

Dr. Mahmoud D. Hafezi arrived in Montreal in Aug 1953 and moved to Toronto in Aug 1954 to work as a physician at Toronto General Hospital. The interview was conducted in 1985*

Dr. Mahmoud D. Hafezi is a general surgeon and family physician who has been practicing medicine for over 32 years in Canada. He arrived in Montreal in August 1953 and then went to Vancouver for 11 months where he worked for the municipality as a physician. In August 1954 he moved to Toronto where he settled down and has been practicing ever since. In 1982 he was honoured with a special award on the occasion of completing 25 years of service as a surgeon at Toronto Central Hospital. Dr. Hafezi is highly respected in the Iranian community in Canada, not only as an eminent professional but also as a senior member, an 'elder', of the community. When he first arrived in Canada, there were very few fellow Iranians here. He found only several dozen in Montreal, one fellow doctor in Vancouver, and a couple of Iranian families in Toronto. Though many things have changed, recent newcomers can turn to earlier settlers like Dr. Hafezi for useful advice.

Q: *Why did you decide to emigrate to Canada?*

A: During the last stages of Mosadegh's premiership, it was apparent that leftist elements were infiltrating the government in our country. There was danger that Iran would find itself behind the Iron Curtain. I was educated in England and had professional and cultural relations with the British as well as the American embassy in Tehran. There was nothing political about it. But if my fears had materialized, my family and I would have had a very difficult time in Iran. Around that time I received several newspapers published in Canada describing opportunities there for people such as myself. Even to this day I do not know who sent those publications to me. Knowing that Canada was similar to Great Britain where I had been educated, I decided to emigrate here.

Q: *What were your first impressions?*

A: I found Canada a very peaceful country to live in. Culturally, though, it could not be compared with Great Britain. I found Canadians very kind and peace loving. In light of the disturbing situation in Iran, Canada was the best place to be.

Q: *How did you settle in?*

A: I found the educational system almost ideal for my children, and professional regulations quite fair for myself. I soon settled down in beautiful Vancouver but unfortunately the humid climate compelled me to move to Toronto after the first year. I found, then, that Toronto was not as friendly as Vancouver.

Q: *Why do you think that was?*

A: I think the answer lies in the fact that the west was climatically suited to people who have retired whereas the east was a place of effort and industry.

Q: *How many Iranians did you meet in the first year?*

A: In Montreal where I first landed I found a couple of dozen; in Vancouver, one doctor who was married to a Canadian woman (also a doctor); and in Toronto, a couple of families.

After a few years, these numbers gradually increased. Those arriving comprised mainly of people who felt uneasy with the progress of events in Iran. Until the change of regime, hundreds of people escaped the country.

Q: *What type of people came in?*

A: They were mostly professionals, such as doctors, engineers, teachers, journalists, and also a number of industrialists.

Q: *How did they find moving to Canada?*

A: Before I answer that question I want to say that this exodus occurred during the worst economic time in Canada. Had they come a few years earlier, they could have done very well for themselves, as well as contributing to the Canadian economy. Because of their untimely arrival in this country, many doors were closed to them. Some of those who came earlier have done very well.

Q: *How would you remedy the situation of these unemployed professionals?*

A: I have two recommendations:

- 1) Those newcomers who cannot find work or employment in the big centers should consider moving to rural areas where their expertise is in demand.
- 2) The Canadian government could make use of their talents in remote parts of the country, or even in overseas missions.

Q: *How long have you been in Canada and how did you manage your career?*

A: I have been here for over 32 years and although I had a specialist status from Great Britain, I had to pass several examinations in order to be able to practice in the province of my choice. This took about a year, and since then I have been sailing rather smoothly.

Q: *What is your opinion of the standard of medicine in this country?*

A: I think medical standards here are as good as the best in the United States and Europe.

Q: *What sort of role do you think Iranians should play in Canada?*

A: The Iranians who came to this country possess and old as well as a modern culture of their own. Since there are many of them living in this country, they ought to join together as well as with Canadians to participate in the industrial and commercial life of Canada.

Q: Earlier you mentioned opportunity in this country. What do you think of it now?

A: I arrived here in the heyday of Canada, but unfortunately, due to the recent world recessions, that sort of opportunity is not available now. However, for those who are willing to work hard, some of those opportunities may be available.

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