

Biases found in surprising places

BY FARAZ KHORSANDI

I COME from Esfahan, Iran, and growing up, education and intellectual curiosity were cornerstones of our household. But even within this nurturing environment, I encountered an early lesson on how deeply ingrained biases can be.

When I was nine, my grandparents welcomed new neighbours who had moved from a different part of the city. Their children and I quickly became friends, spending weekends laughing, playing, and building memories.

Over time, I started picking up bits of their accent — a subtle but inevitable outcome of our time together. One day, my mother noticed and sat me down for a talk. She gently suggested I reconsider spending so much time with them, hinting that their differences might not be ideal for me.

I knew something about it felt wrong. ‘Why did it matter?’ I thought to myself. ‘We’re just kids playing together. They are my friends.’

That moment made me realize something; biases, whether subtle or overt, can exist even in the minds of those who value education and fairness. Racism, I learned, is often invisible, hiding behind societal norms and personal assumptions.

Years later, I carried this lesson with me when I arrived in Canada as an international student.

Like many others, I had been told that Canada was a haven of multiculturalism and acceptance — a place where racism was the last thing I’d have to worry about. And for the most part, that’s true. But beneath the surface of this warm welcome, I began to notice things — little comments, offhand remarks, and stereotypes that reminded me of the subtle biases I’d seen growing up.

Starting to work, I could feel how people of colour and marginalized groups were treated



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

The Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Equity Advisory Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario

differently, how they didn’t get equal opportunities.

For instance, I’ve watched my Indian peers smile politely through remarks like, “Are you studying computer science?” — a subtle but reductive stereotype; or how BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) workers often faced tougher shifts in the service industry, while others received lighter tasks and more flexibility. These moments weren’t just frustrating — they were disheartening, a quiet reminder of how deeply systematic biases can shape everyday interactions and opportunities.

Thunder Bay deepened my understanding of systemic prejudice, especially its impact on Indigenous communities. I learned of its label as Canada’s “murder capital,” a stigma disproportionately affecting Indigenous peoples. Reflecting on my own experiences, I saw that while the biases I faced were subtler, the harm felt similar. Prejudice, no matter how it appears, always leaves a lasting mark.

As president of the Lakehead University Student Union, I’ve made it a priority to foster dialogue and inclusivity on campus. Leadership, I believe, is about creating spaces where everyone feels valued. But change doesn’t only come from programs or policies. It starts with

self-reflection.

I’ve had to ask myself tough questions: Am I doing enough? Am I truly listening to others? Am I thinking correctly? These are questions everyone should ask themselves.

Bias often hides in places we don’t expect, and it takes effort to uncover it, let alone confront it. It is like an autopilot on a plane — it can guide you smoothly, but if it’s set incorrectly or left unchecked, it can steer you far off course. To stay on track, you must periodically question the settings, take control when needed, and ensure the autopilot aligns with your true destination.

My journey from Esfahan to Thunder Bay has taught me one lesson: real change starts with small actions. A conversation. A moment of reflection. A decision to treat someone with curiosity instead of judgment. These are the steps that lead to understanding, and understanding is what builds stronger communities.

Thunder Bay has the potential to be a place where diversity isn’t just accepted — it’s celebrated. That’s the kind of city I want to live in, and I hope you do, too.

Faraz Khorsandi is a passionate community leader who serves as the president of the Lakehead University Student Union. With a master of science degree in civil engineering from Lakehead University, he combines his technical expertise with a deep passion for advocacy, cultural awareness, and fostering inclusivity. Khorsandi is committed to creating spaces that encourage collaboration and understanding, believing that meaningful change stems from education, leadership, and ongoing self-reflection. Through his work, he strives to empower others and build a stronger, more united community. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.