

MACLEAN'S

MY ARRIVAL

THE LIVES OF NEW CANADIANS

“I saw the devastation of climate change in Pakistan. I knew something needed to be done here too.”

Canada is a leader in green energy. I hope more immigrants will come to help realize our goals. By Ali Husnain

I SEND MY MOTHER SO MANY VIDEOS of the snow in Canada. I never saw it back home in Pakistan, where even the coldest days are 15 to 20 degrees Celsius. I was born in a small rural village in a region called Arif Wala. My father worked as a mechanical engineer in textile factories, and we moved around for his job every two or three years. But we never left the country, and I never saw snow.

When it was time to choose my university program, I took a practical approach. My dad heard from his colleagues that electrical engineers were in demand, so that’s what I studied at the Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Sciences in Islamabad. In 2018, I took a semester abroad at the University of Arkansas, where I spent every weekend travelling to different parts of the U.S. I visited 18 states, and in Breckenridge, a ski town in Colorado, I finally saw snow for the first time.

When I came back to Pakistan, I started researching ways to emigrate to a Western country permanently. My time in the U.S. had shown me that a better quality of life was possible. In Pakistan, electricity is spotty. Even now, in 2023, the country frequently experiences blackouts. Climate change has ravaged our lives too. Floods and earthquakes kill hundreds and displace thousands every year. In 2022, the flooding was the worst it’s ever been, injuring almost 13,000 people—the result of stronger monsoons and melting glaciers. Millions lost their homes and access to clean drinking water, and more than 1,700 people were killed.

I knew I wanted to move to the West, but I wasn’t sure where. I ended up choosing Canada because it had a more welcoming immigration system than the U.S.—and I was excited to live somewhere cold. I applied for research master’s programs in electrical engineering and got into Memorial University in St. John’s, Newfoundland. I didn’t know anything about Newfoundland, but it didn’t matter. I was finally moving to Canada.

My flight to St. John’s was in August of 2021, two weeks before my first semester. As our plane broke through the clouds, I saw the shoreline appear below us, dotted with jellybean houses. It was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen. At the airport, someone from the university’s Pakistani Students’ Association picked me up and took me to the apartment I’d share with other association members.

As I got to know St. John’s better, I noticed that climate change was affecting my new home too. Summers in Newfoundland had become much warmer, just as they had back in Pakistan. Locals told me that 10 years ago, icebergs floated up to the shores of St. John’s, but that’s almost impossible at the rate ice is melting now. After witnessing the destructive power of climate change at home, I knew something needed to be done. I only became more convinced of that once I moved here.

In my studies, I learned more about green-energy initiatives, working on small wind turbine and solar panel models. In January of 2022, I started looking for work. I got a job as an engineer-in-training at Growler Energy, a renewable resources and clean-energy company based in St. John’s. I manage two projects, assessing the risk of icebergs hitting power cables at sea and studying the

feasibility of green energy technologies in remote communities in Nunavut. I see Canada as a leader in climate change efforts. There’s a huge amount of funding available for renewable energy research and new sustainable projects throughout the country. The sector is expanding and requires more skilled workers. There’s so much potential for other international engineers to move here and help Canada make the transition to clean energy.

This country has so many natural wonders we need to protect. During the past year, I’ve hiked national parks and gone on a whale-watching tour in the Atlantic Ocean (some of the whales even came close to the shore). When winter arrives in St. John’s, I get a coffee and go up Signal Hill, which overlooks the city. From there, I can admire the snow-covered beauty of my new home. ■



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