

ADJUSTING TO A NEW LIFE

Life Before and After Immigration

Velvili Ratnam immigrated to Canada from Sri Lanka in 1987, she was 25 years old. The narrative below is based on an interview conducted with Velvili Ratnam on May, 23rd, 2021.

A Little Bit About Me

My full name is Velvili Ratnam, and I was born in Sri Lanka. My father's name is Perampalam Murugesapillai, and my mother's name is Theivanaipillai Murugeasapillai. I have four brothers and two sisters. I have a lovely husband and after almost 30 years we are still married and live happily together. At the moment I work as an accounting clerk, a job that I have wanted ever since I immigrated.



Velvili Ratnam's first day of her new job. November, 1989 Location: Toronto, Ontario.



Photo taken after Velvili Ratnam's engagement party October, 1993 Location: Toronto

Childhood

My childhood for the most part was worry free and exciting. I grew up in a village where we had our own big house, a paddy field and many animals, like cows, chickens, goats and other domestic animals. I had a pretty basic and fun routine. I would get up in the morning, do the morning duties, pray, have breakfast, get ready for school and come back home at around 3:30. After that I refresh, have a snack and drink tea and relax. In the afternoon I would either play outside with friends and siblings, or some days go to tuition. I was a very naughty child, and I caused a lot of trouble for my parents and siblings. One day when I was around 10 years old, my sister had gotten a brand new dress from my dad. I wanted the exact same dress too, so I told my sister that she couldn't wear the dress and I held the dress with me and commanded my father to buy me the exact same dress.

Early Adulthood

In school I was studying for my M.Sc. mathematics, but that was cut off because I had to leave. The civil war in Sri Lanka made it unsafe, so my family decided to leave the country and flee as refugees. My younger brother and other family were already in Canada so I decided to go there. I found out that Canada is accepting Sri Lankan refugees and that it is a good place to live for an immigrant seeking better opportunities. So I was fixed on coming to Canada. I left with my younger sister who was only 11 at the time. I came to Canada as a refugee, at the border I filled out immigration papers. After that we got sent to a camp for a month and then we were let into Canada after the end of the month.

Adapting To Canada

The thing that surprised me the most was calling elders and teachers by their name. Normally back home it is manners to call teachers and elders sir, master, aunty, uncle, but I learned that in Canada that is not necessary. Also, I was surprised by the climate and the culture. There weren't many difficulties I faced but if I were to name one it would be getting a job and filling out papers. When I came there were lots of openings and new jobs, and sometimes I attended more than one interview in one day. After one month I was about to give up and join a factory job, but my father didn't allow me and after two or three days I got the job as an accounting clerk which was the field I wanted.

Life Now

Now I get up, do my morning duties, go to work, eat lunch, then come home, watch tv, have dinner, talk to my husband and sleep. On the weekends I volunteer and help out at a temple, and I talk to family and friends back home and in Canada. I am married now, I met my husband back when we both attended college at Seneca college. We both knew each other since we were from the same village back home. We got much closer while in college and we fell in love and decided to get married. After almost 30 years we are still married and live happily together. Compared to back home and in Canada I believe that I am living better here. If there was no civil war back home I would have had a better life there, but now I am happy that I moved to Canada and have a peaceful and safe life with a great job and amazing family and relatives surrounding me. Overall the immigration experience has made me a stronger person and even though it was exhausting it was worth it.