

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Moving to Our First New House in Hamilton

It was early spring of 1968 when we moved to our very first new and private house with the mailing address of 15 Dartford Place, Hamilton, Ontario. After over two years of living in sub-standard places in the city of Hamilton we were so glad to have a place for ourselves in a good neighbourhood and for such reasonable rent. The house had a good-sized living room, large kitchen, two entrance doors and foyer in the main floor, plus three good bedrooms and storage area and full washroom upstairs. In addition we had a full-sized basement for the children to play in if the weather was cold. The house had a good backyard and front yard covered with green grass and plenty of room for gardening and a nice private driveway to park our car. Getting this house for a reasonable monthly rent for life, was a great boost and encouragement to remain in Canada.

One of main reasons that the authorities decided to provide us with this house was that I had informed them that our third child was on the way. I believe we moved into this brand new house on April 1st, 1968. My good wife gave birth to our second daughter Firoozeh on the 23rd of the same month. So, in reality we were gifted with two blessings in one month, a new house and a much more valuable gift, the arrival of our third baby, Firoozeh Hashemi. She was born in the same St. Joseph Hospital as Nader and was delivered by the same family doctor, Dr. Premi. When I visited her in the maternity section, she looked so lovely and like a Japanese doll. Our only close Iranian friends, Mr. and Mrs. Moghadaszadeh drove all the way from Toronto to visit Ellahe and the baby in the hospital.

The spring and summer of 1968 was a remarkable time for us. A week after Firoozeh was born, we were introduced to a new Iranian family who lived in the town of Galt, now called Cambridge. Mr. and Mrs. Rafi and Zahra Moghaddam had come to visit us in Hamilton and to see our new baby. They had two young sons Saeed and Majid with them. Zahra and the boys had joined her husband and father Rafi from Iran in Germany, then they all sailed to Canada. Mr. Moghaddam was advised to come to Galt, which at the time was the textile capital in this country, in order to find a related job. His Iranian work experience was in such a field. Later on God blessed them with two wonderful daughters in Canada, Soraya and Sohaila. The Moghaddam family became our closest friends from then until now, 40 years later. Their four children and our kids grew up together. The same friendship was also developed between us and Louise and Mansoor Ebrahimzadeh and their two nice sons, Babak and Siamak, as well as the Moghadaszadeh family. The three families and ours became one big group from beginning to the end.

We had a new house and three lovely children, my wife and I had finished our schooling and we had a fairly good savings account by working double shifts for the last two years. I decided to slow down and enjoy my children more. I was still considered a young man at the age of 30 with a high school diploma from Ontario and a desire to improve my education further. I applied to enroll into the newly established college in Hamilton named Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology and I was accepted. The course I preferred and hoped to enjoy was called the Communication Arts Program – a full two-year course emphasizing history, social and political issues, journalism, radio/television and the economy. The second year we had a course called Introduction to Computers. There was no computer or monitor or keyboard as such available then, only soft cardboard cards with one corner missing we used to mark and process.

Due to the government programs of the time and generous social benefits available in those days, 90% of Canadians enjoyed the same standard of living. The government grants offered to me easily covered all my family and educational expenses. In fact my monthly rental payments were reduced from \$85.00 to \$30.00 only while attending the college. I continued to work for Hamilton Cotton Company until early September of 1968 and quit my job to become a full-time college student just before my 31st birthday.

Becoming a college student with a wife and three children among a crowd of students all younger than myself was not easy at first. No doubt I still had some awkwardness in English language too. But I always wanted some post-secondary education and a degree in my hand so I had to work hard for it. The two years of college studies passed quickly. At the end of the first year, I was able to find myself a summer job in the field of journalism for a small local newspaper called *Ancaster News*. While working there I learned to use what I had learned in the college and also got to know the town of Ancaster for the first time. I liked it a great deal. Ancaster was a sleepy town and a high class suburb of Hamilton surrounded by trees and clean air. I wished we had one of those nice big family homes with a large lot surrounded with trees and plenty of room for the children to play. This wish was granted about 12 years later.

The second year of my college had started three months earlier and my wife and I were enjoying a period of calm in our lives along our three wonderful children in comfortable accommodation. The news of my good wife's fourth pregnancy around the end of 1969 was another happy moment that we both welcomed. We always wanted to have a minimum of four children. In Canada we had all we needed for them to grow and to benefit. Our circle of our friends both Iranians and other Muslims in and around Hamilton was keeping our minds less focused on our family in Iran compared to the last three years. Our first child

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Fereshteh was now attending kindergarten classes in a nice newly-built school just two blocks away from our house. We decided not to inform our families in Iran about the fourth pregnancy as my mother-in-law would worry about how her daughter could cope with four young children in a strange land.

From the time we landed in the city of Hamilton and found a job and an apartment, we got to know a Muslim couple. He was originally from the Afghanistan/ Pakistan border and she was from Bosnia in Europe. Mr. and Mrs. Mohammad Noor encouraged us to join the small group of local Muslims who used to meet in a room of McMaster university every Sunday. A year later the Muslim Association of Hamilton was formed and its members reached to about 15 families. They purchased a house and converted it to a place of worship and gatherings. I think in 1967 I was elected as the treasurer of the association and continued to work with them in that capacity for about seven years. Some of the friends we became very acquainted with and had regular contact for many years later are as follows: Mr. and Mrs. Ghasem Mahmoud from Palestine. Mr. and Mrs. Ismail Becker from Bosnia. Mr. and Mrs. Riaz Balaika and his brothers from Syria. Mr. and Mrs. Hameed Shaikh from India. Mr. and Mrs. Ahmed Bhabha and Mr. and Mrs. Haroon Bhabha from South Africa. Mr. and Mrs. Sayed Ebrahim from India. Mr. and Mrs. Kemal Demir from Turkey, and Mr. and Mrs. Shahid Mohammad originally from Trinidad.

Shahid and his wife Violet indeed became a brother and sister to both of us and an uncle and aunt to our children from the year we discovered them in 1969 to the end. For over 15 years we lived in the town of Ancaster not far from their residence. They stood by us as sincere friends regardless of where we went and what we did. Their two daughters Shelly and Wazi are considered part of the family. Sadly, Shahid passed away very unexpectedly, after heart surgery in 1997. A loss for us and a tragedy for his family that never healed.

Around the end of 1969, one afternoon, somebody rang our doorbell. I looked outside and saw a taxi and my stepbrother Mohsen at our doorstep. That was a big surprise for us, as we never expected him. He was supposed to be managing my father's notary public office in Tehran and we knew they both had some difficulties running it. He was also married to my wife's cousin and had two children. For some unknown reason he had left our father, flew to Canada and reached our place. We welcomed him and he stayed with us for a while and then stayed in other places for about three months while working at odd jobs. He desperately wanted to become a landed immigrant in order to bring his family to Canada.

Unfortunately Mohsen did not succeed in changing his status to remain in Canada. He later received a U.S. tourist visa and I drove him across the border to the city of Buffalo where

he took a bus for California to see his brother-in-law Mr. Mehrabi and returned to Iran from there. Just before him, another relative called Mohsen Hadji who later changed his last name to Shahram and was the younger brother-in-law of my own brother Morteza, arrived in Canada from Iran and Afghanistan. He was our guest for a while and I registered him in a high school in Ancaster. This Mohsen was young and single, a humorous fellow who made you laugh all the time. After spending a short time with us he managed to become independent, found a job and eventually became a landed immigrant, married and remained in Western Canada with his family for good.

The spring of 1970 had started. My wife was busy with the children and I was busy with the last examinations of my college courses. Life continued and all seemed to be wonderful. The only anxiety or preoccupation we had was how we could manage our future and most importantly, our children's future. The reality was we had always wanted to return to our family in Iran and thinking that our stay in Canada was temporary only, was taking its toll. We even did not bother to teach our children to speak our mother tongue, Farsi, believing that we would return to Iran soon. Our relatives in Iran were still waiting for us and our parents were dying to see our children. With this sort of idea we could not persuade ourselves to buy proper household items or to invest in a parcel of land for the future.

At the end of May 1970 when I had just graduated from Mohawk College in a ceremony that even my wife could not attend due to her condition and our children, I received news from Iran that broke my heart and altered my way of thinking. In a letter written to my wife from her cousin Farideh in Tehran, we learned that my beloved father had passed away. The morning I was told about this great loss, I was holding my own son in my arms and cried in despair for the rest of the day. We both realized that life did not last forever and we had to return to our family at the earliest possible time. In other letters I received from both my older brothers Nasser, Morteza and my mother, they asked me to stand still and not to allow such a tragedy to slow me down in life or my idea of returning to my country.

My father had passed away on the 15th day of May 1970 in his house in Tehran, in the middle of the night without anyone noticing it, at the age of 63. Apparently knowing he was about to die, he had laid down facing Mecca and placed the holy book, the Quran, on his chest. The cause of death was a heart attack. He had been in pressing legal and financial situations due to his notary public office in Tehran, I was told later. The sudden departure of my other brother Mohsen for Canada who was legally responsible his financial affairs and who was supposed to be assisting him at that particular time had not helped my father at all, so I was told.

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Following the death of my dear father we sincerely made up our minds to end our separation from the rest of our family and join them soon. However, we had to wait until our fourth child was born and waited a while until the baby was about six months old to travel. Another major preoccupation was where we would live and raise our children. With four of them we had a responsibility more important than any other agenda. Therefore, we concentrated on that and necessary arrangements were made. On the fourth of July 1970, a couple of weeks earlier than scheduled, I had to rush my good wife Ellahe to St. Joseph Hospital in the centre of Hamilton. Our family physician Dr. Premi was notified and he rushed there as well. As soon as the mother reached the delivery room and our doctor arrived, the baby could not wait and was born. I received a phone call from our doctor an hour later and thanked God that both mother and the child were in good condition. The next day when I went to visit my wife and our latest child, we were both happy again. As I looked among several babies lying in their cribs, I had no problem whatsoever telling which one belonged to me. He looked exactly the same as his brother Nader had when he was born in the same place.

Following the birth of Namjoo, our fourth child, the discussions about how many children we wanted, or we could afford, reached its peak. I was simply witnessing the amount of household work that my good wife was undertaking everyday and did not wish to increase it. We also had made up our mind to return to Iran sooner rather than later. After many exchange of ideas and consulting our family physician, Dr. Premi, I volunteered to undergo the required medical procedure of sterilization. This was done in spite of the fact that I desired more children but I agreed to it to make my better half happy. Preferring this type of prevention rather than placing my wife on birth control pills for years to come was the way I chose. I am still a strong believer in avoiding chemical medications and all kinds of pills unless absolutely necessary.