

**Notes of March 15th, 2011 Newcomer Advisory Group meeting  
Prepared by Jason Stabler, Coordinator**

Muhammad Saleem Shaikh gave a presentation about how and why he came to Canada and what he has learned and done since arriving here over 50 years ago.

Muhammad was born in India and moved to Pakistan as part of the Muslim exodus in 1947 where he was trained as an engineer. He arrived in Montreal in 1959 by ship and then arranged overland travel to Winnipeg where he had his first Canadian job.

He described the cultural challenges he faced as a Muslim and South Asian man in Canada. Cultural challenges began on the ship on his journey to Canada where the expression 'lovely day' conveyed by British man was confusing because in Pakistan, people do not talk about the weather and they escape, rather than celebrate the sun. It took him six months in Canada to understand what this meant.

In Montreal he first encountered issues with food. He sometime ordered two meals by mistake (e.g. he ordered 'black pudding' for desert). Not only was this blood pudding not dessert it was made of blood—it wasn't sweet like he was expecting and it was contrary to his cultural norm (i.e. to not eat blood). His first experience with hot dogs led him to believe they were made of dog meat. Ice cream cones were foreign too. He was accustomed to eating ice cream from a bowl. As such he threw out the cone, until someone pointed out to him that it was meant to be eaten.

Another example of learning about cultural difference was when he was invited to social event in evening. He didn't eat beforehand because in Pakistan if you are invited into someone's home you will be fed. The party however had only finger food and being to polite to ask to be fed more substantially, he went hungry that evening.

The dating system was another interesting cultural difference for him. In India there were arranged marriages, in Pakistan, contract marriages, however there are courtship marriages—a concept he found strange. In Pakistan taking out a daughter is a cultural faux pas. Women are covered and do not go out in public without male accompaniment. The notion of bowing on one knee to propose was also foreign. It was a humiliating concept to him.

Language was also an issue. When he dressed up to go out to movie and his landlord said, “you look good”. He said back to her, “you look good even when you are not dressed up”. The unintended ‘double entendre’ was met with laughter by his landlord.

He learned English from watching TV and reading a newspaper once per week. Shortly after he arrived in Canada his goal became saving money, learning English and then going to University. After working many jobs in Winnipeg and Thompson Manitoba, he eventually saved enough money to go to university.

After graduating he got a job teaching in Scarborough Ontario where he taught for 30 years. Today he calls teaching his true calling. During his time in Canada he has helped his family to move to and adjust to Canada by offering them loans, giving them strategies to improve their English, helping to read maps and encouraging them to take whatever jobs come along. When he retired from teaching he moved to Peterborough. Since arriving in Peterborough he has been active in the community through educating people about Islam and promoting inter-faith dialogue and co-operation through his involvement with the Abraham Festival. He admits that Peterborough is not as welcoming as Toronto is, but he is committed to remaining in the community and to contribute to the work needed to be done to make Peterborough more welcoming.

**Next meeting:** Tuesday, May 17, 5-7 pm, at the NCC Board Room

Please encourage newcomers you know to attend.