we met Santana. She was also a dancer, so we were three girls with the same dream.

After I left my country, it was very hard for my dance group members to continue dancing. When I came to Canada, it was very difficult for me to continue dancing, too. I tried everywhere to find a place where people danced even for fun, but I still haven't found a place to dance. This makes me feel unhappy, and I started to imagine what my life would be like at home. I suffered so much because I could no longer dance that I decided to give up, but my heart kept telling me not to give up the thing that I love. My heart said to keep hoping and maybe one day I would make it.

One day I was helping my dad wash the car and I started to ask him if he also liked to dance or sing. The answer he gave me was very hurtful. He said I know you like to dance, but just give up because I want you to focus on just one thing and that thing is school. I was very sad about that answer. I wanted to cry. I wanted to ask him if he cared about my happiness, but I stopped. Then he told me I just care if you study and get your degree for that I will be happy. After that conversation, it was very hard to convince him that back home people told me that I was a star and that if I kept dancing I would reach my dreams and live a good life. I know that I won't give up, but for now I will do what my dad wants me to do. I know that if dancing makes me feel more precious and wonderful even if I'm only dancing in my home it's way better than walking around and doing nothing.



## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

ESTHER CHIMDIA ETONYEAKU

**S**tarr is a fourteen-year old female student who attends the English Modern School (EMS) which surrounds a large field in Qatar, Doha. Although she is eager to make new friends, Starr finds it hard because of her shyness and her quiet attitude. As she gets accustomed to her surroundings, she slowly pulls herself out of her comfort zone and begins to make a number of friends from different countries. These friendships impact Starr's everyday life.

When the time comes for Starr to move to a different school, she quickly learns that her new school has less diversity than EMS. Newton British Academy (NBA) is a very large school that is surrounded by malls. Going between schools, Starr realizes that communicating and sharing activities with people of different nationalities helps her understand and connect with different people on many levels. Her understanding that people see things from different perspectives helps Starr in her every day decision making because she is able to see a problem as others might see it. Diversity is the key to connecting people and bringing people together so they can learn from each other and apply what they have learned to their own lives.

While Starr was in EMS, her interactions with people from all over the world contributed, not only to her academic learning and her views on others, but also to her accent. Her religious beliefs contrasted with those of her friends who followed the teachings of beliefs like

Islam and Catholicism. Sometimes, these differences strained her relationship with her new friends.

However, because Starr's friends were now from all over the world, she learned different languages and that connected her with the world even more. Languages like Spanish, Turkish, Arabic, Tagalog, Hungarian, Russian, Afrikaans and many others became part of Starr's daily life. Starr took Arabic lessons, so she could communicate more freely with her friends. When Starr moved to NBA, she didn't find as many people from different countries as she did in EMS but she made friends that shared their language and religion with her.

One of Starr's friends, Samaya, is from Azerbaijan, a country which Starr never knew about. Hearing Samaya's accent really intrigued Starr, and she started to be open with people around her. Hearing different languages gave her insight into how people express their opinions on things. She even learned how to say "Hello, my name is Starr" in Danish, "Hej jeg hedder Starr". Everything was going well for Starr at her new school, but she soon realized that she wasn't learning as much as she had at EMS.

This insight led her to the conclusion that when people from countries all over the world are in the same place, they will come to know each other through the ways in which they act and talk. Starr concluded that everyone would like to share their culture, beliefs and religion but in order to do that, they must communicate with one another. They must interact with each other to exchange Information.

If we are all from the same country or we all share the same beliefs, we find ourselves comfortable with one another and we just go on with our daily lives. Starr believes that Diversity can bring people together. It can open up our eyes to different views we never knew were there, and allow us to explore new choices and confide in each other. One of the keys to a peaceful and productive life is to work together and being in a group of people that have different views and opinions can mold the way we view the world and the kind of future we will create together.



# CHILD OF AN ADDICT

MEHWISHAN JOOHI

It's almost 7:00 PM on a September evening and the bright orange sunlight indicates that the sunset is approaching. We have not seen snow yet, but the wind has an ominous chill to it. Nora sits across me while we eat our supper near the window in a cozy café.

We discuss the approaching winter, the new project that our team will start next week, and the news that one of our colleagues will be rejoining after her successful treatment for cancer. When we run out of things to say, we share silence.

Outside, people are gathering at the bus stop a few steps away from the window. A man in a Roughriders' jacket is among those waiting for the bus. He lights a cigarette, and right then the bus turns the corner. He tries to take a few more puffs before the bus arrives at the stop. He taps the cigarette at the side of trash can and throws it in before getting on the bus. He seemed a bit annoyed, maybe because he had to throw more than half of the cigarette in trash. That's when a woman in shabby clothes approaches the trash and scoops the cigarette out of the can with an ugly grin. Her hands are terribly shaking, but she manages to light the cigarette and starts smoking with smug satisfaction and an empty gaze.

Nora interrupts my stream of thoughts, "you know, that's something that my mom would do", she says.

I ask: “Do what? Light a cigarette before boarding the bus?”

“No, take a cigarette out of the trash.”

I don't know how to react to this information, so I keep quiet and give an encouraging smile to show that I'm listening. In my mind it just does not add up that my amazingly well-accomplished colleague-cum-friend could have such mother.

Nora goes on: “My grandma tells me that my mom was a curious, brave soul who lost her way following ‘cool’ neighbourhood kids, and she never returned to her real self. Granny is one of few people who talk fondly about my mom. I remember seeing a glimpse of my real mom in her lucid moments. Most of the time she was struggling to be a good mother and falling short. The drugs pushed her into a ditch of debt that she couldn't get out of, no matter how hard she tried.

As a kid and teenager, I always thought I was dealt a bad hand in life. I was drenched in self-pity and bitterness. I was jealous of kids with happy families and caring parents. I didn't have the luxury of acting out as a young adult, because the grownup responsibilities were thrust upon me with little support from anyone. Now, looking back, I also feel bad for mom; it must've been hard on her as she came from a nice family.”

Still shocked, I manage to say: “You must feel proud of yourself; you've accomplished so much in your life.”

A bitter smile appears on her face as she says: “Yes, I should; but I can't. Once guilt is etched in your personality, you always find a way to beat yourself up. Now I feel horrible for leaving my mother behind when I moved here to start a career. The rational self tells me that getting out of that toxic environment was the right thing to do, but there's still a part of me saying maybe I could've done more for her. I have accepted that it will always be like this: the struggle within me will never end. I can never celebrate or be carefree like ‘regular’ people, but I've made my peace with this war within.”



She concludes her story and I try to come up with something to say in response. I struggle to find the right words for quite a while, and finally I give up.

“Maybe we should head home now”, I say.

On the way to our cars, facing the chilly wind, we are both silent. I have so much to say, but how should I say it? I want to say that I relate to every word that she told me. I know how it feels to be living with a lost parent.

Yes, I can feel her pain in my heart. I, who was raised by two most selfless, loving, and caring parents who were always there for me. It's not my father or mother who lost their way, it was my motherland. Being raised in a country that has lost its way has etched me with a guilt that will live in me forever. It does feel like being dealt a bad hand. I envy the kids of happy, prosperous countries who didn't have to fight as hard to overcome a corrupt system as my family and I did.

Shackled with debt, I can visualize my country doing something as humiliating as digging up a cigarette from a trash can. I know the guilt of leaving someone struggling behind, even if there wasn't any future staying with them either. There's always a voice in my head that says: “maybe you could have done more for those left behind.”

## PG-35

MEHWISHAN JOOHI

Hey mum, you always took care of me  
You spent so much time in cooking me the best meals  
You knitted beautiful, warm jerseys in pink and mauve  
You protected me from chilly winds and snowstorms  
You read each review of a movie, its ratings, and its synopsis  
To make sure that I saw only the best and didn't learn wrong things

Hey dad, you were always there for me as someone to look up to  
For me, you were kindness, hard work, and integrity personified  
I remember the piggy-back rides and magical bedtime stories you told  
You made sure that I knew right from wrong, so you chose the right  
You went to great lengths to show me how to live a life that's worthwhile

And then, suddenly I was an adult, responsible for myself  
In a world that didn't have any filter or buffer to soften the blows  
No one sought my permission before trampling over my dreams  
My little heart, nurtured with your love and care, broke into million pieces  
People chose wrong and they won, everybody knew that's the world's ways  
I was the only one in a sea of unkindness, still trying to be kind to others

I don't dare think your teachings could be wrong  
But the world tells me otherwise all the time  
Nothing in this world makes sense to me  
How I wish I had your help to resolve this disparity  
I wish someone would read the synopsis of my life  
And warn me of the ups and downs ahead  
I could use some Parental Guidance at age 35

# SYMBOL (TWO SIDES OF A CANADIAN DIALOGUE)

MEHWISHAN JOOHI



First Speaker:

We sympathize with your feelings despite our differences  
“You people” have suffered in the past, but now we say, no more  
Go on, wear your feathers, dance with your tribes as you like  
If anyone dares to resemble your appearance, we’ll rip them apart  
No one wears a brown face under our watch, we stand on guard for thee  
Let’s begin anew, let go of the history, share the future that we see  
Let’s give thanks to each other, we’ll celebrate with a turkey  
No need to stay teary-eyed, we know how you feel, you don’t need to say  
What? You don’t believe us? But we’ve vowed to fulfill what we say  
We are careful to mention the land we are on in each email signature  
We tell our kids to be polite and to wear an orange shirt each year  
Don’t you think we’ve repented enough? What is that you still fear?

Second Speaker:

We don’t fear you! We never have. We were one brave soul  
We would have loved to wear those feathers and to dance as a tribe  
That meant so much to us, those were the symbols of our pride  
But that was a long time ago, and those things won’t heal anymore  
What would you do with a symbol, when you don’t feel pride in yourself?  
The wounds are much more than what they appear  
The skin might have healed, but our soul still isn’t  
A bay of lost time, lost lives, and lost values  
Something that you don’t see, is still between us  
Our parents left without handing us the baton  
Now how would you ‘correct’ that loss?  
With a feather or with a shirt?  
That too while “the Bay” still stands  
That’s also a symbol, isn’t it?

# A WHOLE NEW WORLD

OHM TUSHAR RAVAL

## An Introduction

**H**i readers. I am Ohm, and I am fourteen years old. I used to live in India or more specifically, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in India. I have a passionate interest in car-designing and learning about cars, and my dream is to open an automobile designing and engineering company such as Pagani or Koenigsegg.

You may be wondering why am I telling you all this.

It's simply because knowing about my dream of opening an automobile designing and engineering company will help you come to understand me. So, let's stick to the title. When I got the news from my parents, that we were moving to Canada on PR (Permanent Resident) basis, I was so excited that I forgot about all the things that I would miss: our culture, our food, but most importantly, my family and my friends. My first lesson was this: "If you want to get something you have to be prepared to sacrifice a lot of things."

During the period when we were preparing to come to Canada, I was super busy with all the health tests, paperwork, shopping, etc. I forgot about my school tests; in fact, I didn't attend school for a month. When suddenly the test day came, I was not prepared, but I managed to pass. (That is the first and the last time I will ever walk into a test unprepared.) On my last day in my school all my friends were kind of sad, but also happy for me. I am still in touch with them, and I know they were hoping for a good future for me. They wished me luck and I flew to Canada on the 17th of October.

I still remember that day at the airport -- there were at least five cars around, all filled with my family.

And this ends chapter one.

## **A Whole New World**

On the 18th of October, I landed in Regina. At the airport in India where we flew from it was 40 degrees Celsius, and in Regina it was around -5 degrees Celsius. My whole body went into a phase where I was not able to feel anything except cold, and I just felt tired after constantly sitting for twenty-eight hours. That night my uncle dropped me and my family at our apartment, and it was a one bedroom apartment, and we were a family of four people living in that apartment which had nothing in it. It was really shocking for me to live in a really small space in a basement because my dad in India used to earn a lot of money and he fulfilled each and every single wish we ever had, but in Canada we had to start all of that struggle again to be successful.

It was really hard for me to adjust, and I know it was even more difficult for my dad to adjust. He used to go to sleep at two a.m. and, he woke up at seven a.m. We came in the middle of winter, and it was snowing a lot. It felt like hell in winter because of the cold and our situation at that period of time. It was so disappointing, that at some point, we began to feel that we had made a big mistake. But, every situation has a good end, I remember that ours came on my dad's birthday when one of his friends called to wish him a happy birthday. My dad's friend referred us to his brother, a businessman in Regina who could help us. That moment was motivating for all of us.

When we contacted him, he told us that he has many friends and relatives in the same apartment where we were living and this was a really big moment.

And, here it comes: finally, it was the day when I had to go to RODS for learning what school I would attend, and they told me Sheldon-Williams Collegiate. To be honest, when I heard about the school

I was really surprised because back in India when I was researching high schools in Regina, the first school I saw was Sheldon-Williams.

My first days at Sheldon-Williams were very different from the schooling system in India where I attended a prep school. At Sheldon-Williams, they had no common classes, no uniforms and not a lot of people. However, the teachers are very supportive and they help you a lot.

I started to make friends and found a good environment where I felt settled. Things were going really well for our family. My father had a lot of friends and people started to know us. My mom had a job, we got our “PR cards”, and we also bought a car. It was starting to change our opinion about going back to India.

In Canada, I continued to develop my interest in automobile designing and I started to draw and learn about cars and design my own cars. I am now trying my best to become a car designer and engineer. I have a really good friend in India and his name is Garv and, to be honest he and my parents both inspired me to never give up and try as hard as you can.

### **Break Through**

Everyone has a fall in their graph, and I did too. This is the first time I have talked about this. I had been living in Canada about six months and everything was going well. I had friends and I was at school, but suddenly I became the target of some bullies who every single day used to bully me on whatever I was doing: my work, the people I used to interact with, etc. That is most probably because they were jealous of me and were also not happy about the reputation I had made for myself.

The constant bullying was really affecting me mentally. I became depressed, and my depression spoiled my life and the atmosphere in my house. So, I decided to act as if nothing had happened to me. But, one night I was going to my bed and suddenly under my blanket I started crying without any reason. (Trust me, I never let my emotions out.) For the first time in five years, I cried, and it made

me feel good.

I usually have so much control over my emotions that no one could ever identify that what is going on in my mind or what am I am feeling. I liked this quality in me, so I started to act and joke a lot which helped me cover my emotions. All was going well, and then one day my birthday came (which is at the 22nd of December), and on this day my dad was doing Skip the Dishes and when he came out of his car he slipped on black ice and got a major fracture on his hand. When I went to the hospital to see him at midnight, and he was admitted for two days we celebrated my birthday in the hospital, and that celebration with my family got me out of my depression. Since then I have tried just to believe in myself, and never think about the past. Now things are going really well for me.

## **Conclusion**

Whatever happens, stay positive and don't give up -- everything has a result.





# MIGRANT AND TRAVELLER

OLENKA SANTOYO SOKOLOWSKI

Many times, we believe that migrating is simply travelling, but they are two different activities with few similarities.

- Migrants and travellers both move from one place to another, but they don't travel for the same reason.
- Migrants and travellers both pack their belongings, but don't have the same things in their suitcases.
- Migrants and travellers both leave their country of origin, but for different reasons.

For me, travellers leave their country of origin to relax from daily stress. They are financially prepared for travel with an itinerary already made and with a fixed return date. On the other hand, migrants leave their country of origin with little or no money, no itinerary, no return date, with many questions and fears. The traveler's aim is to relax, enjoy him or herself and to learn about different cultures. The migrant's aim is working and saving to grow professionally and have a better quality of life.

When we decided to migrate to Canada, I wondered what our adaptation to another country, another culture, another climate, another language would be like; but I was attracted to the idea of seeing Niagara Falls and cities and landscapes with snow like Christmas cards. I also imagined returning to my home country once a year. But when I arrived in Regina, I brought with me a very thin wallet of money, so I had to postpone the dream of seeing Niagara Falls and the great cities of Canada, such as Toronto, Calgary, Banff, Edmonton, Vancouver and Quebec City.

... And I said: I am a migrant, not a traveller.

In Peru, sometimes we moved temporarily from one province to another to know a new city and its surroundings, in this way, we met many small but beautiful places full of history and tradition. With this experience behind me, I decided to investigate the city of Regina and the province of Saskatchewan; I wanted to know beyond what

the internet said. So, my husband and I decided to know the city first, and then gradually the province. We set a goal to do it in two years while saving to visit other provinces.

And I saw many well-known places in the city, such as Wascana Park and all its connections, Kiwanis Park and its small waterfall, Government House, the parliamentary building, the Royal Museum and many other places. But I wanted to leave the city to travel on the highway, taking advantage of the fact that my husband delighted in driving a car. So, I discovered that Saskatchewan has many small cities with interesting stories and curious things.

For example, Kipling has a life-size bronze lion and the largest paper clip in the world according to the Guinness Book of Records. In Davidson, we found an immense coffee maker with its cup. I met Sukane with his giant boathouse in the middle of the meadow next to a village museum that makes us imagine how they lived in the last century. Motherwell House, where I lived the experience of living in the past and played the kinds of games I played in my childhood: pulling the rope; running with the hoop and riding in a cart. It was a time when there was no internet technology. Here we sampled baking and savoury food as grandma did.

It is interesting to find along the roads to the prairie giants, that were grain elevators used for grain storage. We also found iron statues that represent the pioneers and some of the activities they performed in these beautiful fields.

For travellers, Saskatchewan is often considered boring, but this is not the case for us, two new migrants, because we found villages with curious things such as Kenaston that has one of the tallest snowmen in the world; Watson, which is the home of the original Santa Claus Day; Watrous has Manitou Beach, which is known as the Dead Sea of Saskatchewan, a unique lake that is full of brackish water, not unlike the Dead Sea in Israel, and where we can float. Also, we visited Outlook, Dundurn, Odessa, Lebret, Gravelbourg, Nokomis, Oxbow, Naicam, Weyburn, Indian Head and many more towns and villages.

There are many towns and their stories that I met and enjoyed and so many great things that I made an album on my Facebook page to show my family and friends all the giant things I found in this interesting province.

There is a lot to explore in Saskatchewan and it is not very expensive to know our province, we just need some snacks, juice, water, and the desire to know and admire beauty in simple and “giant” things.

Every weekend of my first two summers in Regina, Saskatchewan we visited its surroundings and saved and prepared to visit other cities in other provinces such as Winnipeg, Edmonton, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Banff, Toronto; until finally, I came to fulfill one of my dreams as a child, to know Niagara Falls.

... And I say: I am a traveller migrant.

As a migrant I can now say that it was not easy to decide to move to Canada, there were many doubts and insecurities we had before arriving here, but I admit that living in Canada was the best decision of our life.

It's nice to travel but, it takes a lot of courage to leave our country of origin and immigrate to a different country, with a different language, a different climate. I will never forget all the effort and perseverance of Daniel, my husband, to find a better place to live and grow old together.

The whole process was long and with many sacrifices, but it was worth it because travel and emigrating to Canada and obtaining Canadian citizenship is the best thing that has happened to us. I love the country that saw me born, Peru, but I learned to share that love with Canada, the country that received us and opened us to so many beginnings and gave us many opportunities.

... Now, I will say: I am a migrant and a traveller.

Thank you very much Canada; I will be eternally grateful.



# A GOOD SPORTSMAN

RAJ METKAR

**L**et's start from the beginning. My name is Raj Metkar and I am 13 years old. The story which I am going to tell you is about me playing basketball from the beginning. This all started by me coming to Canada.

When I came to Canada I saw a lot of people playing sports but majority of them were playing basketball. I wanted to play basketball so badly but I didn't know how to play. Everyday I saw my friends playing basketball but I thought they would laugh at me because I didn't know anything. Then one day my friend saw me standing there watching them play basketball so, he came to me and convinced me to try out basketball.

The only thing I knew about basketball was you have to bounce the ball with your hand and try to get a basket. I didn't know about travel, double dribble — not even a carry. When playing after each bounce I used to hold the ball and then start bouncing it again. Even the grade 3's knew basketball better than me and it was kind of embarrassing. Though my friend never laughed at me and neither did they let me give up and soon I knew basketball just enough to play with my friends.

Then the basketball league started in the school and I had the best coaches in the entire world, they were Ms. Lee and Mr. Bonner. They taught me and my friends to play better basketball and along with my friends Phoenix, Abshir, Annaf and Elias, I was learning really fast.

Soon we were a great team at basketball. Even though we didn't win any games at the league, I felt like we were a good team and the most important part was that each and every one of us was giving their best efforts to win or at least try to win.

One day we had staff vs. students match and we gave a tough time for staff to win even though they were the coaches. I was getting good at basketball by everyday as we used to play after school every day. Though I was getting good at basketball I still did not know about layups.

One day my coach told me about the tournament for Ehrlo basketball and along with my friends I signed up immediately. It started on a Sunday morning with a kickoff. There were so many good players and I thought we stood no chance against them. But that was not it. The practice started for one hour every Wednesday and we had some pretty good players in our team too. And so the grind started. When we were at the final class I have learned so many good tricks I could do. And one thing that I never imagined would happen, happened. Not only was I good at layups but I was the best of the entire team. And finally the moment my whole team was waiting for, the tournament day was here.

We were all prepared so much. We had a lot of fun in the tournament. Sadly, we didn't win any games but the opponents had a hard time playing with us. Even though we lost, none of us gave up on basketball.

Even today I play basketball with the same friends. I will never forget the people who taught me how to play basketball. Thank you to all those people.

I have a message for you guys: when you see any new things you should try them out. Even though you think you are bad at it you try it out because without trying you will never know how good you are at the activity. Not only sports but everything in your life. And never give up and lose hope. Keep practicing and as we all know, "Practice Makes Perfect".

# COURT

ROHIT KUMAR

Maybe I can escape from the court,  
Maybe I can escape from the law, people, past, present and future  
By logic, the cause of suffering birth cannot be proved  
By logic, the cause of a journey of suffering cannot be proved  
Will not appear in court  
There can be no documents, no fingerprints, no expert opinions  
It is difficult to prove, without doubt  
But, how can I escape  
From the court of my own mind,  
Where I am the criminal,  
I am the lawyer,  
I am the witness  
I am even the law,  
And also I am the Judge  
In the court of my own mind,  
No need for proof, no room for doubt  
Hence, after being acquitted from all the courts  
I self-surrender in the court of my own mind



# I MISS YOU ALL

ROHIT KUMAR

I am Rohit Kumar. My date of birth is 15 August, the date when my home country got Independence. I come from the Bhanu community that means different, traditionally a nomadic tribe migrated from Mewar (a south-central part of Rajasthan one of state of India) to different parts of India. In the 16th Century, my ancestors were soldiers in the army of Maharana Pratap, a 13<sup>th</sup> King of Mewar in 1572-1597. After defeat at the hands of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, they were dispersed into forests, a fate that made them educationally, socially and economically backward. Even during the period of British rule, many people of our community were exiled to Andaman Islands due to their involvement in criminal activities. Our community is classified as a Tribal in North India. We have been given special protection under the Constitution of India, but otherside we lacked parity with other communities. In 1952, the Bhanu community was allowed to return to Uttar Pradesh and many were settled in the districts of Moradabad, Kanpur and Kheri. My grandfather was a simple labourer, and my father who is a practicing lawyer is the only educated person among his seven brothers and sisters. My family is settled in New Delhi, capital of India.

In school I was an average student, but I always worked hard and honestly. I was raised by my grandmother because my parents often fought with one another, and both ran away from their matrimonial responsibilities. They stayed separated for many years, and as an obligation, my father occasionally took me to visit my mother. After every visit, my father told me to forget my mother; she would never come back for me, but I decided that I would bring her back home someday.

Time passed, I completed high school studies and qualified for Law entrance exams, and fortunately gained admission to a New Delhi based college. While studying Law I learned that many features (executive, legislative and judiciary) of the Canadian constitution were adopted by India, I developed a passion to work on social issues, advocating for those who cannot advocate for themselves. I also realized that my mother had suffered an injustice and I approached our community Panchayat (an elective village council) of about five members, respected elders chosen and accepted by the community to make local decisions. They made a decision in favour of my mother, and all of our relatives agreed to obey the decision of panchayat. We are now a happy family.

After finishing college, I got an opportunity to work on various human rights issues, and I visited many regions in my home country. I developed a desire to gain experience in a foreign land. One of the reasons I planned to immigrate to Canada was that I heard it is one of the most beautiful and diverse countries in the world. Another reason to move to Canada is that I hope one day I can prove to all those near and dear to me that I am a worthy person. Eventually, I moved to Canada as an immigrant with only one goal: to gain a solid reputation in Canada, so that one day my community would be proud of me. I encourage them to emigrate too. Anyone with a strong will and a willingness to do hard work can achieve anything here.

I had lived a comfortable life in the capital of India, but the trauma I faced in my childhood is unforgettable. I wish to have my own family, that has not happened yet. My trip to Canada was full of up and down emotions. I was frightened about starting a journey in a country where I did not have any relatives, friends or any links.



During the flight I often prayed “God please look after me, don’t let me fail.” Fortunately, I managed to control my emotions and after fifteen hours of a long journey, my first stop on 6th September 2019 was Vancouver. From there, I had a connecting flight to Regina. I was holding the packet of homemade sweets in my hand at Vancouver airport. Many people saw me, and I am sure were curious to know what I was holding. Soon I felt hungry and buying food at the airport restaurant seemed very expensive for me. When I opened the packet of sweets, they fell down on the airport carpet, I was embarrassed. I told myself “Welcome to Canada.”

In my connecting flight from Vancouver to Regina, I became very tired and nervous because I was almost going to land at my destination. I got a window seat and a very beautiful Canadian girl with short hair sat beside me. At first sight, she looked like a girl I had a crush on and for a few minutes my heart was beating so fast it felt like I ran a marathon. After the plane took-off, I just got a good nap and reached Regina with freshness.

My initial days in Regina were full of challenges at first. I did not even know how to cross the road, so I followed other people. Soon I learned that I had to push the button on the pole close to the road to cross. While I was crossing a road in Regina a car coming from the front stopped almost ten metres away from me. At that moment I feel like a VIP, and I giggled while imagining New Delhi Roads which are unregulated battlegrounds.

I feel grateful people here are always welcoming to me. Even when I am walking on the street strangers often say good morning to me. Day by day, I feel happier and I gain confidence. After a few days, I got a job and I am so happy at least I get one more chance to improve myself professionally. One day I went to the Royal Bank of Canada to open a bank account. I met the bank officer who appeared to be from African origin, and he asked my name. I said my name is Rohit Kumar and he said, “But I only know Rohit Sharma”, (a cricketer from the India team) and we both laughed very loudly. Everyone watched us and our surroundings became pleasant. That day, I saw how diversity works in Canada.

In another incident, everyday I take a bus at 09:55 PM to go to my workplace. The very first day I was surprised to see a women driving a bus during night hours. I'd lived half of my life in New Delhi, but I never saw a women driving a bus. That day, I saw how gender equality works in Canada. At first sight, the City of Regina (Latin for Queen) looked like a football ground to me one in which I might run from one corner to another and again return. I observed Regina people are very punctual and disciplined in whatever they do. As well, they are generous; encouraging me, and saying I can achieve whatever I hold in my heart. I've started to like this city. I can feel people here expecting me to prove myself and yes, I am really working on myself and I will not accept a setback in any situation. But I miss you all.

In my home country, the jurisprudence of law says the law should ensure the rights and responsibilities of all beings, but now the legal profession in my country is a business for profit-making, and justice is rarely delivered. I am in a process to write an NCA (accreditation) exam to qualify as a lawyer in Canada. Even after all such efforts and hard work, If I am able to achieve my destiny, I will spend my retirement days in helping my community people. But I miss you all.

I like those lines written by actress Sophia Loren "When I got enough confidence, the stage was gone ... When I was sure of losing, I won ... When I needed people the most, they left me ... When I learnt to dry my tears, I found a shoulder to cry on ... When I mastered the skill of hating, someone started loving me from the core of the heart ... And, while waiting for light for hours when I fell asleep, the sun came out... That's LIFE!! No matter what you plan, you never know what life has planned for you ... Success introduces you to the World...But failure introduces the world to you ... Always be happy!! Often when we lose hope and think this is the end ... God smiles from above and says, "Relax sweetheart; It's just a bend, not the end ...!"

I miss you all.



# ALL THE MOMENTS

SHUCHEN HU

When will you look back upon your whole life and think about the path you have followed? At age eighty, watching your great-grandchildren chasing each other in the park under the beautiful sunset and feeling the coldness in your legs and your back because you have been sitting on the bench for too long, perhaps?

There is a famous saying in Chinese: To know where you come from is to know where you are going. We need moments to reminisce or to regret all the moments in our life.

Since I was very young, I had been taught to remember all my stupid mistakes and avoid making them again. You can imagine a poor young girl who was always worried about “making mistakes”. My most horrible nightmare was not to admit my mistakes; instead, it was to know I could never fix the mistakes. My parents used this harsh method to build up my sense of responsibility for myself, to reduce the risk they had in raising the only child in our family, which it should be mentioned was a powerless and tight-budgeted one in a small and remote city in China.

I don't know if you have magical moment(s) that suddenly flash through your heart with or without consciousness. You can sense that these moments ought to be turning points in your life. Intuitively, you wonder if you are on the edge of a journey, an ending point or a starting point.

I will never forget the five minutes of one ordinary afternoon when I

left a clinic to go to school after several days' IV (intravenous therapy) treatment for inflammation of my tonsils. My childhood is filled with memories of the smell of disinfecting potions and the sight of doctor's overalls. I didn't have a rare or chronic disease but I was sick frequently for inflammation of the tonsils. I was unable to attend school regularly or to attend gym class because of the overprotection of my mom.

When I started the menstrual cycle, things became worse and worse. There was no sanitary napkin I could find to make sure the blood didn't leak into my pants. My classmates laughed at my mess, especially the boys. Worse still, my bleeding could last for three weeks. I was too young for hormone therapy, and my mom took me to see doctors to try traditional Chinese medicines. I never was cured effectively.

I was ashamed to be a woman. I want to self-destruct.

On that afternoon, I walked infirmly and idly with jelly legs. I was questioning my unhappiness and wondering about the meaning of life. I knew I would get to school after five minutes. I didn't pay much attention to my surroundings. I wondered if life would be different if I put a "time marker" on these five minutes. At least, I thought it would be fun to carve this moment into my life just as I asked myself to remember one new English word a day.

Things turned out not to be as simple as I imagined. After I sat in the classroom, even with breeze on my face I felt hollow, confused and not real. For the first time in fourteen years, I realized that we, as human beings, are nonexistent in the river of time and we can only live in the present, not before and not after.

On a sweltering summer evening, I was stuck in my narrow bedroom to study under dim light from a table lamp. We lived on the top floor of the building so we had the privilege of not hearing the tapping sound above us. My mom put a clivia on my windowsill. The clivia is an elegant and strong plant although it doesn't blossom easily.

I was anxious about my future and I couldn't fall asleep for the

whole night. Through the leaves of the clivia, I watched Big Dipper circling and changing direction in the crevice of its silhouette; I felt sad. At that moment, I found no matter how big the sky was, as if I could only see part of it through my clivia. I was reluctant to tell my parents that I felt tired of learning for I thought I couldn't do anything outstanding besides my all A+ grades. For the first time, I began to consider a change of perspective. Why not try a different way of studying and move onto high school?

Months later, I stood on a pedestrian overpass over the busiest road in the capital city of the province. I was accepted to a famous high school with a good reputation. I stared at the road. All the cars roared passing below me, and the world seemed full of people on missions. I wanted to open my arms like Rose did in the movie *Titanic*, but I wouldn't. I gripped the railing firmly so I would not fall.

I was excited to be part of a big city with its crowded streets and strangers. Everybody was watching me and nobody was watching me. I was not afraid of this new city even though I was awkward enough to lose myself many times. Studying in a competitive atmosphere was challenging; however, I managed. I had no families in the city and it seemed I only had friends when they were at school. The majority of weekends and holidays were tough for me. I didn't have any place to go or people to talk to. I went back home twice a year. The trip took twenty-four hours by train. I used to jump on any city bus to explore the city and tried to come back to the landmark in the downtown area then walk back to my school.

At Grade 10, I lived in a school dormitory that could accommodate twenty-eight people and was divided into three separate compartments without any soundproofing. Sometimes, I was the only person sleeping in the dormitory with bright moonlight on my bed. I told myself ghost stories to scare myself so I would be vigilant about sleeping alone. These moments of my high school were like different scenes in a long dream from which I could never awake. I was always lonely, and I knew loneliness would accompany me to the end of my life. I was not pessimistic; I was only facing the truth that a fact was fact.

There is a famous saying in Buddhism: Put down the butcher's knife and become a Buddha. I gave up vicious thoughts towards my second boyfriend in a relationship full of family violence, but I didn't become a Buddha. I started more than ten years' running and hiding until today when I am in Canada.

I can never cut the connection to my past. I can screen people out and I can lock all my memories. I don't talk about my history for it is not a happy one.

Is there a single point of delight in my life, you may ask? Of course. I have a lovely daughter, and I have a husband who seems to be my soulmate and I would like to believe he loves me very much. Why am I too cautious to say I know he loves me? Because I am not eighty years old!

I always joke that immigration to Canada consumes half of my life's energy. My entire immigration story would require another book. I was smug after immigrating to Canada successfully. I thought I was standing on the highest mountain but I overlooked the reality.

Life itself would teach me who the real master is. Countless problems punched me more fiercely than the wind chill of a Saskatchewan winter. I even thought if I was wrong to come to this very strange country. I cried many times as I sat in my car. Sometimes I begged God to let me die; nevertheless, I found I could always see the sun on the next day's morning with red and swollen eyes. Gradually, I learn to solve the problems in my life. I know I cannot win if I lie to myself. I can run away, and I can wave the white flag, but I cannot give up.

When I drive on Arcola Avenue with the window open in the summer, I watch the living sky full of marvels. I cannot help thinking I am like a cowboy riding a horse galloping on the prairies. I feel I look like the real master of the beautiful landscape. I indulge myself in the fresh smell of Mother Nature and I will go farther and farther until the end of the world.

I am a woman, a mother, a wife, and a newcomer. I know where I came from, and I hope I always know where I am going.

A cracked dragon egg on grass. The egg is light-colored with a jagged crack running through the top. It is surrounded by green grass blades. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

# DRAGON EGG

SHUCHEN HU

An innocent girl walks bare foot on the prairie,  
Dimming sun leaks out light from dark sky,  
Blue lilies bend down to kiss the wind,  
Where are you, Dragon Egg?

You don't have a shell,  
Round flesh, half-transparent and jelly,  
Buries a red heart full of subtle veins,  
Wild roses build up a thorn wall to protect the warmth.

Dragon egg is brought to glory palace,  
Standing as the meat on a rotten crown,  
Humble subjects flood to the gate,  
Bellow a big show to start.

The girl feels bored when waiting,  
She cuts her finger with a shapeless thread,  
Dragon Egg contaminated with virgin blood,  
It will produce a human monster to echo divine's will.

Ugly, eyeless and twisted,  
A freak born with love from beginning to end,  
Death Scythe falls,  
Reaps a half-man ghost.

She walks as if she has been there before,  
She can remember something and somebody,  
She listens to music to touch the face in the mirror,  
She is a dead walker with a beautiful soul.

On full moon night,  
She likes to roar towards the living sky,  
Stunning aurora floats beneath the rainbow bridge,  
The shell of Dragon Egg is lost.

## CONTRIBUTORS

*Alberto Ortiz* is originally from Mexico and has been living in Canada for eleven years. He enjoys travelling, cycling, and having a good conversation. Alberto is adventurous, whether it is biking in Regina at -40C or traveling to the end of the world. He always finds time to lend an ear to a friend in need.

*Angad Patole* strongly believes that to love and to be loved is the essence of human life. Angad is sensitive to basic emotional human needs and has been working in the field of pharmacy education and research over fourteen years. At his core, Angad is a poet and human storyteller. Angad's poetry and stories are inspired by human suffering and through his work, he offers hope and solutions for that suffering.

*Bhoomika Dongol* is a strong advocate for resilient communities and has been working in the non-profit sector for over nine years. At heart, Bhoomika is a poet and storyteller. With her work in the post-disaster scenario in Nepal and South Asia, Bhoomika's stories are inspired by stories of resilient people living during some of the most extreme and evolving circumstances.

*Erika-Nestory Mhozya* is a dancer who is trying to find a way to balance dance, studies, and her families wishes for her life.

*Esther Chimdia Etonyeaku* is a sixteen-year old student born in Nigeria to a large family. She has lived in Qatar, Dubai, and Canada and is actively involved in soccer, basketball, choral and vocal jazz. Esther plans to study medicine with a specialization in pediatrics.

*Mehwishan Joohi* immigrated to Canada from Pakistan two years ago. She loves to read and tell stories, so moving to a new country is proving to be an excellent opportunity for her to discover new stories. For her, the most fascinating part of living in Canada is the multicultural environment and the opportunity to meet people from all over the world.

*Ohm Tushar Raval* is a fourteen-year old student from Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. Ohm dreams of opening an automobile designing and engineering company. He wants people to stay positive and persevere through life's challenges because it is worth it.



*Olenka Santoyo Sokolowski* is a woman born in Chiclayo, North Coast of Peru. She and her husband Daniel arrived in Canada in 2014 and settled in Regina. Olenka enjoys creating stories and sharing her life experiences, either orally or through writing. Her stories focus on the positive side of life in a funny way.

*Raj Metkar* is a thirteen-year student living in Canada who found belonging and connection through basketball. He encourages people to try new things and never give up.

*Rohit Kumar* is a young lawyer from New Delhi, India. He is passionate about defending human rights, and previously worked with many committed social reformers. He has a strong determination to prove himself and is currently preparing to write NCA accreditation exam to qualify as a lawyer in Canada. Rohit likes to travel to rare places to interact with people who live in remote places.

*Shuchen Hu* grew up in China, and is an only child spoiled by her mother. She survived many hospital/clinic stays since her childhood and the family violence by her second boyfriend. She now lives in Regina with her husband and daughter. Her motto is: every cloud has a silver lining.

## EDITOR

*Gail Bowen* *The Unlocking Season* is the nineteenth novel in Gail Bowen's Joanne Kilbourn Shreve mystery series. Gail has also written four Charlie Dowhanuik novellas for Orca books. *Sleuth: Gail Bowen on Writing Mysteries* was published in March, 2018. Gail has written plays for CBC Radio and for theatrical productions across Canada. She lives in Regina with her husband Ted.



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Thank you to all of the staff, volunteers, and participants of the 2019 Regina Open Door Society Creative Writing Class.



**Youth Class - From L-R:**

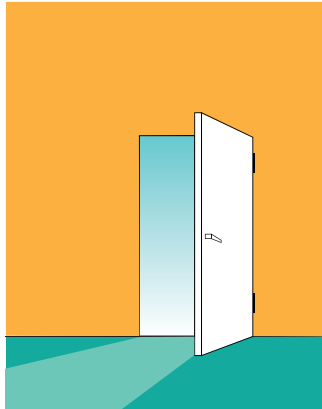
Roberto Misterio (RODS' Youth Program Coordinator), Erika-Nestory Mhozya, Atika, Hassan Haggag Ismail, Raj Metkar, and Gail Bowen.



**Adult Class - From L-R:**

Back row: Bhoomika Dongol, Olenka Santoyo Sokolowski, Angad Patole, Shuchen (Nicole) Hu, Rohit Kumar, Mehwishan Joochi

Front row: Alberto Ortiz (RODS staff), Gail Bowen (Editor), Mussarat Parveen (RODS staff)



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