

Saroj Sharma

[Start of recorded material]

Saroj Sharma: Hi, my name is Saroj Sharma. I came from India in 1969.

On leaving India

Saroj Sharma: I was very adventurous. That was the beauty of it. When I left, I don't think my family or friends ever thought that I would ever make it. I'm sure my family had more doubts than anybody, being the youngest in the family. [01:00:34:01]

But I came here and I already had the job. I had lots of help from friends and co-workers at the hospital. It made me feel so welcome. Right from the time I landed at the airport to the time I started my job next morning, it was perfect and I had no problem to just slip in and enjoy it. [01:01:03:17]

Impressions of Canada

Saroj Sharma: I had altogether the wrong picture of Canada. To me, Canada was a lot of snow, igloos (which I'm still looking for), and really not enough culture. To my surprise, when I came here, people were very friendly. It was almost like home, same small hills. [01:01:33:02] Of course they are much smaller than I was used to. But I think it was the people who really invited me to say, "Stay here."

For me, people mostly made me welcome because my passion was the profession and the patients. I don't think they expect anything more than compassion from anybody. [01:01:58:11] That was one thing I was looking for, and very little prejudice. There was no problems at all. The main thing was there wasn't enough Indian flavours to eat. Sometimes I couldn't even remember the name to call cumin in English. I knew what we call jira in Hindi, but how can I translate it. Same with coriander. So I had to go there and tell them, "It's like green leaves. You eat it and they're flavourful." [01:02:31:13] "We have no idea ma'am." But however, with time, I learned how to explore and advance my vocabulary to find out.

First career steps

Saroj Sharma: I came here in oncology as a therapist. It's to treat cancer patients. [01:02:59:02] It was beautiful because it was more exploring of the same profession that I was in. Equipment might be a little different, but technique is the same. What I found was, especially when you meet the patients first time, they were so nice because they are really apprehensive and all that. But as they felt better and they felt more comfortable, some of them even started questioning me, "Do you know English?" [01:03:28:20] I said, "My God, we have been friends for the past three

weeks I've treated you. So what did you get?" And I felt, "Did you really understand what I was telling you? That was just to get along." That's about it. But those are the people who have become my best friends over the years. We have shared our happiness and sorrows together.

A different kind of citizenship

Saroj Sharma: **[01:04:08:05]** When I came, since I was a permanent resident, there was no requirement for me to have Canadian citizenship. I thought about it, but still I said, "Why should I leave my Indian citizenship? Why would I be a foreigner in my own country?" because India does not allow dual citizenship.

[01:04:29:00] In grade two, my middle daughter, Anita Sharma, was talking about her social studies class. They were talking about citizenship. She came home and she said, "Mom, are you a Canadian citizen?" I said, "No." She said, "Why not? Am I a Canadian citizen?" I said, "Yes, you were born here. So you are Canadian citizen." She said, "Well, I was talking to my teacher. Do you want to come and talk to my teacher?"

So I went there. I took the time off and we talked. **[01:04:58:23]** She said, "I would love you to have the mock citizenship practice with my students so that they know how the foreigners come in." And that was about 1984, 85, somewhere there. The teacher said, "Whatever you learn in the class, you can discuss with the students and they will learn from there."

[01:05:29:20] At that time, it was very simple; who is the prime minister and all that. So we went through that. I learned it with my students, with my children. Finally, they invited a judge at the school, at the Crichton Park School in Dartmouth. They gave the mock citizenship to them, to all the children who were born in Canada.

They got a little certificate and little paper to say now they are Canadian citizen because they knew more about Canada. **[01:06:02:10]** For me, there was a judge there and it was so nice for him to honour me with the citizenship. I'm so much thankful to my daughter that she got me to do that and I was part of the citizenship for them as well as for myself. I'm a very proud citizen.

Sharing stories

Saroj Sharma: My story is very hopeful. It brings hope to very many people when I share with them. **[01:06:31:14]** It's a success. It says hard work never kills you. If you are a hardworking person, people say, "Oh there aren't any jobs." I say do the hard work, do the leg work. You will find something. God has given us two hands and two feet. Walk in mine, and find something, what you can do it.

It gives them some light that no, life is not the ways. It doesn't matter what our parents were, whether they were very well educated or they are not. **[01:07:04:06]** But we can make a difference in the country, in our nation as a lesson to the whole world.

I say Canada is a very beautiful country. Its diversity, its many people. It's just like a little garden with a lot of coloured flowers and different fragrance. How beautiful it looks, just open your eyes and look around, how beautiful country is Canada. **[01:07:30:18]**

[End of recorded material]

Determined to achieve success in her career, Saroj contributed to developing the first nuclear medicine program at the Victoria General Hospital in Halifax. An award in that field now bears her name.