

LIFE OF A GUYANESE IMMIGRANT IN CANADA

Holley Humphrey immigrated to Canada from Guyana in 1979, she was eight-teen years old. The following narrative is based on an interview conducted with Mrs.Humphrey on May 25th, 2021.

[I left my home country] to better myself. When I leave to come here I wanted to be a nurse. But when I applied to the school the girl said the school was fill. So the only other alternative because I came up on a student visa. Was to go to um go to a hairdressing school, so I went to Bruno School of hair design. That was on Bathurst and Bloor and I went there for actually about five years.

Yeah, I sponsored myself. It took a long while to get through but I had to go through a lawyer for everything and I applied under the humanitarian rights and compassion grounds. Yes, and I got through like that. So I prolonged my visa time onto it like that [so I can still attend school].



Holley Humphrey in the first home she lived in after immigrating. Scarborough 1979.

When I first came here, I arrived at Pearson Airport in Mississauga. At migration, I came through with a student visa so it was clear. So everything was okay to go through there wasn't anything they could stop me for. They just checked my passport, how much money I came in with. Well, your bank was only allowed to give you a certain amount of money so it wasn't a lot of money you could have come in with back then. So everything was clear I was stamped and everything was okay. My dad's friend came and picked us up.

The most difficult part was the fact that in Guyana it is always hot. I came here directly in the winter, it was really cold. So that was a change for me because we don't have winter in our country so that was a change for me. I didn't pack for the winter, so my dad bought me all the clothing I would need. It was my first time seeing snow, that was something I always wanted to see. I used to be home in Guyana and we used to read the storybooks about snow falling in these other countries. And I always use to be like, I want to see that one day. I was very impressed.

[When I first arrived in Canada] I lived in a building. I use to live at 20 Tuxedo Court. I use to live in Scarborough. Then I used to have to go from there and catch the bus, go to STC take the RT and get to Kennedy and outside there was always cold because it was open. And then you didn't have any friends going with you there so you just had to go by yourself.

Back then I was very quiet when you come to Canada, compared to now there weren't many people from other countries. There were a lot of caucasian Canadians. You hardly saw anyone from other countries like Jamaica, even Guyana. You would really have to look far to find someone the same colour as you. Due to that, I would feel like an outcast. It was so hard when you came in those times, it was. However, now it's multicultural. It has become that, a lot of people from different countries are here. Even though I came in those times, I was never racially profiled, I've never experienced racism.

I missed my home in Guyana a little. Yes, because of the things I was accustomed to at home I did not have here. Because my dad had more than one car, We had motorcycles, but here I had nothing I had to walk or catch the bus. I had a chauffeur being driven wherever I wanted to go. Every Saturday we went to the movies. But here I never went to the movies till 20 years after, so in 1999. At home, my parents had their own house and everything. I also miss the freshness of everything. Fresh fruits, fresh vegetables from the ground to the stove to your table. But here everything is frozen, we don't know how long it takes to get here. But you have to make do with what you have. You don't complain, my mom always used to say that.

It was hard to get jobs because I was on a student visa so they weren't hiring people. You know, they weren't giving you a work permit. So my dad had to support me from back home. He would send money to me every month, to buy the currency and send it to me. I had to pick up little jobs, factories because I didn't go out to do any kind of typing. Well, I had typing from back home. I had my certificates but I knew it wouldn't be worth anything up here. My biggest challenge then was not being able to save a lot of money because you weren't working for that much money. You only used to work for \$3.25 an hour. My first job use to be in a place called a Curbless Vacuum store and all I did was call people and ask if they want something to be vacuumed. Yeah, from then to now it wasn't that much still. I mean yes if I had time to have a better education and to go to school more but then it would've cost me so much money that I didn't have. Then I had a child and I use to have to pay for babysitting. And the lady said charge me \$100 a week to babysit her. After school, I would go to work often. Sometimes I use to work the day and go to school at night. I use to go to the school for hair design. [So eventually], I took her because my dad and my mom, they said to send her and they would raise her because it was difficult in Canada there and then have a job and to maintain a kid a baby. Because the babysitting was \$100 as I said. Well my papers, I was still on a student visa. So we both went back home and I eventually ended up staying in Guyana for about 8-10 years and I stayed there and then I tried to reconnect with friends, fall back into everything we use to do start working with my dad, having fun, dressing up, getting ready for church every Sunday gathering to speak. To talk with friends after church, going to church meetings. It was very nice. And there and then at that time, something had happened in Guyana and the Canadian embassy use to check on my daughter every time. Because they wanted to know why she was out of the country, being a Canadian than in those days. So I brought her back into Canada and she was about 12 years when she came back.

My family is doing pretty well. Yes, because Neurissa is able to go to school and she has achieved so much in life and still trying to achieve more and wants to get there. And I'm proud of her for everything that she is doing.

[My grandon] well, he's getting there slowly but surely. He's going to college this year. He wants to go off to college so when the time comes I will see.

[My great-grand] she's now at daycare enjoying herself

I'm proud of my daughter. How she's grown up to be a fine woman and she has made a life of her own and has 2 beautiful children.

Overall, I would say that I am Canadian. My daughter, grandchildren, and great-grand are all in Canada. My family is here.