

Most people born on Canadian soil dig deep roots and remain planted. While we may venture outside our borders, we keep our compasses loyally pointed to the True North.

Consistently ranked in the top ten for social progress, Canada comes ahead of the USA, Australia, and the U.K. for personal freedom, choice, mobility, and human needs.

It's why this country attracts immigrants from distinct corners of the world, looking for the same things: economic freedom, opportunity and space, even adventure.

Every immigrant woman profiled for this issue on diversity, tells a bittersweet story of the sadness inherent in leaving behind family, friends, and homeland; the excitement, wonder, and gratitude of landing in Canada; the many challenges—and rewards—of finding her voice in a new nation.

STANDING ONGUARD FOR THEE

BY SHANNON LINDEN

*How
Immigrant
Women
have come
to call
Canada
home*



Marina Dobrynina; RUSSIA

Forty-year old Marina looks like a Russian model with her long, blonde hair, big eyes, and curvaceous figure, yet there's something decidedly Italian about her, with her elegant up-to-the-minute fashion, and penchant for pasta.

Not surprising since Dobrynina says she's a little bit of both—all the while working at becoming a true Canadian.

"My husband and I bought a house and it comes with a backyard," she says, laughing. "I'm trying to like yard work."

Relatively new to Kelowna (she moved five years ago), for Dobrynina, relocating is old hat. Born in Volgograd, the third biggest city in Russia, she left home at eighteen to become a hairstylist in Moscow. "That's where it all happens, in the capital."

A trip to Thailand, where she met her husband of eleven years, set her on a course for new countries. An Italian from Parma,

*Kelowna's women
of the world*

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
MARINA DOBRYNINA FROM RUSSIA,
RENATA WARD FROM BRAZIL
MANDEEP RAI FROM INDIA.
PHOTOGRAPHER: WENDY MCALPINE



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he asked her to move to Italy. She absolutely loved it: the food, the fashion, and the fun, but mastering the language was another matter. After ten years she was feeling more Italian, but the economy wasn't so promising.

Her husband, a chef, now working at Valarosa Foods, had friends in Kelowna who could help him, so they took a gamble and came to the Okanagan.

"Canada is welcoming to all kinds of newcomers," Dobrynina says. "In Italy, they only love you if you're Italian!"

Once again, learning a new language posed the greatest challenge.

"My husband speaks English with a strong Italian accent... I'm still working on mine."

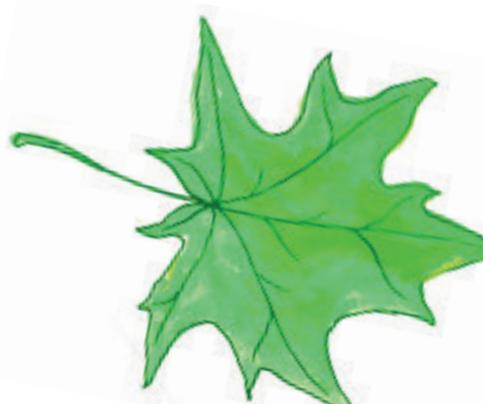
Taking advantage of free tutoring at Project Literacy Kelowna, Dobrynina credits the nonprofit organization with helping her get a better foothold and introducing her first Russian friend. "When you know one Russian, you know the whole community," she jokes.

A lover of the lake, skiing, cycling and yoga, she is at home in Kelowna. Of course she misses her family back in Russia, but she's finding friendship here.

"Canadians are so helpful!" she enthuses. "When you ask, 'Can you help me?' they say yes. In fact they say, 'Can I help you?'"

Employing strategies like writing what she wants in her iPhone and showing clerks who can help, her command of the language continues to grow. Working from home as a hairstylist, she'd love to teach at an academy, and take the higher English courses she's ready for, but all in due time.

For now she is doing great, eh.



Renata Ward; BRAZIL

It was 2008 when then 36-year-old Ward arrived in Montreal. At the time the provincial government was actively recruiting in Brazil and Ward, a mechanical engineer by profession, an adventurer at heart, was thinking about Australia when Quebec came calling.

Right from the start she loved the city, but it was June. When a real Canadian winter descended, she says she might've frozen to death if it weren't for the wisdom and generosity of colleagues at the fabric factory where she was employed.

"I went to the dollar store and bought a toque

and jacket and my workmates told me I had no idea. They got together and gave me winter bedding, proper wear like gloves and a good coat." Coming from steamy South America, it was quite an eye-opener and a heart-warmer. "I could've died running for the subway," she says. "I still have everything for sentimental reasons."

Meeting her husband was the highlight of her new adventure but when he moved her to Kelowna five years ago, she struggled. Her French improved in Montreal, but working at an Okanagan store, it became apparent her English wasn't good enough to get by. "I couldn't understand people, she says sadly. "I couldn't even ask for a coffee."

Perhaps more difficult was coming to terms with the change in her economic and social status. "It's so hard when your degree isn't recognized and you can't speak the language.

In my country you can afford to have help with your house, cleaning, yard-work, I got my nails done. Here it costs so much to do anything."

She says Brazilians are incredibly effusive, maybe partly because they have to line up for everything and pass the time chatting. Parties are prevalent and beach time is part of every day.

"I told my husband to use SPF 60 and he thought he'd be fine because he's a carpenter in Kelowna. He's used to outdoor heat. We went to the beach at 6 AM and were home by 10!"

"I'm used to the nightlife. I want to go to the movie theater and have dinner after. Here it's the opposite. People dress up for work and then wear flip-flops for the night out. Canadians are confusing!"

Like Dobrynina, she's not a fan of yard-work but she does it anyway. She dresses up when she

pleases because that pleases her, but acknowledges it might've been easier for her husband to immigrate to Brazil.

"We have the beach, we have soccer. We don't make war and we're good with that. Here everyone is running all the time."

Still, she knows the political corruption in Brazil is a problem for the resource rich nation and she appreciates the honesty of Canadians. Getting involved in the local art scene and tutoring students at Project Literacy helps her to feel connected.

She also enjoys speaking her native Portuguese with local Brazilians and is looking to speak more French.

Becoming a Canadian citizen on January 15, 2014, was a turning point for her. "Every time we sing, 'We stand on guard for thee, I start to cry,' she says, smiling. "I'm inspired!"



Mandeep Rai; INDIA

It is truly with a glowing heart that 36-year-old Mandeep recalls her entrance to Canada.

"The air was so fresh!"

More than clean, she soon learned Canada was a place of integrity when she misplaced her purse, packed to the zipper with her Indian passport, jewelry, and money. In a complete panic, she rushed to the lost and found at the Vancouver airport to discover someone had turned it in—nothing taken.

"They asked me for ID but everything was in my purse!" she recalls. "They checked my passport photo and confirmed it was me. I'm so happy, I'm crying! I decided this country is good, so honest!"

She says the purse—and its contents—would be gone in India. "I'd love to meet the person who turned it in!"

Along with her husband, Kam, the couple marvels at how polite and caring Canadians are. "People hold doors open for others. From a

very young age children are taught manners and how important it is to be a good citizen," Kam says.

"In Indian your parents are only proud if you're an engineer or a doctor. Canadians are proud of their kids no matter what. Numbers are important in India, not people."

Working as a cabdriver, Kam appreciates the flexibility his job affords, choosing to drive four days a week, so that he can spend more time with his family.

"My husband makes fresh juice, eats well and exercises every day." Mandeep gestures to a treadmill off the kitchen and a cupboard of Chia seeds. "He makes the kids smoothies. He took care of them while I went to school. He's a good dad."

Educated in Punjab Province, Mandeep continued her aesthetic studies at Marvel College in Kelowna. She now operates Bless Threading House from home, offering traditional Indian procedures, like eyebrow threading, along with hair and nail treatments. She appreciates that women are well respected in Canada.

"Indira Gandhi declared women are equal when she was elected Prime Minister in 1966, so things are slowly changing in India, but in Canada there's more respect for everyone, like the disabled and the elderly."

Kam proposed to her in college in the Punjab (she says only about half of marriages are still arranged) and when family in Surrey, BC, offered to sponsor him, the couple decided to emigrate.

They found the big city too busy and are now happy to be in Kelowna, where they can easily travel to see family, but have made new friends at the Okanagan Sikh Temple, where openness and avocation of human rights fit nicely with Canadian culture.

"This country is beautiful. The people are beautiful—the only issue I have is how easily they get divorced," Kam says. "If you're going to have children, you stay together."

"We speak Punjabi at home." Mandeep nods, noting it's important the couples' children, nine-year old Aileen and six-year old Aemanjid, learn English and their parents' native tongue.

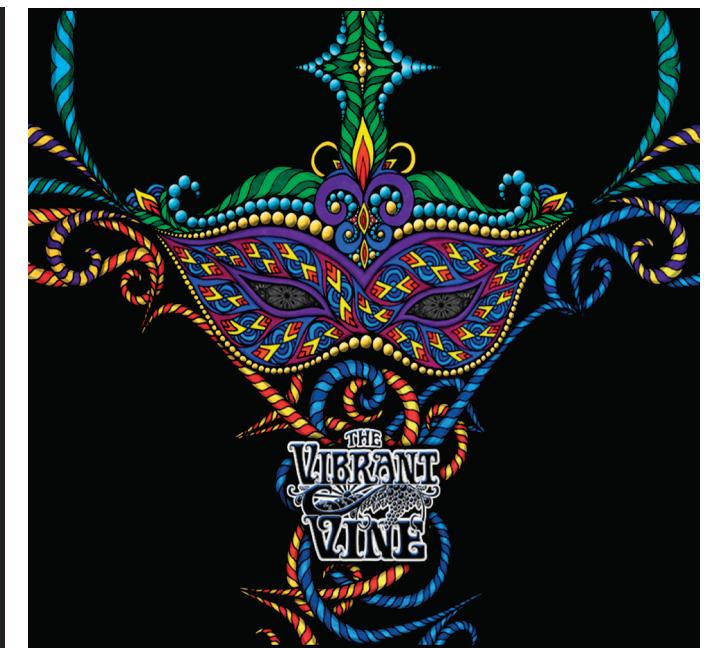
"But they know some Hindu, too," Kam adds, grinning. "From watching Bollywood on TV."

"After about five years you slowly, slowly cut yourself off from India," he admits, "and you build a life here. In India they work for money. I don't want more money; I want a life."

Now that sounds Canadian.

Need information on immigrant services? See the Kelowna Community Resources page: kcr.ca/immigrant-services or call: (250) 763-8008.

For information on free English and Math tutoring, check out projectliteracykelowna.org. or call: (250) 762-2163.



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