

The beauty of dual citizenship

I have two homes to claim as my own

BY SANJIDA RASHID

‘WHERE are you from? Like, *really* from?” is a question most ethnic people are familiar with. This question can often be paired with a nervous demeanor, one that is telling of an individual treading lightly to avoid any offence. It can also often be paired with an ignorant attitude, one that assumes that you couldn’t possibly be from here. However familiar it is to me now, at one point, the answer to this question didn’t come quite so easily.

If you ask my parents, people who left their home country of Bangladesh in their late twenties, they will tell you that their home is Bangladesh. Most people who immigrated later in their life will die swearing their home country is their home, even if they’ve spent the majority of their lives elsewhere.

For someone like me, who left Bangladesh at seven months old, this question is more complex. I often answer in a roundabout way, saying I was born in Bangladesh, but raised in Canada. It’s hard for people like me to claim to be from the place you were born rather than the place you were raised.

Many who immigrated young don’t have strong connections with their countries of origin. However, this connection lives in me. It lives in me through the connections I have with my distant family living in Bangladesh, the ones I look forward to seeing after years that make the two-day voyage worth it. It lives



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in me through the language my favourite childhood songs are sung in, the same language I speak in to those closest to me. It lives in me through the food my mother makes, the same food made lovingly by “aunties” that aren’t related to me, but take me under their wing all the same because we share this very same country of origin.

This connection to Bangladesh and to immigrants lives in me every time I see a headline that calls out my people. When I see the news painting immigrants in a broad stroke as lazy, belligerent, and unproductive to society, I think of my own parents who worked so very hard to get here and stay here. When I see immigrants being underestimated for speaking their second language in an accent, not being seen for their worth, or not getting the opportunities they deserve, I am re-

mindful of my undeniable connection to my country of origin. I am innately empathetic to those under fire because of my tangible connection to Bangladesh and immigrants. Bangladesh, though I do not live in it, is home.

Canada, too, is my home. When you immigrate young, you may feel almost guilty for thinking so. Your parents, like mine, may insistently puff out their chests and swear allegiance to a country that hasn’t been home to them either for some time. Despite their pride, they love Canada too.

Having first moved to Toronto, my parents hardly felt like they’d left Bangladesh at all! They were delighted to find a city littered with culture, shops reminiscent of the ones they’d grown up with, and a community of people just like them — the only thing missing was the actual litter!

Moving to Thunder Bay was an adjustment, but even in a smaller town in Northwestern Ontario, they found a community once more. They embraced the community of Bengali immigrants, and the community of Thunder Bay as a whole. In true Canadian spirit, they were embraced in return. I suppose that that’s the beauty of dual citizenship; two homes to claim as my own.

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