

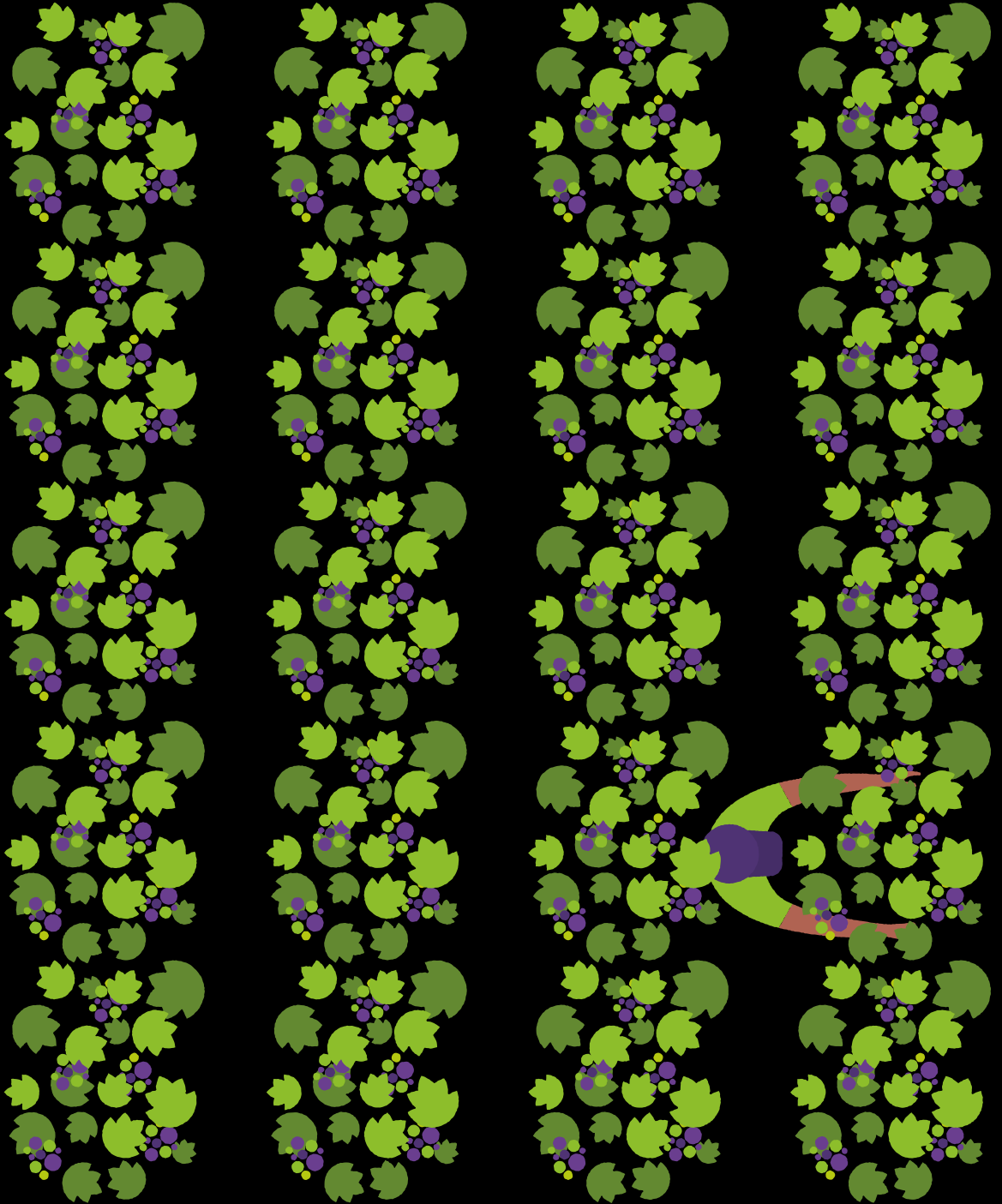
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MAGAZINE



A DAY IN THE LIFE

WINTER/SPRING 2022



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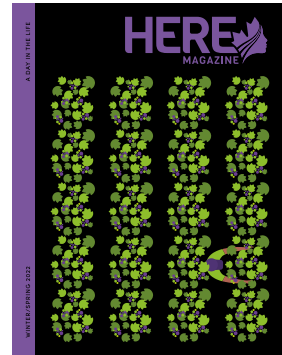
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Alberto Cortes (@salchipulpo\_) is a Mexi-Can illustrator whose artwork mixes fun concepts, colours, and sometimes a little bit of humour.



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# Letters from the Editors

Doing heart work pandemic-style has been nothing short of interesting and has definitely been exciting. We have gained quite a bit of practice over the past 18+ months when it comes to building and maintaining connections, and doing what we do everyday with a virtual twist.

My days are filled with juggling the hybrid model of working in the office a few days a week, watching variants and restrictions updates, balancing life, and being a mom. Sanity is not possible without the gentle hum of music from my laptop speakers, warm soup on the too-cold snuggly days, and Fiona's husky Ranger (who belongs to me—he just doesn't know it yet).

My first activity on office days isn't sipping coffee or reading emails, but instead donning my warm, cozy office socks before settling in my chair. It's been over 18 months of living on the edge of our seats, playing the guessing game of planning virtual events while also hoping that restrictions would be lifted to enable us to hold them in person. From segmenting our events into sizes based on restrictions to hunting out locations conducive to hosting meetings based on protocols, our operations team remained focused on the community and their needs.

Bringing stories of hope, courage and purpose to you, dear reader, gives it all meaning. A Day in the Life leads you into the working lives of amazing humans, giving you behind-the-scenes access to their day-to-day realities. This Winter Issue brings out the soul behind the many aspirations, passions and purposeful actions that underscore their work and strengthen community. •

**Kareece Whittle-Brown**

Kareece (Kari) and I have been pretty much like this, joined at the hip, this past year in my home office overlooking the backyard. (She always looks as glamorous as in the above photo; Me? Not so much).

Kari was the one to start bringing delicious homemade soups for lunch, with an aromatic Jamaican flair I could never duplicate. I have since given up on the competition altogether and am now committed to distracting her from my failings with fried pita bread and Purdy's chocolates. The rest of the team still work remotely and have to forage for their own lunches, but we somehow have managed to stay a tight-knit group, regularly straying in Zoom sessions with random interjections, Beto's gifs, funny-to-us memes, Kaye's "awkward questions," and my worried-mom pandemic updates. We are the lucky ones.

It is hard not to repeat clichés in these times, but for me at least, the past two years have seemed a fitful loop stop-starting us between hope and loss, gratitude and grief, cautious optimism and bunker building. And yet, not only does the Earth keep turning, but there remain more compassionate and selfless humans than not. This issue highlights the people across British Columbia who, in the daily course of their work, support the community and Canada in extraordinary—and often unseen—ways. Perhaps this is the one unchanged and unchangeable thing: magic blooms even if, or maybe especially when, it is invisible. •

**Fiona Bramble**

# The First Annual **IYAKT** Indigenous Music Festival



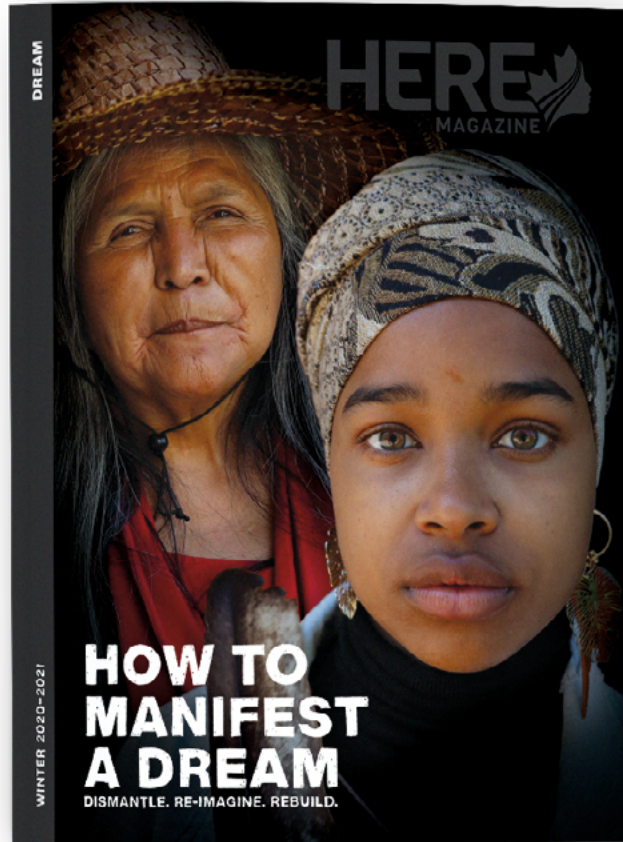
Organized by Dennis Johnston and Jason Jones of the Municipality of Saanich, the first annual IYAKT Indigenous Music Festival was held on August 21st, 2021. It was a day-long celebration of family and community, graced with Indigenous artists from across Vancouver Island showcasing Indigenous arts from singing to dancing to craft-making!

Photography by **John-Evan Snow & Mary Kaye Abellana**





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# Kabir

Playing it forward

Interview by **Kareece Whittle-Brown**

Photography by **Mary Kaye Abellana**

Illustrations by **@salchipulpo\_**

**Kabir Hosein** is a sports enthusiast and practitioner. He believes that sports and physical activity can connect different cultures around the world to allow people to express themselves regardless of language, customs, or lifestyle. For him, the field, the track, the playground, and the turf are unique spaces for uniting those of diverse backgrounds, allowing people to learn and to understand this new place he and his family now call home—Victoria B.C., Canada.

Kareece Whittle-Brown sat down with Kabir to learn about his home country, his journey to Canada, and his vision for the future.





### *Where are you from?*

I am originally from the twin island republic of Trinidad and Tobago, which is the southernmost Caribbean island within the chain of islands. The country gained its independence in 1962, and we have a population of approximately 1.4 million. We enjoy a diverse mix of ethnicities, with the latest influence being the Chinese and Japanese within the last couple decades.

I was born and raised in a town called Diego Martin, which is northwest of the island and located just outside the capital of Port of Spain. Diego Martin was supposedly one of Christopher Columbus's brothers, from whom the town got its name.

### *What is your first language, and do you speak any other languages?*

English is my first language, and I understand bits and pieces of Spanish and French. There is a common dialect spoken across all the Caribbean territories called Patois, which I can understand a bit of. It is commonly spoken by the older generation, so when my grandmother is angry, what she speaks is Patois.

### *What is your job or training and your background in the industry?*

I am the senior operation manager at Sport for Life. In my role, I oversee finance, human resources, and compliance and information technology. Last year, we developed a portfolio dedicated to engaging newcomers in sport and physical activity. This is a project that I have been spearheading, and it has grown so fast that it is now a complete unit in the Sport for Life organization. Coming out of university, I studied business management with a minor in economics; however, because of my passion, I was always involved in sports, and always stayed connected in some way. I was a high-performance junior athlete, did some recreational sports, then did a bit of coaching and eventually transitioned into administration. I was climbing the volunteer ladder while holding down a full-time job. I was a business owner for a number of years, and while doing well financially, my family life was unbalanced. I often left for work early in the morning with kids crying, and I would come home late at night to the

same scenario. Then I made the life-changing decision to choose a different path and transition into educating myself around sports administration and coaching while holding down a corporate job as a manager within the insurance industry. Through some of the connections I made in sports, I was able to land the position of CEO for the Trinidad and Tobago Athletics Federation. I also sat on a number of national boards that were within the sporting sector, so I was juggling many roles: full-time employee and CEO, as well as sitting on boards of organizations directly involved in sports.

### *What was your social life like in your home country?*

Both my wife and I have huge families, and we both are from sporting backgrounds, so we have always had lots of friends and our social circle was quite large. We also created a great family atmosphere. Our family gatherings were easily close to one hundred people. We always had friends and family over at our house. We had a large house in Trinidad, so Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays were almost like a mini-party. There was always food, drink, and music. Community life and safety was never a huge concern where I grew up and lived.

It is quite common for Caribbean people to "lyme" (hang out) after work. With my job, I had to do a significant amount of networking, so most evenings I was out meeting people and lyming, which served two purposes: growing my network, and providing a boost to my mental health after a long, stressful day.

### *Tell us about your family, and if family life here is different from family life in Trinidad.*

My wife is Kecia, and we have four children: the eldest is Kai, age twelve; then Kardan, seven; Kameelah, four; and Kadira turned three years old just a few months ago.

Life here is definitely different than it is in Trinidad. For starters, there is always your extended family around or close by. Your neighbour is considered your family, so a sister, cousin, or aunt neighbour is always baking, cooking, and bringing over a dish of some sort. The support network we had was strong; there was always someone able to assist with picking up kids, dropping them off, watching them—there was always someone available to fill in when needed. In Victoria, it's two adults with four kids! Coupled with a pandemic with



Kabir at his home in the Cedar Hill area of Victoria B.C.

limited social interactions as a family, we haven't been able to create the sense of community where we live or within the Caribbean diaspora.

*What were some of the factors that influenced your decision to move? And why did you choose Victoria?*

For us, it was primarily career advancement, but crime had also become a concern in Trinidad and Tobago, which was also a major consideration.

For both myself and my wife, we were both in senior roles in our organizations; to progress any further, we would possibly have taken a path into politics, which was never an intended part of my journey. This caused us to start looking outside of Trinidad and the Caribbean for alternative opportunities. We both had international experience with our studies, through sports and in some of our professional development opportunities. We started tapping back into some of those markets, and we were successful.

Through field hockey, my wife had visited Vancouver on two occasions, once as a player and the other as an umpire. On both those occasions, the organizers arranged to take the travel contingent by ferry over to Victoria to show what B.C. was like.

When I reached out to the universe in search of a job I got several offers, one of which would require us to reside in Victoria. Before I even did the interview, Kecia proclaimed, "That's the one. That's where we are going to spend the rest of our lives."

*How do you maintain connection to your culture?*

We are a very spiritual family; our religious upbringing and principles are something we hold dear and try to build on. We also utilize the technology we have to keep our extended family connection close. We telephone and video call regularly, sometimes several times a day, with family and friends.

*Can you remember the date that you arrived in Canada, and how it felt to be here?*

I certainly remember it very well: it was Thursday, April 18, 2019. I came first to get settled and prepare for my family to come afterwards, so I travelled alone that first trip.

I arrived in Victoria late at night, and the very next day I was in the office. Coincidentally, there were some delegates from Egypt visiting the office, and because of my Islamic connections I was asked to come in and assist with the conversations. I vividly remember that first week in Victoria—the difference in the smell of the air, the difference in temperature. It was April and I was freezing. I had on four or five layers of clothes.

There was also a mix of emotions, and more questions in my head than I knew the answers to.

I constantly asked myself, *Did I make the right choice?* I knew where I was, and I knew why I came, but I was still questioning whether we had made the right decision because it certainly didn't look, feel, smell, or even taste like what I was used to. The differences were vast. So I started networking, figuring things out on my own. I developed new relationships, and I explored and tried to understand Victoria, to see if I could understand Canada. That I am still working at.

*What was it like for the children when they arrived later?*

It was sheer excitement for the children. We had planned a family vacation months before, so we all had a wonderful time in Florida—and then my two eldest children and my mother-in-law returned to Canada with me. We flew into Vancouver and took the ferry over to Victoria. That sailing turned out to be an experience of a lifetime for them because, from the ferry, we saw a whale and her calf.

The excitement was memorable—but that didn't last long when the reality hit that they would not have their mother, grandparents, or their friends here.



Kabir and his wife, Kecia.







(top), left to right: Kai, Kecia, Kabir; (bottom), left to right: Kameelah, Kadira, Kardian.

*What has been the hardest thing for you here?*

The hardest thing for me individually is getting people to understand my identity. I have had experiences here where my country of origin was questioned after I told them where I was from because I didn't fit their image of what a Trinidadian or Caribbean person should look like, or how they should speak or act. My family and I have experienced racism on account of our skin colour and our faith, through Islamophobia, and we have had to deal with that as a family.

I aspire to raise awareness of such cultural sensitivities, and understanding of insensitivities, in Victoria. I intend to do this in small steps as I connect with my community in Victoria; I know it's going to be a long journey.

*What is it like being a minority and the realities that come with that?*

The best way I can articulate this is to say that people need to unlearn some of what we think we know. So, again, in the areas I can influence—through education, networking, and building partnerships—I am putting myself out there and interacting with various groups to change the narrative. Then I sit back and reflect on how I can actively work through some of the discrimination that exists here.

The Jamaican cricketer Micheal Holding always uses this quote: "History is written by the conquerors, not the conquered." That is something I have taken on as a personal motto within the areas that I can influence, in my own way, which is through sports and physical activity.





*What is one thing that you would like someone to know about Trinidad?*

I would speak to the number of accomplishments as a country that Trinidad has made and how we have achieved those accomplishments. In the sporting realm at one point in time, we were the smallest country to qualify for the football World Cup. In arts and culture, we have had numerous Nobel Prize winners. We have leaders that sit in positions of authority in almost every major sector worldwide, sitting at the helm of power and making major decisions that impact the world in a positive way. So, if I had some sort of superpower, I would wish to communicate some of those achievements to the world on behalf of Trinidad and the Caribbean.

*Have you had professional challenges here, and if so, what strategies have you used to overcome them?*

I would speak to two challenges professionally: Firstly, the challenges of a temporary foreign worker and the restrictions that apply. The other one, which has been my greatest challenge, would be the mental shift I have had to make from an executive-level strategic leader to the execution level.

I have had to change my thinking and approach from governance and strategy to implementation.

As time passes, however, and my reputation continues to be built, more and more I can add value to the executive-level management.

*What is one thing you wish you knew before moving to Canada?*

I would say the actual cost of living here and how to navigate the education system. When investigating the cost of living

before moving, the internet can only take you so far. As parents coming from a Caribbean English results-oriented system that is primarily textbook driven, we have not yet made the adjustments to the new and different teaching and learning styles [in the Canadian system].

*What differences do you see for your family in Canada five years from now?*

I would predict that our children would be more worldly. Learning is different in this school district; I can only speak for this district as this is what I have experienced. Real-world team dynamics from interacting with different cultures at an early age is developed in a way they may not have in Trinidad and Tobago.

*What is something you find strange, funny, or challenging about Canadian culture?*

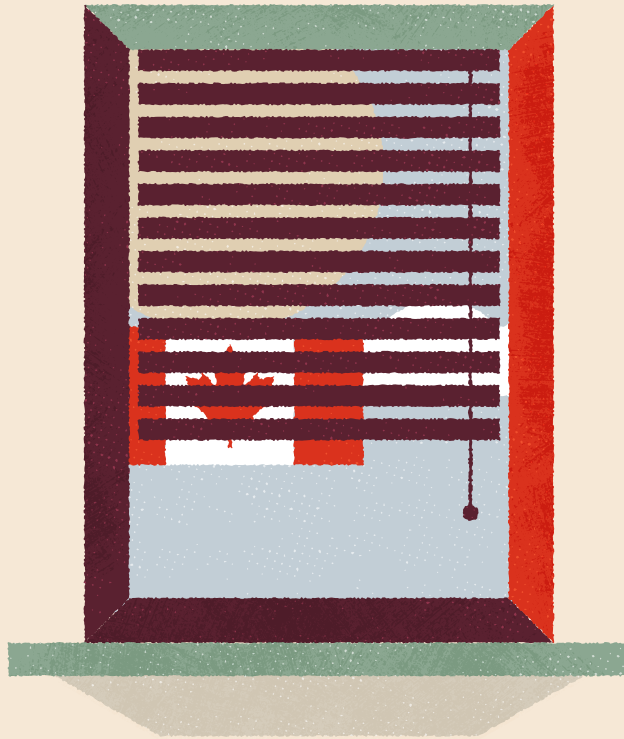
I see that everyone is so calm. It is funny for us when we come across those situations, and it has really helped us to calm down.

*What's your favourite thing to do in Victoria?*

Exploring the flora and fauna, lakes, splash parks, and playgrounds. There are so many things to do for families, which we didn't have back home. Every weekend we are able to do something; we can always see and possibly explore a new place.

*What advice would you give to someone about to immigrate to Canada?*

Take the leap, and grasp the opportunity that has presented itself. The journey will be challenging, but it will pay off. •



# A Window of Hope

Words by Kareece Whittle-Brown

Illustrations by @salchipulpo\_

This is a fictionalized account of the lived experiences  
of international students living in Victoria B.C. in 2021.

**P**riya looked up from her phone and took a breath. She was speechless and more anxious than she had been in a long time. Did she just read that in three weeks the Canadian government would announce a new pathway to permanent residency?

This had to be the answer to her months and months of prayer. Her three years of working and applying for permanent residency was almost up, and she had still not met the requirements to qualify. Her belongings had already been packed, donated, or tossed as she had been preparing to return to her home country. The COVID-19 pandemic had triggered the closure of borders all over the world, which was the only thing that had delayed her purchasing her return ticket to Bangladesh.

Priya and her family had planned for a long time before she made the move to Canada. Seeking a better life, they had sacrificed a lot and invested all their savings, hoping it would pay off someday. The plan had been simple: she would leave her husband and children to pursue higher education in Canada. During this time her husband would keep his successful medical practice and continue to support their family. After she received her permanent residency, her husband and children would join her in Canada; this would guarantee

that they had sufficient resources to meet all their obligations. The costs of international tuition fees were sometimes daunting, and the only way to keep afloat was for one spouse to bear the financial responsibility.

It had been a frustrating and difficult year for her and so many others, and day by day her journey to attaining her permanent residency had seemed like a wish floating away in the wind.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the ringing phone. She sighed audibly and looked down at the phone on the table, seeing her friend's picture on her caller ID.

"Did you see what I just sent you?" Maria shrieked when Priya answered.

"Yes, I was just looking at it," Priya responded, distracted.

"Isn't that unbelievable? We qualify! We definitely qualify!" screamed Maria.

Maria was originally from Brazil. The two had met in class, and they connected well.

Their situations were very different and yet had similarities. Maria had no husband or children, but she did have two younger brothers and a sister. Maria's entire family had saved up and

chipped in to cover her trip to Canada. It was her responsibility, however, to work and support herself and cover as much of her tuition as she could. It had not been easy, especially since during school she could only work twenty hours per week, but she had completed her program successfully and was working two jobs before the pandemic hit. Once she attained her permanent residency she would be able to help her brothers and sister move to Canada.

It had been almost five years since they had both arrived in Canada. They each had two months remaining on their work permits, and their options were to return home or face deportation—at least those were the options before this fantastic opportunity that was now staring them in the face.

"What did it say we need to apply?" Priya quizzed

"We already qualify, Priya! We would apply under the International Student stream. The requirement is that the applicant must have graduated from a designated learning institution after 2017 and currently be employed. We graduated last year and we are employed! That's all that we need—our job positions don't matter!" Maria responded excitedly.





Using her phone, Priya went online and looked again at the requirements.

“OH MY GOD! We really do qualify!” she breathed in a low whisper of disbelief.

“That’s what I told you. I read it about three times before I sent it to you!”

“Okay, let’s do it—where do we apply?” Priya asked impatiently.

“We can’t yet—it doesn’t open until May 6, 2021.”

“Oh goodness, I’m going to explode with excitement!”

“I know what you mean—we all are,” Maria giggled.

This new pathway was the first of its kind, according to the news reports, documents, and immigration articles that Priya read. The Canadian government had decided to introduce this new conduit to permanent residency in consideration of the international students and healthcare workers that had been stuck in Canada throughout the pandemic. Never before had a person's job title not mattered, nor had Canadian Language Benchmark scores below seven (the normal minimum language requirement on a scale that stops at 10) been deemed as acceptable. This was unheard of and almost felt too good to be true. This was the window of hope she and others in her position had been praying for, but Priya was almost afraid to get too excited.

On her way to work that morning, Priya did what she always did on her daily bus commute: scroll through her phone to look at the latest news from Bangladesh. As she read the headlines, she glanced through the bus window, thinking about the years before her move to Canada. Their life had been good back home. Priya had been a systems engineer at a software development company, and her husband was a medical doctor. They lived well and could afford the best of life in Bangladesh. They lived in a fantastic neighbourhood, their children went to the best schools, and they were exposed

to the best Bangladesh had to offer. Still, they dreamed of more for their children, with more opportunities, a safer society, and a better future—a future where they could pursue any career they wanted to, and in a first-world country.

The path to permanent residency had been so different from what Priya and her family had anticipated. Not one day passed without her wondering if they had made the right decision as a family. Her children were now twelve and nine years old, and she often felt like she was missing out on them growing up.

The immigration consultant they had worked with, and the research they had done online, had made it seem so easy. Priya would finish her studies, earn her post-graduate work permit (PGWP), get a job, work for a year, apply for permanent residency status for herself and her family, then have her family join her in Canada. However, the actual journey had been so very different. Priya had started looking for jobs the second day after landing in Victoria. Working as a successful, highly qualified systems engineer with over eighteen years of experience in the field, she had assumed that landing a job in her field would be a breeze. Nothing was further from the truth. Priya had sent out hundreds of resumé's, attended numerous job fairs, sought out many networking events,

but all to no avail. She needed a job in a supervisory position for at least a year to meet the permanent residency application requirement. However, after two months of searching, and desperate to earn an income, she took a job at a fast-food restaurant. It was certainly not what she had expected she would be doing, but it could contribute to the bills.

The weeks leading up to the May 6th opening of the new pathway were filled with many emotions. There was joy, excitement, apprehension, and fear within the newcomer community. The dominant emotion, however, was fear—fear of unpreparedness, fear of technical glitches, and most of all fear that they didn't make it into the group that was limited to 40,000 candidates Canada-wide. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and everyone wanted in.

Speculation abounded as the eligibility requirements were published, but exactly what would be required to submit the application would not be known until the policy took effect. The applicants fell into a frenzy of activity doing all one could to get prepared, and COVID-19 restrictions did not make it any easier. Appointments for permanent residency medicals on Vancouver Island became a scarcity, as did the appointments for the English tests.

Priya and Maria were able to get appointments for their medical and English tests in the second week in June 2021, a full month after the opening date. Getting the police records was a completely different story, but they started the process and hoped that was enough.

As the time grew closer to application opening day, their anxiety grew and grew. The day before the applications were to open, Priya felt unprepared and nervous beyond words. There were so many questions, and uncertainty fueled more and more. Would they have enough time to meet all requirements? How long would it take for the 40,000 applicants to be chosen? Getting all the documents prepared was also costly and may well have been a barrier for many people.

On the morning of May 6, 2021, a huge number of qualified newcomers hoping for permanent residency tried to get their application in online. It was chaos—the site moved slow for some, payments wouldn't go through for others, and some didn't have all the documents, so the process couldn't move forward for them. It was a day of great anxiety.

That afternoon, at 4:48 pm, after trying to complete the process for most of the day, Priya looked at the screen and read: "Your application has been submitted."

Tears filled her eyes; it felt like a miracle to have the application go through. She had all but given up hope that the pieces would fall into place, and yet they had, right in the nick of time. The weeks leading up to this moment had been gruelling, but now it felt like all the effort and anxiety were worth it.

She smiled to herself, knowing she would have her family with her in a few months. All their plans could finally start taking

shape. Her husband and her children would be with her once again, and her family would be complete. Finally the pieces seemed to fit. Finally it was all coming together as she took another step forward in her journey as an immigrant.

Priya texted her husband: "Submitted, we did it!" Then she called Maria, who picked up on the third ring.

"Has your application gone through?" Priya asked.

"No, not yet. I'm still trying."

"What's wrong?"

"The payment screen has an issue, it seems."

"Yes, I know; I got that too, but I waited about seven minutes and tried again. Let me know when you have submitted, okay?"

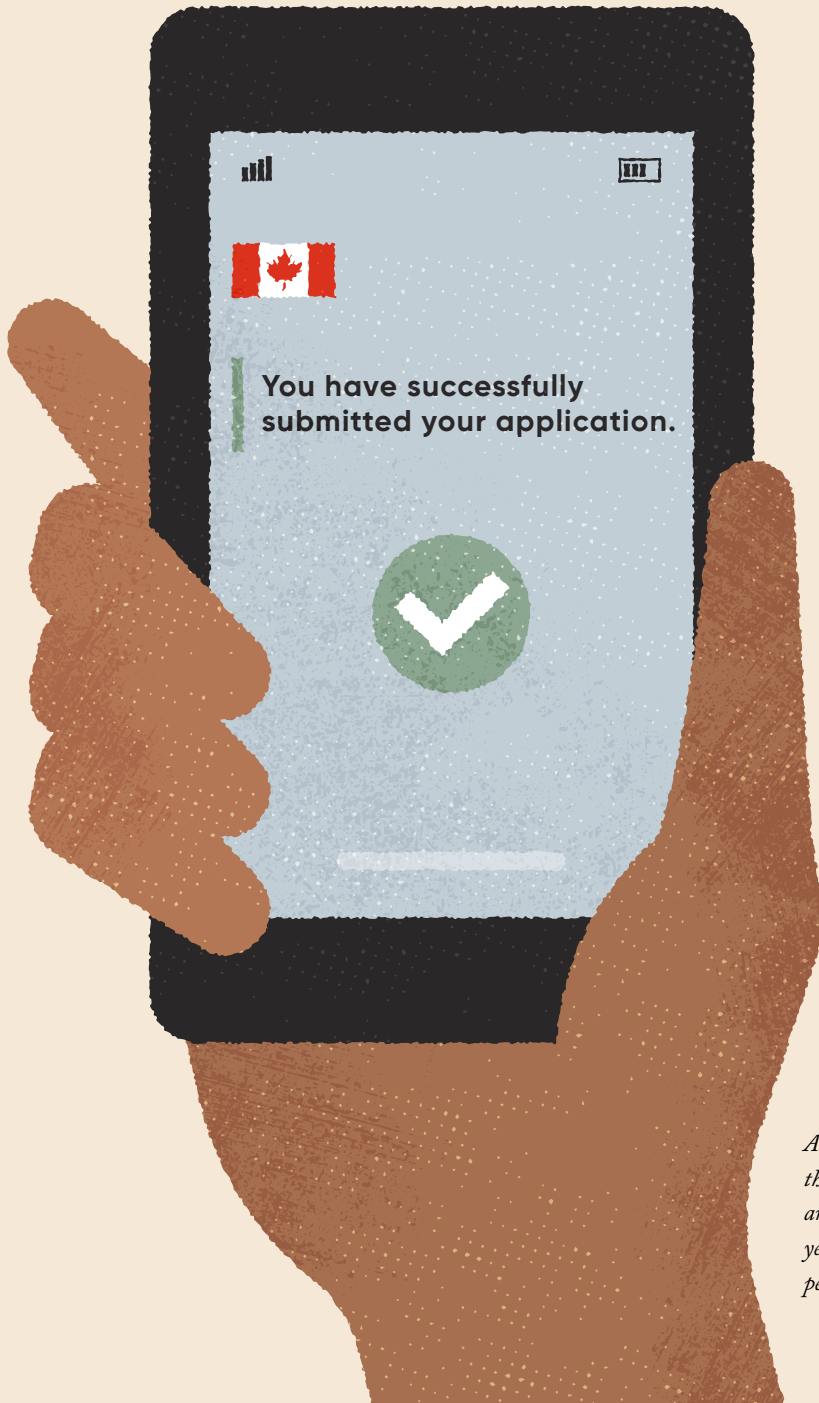
"Will do," Maria responded, sounding defeated.

Finding the extra funds to pay for medical tests, police records, the English test scores, plus the application fee had not been easy on anyone, but for Maria it had been a real challenge.

At 7:48 pm, Priya got the text from her friend: "Submitted, finally. I'm exhausted. Going to bed."

Priya responded, "We did it! Now we wait."

Placing her phone on the night table beside her bed, Priya exhaled and settled into the pillows behind her. •

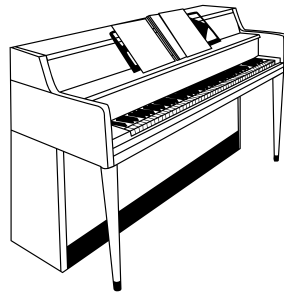


*As of press time mid-December 2021, the applicants whose experiences are embedded in this story have not yet heard about the status of their permanent residency applications.*



# Liberty

In the heart of Quadra Village sits Liberty Barbers, a local barbershop with a piano in one corner and a beer fridge in the other. The shop is owned and operated by Lorian Maendel, a woman with kind eyes and warm energy. Her shop is thriving: people fill the seats and laugh, chat, and play music. But it's been a long road for Lorian to get to where she is now.



Words by **Carli Van Stolk**

Photography & illustration by **Tracy Guinchard**

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**Liberty**  
**BARBERS**  
// // //



**B**efore owning her shop, Lorian worked various jobs to make a living—as a barista, in landscaping, and homecare, to name a few. The idea for Liberty Barbers came from a desire for personal freedom. “I just had this sensation that I never wanted to ask for a job again,” she says. “I wanted to call the shots and start my own business.” This mentality was partially due to the hardships of Victoria’s economy. Like many smaller communities, it’s a gig economy, which comes with its own set of challenges. “You have no sense of security. No way to project forward what your year or your finances are going to look like. I knew that I needed to have a plan.”

The seeds of this plan began five years ago when Lorian was initially inspired to cut hair. Originally from Colorado, she heard about a barber in Los Angeles who would bring clippers and a chair to a park and offer haircuts to low-income communities. The fact that these few tools were all he needed to operate his business (and that he contributed

to his community while doing it) flipped a switch for her. After learning about his story, she quickly enrolled in barber school. Following her six-month program, her career in hair began.

Initially, she worked at a local barbershop in Victoria. But after three years, she left. Still searching for freedom, Lorian wanted to open her own shop. “I was independent for a year without a name or a place to cut hair while I worked on the ‘how’ to make [the shop] all happen.” During that time, she floated from place to place, working on contract and even in friends’ basements. One notable moment was when the owner of Eden’s Barbershop—a fellow immigrant, female barber, and woman of colour—let Lorian work in her shop. Lorian, a Black immigrant to Canada herself, reflects fondly on this intrinsic support between marginalized communities: “Diversified female business owners [are] very supportive of each other. It’s amazing.”



Lorian with colleague Alyssa Kenny.



*“Never underestimate the power of a good conversation.”*

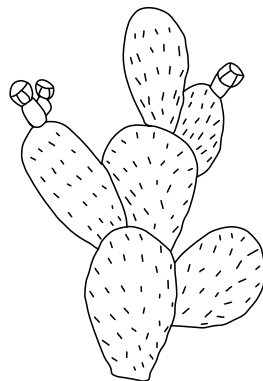


After time, dedication, and commitment, Lorian’s ambitions paid off. With years of experience in one hand and a following of local clientele in the other, Lorian took the leap. In January 2020, she bought her first little shop in Quadra Village. Liberty Barbers was born—the name liberty to honour her sought-out quest for freedom.

Although it’s been a turbulent ride with the pandemic, Liberty Barbers has been overwhelmingly successful. “It’s been beyond my wildest dreams,” she says with a smile. One reason for her success has been her clients. The shop is a microcosm of different personalities, cultures, backgrounds, values, beliefs, and opinions. Most importantly, it’s a safe space.

From LGBTQ+ to racialized communities, Lorian creates a space for anyone and everyone to feel welcome—which she does naturally with her warm, kind presence. As a Black woman, she also acknowledges the importance of these spaces for racialized communities. “There was never a stylist for me here [in Victoria], so I would wait to go to America every

year to get my hair done,” she says. “Hair has been colonized.” Her shop is also a place to reclaim what may have been lost or devalued due to whiteness. With Liberty Barbers, Lorian strives to celebrate everyone’s individuality. “A big part of embracing [diversity] is recognizing that all those people have different needs, and somebody needs to know how to take care of those needs. And that starts with places like this.”



Given that Lorian runs a barbershop, her clients are primarily male, too. She finds that many of these male clients have questions regarding social movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. “And they need a place to ask them,” she says. “I try to make that okay for them. Nothing’s





going to change with cancel culture.” When it comes to social progress, she refers to Daryl Davis, a Black man in the U.S. who talks to members of the Ku Klux Klan to try to dispel racism through communication, and succeeds. “Never underestimate the power of a good conversation,” she says.

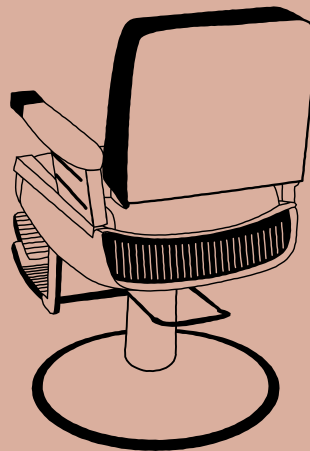
This diverse network is central to her business: she profoundly values her community. And although everyone is part of a community, Lorian believes establishing a network close to your heart requires effort. That means checking in on her people and support for one another—especially when there are challenges. This past year, there were. Lorian bought her Quadra Street shop in January 2020, and in February, they closed due to COVID-19. To stay afloat, Lorian’s perseverance and determination helped, but her community “was everything.”

They supported her through difficult times for a barbershop, an industry hit hard by the pandemic. Amidst renovations and a closure, her clients not only got haircuts, but they also offered anything from money to construction help. Thankfully she didn’t need much assistance, but knowing people were there for her gave her comfort. “I didn’t have a doubt that we would be fine.”

And she was right. Although the business is still getting back on its feet at this stage of the pandemic—her shop doesn’t yet have

signage or a website—she’s busier than ever. Her success is almost entirely due to word-of-mouth. “I don’t advertise; I don’t even have a sign on the door,” she says with a smile. “But my clients love that and they help it grow. So, that’s the community that I feel like I’m a part of. I feel very lucky.”

Throughout all of these ups and downs, one thing remained constant: belonging. This inclusive, supportive network is a testament to Lorian herself. It’s a culmination of her warmth, kindness, and her long-standing dreams of personal freedom. To Lorian, freedom is not solely financial or entrepreneurial; it also means celebrating what makes you authentically you—all of which is reflected at Liberty. If you want to be a part of this beautiful community, too, you know where to find it: at a signless barbershop in the heart of Quadra Village. •





In visible  
Indispensable  
Invaluable

Words & photography by Fiona Bramble

Illustrations by @salchipulpo\_

**R**aymundo shakes his head *no* at the question when translated, but to his right, Netali chuckles and shouts, “Chiquito! Small one. Like Smurf!” The group laughs, and Raymundo seems to take it all in stride. The men have been asked if they have given one another nicknames in their time working in the vineyards in Kelowna, British Columbia. Raymundo is slight and perhaps shorter than the other four, but he is certainly not Smurf-like. His companions tease him. Netali reveals that his family has called him *El Cuco* since he was a child. This sparks another round of laughter.

Five men are gathered around a circular steel table with a gazebo top shaped like a beach umbrella, the faded green paint peeling in the August afternoon sun. Okanagan Lake shimmers behind them, and the suffocating clouds of wildfire smoke of the previous two months have mercifully dissipated, although one can see fires still burning in the hills beyond. The men have walked five minutes from the vineyard, their workplace and home for the past six months and for another two to come. Eight months total in Canada. Eight months away from their families in Mexico.

Javier, our interpreter, piles boxes of pizza and Cokes onto the table, confident the food and drink will be a welcome treat. The men are sacrificing several hours of their precious time off work to meet with

a stranger, to share their lived experiences. The refreshments are a small gesture of gratitude.

### **Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program**

A substream under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) brought in 50,126 foreign workers in the agricultural industries in 2020, according to Statistics Canada. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture deems “international workers...essential to the production of food in Canada... [and] relied on as Canadian trained and experienced workers that support the success and quality of Canada’s food supply.”

While they come from around the world, close to half of Canada’s international seasonal workers come from Mexico, with those from Guatemala and Jamaica comprising another thirty-four percent. After Ontario and Quebec, respectively, British Columbia hosts the largest number of seasonal agricultural workers. This past summer, in the fertile Okanagan Valley in particular, thousands of workers were employed to pick cherries through July and August, feeding domestic and international market demand. 95 percent of the cherries grown in Canada are grown in British Columbia.





### Roasted slope

Trading orchard for vineyard, Raymundo, Netali, Geronimo, Cornelio, and Alberto spend their days picking and processing grapes from five in the morning to two in the afternoon. When asked more about their work, Raymundo and Netali, both natives of Oaxaca, Mexico, admit to having a deep understanding of and extensive experience in most aspects of the harvesting process. Each with over four years of experience working for the same employer, the two men are confident in their knowledge and abilities. The suggestion that they might one day run their own vineyard or winery is too fanciful to imagine, however, and both men throw their heads back in laughter at the idea.

The reality is that the men are, for the most part, hired and treated as labourers, physically toiling in the hot sun and wildfire smoke in picking season. At the peak of the B.C. “heat dome,” a heat wave in late June 2021 believed to have caused hundreds of deaths, their employer had to pull workers from the field because of the extreme conditions.

Current climate realities make their daily work even more challenging and uncomfortable, including the need to wear masks to protect themselves, not from COVID-19, but from the smoke-polluted air. The masks are smothering though too, and for Netali, the smoke is secondary to the oppressive heat: *Sufro más cuando hace mucho calor. Me sofoco.*

Although they are essential workers, in agriculture in this case, Raymundo does not feel that their contribution is truly valued by the larger community. This is partly because agricultural workers most often live and work far away from the heart of a community or town, but also because they and the work they do are not visible—their faces not seen in *Buy BC* campaigns or on winery websites. Not at all familiar with *Buy BC* or its colourful supermarket posters, Raymundo says it’s not about public recognition per se, but it bothers him that the visitors, *los turistas*, see the fields and are told by a guide how the work is done, but never see or meet the actual workers. The men take pride in their work at the vineyard, but to never be acknowledged as being a critical part of the final product sometimes makes them feel *no bueno*.





### In isolation

With the exception of Tonalá-native Alberto, 37, whose work at the vineyard is his first Canadian posting, this job, as is said, is not their first rodeo. Or orchard or greenhouse, for that matter. Raymundo, 34, began his Canadian tour in Quebec, a common path shared by this group. After two years picking apples in Quebec, Raymundo transferred to an Ontario greenhouse floriculture operation, which was eventually sold. International agricultural workers generally have an initial contract for three years, after which they can request a change in employer and/or region. Raymundo has worked the last four seasons in British Columbia. Cornelio, 50, from Tizayuca, describes his first Canadian job in Ontario packing tomatoes as a good experience. Geronimo, 31, and from Veracruz, spent three years picking strawberries in Quebec before joining the Kelowna group. He did not enjoy picking strawberries—*mucho de rodilla*—but is content at the vineyard: *está tranquilo*.

For Geronimo to feel content is not insignificant; the work and the workplace for these men here in Canada is almost the entirety of their existence for eight months of every year. They go grocery shopping on their days off and may play the occasional soccer game with workers from different farms, but they are far from the centre of town and are separated—*hasta arriba del cerro*—in every meaningful way from the community their work supports.

Because this is the way it has always been, the men do not question the isolation and genuinely seem to prefer the arrangement that has been fashioned by policy, geographical realities, and economic considerations. And yet there are cracks in the system that not only leave workers vulnerable, but that also sink opportunities for advancement and connection that can benefit the workers, the host communities, and Canada.

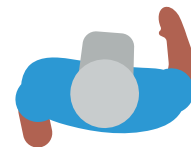
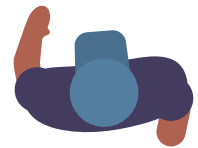
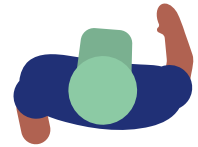
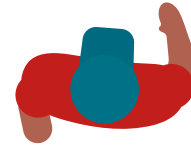
## Unseen, unheard

A significant obstacle to forming community connections and relationships is a language barrier, a challenge only exacerbated by geographical separation. The men all describe their English skills as limited (*poquito, poquito!*), but it is obvious they understand much more than they choose to speak. Nevertheless, in this catch-22 situation, even after having worked and lived in Canada for many seasons, they do not feel confident communicating in English. Geronimo acknowledges that language acquisition comes down to practice, something this group of Mexicans don't do in Canada because it is just them together *todo el tiempo*.

This lack of skill or lack of perceived or real need to learn English doesn't necessarily affect the group's work or their quality of life here, but it can contribute to inequities that aren't always obvious or predictable. Raymundo and Javier together describe a visit to a local clinic after Raymundo injured his shoulder at work. After having been told to wait in the parking lot, the medical office assistant eventually came out to tell them the clinic would treat citizens and residents first. Stunned and angry, the two men left without Raymundo receiving care, despite his being insured and in need. Not to say that Raymundo would not have been discriminated against regardless had he been able to advocate for himself in English, but it may have been a factor in his poor treatment, in his being labeled as

“other.” Raymundo gives this as another example of not feeling a part of the community: *no nos sentimos acoplados a una comunidad con los Canadians*. His injury remains untreated.

This detachment can also embolden some employers to be less responsive to, even negligent of the needs and basic rights of agricultural workers because they assume the workers don't have the capacity or resources to leverage complaints or advocate for themselves. Javier shares a story of another farm in the area whose worker accommodations don't have refrigerators or air conditioning. Three days in June 2021 saw Kelowna temperatures higher than ever before in recorded history, the hottest day registering at 45.7°C. Employers hold the balance of power in other ways too, including, and importantly, the fact that each worker's employment contract in Canada is contingent on the employer re-issuing an invitation each year. While the Kelowna stories are anecdotal in nature, migrant worker rights advocacy groups have long documented employer abuses and human rights violations across Canada, including those in the agricultural sector. The Migrant Rights Network at [migrantrights.ca](http://migrantrights.ca) is one such organization that, among other critical priorities, supports policy change that would create a pathway for all migrant workers to apply for permanent residency status “immediately, independently and permanently without depending or relying on the sponsorship or goodwill of their employers or third-party agencies.” The employment arrangement for



international agricultural workers is coordinated at a federal level and was designed to be permanently temporary, erasing the possibility of the workers transitioning to permanent residency in Canada. This seems inequitable and short-sighted.

### Pathways to prosperity?

Although the federal government opened a new, temporary pathway to permanent residency that included essential agricultural workers this past spring, the Migrant Rights Network noted that it was “a short-term window for thousands of migrants who are able to meet restrictive criteria, but [kept] the fundamentals of the temporary immigration system intact where hundreds of thousands are exploited.” It is estimated that there are over 450,000 migrant workers in Canada.

The program was closed in just two months, apparently having reached its 90,000 application cap for all streams. In addition to the burden of cost and first-come, first-serve time constraints, application requirements that effectively excluded many agricultural workers included language requirements and a minimum work experience period. Undocumented agricultural workers and refugees were not even eligible. The call for “Status for All” has yet to bring about the change the Canadian Council of Refugees hopes will “move us away from treating newcomers as disposable, as we have been doing by using precarious, temporary labour to fill long-term positions.”

### The trade-offs

Despite the multiple ways workers and allies believe the Canadian government fails its migrant workers, for the five men drinking Cokes lakeside around the green table, working in Canada is still better than working in the United States, an early path for some of the men here and a common “choice” for their compatriots. But unlike Canada, “farmworker” representation in the U.S. is historically and overwhelmingly that of undocumented migrants—of the foreign-born agricultural workforce in the U.S., approximately “49% lack authorized immigration status under current U.S. law,” according to non-profit organization Farmworker Justice.

For this reason, for Netali, working in the U.S. is a risky proposition. The pay may be higher, and there is more of an established Mexican migrant community in American agricultural work, but Netali says, without legal authorization, or *papeles paga*, one pays a great deal of money to cross the border. Most important for Netali, a father of four, is that he is able to return home at the end of the season to be with his family, something that would not be possible *en los Estados Unidos*. Netali adds that, here, he is safer and *tranquilo*, and not perennially anxious about being detained by *migración*.

### Buenos amigos

Raymundo, Netali, Geronimo, Cornelio, and Alberto—who share a *casa* at the winery—interact and move together

like old friends or close brothers. Comfortable posing together for photos and teasing each other during individual portraits (especially Geronimo, who is shy and ducks when the camera is on him), they give the impression of having built bonds of trust and genuine affection for one another. Their different personalities seem to balance the group well and Netali confirms that they are good friends and *buenos camaradas*, adding that it is important to be *a gusto*, at ease.

The camaraderie includes Javier, their lone Kelowna-based support, who works for KCR Community Resources (KCR) but often assists local agricultural workers in his spare time. He acts as an interpreter on this day, but on other days he is a taxi driver, mediator, banker, or friend—whatever is needed to support the workers, for whom he feels an affinity and responsibility.

Javier Robles Caraccioli was born in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. A pharmacist with over fifteen years of experience, Javier took a position as Migrant Worker Support Outreach Worker at KCR in 2019 after moving to Canada in 2015. Javier goes above and beyond for the workers here in Kelowna, and even acts as liaison with the Consulado General de México in Vancouver when the situation calls for it. Javier describes that relationship as a delicate balance of advocacy and diplomacy, keeping the big picture in the frame while also keeping the workers’ needs and rights front and centre.



## Don't worry, be happy

The big picture, or a big part of the big picture, is that the men are here working to support their families back home in Mexico. This is their singular focus. Questions about their families trigger bittersweet responses. All of the group are fathers, although Cornelio's children are now young adults. Netali, who describes his family as small, has three daughters and a son—a mirror of his own sibling group. It was his son's seventh birthday the day before. Over eight months, many birthdays are not spent together. However, Netali says that he and his son talk on WhatsApp *todos los días*, and, as they do each year upon his return to Oaxaca, the entire family will go out to a restaurant to celebrate his homecoming and all the missed birthdays.

Father of an eight-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy, Geronimo says that when he returns home, his *niños* just want to play with him non-stop. The conversation topic is uncomfortable territory for him though, as Geronimo describes his strategy for coping without his family as one of closing out thoughts of them: *no pienso*. Although his focus is shaken when his wife shares that she misses him, for Geronimo, he has made this choice, *por sacrificio*, for them and must stay the course.

One worry all the workers share is that of getting sick or injured or a member of their family getting sick or injured. Even outside of the context of the pandemic, this fear nags at them all. That there could be an accident or

illness which would prevent them from being with their families or lead them to never seeing a family member again is described as a risk they take each year, one not taken lightly. As many of the men are the sole financial support for their families, any loss of employment due to accident or illness here in Canada would be an additional devastating burden. Every season wrapped without these fears being realized is a win.

## Cultural exchange—with India

Each year, at the end of the season, the employers at the vineyard host a celebratory dinner. Ironically—as the group has not experienced any meaningful Mexico-Canada cultural exchange over the years—this one night, the Mexican workers and their Indian colleagues manifest a multicultural potluck, sharing dishes inspired by home. Some of the Indian dishes, Netali admits, are *picantes*, spicy.

According to Netali, the Indian employees are permanent residents who operate the machinery and hold managerial positions. When asked about communicating with each other, Netali confesses that the lilting Indian accent strains his own perceived minimal comprehension of spoken English.

This seemingly odd reality of relative newcomers from vastly different backgrounds struggling to negotiate meaning with one another in the unique setting of the Okanagan Valley could be the start of a brilliant screenplay—or perhaps a new CBC sitcom?

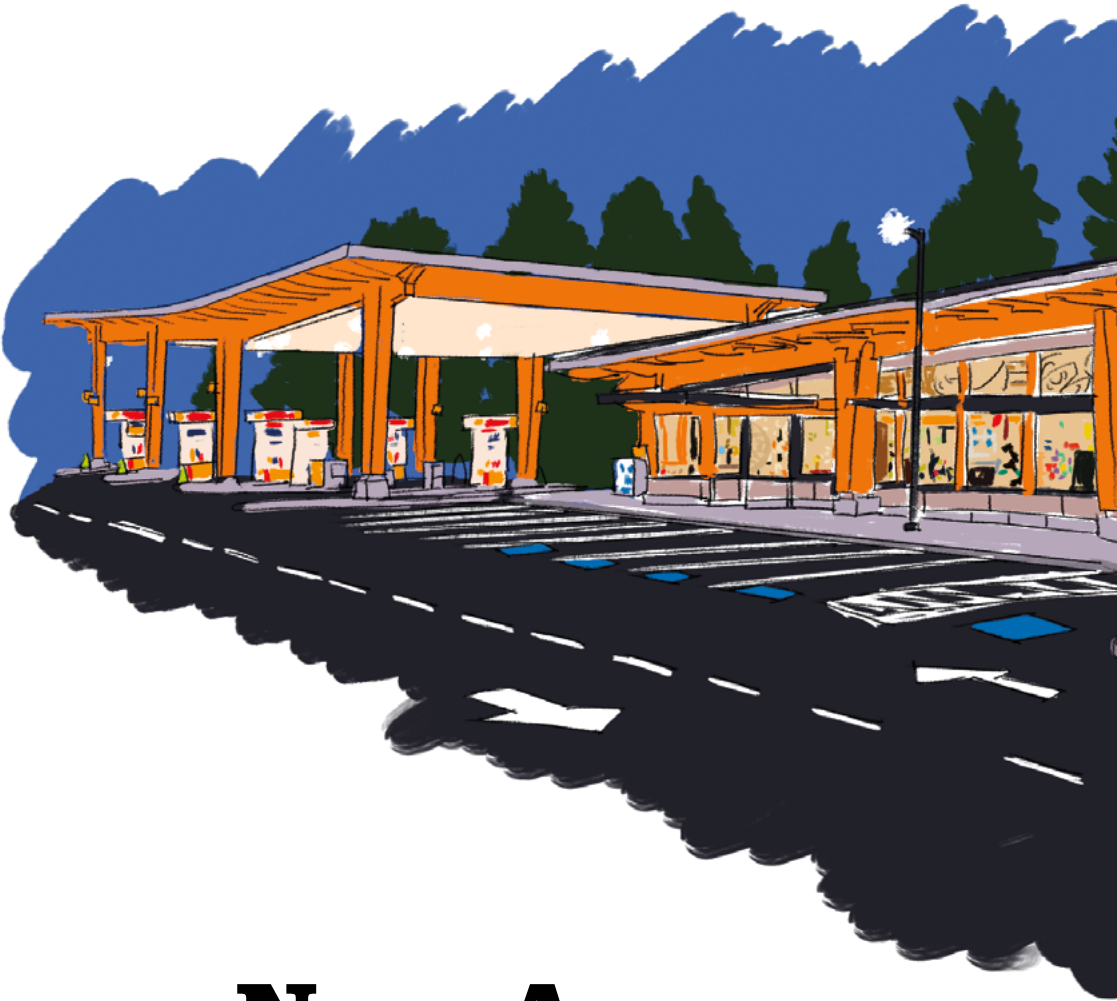
## Mexico dreaming

As this season draws to a close—this group returns to Mexico at the end of October—home appears a little closer on the horizon. The men will pick up jobs they had left behind and reunite with their families and friends. Four months to re-set in familiar places and surrounded by their own culture, language, and food before they contemplate the journey north again. Cornelio, for one, can almost taste the *barbacoa* and *pulque* that are always a part of the welcome home feast his family prepares for him.

Unanimously, the men share that their Canadian chapter is one part of a legacy they hope to leave: a better life for their children, one that includes an education and a career. For Raymundo the dream is for his children to have professional careers, and that if they do come to Canada, it is to explore and travel, not work in the fields. For Canada to be the path to a dream is no small thing, nor is the work Raymundo, Netali, Geronimo, Cornelio, and Alberto, and other essential workers do for Canada. •



(top), left to right: Netali Cruz Ortiz, Cornelio Cruz López, Geronimo Luna Magin, Raymundo Navarrete, Alberto Martínez Ramírez; (centre), left to right: Netali, Javier Robles Caraccioli, Alberto.



# **Snaw-Naw-As Market:**

Working towards reclaiming  
power and place



Words by **Avigail Olarte**

Photography by **John-Evan Snow**

Illustration by **@salchipulpo\_**





**W**hen you're cruising north on Highway 19 up island from Nanaimo, there's a landmark that's hard to miss. As the sun sets on the deep waters of Nanoose Bay, rays of light slither past towering fir trees, casting shadows on a stunning piece of architecture: the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation's Market.

Designed with the use of 3D modelling, the market features a West Coast look built with heavy timber vestibules and glass, mirroring its natural surrounding area. A project of the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation, also known as the Nanoose First Nation, the marketplace offers a range of services to up to 30,000 motorists passing along the highway every day. You can stop for a gas fill-up at the Shell station or charge your electric car, grab coffee and food at Tim Hortons or at the convenience store, and shop for gifts made by Coast Salish artists.

"It's undeniably the most beautiful car stop on Vancouver

Island," says a motorist visiting the market one rainy day in fall. To the Snaw-Naw-As people, however, the place is more than a hub for motorists: it is a key pillar of the Nation's overall strategy to strengthen their economic future—a step towards self-government and sovereignty. To them, it is how they reclaim their place and power.

"This market is certainly an opportunity for us for development. We have been trying to build that gas station for 30 years," says Brent Edwards, council member of Snaw-Naw-As First Nation and chair of the Nanoose Economic Development Corporation (NEDC), an entity that leads the overall economic development of the Snaw-Naw-As Nation members. The groundwork was laid by the Nation's past leadership, spearheaded by Wilson Bob, David Bob, Wayne Edwards and former chiefs and council members.

"We formed the NEDC to have the right business governance system set up, so we would be attractive to invest in. The

market was designed in such a way that people would want to visit it,” he adds. With its friendly and welcoming vibe, the market won the Commercial Retail Award of Excellence under the 2020 Vancouver Island Real Estate Board (VREB) Commercial Building Awards.

Independently run and Indigenous-led, the store’s proceeds go to the small community of 250 band members, funding their programs and needs like road construction and repairs on the 62-hectare reserve, located a few meters down the hill from the market.

### A day at the market

To Alison Edwards, the Snaw-Naw-As Market’s assistant manager, the project is providing jobs to band members like her. Of the 15 staff members, 11 are from the Snaw-Naw-As First Nation. “Growing up, my grandparents always told me how important it was to go out there, to get educated, then to come home and bring it all back to the community. This is what pushed me to get involved in the business,” she says, adding that her current role is much bigger than her coffee barista experience elsewhere.

She and the other staff members get a lot of support from Doug Tombe, the General Manager who brings in 30 years of experience in the gas industry. Their typical day at the market starts with a steady stream of customers and gets busy at 10 a.m. all the way till 5 p.m., with one last rush in the evening before closing. Tombe says he had to train the entire staff from scratch, as most of the workers had no prior gas station and convenience store experience when the store opened in June 2019.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, business slowed down for a few months. The market lost a few staff members who were uncomfortable interacting with the public. “There was a lot of anxiety from the community about infecting people on the reserve. But that never happened; no one got sick of COVID,” Tombe says, adding that business soon picked up and profits grew during the pandemic.

One factor for that is the market’s strategic location. When one approaches the highway intersection at Lantzville,





**“Growing up, my grandparents always told me how important it was to go out there, to get educated, then to come home and bring it all back to the community. This is what pushed me to get involved in the business.”**

the Snaw-Naw-As Market sign is immediately spotted. Below it is a huge orange sign bearing the words “Every Child Matters.” Turning right onto the station, there are parking slots marked for Elders and a wide-open space for cars to line up for gas. As you approach the convenience store, Coast Salish artist LessLIE Sam’s artwork on the glass walls stands out, and behind that is the Indigenous gift department, a unique feature of the market.

Each section of the gift store is carefully curated, featuring a range of products from accessories, colouring books, and blankets, to socks and mugs, coasters and pins. Racks of orange shirts designed by local Indigenous artists draw much attention from visitors. One popular shirt bears the translation of “Every Child Matters” in Hul’qu’mi’num, the ancestral language of the Snaw-Naw-As people: “MUKW SMUN’EEM ‘O’TLI”.

### **A shared future for our children**

Seeking resources to revitalize their language and culture is only one of the many reasons why the Nanoose First Nation is seeking self-sufficiency. “There’s more to the market than just selling gas and merchandise. Our Elders have always told us the children are the future. The work that we do today is for them,” says NEDC board member Amanda Bob, who as a child remembers being in rooms where her Elders would talk about building a strong future for the children.

As the manager of the daycare centre in their community, Bob collaborates with the market managers for events on the reserve. On National Truth and Reconciliation Day on September 30th, for example, the market donated the orange shirts for the children in the daycare to wear.









**(top left)** Snaw-naw-as General Manager Doug Tombe; **(bottom)** Snaw-naw-as Guest Service Specialist Rick Bob; **(top right)** Snaw-naw-as Assistant Manager Alison (Ali) Edwards.

“Wearing those shirts and having those signs up at the market is a way to support families impacted by the residential school system. They create spaces for discussion, starting with the 215 unmarked gravesites of children buried in the former site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School,” Bob shares. Her own family has been deeply impacted by the residential schools, which were established by the government in the 1800s to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture. The system that went on till the late 1990s is widely considered a form of genocide, with some 4,000 to 6,000 children reported to have died while in school. Accounts of horrendous physical and sexual abuse have been made public through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report in 2015. Bob’s grandfather had a brother and sister who had been taken to the Indian Residential School in Port Alberni, a city one hour away from Nanoose. “They never came home,” Bob says. “Now that gravesites are being recovered, my family might be able to bring them home and give them a proper resting place.”

### Reclaiming power and place

To Bob and other members of the Nation, nurturing courage and resilience in the younger generations is a crucial step towards reconciliation—starting with reclaiming their identity and place. The Snaw-Naw-As Nation stands on unceded land and are former signatories of the Douglas Treaties, known as the Vancouver Island Treaties covering Indigenous territories in Victoria, Saanich, Sooke, Nanaimo and Port Hardy, all signed in the 1850s. The Nation and other First Nations in the surrounding areas are now in the final stages of negotiating the Te’mexw Treaty, which will allow the Snaw-Naw-As people to pursue new economic development opportunities as an independent and self-governing Nation.

The market blazes the trail towards that vision. “It certainly is the biggest project under the economic plan right now,” Brent Edwards says. “Everybody in our community benefits when we are successful with our business ventures.”



“Despite over 150 years of colonial pressure to assimilate, our people have built a healthy community government and a sustainable economic industry to provide opportunities for our people. We have continued to practice and pass on our ancestral knowledge and ways,” their band website reads. Keeping traditions alive includes promoting the work of the artists from the community, as their designs, used for places like the market, are handed from one generation to another. “It’s carrying on with our cultural way of life,” Bob adds.

The influence of the project is far-reaching. With a visibly impressive place of business that’s Indigenous-owned and led, the market draws attention to the issues and challenges Indigenous peoples face today. And while the store is not meant to be a hub for these discussions, it awakens the sense of curiosity and responsibility to know and learn more about Indigenous peoples on the island—whether it begins with questions such as how to pronounce “Snaw-Naw-As” or who they are as a people and what their story is.

“The gas station is really a place of business. But the Coast Salish people are a friendly people, and so for folks looking to learn about us, talking to us is a good start,” offers Edwards. •

# HANDS ACROSS BORDERS

Words by **Fernanda M. Ochoa**

Illustrations by [@salchipulpo\\_](#)











**C**limate change is amplifying worldwide weather events to the extreme. Here in British Columbia, this reality not only extends our ‘typical’ wildfire season, but also the size and frequency of the blazes, making the situation on the ground increasingly unpredictable in recent years. What has become predictable over the past decade, however, is the critical need for international resource-sharing during wildfire season.

When international firefighting partnerships were first developed under the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) after it opened in 1982, the “agreements were more informal letters of intent to cooperate and considered for the exchange of information and best practices only,” according to Kim Connors, executive director of CIFFC. “Now,” Kim adds, “all aspects of wildland fire management are included: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.”

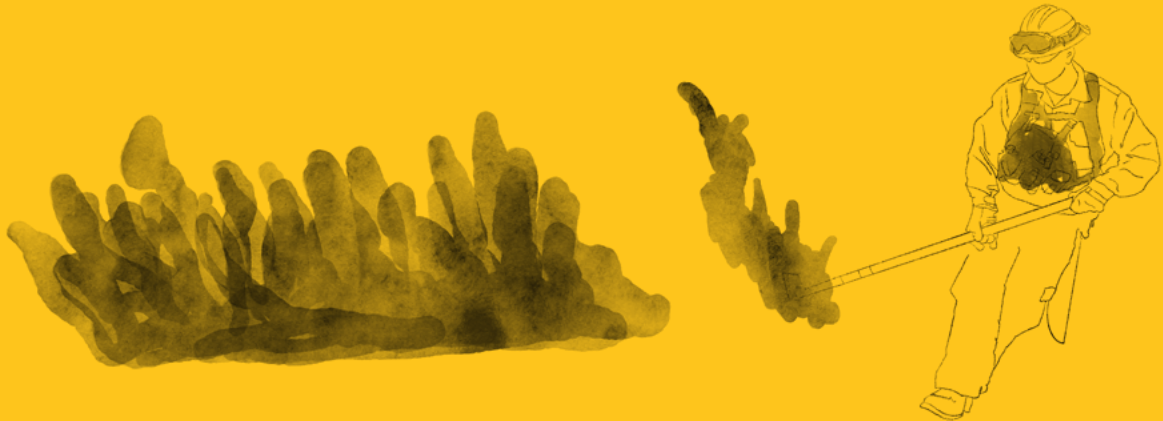
Canada currently has formal partnerships with the United States, Mexico, Australia, South Africa, New

Zealand, and Costa Rica. “We are at a point where countries need to help each other,” says Kim. Although the relationships are reciprocal—Canada sent a great deal of “resources” to Australia in late 2019 and early 2020 during its infamous “Black Summer” bushfires and to the western United States last September 2021 during its extreme wildfire season—Kim admits that Canada is a “net importer of assistance” from the international agreements.

“Resources” in wildland firefighting jargon is a long list that can include personnel, aircraft, training, and capacity development. Kim emphasizes that at this stage in these global arrangements, when it comes to personnel, all partners “only exchange what we consider the best of the best for this work” and that partner countries are partly identified by their level of training, engagement and the operating system they work under, specifically those who understand the “language” of the Incident Command System, or ICS. One other factor considered is whether the firefighters from other countries are familiar with

working with water: “Canada is rich with water, so we fight fires with water. A lot of countries don’t,” says Kim. If a potential partner country demonstrates gaps in this knowledge, CIFFC weighs how big of a task it would be to train international personnel. South African partners, for example, who supported Alberta in 2015, 2016 (in the Fort McMurray wildfire), and again 2019, required training to learn how to work with pumps and hoses to deliver water to a fire. The reverse is also true; when Canadian firefighters went to Australia, they had to adapt to different methods of fire suppression due to limited access to water.

International collaboration is crucial for the province and the entire country also because recruitment itself is an issue in Canada, says Kim. “Normally the provinces, territories and Parks Canada have the capacity for what would be considered a normal or a bit harder-than-normal fire season.” But, he adds, “when you get into these extreme seasons, like now, then agencies will consider their levels of capacity.”



## THE BOYS (AND GIRLS) OF SUMMER

As part of this international wildland firefighting collaboration, a crew of 103 highly skilled—or “Type 1”—Mexican firefighters and supports arrived in British Columbia on July 24, 2021 to help the local crews mitigate and extinguish the hundreds of wildfires that have been active across the province this season. A mobilization of “Operation Yellow Snake,” this particular crew consisted of five brigades composed of 100 field firefighters, two field coordinators, and one COVID-19 supervisor.

Both born in Durango, a northern state in Mexico, brigade leaders Ricardo Pacheco and Juan Ruperto Vergara have 24 years and 13 years of wildland firefighting experience, respectively. This is not the first time that Ricardo and Ruperto have come to Canada; in the past, they have traveled to the country specifically to assist in combating the wildfires. “We have collaborated here in Canada four times,” Ruperto says. “The first year was in 2016 in Alberta, in 2017 in British Columbia, and in 2018, I went to Ontario. This year we have the opportunity to be in

British Columbia once again for two 14-day periods.”

Canada is not the only country the Mexican firefighters—“yellow snake” is how the crew refers to itself when supporting an incident or fire outside Mexico—have been deployed to in order to provide their support. In February 2017, Ruperto, along with 57 other firefighters, went to the Araucanía region in Chile to mitigate the aggressive wildfire situation there; Ricardo, together with 99 crew members, helped extinguish the severe wildland fires in the state of California in 2020.

Here in B.C., the relationship between the local and international crews is strong. Despite living in a demanding and stressful environment, they see themselves as one big group in which camaraderie is built all the time. “I would say it is a very good relationship,” says Ricardo. “Being on the line, we are all forest firefighters—we are not Mexicans, we are not Canadians or Australians, we are all the same, and we have learned to be a great, unified

team. We have worked very well with the Australians, the Canadians, and our fellow Mexicans.”

**“WE ARE NOT MEXICANS,  
WE ARE NOT CANADIANS  
OR AUSTRALIANS, WE ARE  
ALL THE SAME.”**

Four of the Mexican crew also identify as female, a gender representation which is a slowly changing statistic in firefighting. According to Kim Connors, South Africa leads international wildland community efforts towards gender parity, with approximately one-third of their wildland firefighting program composed of female-identifying firefighters. Kim says that when South Africa “exports” their resources, they try to maintain that proportion in their international crews, including those that come to Canada. CIFFC, as an organization, has also begun to undertake purposeful efforts in the area of equity, diversity, and inclusion, adds Kim.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

Ricardo and Ruperto briefly talk about the crew's daily routine: they begin their operational period early in the morning to make the most of daylight hours. They eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the same hour every day, but every once in a while there are delicious surprises, like a Mexican banquet with delicious tortillas and other treats—sometimes even with Mexican music. This lifts everyone's spirits and gives them the boost needed to continue with their tremendous task. On regular days, when the operational period ends around seven in the evening, Ricardo and Ruperto go back to the camp and hold a meeting with all the brigade members and coordinators to debrief their daily activities and the next day's plans. Once that's over, they have the freedom to do whatever they like with their time, and take a much-needed rest.

Since Mexican culture is very family-oriented, Ricardo and Ruperto make it a priority to keep in touch with their family throughout their stay. They have an internet connection in their camp, so they mostly talk to their families through social media platforms, text messages, and video calls. However, even though they are in constant communication, it is tough to be apart from their loved ones.

## WHERE THE HEART IS

"I have a five-year-old boy," says Ricardo. "He wants to talk to me and see me every day. I think he feels the absence the most at this moment because he is so young." Ruperto shares that his two children are curious and always ask him about his day and about the fires: "They ask me questions all the time."

It's clear by their tones that the subject of family is dear to the fathers' hearts, and being away for so long makes them miss their family even more. "I am going to talk about something very personal," Ruperto says intensely. "I would like to have the opportunity at some point in life to invite my family to visit the British Columbian landscapes that I have seen while moving from one place to another when we have been in the fires. The landscapes are spectacular; the rivers and lakes that I have had the opportunity to witness are beautiful. I feel the nostalgia of one day being able to share this with my family."

Being away from family can take its toll on a person, making it very important to create friendships and a support system when out in the field. Ricardo and Ruperto describe their strong relationships with their colleagues, who seem like extraordinary people. Ricardo and Ruperto have also met friendly folks in British Columbia, as well as other parts of Canada, who have been attentive and supportive towards them.

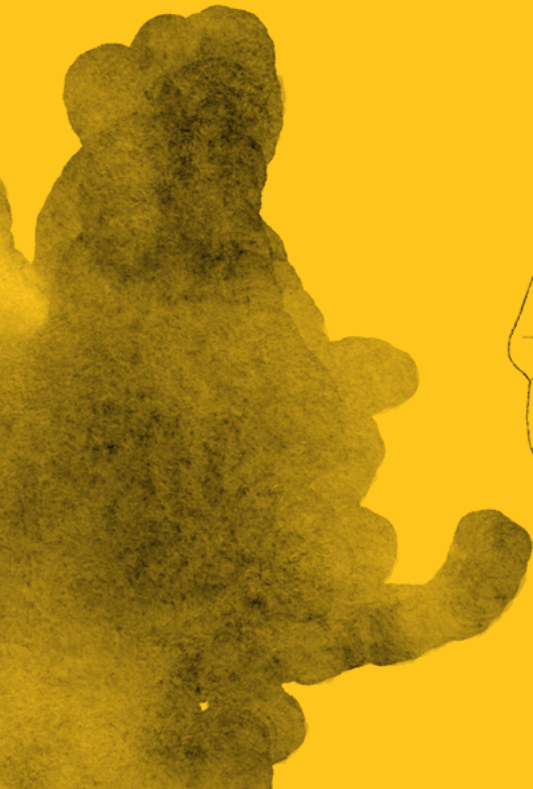
One such person is Gregory Blais—nicknamed "Gregorio" by the Mexican crew—their British Columbia Wildfire Services Liaison Officer. Ruperto reveals that they "have a closeness with him, and [they] have been exchanging many points of view, many conversations." He adds that they see each other regularly, and it feels like they "have been friends for a long time."



**RICARDO**



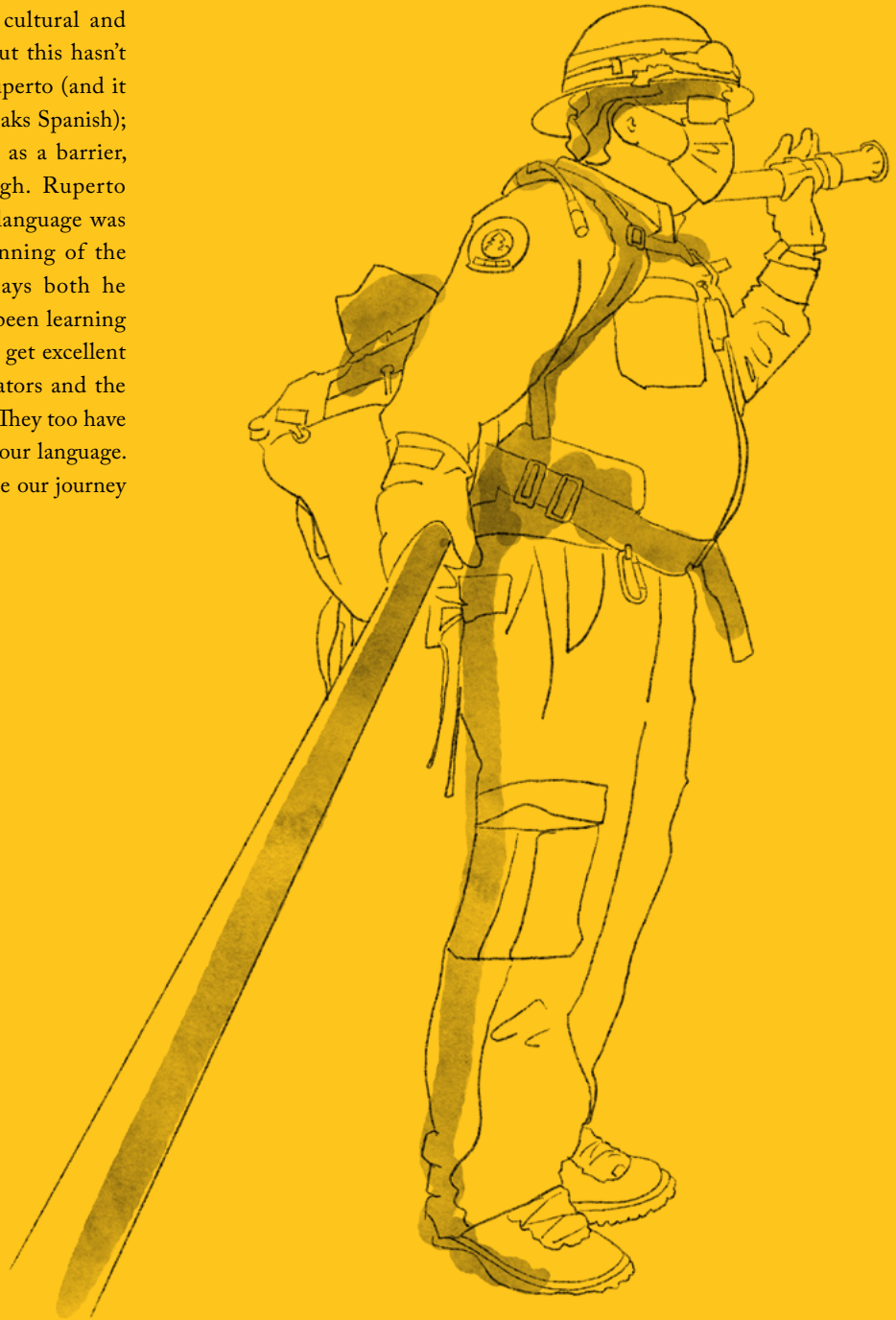
**RUPERTO**





## ¿HABLAS ESPAÑOL?

Building these types of relationships can be complicated by cultural and language differences—but this hasn't stopped Ricardo and Ruperto (and it helps that "Gregorio" speaks Spanish); they don't see language as a barrier, more as a tiny hiccup. Ruperto admits that "of course" language was a challenge at the beginning of the journey; however, he says both he and Ricardo have both been learning and improving, and they get excellent support from the translators and the Canadian coordinators. "They too have made the effort to learn our language. They have definitely made our journey better," Ruperto says.



## MI CASA, SU CASA

The Mexico-Canada arrangement has worked so well for many reasons. One of them, say the two men, is that the fire season differs between the two countries; this situation makes it ideal for the Mexican firefighters to come to Canada without neglecting the needs of their home country. Ricardo explains: “In Mexico, the season has different stages: In the center and south, it starts in February and ends in June; then, in the north, northeast of the country, it starts at the end of February and ends in July.” Also, the way the fires present themselves is another aspect that works for both countries. Ricardo tells us that some of the ecosystems he has worked in in Mexico are very similar to the British Columbian ecosystem, helping them to successfully fight the fires and adapt to specific environmental conditions here. However, the ecosystems in Ontario and Alberta differ from what they are used to, and sometimes the conditions become more challenging. “Ontario was very surprising,” Ruperto says, “There was a lot of humidity in some parts of the territory, and on the other side, it was on fire. In Mexico, the whole territory is typically dry, but in Ontario we found places with a lot of humidity and other very dry places in close proximity. In Alberta, the fuel we found was very deep and very thin; it took a long time to extinguish it. There was water accumulated on top and below was the fire, which for us was something different.”

Not knowing what to expect can be very dangerous; the firefighters have to frequently remind themselves to keep safe, stay focused, and always pay attention to the surroundings because the fire’s behaviour in unfamiliar places can be extreme and unpredictable. Ricardo recalls that sometimes the flames can be ten to fifteen centimeters tall and a moment later be as tall as the trees around you.

Firefighters risk their lives to keep people and property safe, and wildland firefighters in particular are being tested to new extremes every day. They are often hailed as heroes who deserve praise and appreciation. The gratitude goes both ways, however, as the opportunity to come to Canada means a great deal to the Mexican crew. They express how meaningful it is to them to have a voice, to be seen, and to contribute their knowledge.

“We are here helping a country, and for that very reason, we must do everything in our power to demonstrate the role we are playing as ambassadors of Mexico,” Ruperto says. “We have this unity with all Canadians. When we are here, they have greeted us in the street; they recognize us, and we are very proud of that. We always try to give the best of ourselves, every single day.”

Because of the severity of both Canada’s and the U.S.’s 2021 wildland fire season, the two countries were

unable to support each other as they had in previous seasons. To exacerbate things, the pandemic curtailed support to Canada from Australia and New Zealand as well. Kim Connors admits the situation was unfortunate and that the partners are “heartbroken” when they can’t support one another. Kim emphasizes that “constant communication” keeps the relationships strong even when the international partners are unable to deploy support resources in times of need.

The feeling that they are part of something bigger than themselves and also part of a critical, and growing, global network at the frontlines of climate change both motivates and humbles Ruperto and Ricardo: “Yes, we are part of this movement; we know fires [will] become more and more erratic and stronger, and these organizations contribute so that the forces of one country and another can serve at the moment they are needed. So we feel part of it, we are part of it, as are all the participants, from coordinators, fighters, to the many people who are in Mexico who have worked for this—because here they see us. They see 103 Mexicans who are in B.C., but there are many people in Mexico working so that we can show our faces.” •



# Fighting Racism One Recipe at a Time



Words by **Fiona Bramble**

Interview by **Ximena Londoño**

Photography by **Tracy Guinchard**

Illustrations by **@salchipulpo\_**





**O**n September 18, 2021, guest chef Richard Hum kicked off Kulea Culture Society’s new “Kitchen & Culture – A Cooking Journey” series in Victoria B.C., with an interactive demonstration cooking authentic Hong Kong-style Crispy Chow Mein. However, the original style, as Richards tells his host and helper Ximena Londoño, goes back to the mid-1800s and has links to the migration of Shanghai businessmen to Hong Kong. During this period, chefs in Hong Kong and Singapore began making the crispier “Shanghai-style” because it was considered more high-end.

Richard talks about that era’s adaptations of this dish in the “new world,” on North America’s east and west coasts—adaptations that were spurned by Chinese gold miners and railway workers. To maintain a connection to home, these men (and they were primarily men—Richard suggests the ratio of men to women was 1:28) learned to cook familiar dishes with regional ingredients.

Ximena appreciates the freshness and subtle flavours of the dish. For Richard, what is paramount is that one “can taste everything individually . . . the bok choy . . . the chicken” and that the colours are vibrant—the orange carrots, the little yellow peppers, and the bright green bok choy. Richard laments that there is “nothing worse than going to a restaurant and getting a dish like this and everything tastes the same, and everything is brown because they have used too much soy sauce and too much oyster sauce.”







Silvia Mangue, Kulea Culture Society President.

**“By sharing our stories as we cook together, we can celebrate diversity, reduce prejudice, promote inclusion, and make new friends.”**

— Kulea Culture Society President, Silvia Mangue.

Kulea Culture Society launched the Kitchen & Culture initiative with the goal to “build bridges across our community through food and storytelling.” Other demonstrations of cooking dishes from around the world are scheduled through 2022. •





(top left to right) Host Ximena Londoño; Guest Chef Richard Hum.



Words by **Parminder Kaur Virk**

Photography by **Mary Kaye Abellana & Tracy Guinchard**

Community organizer Parminder Kaur Virk, along with her husband Jagir Singh Virk and adult children Mantek (Monty) Singh Virk and Sonia Kaur Virk, helps coordinate monthly events celebrating Punjabi heritage across the Greater Victoria region with the groups Punjabi Cultural Community of Victoria and Punjabi Women of Victoria.







**T**he annual festivals we celebrate are Lohri, Vaisakhi, Diwali, Teeyan, and Mela. Mela is celebrated annually in August and serves an important purpose: it connects the performers and participants closer to their Punjabi heritage. It helps them become more comfortable with who they are. Our next generation needs to stay close with their cultural roots. Because their children attend different schools across the region and don't know one another, parents bring them together to practice, and to make friends within their culture.

In August, we also celebrate a women's dance festival called Teeyan, which welcomes the arrival of the monsoon season. Young Indian women wear shiny and colourful clothes and perform folk dances. In November, we celebrate Diwali, an important festival in India. It is similar to Christmas festivities here in Canada. The Punjabi Cultural Community of Victoria celebrates Diwali with the Festival of Lights at the Saanich Commonwealth Place in Victoria, B.C. Pre-pandemic, more than 350 community members would attend every year. All communities in India celebrate Diwali, and it has more than 5,000 years of tradition. As it is commonly described, Diwali is a time to "turn inward and light the lamp of knowledge and truth in our hearts and minds so that we can dispel the forces of darkness and ignorance."

The Punjabi Cultural Community of Victoria meets on the last Sunday of each month at the Parkes Recreation Center to cook, eat, and socialize together. We discuss lots of subjects, and we sing and provide entertainment. We also meet every second Sunday of each month for the Punjabi Literary Society of Victoria, a poetry group where people come together to share stories and discuss any topic. We plan an event for each month and encourage people of any age to come and talk about anything to bring awareness. It's an opportunity for people to mingle, practice their speaking skills, and build their self-esteem. We take this time to connect and provide an educational opportunity for families to learn from each other in a supportive environment. Each year, with the Guru Nanak Foundation of Victoria, we organize and choose different organizations, such as Our Place and Rainbow Kitchen, to donate to and provide hundreds of meals, supporting the community.

We are a warm and loving people who love to make everyone feel welcome and acquainted with our culture. We are friendly and always like to have a good time. We love to dance, sing and make sure we make the most out of life. Our food is quite amazing as well! •





(left to right) Jagir Singh Virk, Parminder Kaur Virk, Sonia Kaur Virk, and Mantek Singh Virk.







# CARIBBEAN CHAT

Words by Kareece Whittle-Brown

Illustrations by Kat Tzingounakis



## JAMAICA

**Quote: "ONE ONE COCOA FULL BASKET."**

**Interpretation:** Success is never achieved overnight; it always takes small steps. Every little bit in the right direction counts.

**Quote: "TROUBLE NUH SET LIKE RAIN."**

**Interpretation:** Problems come unexpectedly; there is rarely any warning.

**Quote: "BLOOD TICKA DAN WATA."**

**Interpretation:** Blood is thicker than water; never get involved in family affairs because the bond between relatives is very strong.





## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

**Quote: "ANYTIME IS TRINIDAD TIME."**

**Interpretation:** Time does not matter on the social scene, as long as you show up to your destination.

**Quote: "MONKEY KNOW WHAT TREE TO CLIMB."**

**Interpretation:** A bully will always know exactly who they can target as their victims.

**Quote: "GOAT DOH MAKE SHEEP."**

**Interpretation:** Children usually grow up to exhibit similar traits as their parents.



## BAHAMAS

**Quote: "FISHERMAN NEVER SMELL HE OWN BASKET."**

**Interpretation:** It is always easy for human beings to see the faults in others while not acknowledging their own.

**Quote: "DON'T HOLLER BEFORE YOU GET OUT OF THE BUSH."**

**Interpretation:** Don't celebrate a victory prematurely; wait until the situation has been fully resolved.

**Quote: "TIME AND TIDE AIN GA WAIT FA NOBODY."**

**Interpretation:** A warning that time waits for no one, so use your time wisely.

# “Pamahaw”

(Breakfast)

Words by Suzanne Alexa Marie Peñola

**T**he sunlight seeps brightly through my window, caressing my eyes until I am awake. I curl my toes deeper into my sheets as the morning breeze makes its way in. Sunday is my favourite day of the week. When I hear my parents’ laughter from the kitchen, all my anxiety from my strenuous week melts away. This Sunday laughter is like welcoming fanfare in a house bellowing with silence throughout the week. It wasn’t always like this—not seeing each other despite us living together—but I suppose this is what happens when setting roots a long way from home. We have new and different routines and responsibilities now. Life here in Canada isn’t the same—there are no parties and competitive karaoke, three-month-long Christmas celebrations, street parades, or Jollibee.

At half past nine, my father knocks on my door and calls, “*Sam, mangaon na* (Sam, it’s time to eat).” The smell of freshly cooked omelette and steamed rice beckons me to the dining table, which my mother has set.

“*Mata na imong manghod?* (Is your brother awake?)” she asks.

“Should be up in a second,” I answer.

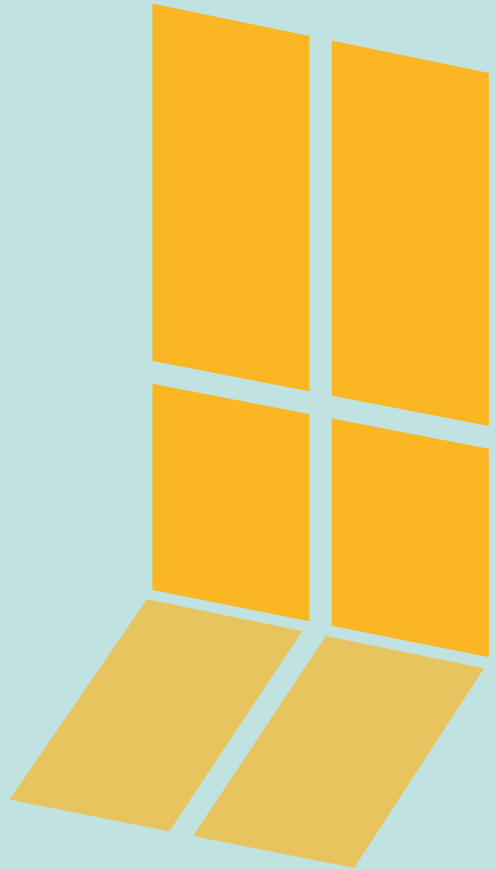
My brother walks out of his room sluggishly in his worn-out red hoodie. “You’re up early,” I say to him.

He smirks. “Makin’ sure you don’t stuff everything up inside those cheeks.”

“*Sige na, lingkod namo* (Go ahead and sit down),” my dad says.

With every bite, we exchange stories and talk about all the places we plan to go to.

“We can bus around Europe,” My mom says to us, her mouth curving into a playful smile.



“I really want to go to Santorini,” I chime in.

“Soon, when all is settled for us. But today, where should we go?”

My father, in his mischievous way, says, “*Ay! Wala, manlimpyo ta!* (Nowhere! We’ll clean the house!)”

Laughter fills the room, a sound that echoes between the walls, reminding me to relish the moment.

As Sunday gives way for the night, I often wonder why the best days seem to end the quickest. I lie in bed anxiously, arms crossed over my head as I stare at the ceiling, waiting for the next day. It wasn’t always like this, but at least I’ll always have Sunday to be thankful for a home away from home. •

# Volunteer Victoria



Words by **Lisa Mort-Putland**

**V**olunteers are the heartbeat of a community, not only here in Greater Victoria but also in communities across the country and around the world. At Volunteer Victoria, our mission is to inspire people to volunteer locally and to promote volunteerism.

Volunteer Victoria offers free volunteer advising services to new and experienced volunteers of all ages and stages of life. We help people explore their individual needs, schedules, and passions, and then help them find a volunteer position (or volunteer positions) to align with their goals. For some people, this means volunteering to get to know people and the community better, or just to have fun. For others, volunteering is a tool to learn or practice English, to build new skills, or to become leaders in their new community. There are many reasons to volunteer, but most people donate their time because they want to give back and make a difference.

In Canada, volunteerism is considered a value and not just an activity. According to Statistics Canada's 2018 General Social Survey: Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 80% of Canadians volunteer formally or informally each year. Informal volunteering is when a person helps a neighbour, family member, friend, or stranger on a casual basis and there is no application process or barriers to participation. During COVID, many people volunteered informally for the first time and participated in activities such as delivering groceries, checking in on neighbours, or helping to promote an idea or activity online or in person. Volunteering informally is a great way to get to know your neighbours and community without making a big time commitment.

COVID-19 impacted many formal volunteering programs. Volunteer Victoria's March 2021 survey of local organizations revealed that the pandemic displaced 63,000 volunteers in this region. While the shift was difficult, it now means that there are new and different ways to volunteer safely, either in person or online. Most of the people who volunteer formally align themselves with a cause or an organization that matters to them. People complete an application form and are assessed before being approved to register as a volunteer in a specific volunteer position. Many people volunteer formally to share their skills, to build new skills, or to make connections in the community. Formal volunteering provides many supports and benefits that are not available through informal volunteering, such as receiving training, working with a team of colleagues, receiving a reference, or having a formal volunteer position to add to a resumé.

No matter when, how, or where you may choose to volunteer, we want you to know that every volunteer brings value and is valued. Volunteers bring a broad range of expertise and experiences to the community, and we could not be more grateful that newcomers, refugees, and immigrants share their time, talents, and ideas.

To learn more about volunteering or to book an appointment with a volunteer advisor, please visit [volunteervictoria.bc.ca](http://volunteervictoria.bc.ca), or email [volvic@volunteervictoria.bc.ca](mailto:volvic@volunteervictoria.bc.ca) •



أهلا بك

خوش آمدید

Olá

Hola

xin chào

Welcome.



**Belfry**  
Theatre



# café

## new canadians



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meet  
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