

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Our Arrival in Canada

Midday December 20, 1965, three of us were back in the city of Brussels, the capital of Belgium and boarded the last flight to our destination. A big jet took off in late afternoon and about eight hours later we reached the city of Montreal. My wife, who was sitting by the window looking down, was excited to see all those lights on the ground. She called me to see for myself. A big city, near Christmas time, within the darkness of night and from the sky was shining like the Milky Way. When we landed it was just eight in the evening. To us it was the longest night in our lives because in Belgium it was around 6 p.m. and already dark, when we left. Anyway, we followed everyone else and picked up our luggage and proceeded to the exit gate and passport control.

When I handed over our passports, I also handed over the envelope containing our immigration papers to the officer in charge. He looked at them with interest, asked a few questions and welcomed us to Canada. However, he said that he had to forward our passport and the enclosed immigration papers to the capital city of Ottawa to be reviewed and stamped to show our arrival as immigrants. As required by immigration rule, both of us were guided to see a physician at the airport to make sure all was fine at the time of arrival. The officer then assured me that our passport would be forwarded to us as soon as we provided them with the mailing address of our place of residence. It would take about five to ten days maximum, he said, and I should stay in contact with the local immigration office wherever we decided to live.

Yes, we had arrived in Canada, the city of Montreal on the night of December 20, 1965 and the temperature was 20 degrees below zero. We did not know a soul in the country and just took a taxi to a hotel to rest. Early next day I was up and looking through the window and wondered how we could step outside in that abnormal weather. Nevertheless I was the one responsible for bringing my family to such a strange and unbearable cold country and had to find out soon what to do. My first look at the country and the city was not encouraging at all. It was nothing but an illusion so far. While my wife and the baby were still resting, I dressed up warmly and went out to the street. I wanted to know where to go from here and could not accept to remain in Montreal more than one night. After I found a local immigration office I told them I needed my passport and did not want to proceed to Calgary as I had originally been advised. The man in charge had no other suggestion for me. Our passport would not be ready for about ten days, he said. I began walking back to my hotel shivering though my body was covered with all the warm clothes I had. I began blaming myself for

coming here from the very mild and nice climate of my own country. As I returned to my wife and the baby in the hotel, I had decided to forget about flying to Calgary and considered returning to Iran within the next 30 days.

As I talked to Ellahe, my wife, she was not impressed with the situation either and was wondering how people could live in such a cold environment. I wasted no time and took another taxi to take us to the train station to travel to the most southern part of Eastern Canada in order to wait for our passport. In the train station I looked at a map of Canada around the U.S. border and saw the name of a city called Hamilton. It was quite south and close to New York State. I thought we better go there, wait for our passport and then travel to the city of New York, in the United States, spend several days with my good old Iranian friends and fly back to Iran.

As I was looking at the map, I asked someone nearby if he knew what language people spoke in Hamilton, French or English. The person assured me that it was all English in Hamilton. I purchased two train tickets for that city and an hour later boarded the express train to Hamilton via Toronto. We arrived in the train station of the city of Hamilton about four in the afternoon of December 21, 1965. The weather was much easier to tolerate with not much snow on the ground. I asked my wife to remain with the luggage in the train station while I went to find the immigration office to seek their advice. I took a bus downtown and had no difficulty finding the place I was looking for.

The city was not as big and crowded and cold as Montreal. As I told my story to the immigration officer and asked for advice, he asked me how much money I had with me. I told him \$600.00 dollars. This was the amount of money I had indicated in my application form that I would bring with me to Canada. He was happily surprised to hear that. He asked me to repeat it again to make sure that he heard it right. He then informed me that there was nothing to worry about and I could book into the hotel close to their office and wait for my passport to arrive. He promised to ask their main office in Ottawa to forward our passport to Hamilton. I returned to the train station, called a taxi and booked into that hotel near the immigration office to wait and to watch the next phase of our destiny unfold.

The following day in the hotel lobby, while I was talking to some of the guests, I realized that most of them were very recent immigrants from Europe. They told me that the Canadian government had paid for their flight from Europe and from the moment they had landed in Toronto and Hamilton, the Immigration Department was paying their expenses until they found a job and a place to live. So that was why the officer was surprised to hear that I had \$600.00. I was entitled to receive the same benefit only if I had asked for it. All our hotel and

food bills would have been paid by them if I had not told the truth. As we spent two nights and days in that hotel at the cost of \$20 per night, spent hours in downtown Hamilton shopping for a warm winter coat for our baby from the Eaton's store, my wife and I made up our minds.

As soon as our passport arrived, we would take the bus from Hamilton to New York City, spend a week or two with my friends and fly back to our home and family. The third time I returned to the immigration office and insisted that we needed to get our passport as soon as possible because we did not have much time left. The manager came and tried to change my mind with no result. He then said that there was nothing he could do and we would have to wait until the end of the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

We used to visit downtown stores everyday to buy some winter clothes and even some presents from Canada for Iran, we checked with the immigration office asking for our passport and then went back to the hotel to wait. One day I took a piece of Persian carpet that we had brought with us to a carpet store in downtown Hamilton to see if I could sell it before returning home. The owner began asking where I had come from and wanted to hear the story of our immigration to his country. He listened carefully and instead of buying the rug, invited us to come to his house and family and to spend one of the Christmas holidays with them. I thanked and welcomed his invitation and he came with me to our hotel and met with Ellahe and the baby. He told us he would come to pick us up the next morning from the hotel.

I only remember his name as Edward, who along with his wife, came to our hotel the next morning and drove us to their house located on the upper section of the city, called Hamilton Mountain. It was a holiday and their entire family was gathered there. The house was decorated for the occasion and the atmosphere was warm and friendly. The whole family belonged to a Christian church with its roots in Germany. After the serving of their Christmas dinner and getting to know other guests, we all went to attend their church services. We returned to their house and I had a long talk with my host about our plans and situation. He and his wife, who had just discovered two new potential members for their group, tried to assist us in our plans and honestly informed me about all potential services we could get if we decided to make Canada our home. The encounter with this Canadian family helped us to understand more about Canada and such decent people we were dealing with. They proved to be very honest and sincere friends to us for the next several years that we associated with them.

Immediately after the Christmas holidays, I was in the immigration office waiting to see the manager. He still had no news for me. The maximum ten days had passed and we were

still waiting and spending our money. The immigration officer suggested we move out of the hotel into a more reasonable furnished place. He provided us with several addresses to check. Because we were looking for an inexpensive place, we found most of them in terrible conditions. Some of them were so bad we wondered how some Canadians lived in such places.

We finally choose a small bachelor furnished apartment located near the immigration office at 221 Main Street West for a cost of about \$20 per week, and moved there. Two days later I went to see the manager of the Hamilton Immigration office to demand that my passport be ready within the next few days or else. He understood my uneasiness, took me to his office and seated next to me, like a father to a son, began telling me the story of his father when he landed in Canada as a young man years ago. The father had become very much homesick and wanted to take the next boat back to his country he said. He then invited me to be more patient and not to rush to conclusions and to allow fate to take its own course. He also provided me with a letter indicating that we were living in Canada as permanent residents and could receive our identification cards to look for a job. He even telephoned someone in the Department of Manpower and asked them to look for a position to keep me busy until the passport arrived. I kind of surrendered and capitulated because there was nothing else I could do.

During the next few days I was sent to several employers and I accepted a job located in downtown Hamilton, close to where we lived, called Cambridge Clothes. The place is still in operation and it must be one of the oldest in the city of Hamilton. They produced men's clothing and shipped them to other parts of Canada. I had a simple job working in the shipping department for a salary of \$70.00 per week. I did not like the job and my whole mind was still on returning to my country as we both did not like Canada and felt very homesick. Because I had to attend to my wife and baby's needs, such as finding a daycare to free Ellahe to go to school or to find a job, I failed getting to work on time occasionally. After two weeks they let me go and the Manpower Office found me another job in a company called Hamilton Cotton. They agreed to train me in the field of fixing their looms with a starting wage of \$2.00 per hour or \$80.00 per week. The factory was producing web for underwear garments.

At the same time when I told the lady in charge of finding jobs that I was looking for a better place to live, she invited us to take a look at her second floor house which was available for rent. We paid a visit there and preferred it to where we lived. It consisted of two good furnished rooms with a full washroom and a little kitchen on the second floor of a private house. The landlord was nice and she even allowed us to watch her television set in her living room sometimes. All for a monthly rent of \$50.00 all included. Before moving and

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beginning my new job, I checked with the immigration office for the last time. They still had not received our passport. It was the beginning of February 1966 that we moved to this house located at 21 Stirton Street, off King Street East, Hamilton, Ontario.

I began my new job located several blocks northwest of the city. The new company was fairly good and 90% of the employees were female. Following a couple of weeks working there, I managed to get a job for my good wife Ellahe to keep her busy and to earn more money. The arrangement was that I worked from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. My wife had to leave our daughter Fereshteh in her bed for 30 minutes, walk to the job to begin at 3 p.m. and I would reach the house around 3.20 p.m. I would walk back to the place we worked, at 11 p.m. to walk her home. The schedule worked fairly well for a week until my wife was sent for her medical check up and was told that she was pregnant and she could not work there. Two days later she lost her job, but not before finding a Muslim lady working in the same department.

This lady's name was Mansooreh Noor and she introduced us to her husband Mohammad Noor. Both of them became our first and the lifetime friends in the city of Hamilton. In the meantime, I had no choice but to inform my employer CARE in Iran that I could not return to my job due to circumstances beyond my control and resigned my position. But we kept telling our families that we would return to Iran as soon as we saved enough money. We had given the immigration office our new address and about the very last days of February 1966 our stamped passport, including our immigration papers, were delivered to us. The Canada Immigration stamp on our documents was dated February 15, 1966. This card showing my personal information and date of arrival and flight number is published in this book in support of our dilemma. The simple fact that our passport was sent to us so late meant we couldn't return to Iran when we wanted to. Another word, the destiny of my family and the fate of so many others who followed us later to Canada were totally changed just because of that matter.

Mr. and Mrs. Noor, our first Muslim friends in Canada, invited us to their modest apartment in the city and we became acquainted. Through him I was told about another Iranian who lived in the city of Guelph, not far from Hamilton. When he gave them our names they realized that we knew each other from Tehran and they contacted us immediately. We then travelled to Guelph and met our first Iranian friend in Canada, called Taymour Gol-Mohamad and his wife. Through the Noors we learned about another Iranian couple in Toronto called Mr. and Mrs. Abdollah Moghadaszadeh and Fatemeh who had just married in Toronto. With them came another newly married couple named Mansour and Louis Ebrahimzadeh. Our acquaintance with three Iranian couples and our weekly schedule of visiting each other every weekend, with the addition of other friends, changed our attitude

about living in this new country called Canada. We were also introduced to a small Muslim group of families who used to meet for prayers in one of the rooms of McMaster University in Hamilton every Sunday. My acquaintance with those faithful men and women and becoming a part of them for many years to come, also contributed a great deal in shaping our lives and bringing up our children in a non-Muslim society.

We stayed in the house on Stirton Street, though the landlord sold the house and retired. The new owners were very family oriented and were happy to keep us. Finally the long winter of Canada finished and the late spring and early summer showed us a different side of the country. My good wife was attending a nearby English class a few hours a day and I had changed my hours of work to the afternoons and evenings to allow me to take care of our two year old daughter. Our holidays and summer weekends were spent with our new Iranian friends visiting and enjoying each other. The month of July ended and my good wife was having a fairly hard time moving around because of her pregnancy. She was due early August and I was hoping to be blessed with twins. My job continued at Hamilton Cotton Company and through a doctor visiting there I made arrangements to have him as our family doctor. He was named Dr. John Premi, a wonderful physician to our family for many years. When the end of August approached with no sign of our next baby, Dr. Premi suggested Ellahe be admitted to the maternity section of the St. Joseph hospital, in Hamilton for a check up. In the mid-morning of August 25, 1966, I left my good wife with the nurses in the hospital, returned home with our daughter and went to work in the afternoon. Our landlord promised to look after our two year old girl while I was working.

About 4 p.m., while on the job, the company's nurse came to me to deliver the good news. The nurse had just been informed by Dr. Premi, from the hospital, that my wife had given birth to a baby boy and both the mother and son were in good health. I thanked her and thanked God. I had to finish my shift and then ran home quickly before midnight. As I arrived upstairs at our place, I noticed the washroom light was on and heard a noise. I rushed inside and saw our two year old girl cleaning the bathtub with some detergent. The smell of the washing powder was so strong that I just picked her up and rushed outside the house to allow her to get some fresh air.

Apparently Fereshteh had woken up after she was put to bed and had gone to the washroom to play, with the landlord unaware. In such moments one realizes how lucky and fortunate we were. Somebody up there must have been taking care of us. For the next three nights that my wife was not home, I excused myself from work. I could no longer rely on someone else to look after my child. The very first day, after I visited my wife and the baby boy, I rushed to the main post office in downtown Hamilton to send the good news to my

parents-in-law in Tehran as none of us had telephone services at that time. I cannot recall that anyone else visited my wife at the hospital as we did not have any close friend or relative in Canada yet.

After four days in St. Joseph hospital in Hamilton, Ellahe and the new baby came home and all was ready for them. In fact, one of the reasons we hesitated to return to Iran early in the year, after receiving our passport was to wait until the birth of our next baby. My wife and I choose the name of Nader Ali for our first son and now my family had become much more absorbing, bringing with it much more responsibility. From then I had to work harder and to fulfill my duties better than in the past.

The year of 1966 ended and our two children were growing with my wife and I enjoying them fully. My income from working 40 hours a week was about \$85.00 net and had not been increased much. I had borrowed and forwarded some money to my mother in Tehran earlier and was making the payments on that as well. I had also purchased our first car in Canada for the amount of \$500.00. It was a seven-year-old Ford Falcon. We went to visit Niagara Falls the first weekend we got our car. I had found myself a part-time job from 8 a.m. to 12 noon in another factory and my wife was busy with our children and the household. Through a search in the job market I was told about a new program initiated by the federal government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau financing a program for the employees who wished to upgrade their education and skills.

I managed to register in the program and received my high school diploma in a crash course of about ten months. The government paid me more or less the same as I made in my full-time job. However, I decided to keep my factory job as well. My courses began early 1967 and ended April 1968 when I completed my equivalent Grade 12 in business and commerce from the Hamilton Board of Education. I had changed my shift at Hamilton Cotton Company to work from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. so that I could attend my classes from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. This way I could save all of my earnings from my factory job. For the occasion of Canada's Centennial, July 1st 1967, Ellahe, Fereshteh and I took our first pleasure trip in Canada. We went to see the great Expo 67 held in the city of Montreal and participated in by most countries of the world. Our baby Nader was left with our close Iranian friends Mr. and Mrs. Moghadaszadeh in Toronto for three days. They wanted to learn the art of taking care of a baby before they had their own.

Another major travelling we did was a visit to New York City to attend the Iranian New Year party, (March 21st) held by the Iranian Student Association in that city. We were invited by one of my old close friends named Dr. Mohammad Nakhshab, one of the top student leaders

in the U.S.A. He had recently graduated from New York University with a doctorate degree, had married a lady from Syria and was working for the United Nations in New York. We spent a full week in that city and revisited some old friends of mine that we had so much in common during 1961/62.

In the fall of 1967 we changed our place of living from a second floor house to the main floor of another house, a few blocks from the first one. In the meantime Ellahe, was able to register in a government-sponsored school to learn English as a second language. She was also paid about \$60.00 per week to attend her four hour a day classes. We arranged for babysitters or daycare or often a neighbour would take care of the children while we both were busy. This way our income had increased and we could save as well. Again through our close friend Mr. Moghadaszadeh I was informed about the possibility of being eligible to get a private house subsidized by the local government. I phoned the authority in charge and was sent an application. I followed the case during the next three months and one day the Hamilton Housing Authority informed me that a brand new house in a good neighbourhood was assigned to us. When we referred to them and they handed us a key and we visited the place, we could hardly believe it.

It was a brand new single family house with two floors and a lovely front and backyard built among privately owned houses, located in a new district of Hamilton Mountain near Mohawk Road and Upper Sherman Avenue. The total monthly rent which included all utilities such as electricity, gas, water, heat, was 20% of my income, or about \$80.00 per month. This was based only on the income I was receiving from the government to attend school. A boost to our situation and a great help that we appreciated.

CANADIAN IMMIGRATION IDENTIFICATION CARD

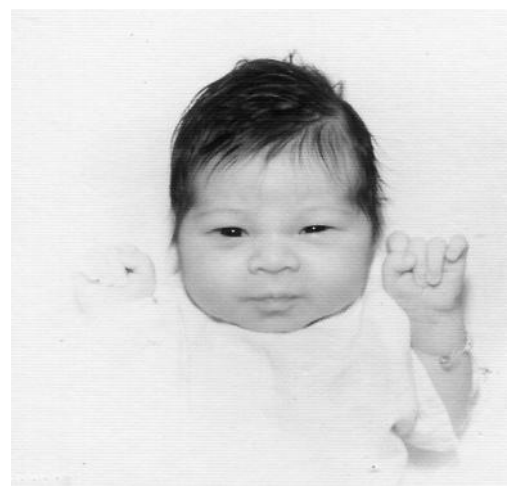
<p style="text-align: center;">CANADA</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SIGNATURE OF RIGHTFUL HOLDER</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>M. Hashemi</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hashemi, N. Seid Mehdi</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FOR USE OF CARRIER</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>SABENA 551 FLIGHT NO. MONTREAL AIRPORT</p> <p>BRUSSELS</p> <p>ARRIVED 20 DEC 1965 IMM. 1000 (REV. 3-64)</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">BIRTH (Day) (Month) (Year) PLACE AND COUNTRY OF BIRTH</p> <p style="text-align: center;">HASHEMI 23 OCT '38 ESPAHAN, IRAN.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DATE AND PORT STAMP</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">CANADA IMMIGRATION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FEB 15 1966</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MONTREAL AIRPORT DORVAL, P.Q.</p> </div>
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THIS CARD, WHEN STAMPED BY A CANADIAN IMMIGRATION OFFICER, IS EVIDENCE THAT THE RIGHTFUL HOLDER IS A LANDED IMMIGRANT.
 THIS CARD IS REQUIRED FOR CUSTOMS CLEARANCE AND WHEN MAKING APPLICATION FOR CITIZENSHIP, IT WILL ALSO PROVE USEFUL FOR MANY OTHER PURPOSES.

My Canadian Immigration Identification Card showing our arrival in Canada was December 20, 1965 in Montreal Airport. Because it took them until February 15, 1966 to process and stamp it and return our passport to us, we could not return to Iran immediately as we wanted to do. The documents reached us the end of February.



Nader Ali Hashemi, our first child born in Hamilton, Canada, August 25, 1966.



Our second daughter Firoozeh born April 23, 1968 in Hamilton.



Our first new home, No. 15 Dartford Place, Hamilton, Ontario.
Winter of 1968. Nader in my arm and Fereshteh standing.



Summer of 1968 in the backyard of our house in Hamilton. I am holding Nader, Fereshteh in the middle and my wife is holding baby Firoozeh.