

Enlightening stories from migrants

HOMELANDS

Journeys and experiences
from motherlands to New Zealand

THEN & NOW



by Ingrid van Amsterdam
on behalf of Migrant Connections Taranaki

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Ingrid van Amsterdam

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Foreword

'HOMELANDS THEN & NOW' was produced by Migrant Connections Taranaki (MCT) New Plymouth, which is a point of contact for migrants and their families who choose to make Taranaki their new home. We are a community based initiative aimed at a broader migrant focus which includes skilled and non-skilled migrants and families.

MCT assists migrants to get accustomed with the shift in culture, to overcome challenges in a new country and integrate into the local community by providing ongoing support on a case by case basis with the skills, tools and networks you require to do so.

As a coordinator, I have worked closely with local people, migrants and refugees to encourage and support their participation and inclusion in the community and to help them to achieve their goals. I like working with migrants in Taranaki and help them with their challenges and issues to settle successfully in New Plymouth.

New Plymouth is a diverse mix of ethnic communities and there are people from around seventy countries living in our region. This book provides an increased understanding of people's culture and how well they integrated into New Zealand. Migrants come to New Zealand for various reasons and do face a lot of challenges when uprooted from their culture and country of origin. They develop a sense of belonging with their new community over the years. People from various countries have contributed their stories to this book: Jordan, Chile, Zimbabwe, France, Germany and India.

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Geetha Kutty
Coordinator
Migrants Connections Taranaki

Maha Al-Fayyad



JORDAN



Places Maha used
to live in Jordan

Irbid
Only stone is used
for building
(above, right, below)
Wind energy in
Irbid (below)



Amman by night
(right)



Maha is a beautiful woman I had the pleasure of meeting with at a local cafe to tell me about her story. She is wearing a hijab - pronounced 'he-djaab' or /hɪ'dʒɑːb/ according to phonetic spelling in the online dictionary and is Arabic for 'head cover'. It is most distinctive and as a Western woman myself it really made me wonder what makes a woman want to wear a hijab, what could be hidden underneath, and why.

Maha is a modern woman who comes from Jordan, in the Middle East. It is not a country most westerners are familiar with so I was very interested to find out more.

She is married to Hashem Talafha, and they have four sons, aged from 14 to 4. Both Maha and Hashem are professional people. Their stories are both different and typical at the same time.

Hashem has a Master's Degree in Animal Production gained in Jordan. Maha has a Degree in Law and practiced as a lawyer for six years in Jordan before coming to New Zealand.

When still in Jordan, Hashem had often thought about moving to Australia or New Zealand to do research. After finishing his degree, he did some research to find out where his skills could be needed and discovered that New Zealand had a very good farming industry. He applied for, and was accepted for a job at Inghams, a New Zealand poultry producer.

Maha however knew nothing about New Zealand or where it was. She thought we might speak Spanish. To move or not to move was a difficult decision for her. In Jordan she had a successful business as a lawyer with a good clientele base and was becoming well known in the legal industry. Then there were her family and friends, and she and Hashem had already had their first son who was two years old at the time. Thinking they might be in New Zealand for a couple of

years before going back to Jordan, Maha chose to go with Hashem. It was worth exploring at least.

They immigrated to Matamata in 2006 where they lived and worked for a number of years. Then Hashem was relocated for his job to Tokoroa where they lived for a year, until he accepted a job in New Plymouth at Tegel.

The move to New Zealand was relatively easy for Hashem - already having organised a job and working full time meant he was getting to know people there. The only time when it was hard for him while in New Zealand was when his parents (who lived in Jordan) died eight months apart from each other. He realised then he hadn't spent much time with them.

For Maha the experience was quite different. It was nice in the beginning, in a supporting environment. But she had to face the fact she didn't have a job anymore and had to be a full time housewife, which wasn't who she remembered herself to be - it wasn't *her*.

When taking her son to play centre, it was hard to relate to other mothers because of the language. She says: "I remember one time when there was laughter but because I missed parts of conversation, it gave them the impression that I probably didn't have much of a sense of humour. And when one of the mothers asked about my country and religion I just didn't have the words to explain. She thought I was rude and probably thought she wasn't supposed to ask about my religion."

She had no luck applying for jobs, and English was an issue. Maha then decided to study English which she did online. In addition she also began to watch TV to become more familiar with the English language.

In 2007 Maha made the decision to study business and started an immigration business which she operated for three years. She would find work for other immigrants, do the visas, and bring them to New Zealand. Whilst enjoying her work, the law changed which meant that she needed a licence to be able to perform those duties. In her heart Maha felt and knew she needed to study but was reluctant. A qualification gained in New Zealand would only be useful inside NZ and not overseas.

Instead of studying Maha started up her second business, a Jordanian takeaway shop, the biggest motive being the Mediterranean food both she and Hashem missed from Jordan.

Mediterranean food is very similar to Turkish food. One dish Maha loves is Shawarma - similar to a Turkish kebab but with different spices. She also loves vine leaves stuffed with rice and mince, oil and tomato, as well as courgettes and other similar vegetables, stuffed in the same way as vine leaves. Another specific food to Jordan is Mansaf: rice with almond and pine nuts with meat on top (usually lamb or chicken), with a yoghurt sauce cooked with chicken stock and special spices.

The takeaway shop in Tokoroa did well until Maha became pregnant. It was a big commitment to manage the shop on her own, with her husband working full time. Family life was suffering. Spending more time with her family with now three children was essential. Not able to keep working in the shop from early mornings to late nights Maha needed to hire staff and teach them how to cook authentic Jordanian food. This proved to be quite a challenge: "I employed a lady who could do my job but she wasn't able to do what I told her because she didn't understand the culture of Mediterranean food. I started to realise how hard it was to find an employee who could do the job to those same standards.'



Some of the Jordanian dishes.
 Stuffed chicken with rice and spice, stuffed
 vine, stuffed courgette with yoghurt sauce,
 roasted vegetables with chicken (above)
 Mansaf (top, middle, bottom left)
 Ouzie (bottom right)



Around that time they moved to New Plymouth where Hashem found a job at Tegel Foods as Production Manager. Although Maha's English was good now, she still found it difficult to find work - it was frustrating as she found she couldn't even get a job in a library.

To improve her chances of employment, Maha started to study to gain a diploma in business, which enabled her to get a job as grocery assistant in New World Supermarket even though she knew she could do much better. She asked to meet with her employer to explain her situation and her professional qualifications. "I told him I needed to step up and asked him if there were any opportunities - if there was a chance to step up." He asked her to write down what she could do for him to make the company run better.

They had a good working relationship in which Maha proved to be a great problem solver, and within a month Maha was given the job as Lead Buyer for the company. "That was so good for me. I kept growing with the business. Every time something happened I was able to analyse problems, find solutions and wrote reports. I felt very passionate about analysing the business and trouble shooting."

After having worked in New World Supermarket for almost three years and completing her diploma in business management she had her fourth baby. "I missed my family and my mum very much at the time and felt so overwhelmed."

Maha had had enough and wanted to visit her family. She felt she had made herself very flexible following her husband everywhere he had been appointed as he was the main income earner.

The challenges they faced in New Zealand put a lot of strain on Maha's and Hashem's relationship affecting it in negative as well as positive ways: "In the beginning we were stressed because it was a big move and we were stressed having to deal with our residency

and this and that. That affected our relationship negatively but then going through all that hard life together and solving problems together while being the only support to each other, that strengthened the relationship a lot. So now our relationship is really strong.”

In 2015 Maha went back to Jordan with her four children. After living in New Zealand for nine years Maha found herself to be estranged from her motherland. This was not the country she remembered it to be from the time she left - the country she missed and where she lived, ten years ago. “I felt like a stranger and had to start from scratch again.” Having to start all over and finding work was hard. Maha recalls: “I decided to go back to Jordan for the children to learn the culture, and if I found something there, we might just stay there. Surprisingly, after six months, I started to miss New Zealand. I started to miss the people I knew, my work, my daily routine. I was growing and changing, but also Jordan was growing and changing.”

The children faced their own challenges. Three of them were born in New Zealand whereas the oldest one was only two and a half years old when they immigrated. They had problems in Jordanian schools because they didn't know how to speak Arabic properly and didn't know how to read and write in Arabic. Maha explains: “Education is very hard in Jordan - a very hard job for children. It's very advanced, very very advanced - like mathematics, science, all these big subjects - really advanced. Because competition is really high, to find a job you have to have a Masters Degree. In Jordan a Master's Degree is not a big deal because a lot of people have a Master's Degree. You have to be like PhD or have a really good background.”

The children miss their family a lot. “They love their grandparents. My youngest son asked me when we are going back to Jordan. New Zealand is a really far away country. Tickets to everywhere are really

expensive, so that's the main challenge for us. The money side is the biggest challenge." If they did decide to go it would have to be in the school holidays during the New Zealand winter months. "When we went in 2015 it cost about \$10,000 and to pay all that money for only two weeks it's not worth it. When school finishes here it's winter in Jordan - it's snow, it's cold. It's very hot in summer and very cold in winter. It would be nice to be able to visit the family." Otherwise the children are very happy. New Zealand is their home where they go to school and have their friends. After a year and a half in Jordan they came back in 2016 and decided to stay here, in New Zealand.

New Zealand is Maha's home now too. Upon returning to New Zealand, Maha qualified as a Professional Coach. She now owns a professional coaching business in which she consults with businesses to help them become more successful, grow, and move to the next level but in a way that inspires them in new cultures, diversity, and acceptance of differences. She says: "Employees and employers are happy because they get results, and that is my focus. It has to do with cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence. My strategy is not just to employ migrants, but also to train them. Businesses can grow their businesses by using immigrants' skills they may not be aware of."

She hopes that it will make it easier for migrants to get a job once businesses have worked with her. Maha is now in the process of researching why businesses find it challenging to employ migrants who may have qualifications but have an open visa. She wants to know how can we help them fit in and if they need any training. "We need to know what is needed so we can train them to fit better in the business. I hope that that way we will close the gap between migrants and Kiwis, or Kiwi businesses."

She says that it's fair enough if New Zealand employers want to give New Zealanders first option when employing people. Sometimes



Maha with her sisters and two sons Mohammad and Ameer during Eid Al-Fitr celebrations back home in Irbid.



Wild fig, Maha's most favourite fruit with Irbid in the background.

however we still have migrants who are highly skilled but often don't get the opportunity, simply because they come from a different culture. "If they are willing to get training, if they are willing to improve, then I think they must get the chance. It would be beneficial to bring in different people. Every culture has a different work culture, and work attitude. If we get the right attitude and the right culture in the right position, that would be an extra benefit. To find these differences might help businesses put them in the right place and therefore will benefit. You have to embrace differences in a good way. Because every culture has a goodness in it we have to highlight this goodness and we will have a very rich community. Better businesses, better communities."

Over all of the twelve years Maha has been in New Zealand she has not experienced any problems personally within the communities she has lived in, other than two or three incidents through sheer ignorance. "The way I looked at myself made it easier for other people to accept me for who I am", she says. Only three or four times over the last twelve years people have said something to her. On these occasions it has seemed that those people had their own issues, were teenagers, or someone trying to offend her based on religion in that theirs was better than hers. None of these incidents have had a negative impact on Maha. She laughs when she remembers how once in the park there was a young couple who, when seeing Maha and her family, demonstratively starting kissing each other. As far as she is concerned, people are free to do whatever they like.

The Muslim religion is more important for Maha than her country of birth. It's all about values. She emphasises that wearing the hijab has nothing to do with the country, as there are other religions in Jordan including Christianity.

Maha explains that the reason for wearing the hijab is so that a man really needs to get to know the person and personality, and not the body first when they are interested in a woman. It means that when they engage in a friendship they are serious about the girl they are seeing. "A man must be attracted to a girls' brains as well as their bodies." She says that women in general don't look for a man's appearance but rather the character whereas men first look at a woman's body. She chuckles: "No offence to men but women are just more attractive!" She goes even further by stating that it causes less cheating and therefore this will save their relationships and their families.

A lot of people have asked Maha why men don't cover their head and don't have the same rules about dress. For her, the answer is easy (laughs): "Because they are not as attractive as women. When a man sees a woman from a psychological perspective, they get attracted straight away to the body and judge them based on their body before they even talk to them. But ladies don't do that by nature. Ladies look at men's brains first and when that is good enough, they would like to have a relationship. That's why it's ok for a man to not cover."

People have also asked her in the past if more customers would be attracted to her business if she took off her hijab. However wearing the hijab is a belief so this has never been negotiable for Maha.

The hijab doesn't have to be worn all the time. It is only necessary to wear it in the outside world, that is from cousins onwards (as a Muslim woman can get married to her cousin). It is fine not to wear one within the immediate family environment.

In the Muslim religion no sex or sexual relationships are allowed before marriage. You can have friends from the opposite sex, but you can't have a partner, boyfriend or girlfriend. This is all done out

of respect and to protect girls from emotional and physical harm. If you want to get to know each other there are rules which need to be followed.

In Maha's and Hashem's case they were meeting many times, having many serious conversations about interests they had to really get to know and like each other. "My husband and I, we used to meet each other over coffee in a cafe to talk about ourselves and our values and our religions and everything, nothing more than this. Some families, they don't do even that. They have to go through their families. For other families it's ok and they can go out and they can go to the cinema." The only reason to develop a friendship is if a couple wants to talk seriously about their future. "It is all out of respect because girls are not just for... they are very attractive, and not for having fun. A man must pick their brains and their minds, not just their body", she says.

As soon as they have introduced each other to their families they are engaged, and can see each other under supervision. It is a huge commitment and truly shows that a couple are serious about their relationship, willing to take it further and into the future. Maha has talked to her teenage son about relationships and values.

There are other values hugely important to her too and this is what she teaches her children also. These values are directly related to their religion. In the Muslim religion there is no consumption of alcohol or pork. She says: "Alcohol can help you lose your mind. When you consume huge amounts of it it can make you drunk, therefore you better stop even small amounts of it. It is not good in the long run, not good for the brain. Even if you have a small amount all the time it can still do damage over time even if you don't get drunk. The rule here is anything that is going to harm the body you better stop it. Based on that rule now they say smoking



Maha at a museum at the Amman Citadel, a historical site called the castle mountain (above left and right) and in the rainbow street (Amman) which, as the name suggests, is very colourful. It has cafes, street music at summer and nice views, but it is not coloured specifically for any celebration. I notice that no hijab is worn by the young girl. Maha explains that the hijab is a must once girls have periods but not before that. (below)



belongs to the same group (as pork) and is harmful to the body. The limit is different for each person and therefore it is best to avoid consumption of these items altogether."

Maha explains: "The pig is not healthy to eat for humans. Like the Indian cultures, Islam religion is about energies and therefore pork contains a lot of negative energies. We are responsible for the mind, body and soul - everything we do in the Muslim religion is to purify us."

She is not one to push her religion onto other people because religion is a free choice. Generally misunderstandings or fear of the Muslim religion and the hijab are created by a lack of knowledge, and people are confused by political events we read or hear about in the news. People tend to generalise quickly. In the Muslim religion people are not supposed to force people to leave their original religion and convert them.

"There's a misconception that people from other religions want Westerners to stop going to their own churches, and that they are 'taking over'. Islam is a growing religion. The problem is when listening to the media it seems that the problem is Islam, but it's not. What we see on TV is politics. In Jordan we have 9-15% of Christians. Before the Israeli people came to Palestine and other Arab countries, there were the Jewish and Muslim and Christian altogether. We have the churches. We never felt any different or any discrimination.

It's only when the wars started they began to highlight these differences to create conflict between people because it's easier to win a war by making conflict in the area. In our religion, if you are in a war and you go to another country you are not allowed to distract a church or a place for worshipping God, doesn't matter which religion it is. That is banned - as is to kill a child, or woman, or an old

person, to cut a tree, or to harm an animal. You are only allowed to fight the soldiers, the army who are fighting you. Unfortunately what happens now is nothing to do with Islam, it's a lot of politics, and I can understand someone in New Zealand being scared of there being too many Muslims suddenly and then we have to force them to do stuff and to take over or I don't know." She laughs at the idea. "Isis does a lot of bad stuff and to the name of Islam and we Muslims are against them because it's not Islam. But someone from a country like New Zealand may never know because you hear that Isis is Muslim."

As Maha's family is Muslim, they pray five times a day and fast in ramadan for a full month. It's not too hard for them to do in New Zealand. She explains that the praying and fasting rituals are helpful for the soul, and help to purify them.

They do like to get together with other Muslims on special occasions especially in the fasting month and during religious celebrations. "In the past I used to meet much more with Jordanians but now only if there is an event or something. I don't have time. But we do socialise also with other Muslims here in the community."

Here in New Zealand they take days off work and school and go to places. "We make cookies and stuff to make the kids feel the celebration, but not everyone is able to do this and the community does a bit of celebration here in New Plymouth."

Religious celebrations are done at the end of the fasting month and at the end of the Arabic year. Each year an Arabic year finishes ten days earlier than the previous year and this is based on the movements of the moon.

One significant celebration is called Eid Al-Fitr, which takes place after a month of fasting which itself is called a 'dry fast', which

means no drinking of water, no smoking and no food from sunrise to sunset. When the fast is over they celebrate for three days. "We dress up, invite each other for dinner or lunch, get all people together and feed each other, and give charity to the poor."



Bread is a staple food in Jordan and an important part of the Jordanian diet. A very traditional type of bread with olive oil and aniseed baked at Eid Al-Fitr (above left) and an authentic Jordanian rotary bread oven (above right)

Qatayef,

A very traditional dessert which is consumed in every household every day during Ramadan.



The next celebration is called Eid Al-Adha, after Haj in Mecca. Haj takes place two and a half months after Eid Al-Fitr during which all Muslims go to Mecca in Saudi Arabia (they do this at least once in their life) and pray. Other people fast for three days. This event is described in the Bible and the Quran. When Haj is finished they do what we know in the western world as Easter. Sheep or beef is slaughtered or bought and fed to the poor. She says: "We all are encouraged to bring a sheep or cow to sacrifice on the day and feed the poor people. But you don't have to if you don't have money."

Another Jordanian tradition is the Dabkeh. This is an Arabian dance in which people dance in a circle holding hands and is done at happy occasions such as weddings or other celebrations. "The music is very different than here. It is Arabic and Turkish and Arabic mix. We use western instruments but also Arabic instruments such as the Oud, a string instrument, the Tabla, a kind of drum, and Qanun, a big square string instrument which lays flat when played.

In Jordan these celebrations are big days and everyone goes off and on the street and visit each other. They are big socialising events, and not just for the family.

María Cárcamo



CHILE

The first thing that springs to mind when I see María is her warm, bubbly personality. She and her family come from Punta Arenas, at the bottom of Chile. Punta Arenas is Spanish for Sandy Point, which it was called by old English historians and therefore named as such in some history books.

In my mind I had always imagined Chile as a warm and hot country, immediately associating the name 'Chile' with the spicy hot chilli used in many cuisines, and not with 'chilly', as in cold temperatures. María is quick to point out that the word is pronounced as 'chee-lih' or /tʃɪl.i/ according to the International Phonetic Alphabet, and not like the spice! And no, where they come from it's not at all a hot climate. The weather in Punta Arenas, Chile is quite rough and cold, windy and snowy although it is not as wet as we are used to here in New Zealand. Compared to Chile the weather in New Zealand is much more moderate.

When the family came to New Zealand it was winter time, which in comparison to Chile wasn't very cold even if there they were having the same season, being in the same part of the hemisphere. María was struggling with the humidity. "It killed me", she says. "I was feeling like even with three or four layers I was still feeling cold despite the fact that we have a good heating system. But now I am more used to it and for me the temperature in winter is like summer. It's like being in a paradise, back at home it used to be fourteen or fifteen degrees in summer. Eighteen is the maximum. Twenty if it was really hot! And that would only happen once or twice a year. Fifteen was more average in summer of a good day. Here in New Zealand it can be thirty degrees and I am struggling with the heat. I can't do much exercise here if it's too hot, because I'm not used to the heat and humidity combined. I don't work well with that. With the New Zealand winter temperature I can do everything. If I would like to swim I would here because it wouldn't be that cold."

María and her husband's main interest in moving to New Zealand in 2013 was to improve their English. In Chile María taught English at kindergarten, primary, and secondary level and to adults during evening classes so she had the advantage of already being familiar with the language before they came even if it was 'school English'. In Chile it's compulsory to learn English, which they teach two hours per week. In private schools they have English three or four times a week so you can get two or three jobs at once, in different schools. She recalls: "I was working with the little ones in kindergarten till secondary education, and with adults in evening classes for people who haven't finished their secondary education. So I am very passionate about teaching different ages." In her teaching María mainly focused on grammar, writing and reading but not on speech because in Chile there are no English speaking natives and spoke English with colleagues or students only. When María first came here however she couldn't understand the language mainly because of the New Zealand accent, English being her second language. Being in New Zealand was a great way to learn as they would be surrounded by the language and be exposed one hundred percent.



María's husband is an electrical engineer who works as a panel operator at Methanex, an international company where he started almost twenty years ago in Chile. He was asked to transfer for six months to New Zealand, almost ten years ago in 2008. That is when María and their two sons now aged twenty and fifteen, came to visit and fell in love with the country. "We came for one month when my husband was working here. We came back to live here in 2013 which is when my husband accepted a permanent position in New Zealand even though enjoying his work in Chile. It was the perfect opportunity for the family to learn fluent English." María explains: "We didn't have plans to come back to New Zealand but it was because of the gas crisis in South America so it was an opportunity, and we just took it." Everybody in the family felt the same way. They looked forward to improve their English and enjoy nature. After their first visit to New Zealand they knew that it was an easy country to live in.

Their oldest son was also passionate about studying overseas, wanting to challenge himself in his second language. He had studied English back at home, in Chile. He was in love with New Zealand and said that he would like to study in a country where English is spoken. María thinks that her oldest son has already achieved the goal of improving his English. She says: "He's very good at what he does at uni and very competent in English and in all the subjects he's taking."

Since their arrival he found that it was quieter here, despite the fact that Punta Arenas and New Plymouth are similar. "Our city in Chile was as small as New Plymouth, but we are night people", María says, "and we have more people with the population of Chile almost four times higher than in New Zealand." He was almost ten years old when they first came to New Zealand and told her that he thought the children are happier here, seeing children play outside in the backyard. In Chile they aren't able to, as the weather is much

rougher. It's windier, colder, snowy and rainy - although not as much rain as here, according to María. This kind of weather is common all year round because they are closer to the Antarctic in latitude, and therefore in New Zealand in winter they don't feel as cold.

As María had been working in education she wanted to know how the system here worked, so they decided to visit some schools just to get an idea. The education system in New Zealand is quite different from the one in Chile, where you study in the morning until lunch, to continue in the afternoon until six o'clock in the evening. Seeing how things work here in New Zealand meant the children were very enthusiastic to go to school, since they wouldn't have classes in the afternoon, and therefore have more time for themselves outside of school. They felt everything here was much easier compared to Chile, where they get homework every day and tests every week. "Without books", María points out. "In Chile we have a very strict education system."

The children are fluent in English now. It was a very big challenge because in Chile they learnt British English. When they first came here the older son said that he couldn't understand anything. His mum reassured him: "I told him not to worry as this happened to me too, and I studied English at university. I felt like I had forgotten everything. I couldn't decipher it. I couldn't get the accent. I told him don't panic. It was a big challenge for all of us. He didn't understand the older people much. But to the younger people he was very good, probably because of the age gap." For María it was the other way around: "I couldn't understand a word when he was speaking with his mates at home: 'What language do they speak? It's not English, it's not Kiwi English. When I started to go to Jean Sandel I realised that the old people speak differently. I can even understand the words I didn't know before attending those meetings. It's a wide bridge. It's so difficult to catch up with young people. They are speaking their own slang. Now my son is able to

understand anyone no matter what age or nationality. All the teachers at uni and secondary school say that he has a very strong accent. But his English is quite good and they still give excellent marks to him. He received a scholarship to go to uni, so all his efforts paid off. He read many, many books in the first six months of being in New Zealand to learn vocabulary.”



Proud parents María and husband with their oldest son

The youngest son had different challenges when they came here to live. At that time he was ten years old. To him it felt like there was just play at school, unlike school time in Chile where there were tests and readings. It only took him a few minutes to complete tasks handed out by the teacher in New Zealand. At that time his English was still very poor so he found it hard to explain why he was so fast with his school work. He felt somewhat frustrated and confused, María confides. All of the material presented to him here at school

he had already seen two years earlier, so there was nothing new to learn for him. He wondered what was going on because he didn't have anything to do, academically.

His mother María was supportive. She explained to him to be patient and try to see the positive side now he had more time to enjoy life after school. She wondered if maybe they had made a mistake in coming to New Zealand. She recalls: "But then I realised it was just different. Here I think that the education puts emphasis on the social side of the person which is good. In Chile we put ninety percent emphasis on the academic stuff."

Even if their son says he's bored he has still maintained his work ethic. "I was afraid of them going haywire or astray - especially the youngest one because he's a bit more relaxed in general. So you've got two children but they are still very different. Very different personalities. The same happens with countries and people. We are just different. We are never going to be like a Kiwi." She feels that even if they've been living here five years, and even ten or twenty years later, they will never be a Kiwi. "Because you got your other roots", she says. "I think when you move to another country and you are one or two years old, maybe."

María's lifestyle has changed considerably since living in New Zealand. "I used to be very stressed in Chile", she says. "When I came home from teaching at almost seven or eight o'clock at night every day I used to have to check the homework of the students for the next day or their tests. I was very busy even when being at home after school." María is passionate about working with children and that shows in her commitment: "Of course they still have certain priority. If a student wants to speak with you after classes, you must speak with him."

While living in Chile, apart from her daytime job María had evening jobs some days of the week which meant she was always busy and the children didn't see her. She feels very lucky that they are quite responsible and that they were the best in their studies every year without any supervision from mum. "The children have taken their responsibility to achieve their goals. I want them to be happy. It doesn't matter what they want to do as long as they put their effort in and become good at what they do. Whatever they want to study or even if they don't want to study, if they are happy, I will be happy." She continues proudly: "They are still independent. I don't need to check if they have done their homework or projects or if they have an assessment to submit. Since the very beginning I tried to teach them to be independent because I saw myself too busy with forty six students per classroom, with ten classes - four hundred and fifty students a year. Some of them used to have two or three brothers and I used to learn every name. I was never confused calling a boy by his brother's name. Never in my life.

I think the effort is a family effort. All of us have made some different sacrifices. All of us left someone home. Maybe they are missing their grandparents. The grandparents are the ones who spoiled them. We weren't very good at spoiling them. We were more strict. But those times are now paying off as they have been successful here, with another language. The youngest came with no English at all."

In New Zealand María speaks Spanish at home with her Chilean husband. She says: "In my opinion I am the weakest in English now because my other members of the family are in an English environment every day. It's different. Every day they speak twelve hours in English, compared to me two or three hours a day. Of course I have friends, but I am not with them the whole day. It's not the same as having an English speaking partner or husband who speaks English as a native speaker.

María can work here as a volunteer but not professionally because her studies are not recognised in New Zealand so being here almost seems like a holiday. After five or six months living in New Zealand María offered her services as a volunteer and started to work at the hospice to clean and wash donated material. After some time she realised it didn't really help her in terms of learning to speak English fluently. She remembers: "I thought: 'I could be doing that in my own house as well. This is not the work I want to do. I wasn't sharing or speaking in English with anyone.'"

Having experience as a teacher, after two years she decided to leave the hospice. On her own accord María went to Central School to help one of the teachers of Spanish there. She says: "Then after one year I taught Spanish as a volunteer at Highlands Intermediate. The subject was not compulsory - they wanted to teach the students something new. But it wasn't part of the curriculum. I just offered myself as a volunteer to teach Spanish at schools because I am passionate about teaching."

You also may have heard María speak on Access Radio Taranaki, presenting a radio program in Spanish about four or five years ago. She says: "I presented a program in the first year. It was recorded, not on air. It was prerecorded. I was required to bring two or three songs in Spanish to make the background for the program. I had to speak about the differences between the education system in Chile and here, and the differences of our culture or about our way of lifestyle or whatever I wanted to speak about. What I used to do there and what I used to do here. Things like that. I was sharing my experience of living in New Zealand to the Span-American people. These recordings lasted about half an hour to forty five minutes and should still be found online. Everything is in Spanish. I could listen to the program later and I send the link to my family in Chile. I did almost six or seven programs in about 2013 or 2014. It was a fantastic experience." She smiles.

"The other job was at Taranaki cathedral or Saint Mary's but they call it Taranaki Cathedral. I was at the front desk welcoming people on Wednesday mornings for two years more or less. I also was a tour guide inside the church. By that time there weren't any problems as now it's closed as it is earthquake prone. I also received any donations that people brought and did the eftpos transactions because they have a store in front of the church. I think it's called the Stop In."

A year ago María worked as a cashier at a hotel. She resigned after a five month period when the family went back to Chile for a one month holiday to visit their family and friends in Chile and Argentina. She says: "It was the first time the whole family went back because we had been traveling alone, so it was a good catch up."

Traveling is something they still do regularly. María explains: "I traveled three years ago but by myself. My husband stayed here with the boys because of school and because of his work. So I said well I'm going alone because I'm not that necessary to be here - they can survive without me." She laughs. "We usually travel one month because otherwise it's not worth it as it's quite expensive. We have family, friends, ex colleagues, things like that and all our family want to invite us. We have to distribute our time plus, see our belongings. We still own our house there, things like that. You always have paperwork to do when you live overseas. You need your time for yourself as well. Both of the times I was there I travelled to Argentina as well because I have family there so I have to distribute my time very well."

María has worked as a volunteer at Migrant Connections Taranaki once a week to help coordinator Geetha at the office, for almost three years now, and every now and then she goes to Jean Sandel on Fridays to speak with the elderly because, she says: "I think they speak the best English."



In home town Punta Arenas, Chile (above and below)



She tells me that the best experience comes from speaking with the elderly. At Jean Sandel María really gets the opportunity to get into conversations with the locals, something she really loves as they have great stories to tell and the content really helps her with the English vocabulary. "The people at Jean Sandel always encourage you to speak even if they can't understand your accent very well" she says. "They just try to make you feel more confident in your English." She laughs. "They are more formal when they are speaking and they share their life stories. It's good to listen to them because they own a rich vocabulary and I think it's a way of improving my English. And apart from that it's making them a little happier because some of them do not have any relatives anymore here or only get visitors once in a while, so I am an extra visitor." The opportunity at Jean Sandel came up thanks to a member of 'Migrant Women Meet', a group María attends at the Puke Ariki library every Tuesday.

Now María teaches private lessons of the Spanish language to exchange students and adults going to Chile and other countries in South America such as Ecuador, on a freelance basis. That's why she can't always attend the meetings at Jean Sandel as there are times she needs to be at home to see the programs of her students and plan a class if necessary. She tells me: "I do some private lessons at home, but it's not the same as in Chile. It's just one boy, one girl. Once in a while, especially the boys, will go to South America, to Chile, as exchange students." In May María was preparing two boys from Boys' High and one girl from Girls' High who were traveling to Chile in July whom she taught Spanish. Last year she taught three doctors who contacted her to teach them because they were traveling to South America. And one or two years ago María taught two ladies who were to travel to Ecuador.

Teaching is something María loves: "Just when people contact me by coincidence or because a friend of mine told them that I am a teacher by profession. So they can learn a little more." And she emphasises: "Just because of my profession, not just because I am a native speaker. I know English and Spanish grammar but I don't have much practice in speaking skills so it's good for me. I am interested in sharing our language skills."

She also does translation work from time to time. "Sometimes people ask if I can translate something for them. Sometimes someone recommends me. And I say why not? Because if it is in English to translate into Spanish is quite easy for me", she says.

María loves being active. When she came here five years ago she found herself with a lot of spare time available since she didn't have a job. Home alone while her husband worked full time and the children attended school, she decided to get into sports. When she saw Paritutu Rock she remembered a close friend in Chile with terminal cancer and wanted to do the climb in support of him. That was the first time she reached the top. She really enjoyed it even though the next day was a little painful. But because she knew her friend was in the last stages of his illness, she was determined to climb for him as he was suffering so much. The goal was to climb one hundred times for him in three months. "To think that he could suffer a bit less. I thought this would be the best effort I could make from here, when my friend was still alive in Chile", she says. "When I was in my ninety seventh climb, he passed." She continues: "I had to continue. And then I decided to continue for me."

After her one hundredth climb, María is now working on reaching one thousand climbs. This is why you will see countless photographs and reports about these and they are all numbered, rain, hail or snow. At the time of our interview she has completed seven hundred

and sixty five climbs and is aiming for one thousand climbs, putting the number into brackets on her updates on Facebook.



One of the many ascents to the top of Paritutu Rock!

As well as climbing Paritutu Rock María has climbed Mount Taranaki and Mount Ngauruhoe as well. She has also biked around the mountain, and run around the mountain. She clarifies: "I go to volunteering jobs and have a social life but I still need something to store away the anxiety that sometimes comes when you don't know exactly what is happening back home. It's the best way that I found to express my loneliness sometimes. Even if you have a lot of friends or acquaintances it's not the same." María is still in contact with her friends from primary and secondary school and university. "Once in a while we text each other and it seems that the time stops when we send our messages or texts. Sometimes you think where your family is, is the best place. Sometimes you miss your mum, your neighbour,

even the grumpiest neighbours you had - you still miss it", she says. "You still miss your culture. I don't want to bring my country here, but I sometimes need to feel everything. A taste from Chile, the background. The landscape is totally different here. The South Island is quite similar to my place in Chile. So I would have felt more at home there, I think. Nobody knows. I have found that being a sporty girl here helped me to miss my country, my family and my friends less."



María at Universidad de Magallanes,
Punta Arenas, Chile

Sporting activities keep María busy and is something she really enjoys. "My best time is when I climbed Paritutu thirteen times in a row. Everybody was looking at this 'poor old lady' climbing (she laughs) because there were a lot of young people climbing that day and they were looking at me and some of them realised that I was back and they asked me: 'Are you coming up and down, up and down?' And I said, yes, this is my seventh climb. They would exclaim: 'I barely made it once!'" She laughs out loud now. "I just drink a little bit of water. It depends on the weather and the time how many climbs I do per day. Once I am there, I forget about missing my mum or missing someone else. It's my way to feel happy in this time."

In the crater of Mount
Taranaki! (right)
Climbing Mount Taranaki
with husband Luis, below
On top of Mount
Taranaki (far below)





One of the many bike rides (left) and on Paritutu Rock (right)

María is very open minded and respects other people's beliefs but feels different because she is from another country. She tells me: "I always try to make it easier for the others because I am the one who came here - I am the one who has to adapt to the environment, to the culture. I don't want to have my country here in New Zealand, otherwise I would be living there you know. I came with a goal. And I think I have to work on that goal still. I really would like to improve my English more. But of course you could always make a mistake because of lack of information or not knowing everything when you travel to another country." She says she read a lot about New Zealand before coming here so she wouldn't offend anybody with their cultural system or religions or beliefs.

According to María the way to stay in a country is respecting other beliefs. Respect the fact they are different or... *not* that different, because "I have met some Catholic people. I am Catholic, but not fanatic. And I am openminded. I can understand that a person can think different than me. I don't want to push them to think the same or to have my opinion of this or that. Of course the culture is more important with rugby and I didn't know much about Māori culture before coming. I read something but not that much."

Being a teacher by profession María was trained to accept anybody with their differences - their skills, their strengths and their weaknesses. "This world is full of a wide variety of people and you have to be concerned about that", she says. "You have to think that nobody is perfect, nobody is superior, nobody is inferior, we are just different." She explains: "Sometimes it's difficult for migrants. People can misunderstand us when we make a comment, like: 'This is different, or back at home we do this or that.' But we're not saying that it's better or worse, it's just different."

At school the boys had to learn how to do the haka. "They were a little, you know, reserved", María says. "They were embarrassed because they didn't know how to do it well because it's not part of their culture. But luckily the youngest one came here when he was five the first time when we came to visit. And he saw some haka, so he had an idea. When we came back to live here when he was nine years old he said: 'Mum, it's not that difficult.' He enjoys it. He enjoyed the Māori teacher in Central School teaching them to do the haka and teaching te reo Māori. But the oldest one was a little embarrassed because he knew he gave a bad performance in comparison with his class mates but they still enjoy it."

Coming to New Zealand has meant that María and her family have met a variety of people from different cultures. This is rare in Chile because in Punta Arenas they just had contact with Argentinian and Chilean people, other than the occasional British tourists or sometimes a scientist who came to the Antarctic and would stay in the city for a while. In New Zealand you can find different people from different parts of the world, from very different countries. María has met people from the Netherlands, Canada, the United States, Japan, and other countries. She points out that back at home she never met any of those nationalities. And they *live* here, they are not just tourists. "At any point of the day you can meet them", she says. "At Migrant Women Meet, I have met many many women from all

around the world with different cultures, different points of view, different families, different values, and different beliefs. Back at home we were all equally Chileans or Argentinian", she laughs. "Sometimes you met someone from Peru but it was just difficult to find or to meet someone from other areas. Here it's mainly because of the gas and oil industry, I think."

In Punta Arenas (right)



She notes the Indian community here, Bollywood, and Multi Ethnic Extravaganza, which is an annual community event celebrating the diversity of residence in Taranaki. "I have friends from different countries here and I feel like I have been getting very very involved in their lives. And they are in my life. Back at home I might not have been that open to a person who I just met one or two years ago." she says. "The connections are different here, the way I relate to other people is quite different."

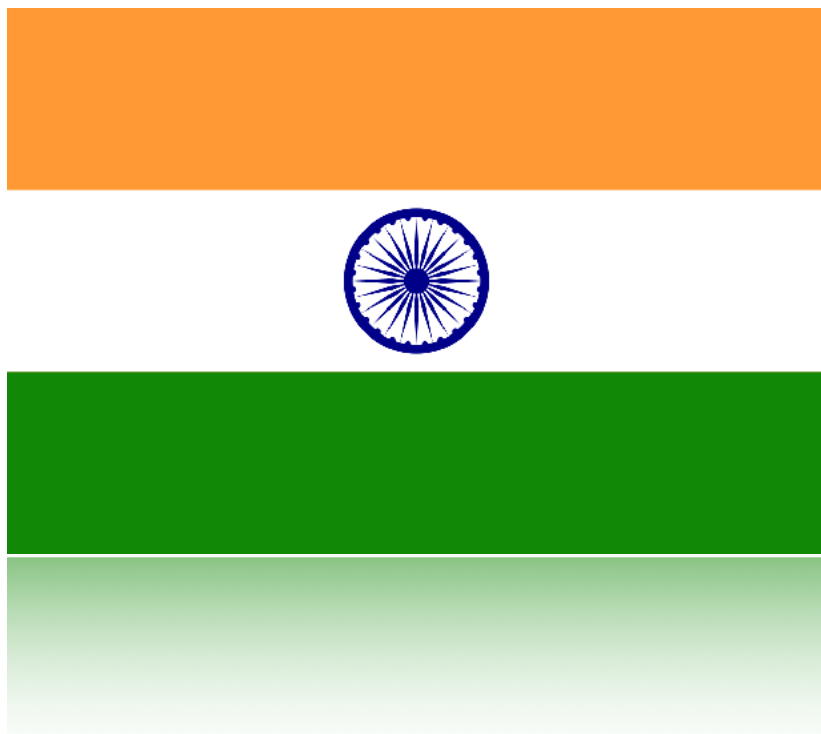
María loves Chilean chilli, grapes, and wine. "Even if I don't drink wine, to have Chilean wine at home makes me feel closer. If someone comes, I can offer them Chilean wine. It's better for me. Because it's part of my country and I feel proud. I'm feeling very happy that sometimes I can buy Chilean products here."

She finds it difficult to create or to cook like she used to, in Chile. We used to have a lot of chillies. Here we can't find them. You can find chillies here but not from Chile", she laughs. "When we traveled some months ago we brought three or four jars and they are already gone. I don't know if everybody thinks the same way but it's not that it's better, it's just that it's different. You miss that because you grew up more than forty years with the same stuff. Suddenly it's all gone and when you don't have it you need it more, I think."

She contemplates: "In some point of my life I need to come back to my roots. Everybody comes and goes in the same way, with nothing. Therefore I feel like I need to come back to my country. I don't want to leave my bones here", she laughs. "At some point of our life when my husband is not working or if the children decide to move to another country themselves, then we don't have much to do here. We came to improve our English."



Raj Khadilkar



INDIA

Raj Khadilkar is a businessman who comes from India. He looks immaculate, wearing a sharp, fawn colour suit when he walks in to greet me. He comes from Pune, to be precise - a city in the Western part of India which is about 180-190km South East of Mumbai. "We came to New Zealand in 2003", he tells me, and continues: "At the end of 2007 we went to Singapore, then back home to India where we stayed from 2011 to 2015 until we landed here again, in New Zealand." Raj is articulate and speaks fast so I need to stay alert to make sure I don't miss anything. He tells me that when the family first came to our country, they lived in New Plymouth.

"We applied for Permanent Residency in 2002 and got approval in 2003", Raj tells me. "In those days you could apply for Permanent Residency straight away", or 'PR' as he calls it. He speaks in abbreviations, something I'm not usually used to. "In 2003 there was no requirement of EOI (expression of interest) so we straight away applied for the PR, on the points basis." He continues: "I quit my boss in India, a Houston based company called World Wide Oil Field Machines in the US where I worked as a sales and marketing manager. I approached them and said: 'I am going away to New Zealand and therefore I am resigning. But if you need any representation in this part of the world - New Zealand and Australia, I am happy to help you.' So he gave me a part time job as business development manager to explore Australia and New Zealand, and asked me to come back to him after four or five months."

In his job Raj used to travel within New Zealand and Australia. "I developed some market here during those years, when a company from Singapore called FMC hired me. I worked for them as a sub-territory manager for South East Asia. That made us move to Singapore at the end of 2007, just after gaining New Zealand citizenship", he says.

Raj tells me that their motivation to come here in 2003 definitely was the lifestyle. "Second thing", he says, "We got limited choices as far as India is concerned. Not as far as business or employment, because there are plenty of opportunities there. But the safety was a concern. Lifestyle was a concern." At the time Raj and his wife Priya had one son who was born in 1999 in India. Their youngest son was born some years later in 2008, in Singapore. "Education as a whole was a consideration as well", he continues. "Growing kids and a better future. It's really competitive out there in India. You're looking at the top level all the time. You have to get 90% marks. It's complicated when it comes to education. Only those people who are in the top bracket as far as the grades are concerned, go a long way. I really wanted them to have a better lifestyle."

Their firstborn was four years old when they moved to New Zealand. "He went to kindy for about a year before he joined school", Raj says. "There was a bit of difference with regard to education back home and here. I wouldn't say it was a shock, but in India it's more academic focused whereas in New Zealand education is more practical focused."

"Even at an early age?", I ask. "Even at an early age", he confirms. "Even at four years old. Our first language was a barrier for him when he came here the first time, but he was an easy going guy, so he could pick up the game as far as the language is concerned. He was three when he started preschool. As that was in the English medium he could talk a little bit but still at home we were conversing in our own languages - local and Pune language, which is Marathi", Raj explains.

He gives me some more insight into this. "My wife and I come from about a thousand kilometres from each other. She comes from Mysore near Bangalore where their language is Kannada. The script is different, the way we phrase things - everything is different. It was

kind of difficult living in Pune without speaking the local language. We were speaking Marathi and our son was more comfortable with that when he started. But when we came here, he picked up some bits and pieces of English at kindy straight away. He's an easy-going chap, really", he says.

"We realised very quickly that in New Zealand the education system is more active focused. In the first or second week, he had some projects to do. In India they learn the ABC's at that age." Raj recalls one incident. "What we liked about it was that at the beginning of term one in 2004 the children were asked to share what they did over the school holidays. Going in front on the stage - that's a really practical atmosphere. Rather than sitting and writing stuff or spelling", he says. "That was not really easy for him. A four or five year old, straight away going onto a stage and talking to the people. That practical approach is what I liked about it. They have to think: 'What did I do?' And then start talking to us about it. Another incident I remember was, somewhere in mid 2004 at Brooklands kindy here. A lady over there used to give them some blocks and wooden kind of nails. She would ask the kids to make their own things. With this kind of approach the children get an opportunity to be creative. That was completely new for us when we came here."

I ask Raj if his son spoke English, Marathi, as well as Kannada. "Yes. Absolutely", he answers. The kindy teacher told us not to push him to learn English too much as he would pick it up anyway. She told us to keep talking to him in his own language so that he wouldn't forget this, and keep those languages alive. Which was great, absolutely. Because when we first enrolled him, we thought we should really push him hard to talk to people in English. But she said 'Don't worry. He will get there anyway'. That was really good. It was natural."

I want to know how his son experienced the change over from India to New Zealand, then to Singapore, then to India, and then back to New Zealand again. "When we went away from here to Singapore he didn't have much choice, really, in 2007", Raj tells me. "He was hardly eight years old so he didn't know much. But the thing with the schools and all that - in Singapore he was ok."



The family at a religious function, India 2009 (left)

Raj and Priya with Priya's family, 2012 (right)



But after four years in Singapore, Raj was transferred to India as a project manager for some other projects. "That's the kind of business it is", he says, matter of factly. "So mid 2011 we went to India. A lot of people said there had been much change, since we last lived there. But when we went back to India we found there wasn't that much change, really. There was still a struggle for those minimum basic services, education was a concern, safety was a concern, so no change from 2003. When we went back home to India in 2011, it was pushed on him, really. He was not comfortable and was definitely chewing my ear all the time, to go back to New Zealand. He was about twelve at that time. We waited for a couple of years but everybody was kind of unhappy. We then decided it was a no brainer and came back to New Zealand in 2015. Our youngest son was seven years old then, and the older one was almost sixteen."

"Was the Indian education system and lifestyle quite different from Singapore?", I ask. "I would say similar" Raj tells me. "But he still preferred Singapore over India. One reason being, the service. Both places are pretty Asian, I would say. But what happens in Singapore is that you have only thirty or forty kids in one class. In India in one class there would be sixty or seventy students. One teacher had to handle all of them. That's too many. Even thirty or forty is getting up there", he says. "When I grew up there would be fifty students in a class with only one teacher. But in those days the teaching conditions were different. It wasn't very collaborative, whereas it's very collaborative nowadays. I mean India is changing, but not to the speed it should. So Singapore was still acceptable for him. Even if it was competitive there, they were still respectful to the kids as well. More of a 'Do it' kind of thing, in Singapore. So they had more respect. In India it was more 'Do as I say' kind of thing. There wasn't much flexibility. Then you can understand why he wanted to come back. That's what he wanted all the time", he says. "There has to be freedom, there has to be creativity, there has to be a level of free

rein given to them. Freedom to do the things they want to do, rather than asking them to 'Do as I tell you'. It felt choking for him when we went back to India. It made him less confident."

I ask if his son feels that New Zealand is more like his home country, rather than India. "Absolutely", he confirms, and tells me about the effort he put into fitting in here. "He didn't mind walking, when he and my wife came back here. They arrived about twenty days before my younger son and I did. He was happy to walk two or three kilometres, and he was happy to walk in the rain. He was quite committed when he came back here, wanting to prove himself. He was quite obsessed. He really wanted to be here. 'I am not flourishing, not really getting my 100% when I am in India', he said. He had decided to be part of the community here, rather than going back home. He had his friends in India, but once he got some friends here he gelled more with the community. It was not really difficult for him. When he came back he went to Boys' High, because he was a year 11. He had some friends out there from his kindy and Central School, one of the local primary schools he had attended. He was quite contented, and easy going. It was really easy to get him into the groove again. He was coping very well with the curriculum and other activities like football or badminton. He is still active in sports and plays in the Taranaki under 17 and under 19 in badminton. He is really happy", Raj says.

I wonder what Raj's younger son's experiences were like with regard to moving countries. "He's a different breed, I believe", Raj says. "In India we still follow that social and combined style of living. There's a lot of uncles and aunties around and my cousin brothers - kind of close knit families. When the younger one was born, we were in Singapore so he hadn't experienced New Zealand. For three of four years while we were there he didn't have that kind of family around him. And we were not really friendly with our neighbours, which is one of the the things I disliked about Singapore - the people there

are not really cohesive. Therefore he didn't really learn those social skills we wanted to give to him. That carried over into India as well. It was a little bit different as far as the English language was concerned as well. When we went back to India in 2011, my wife was staying in Mysore, while I was in Mumbai because I was traveling. I was about a thousand kilometres away and he missed that as I was not with them. That was another problem because it affects the children mentally and is probably another thing which got him into that safe zone", Raj confides. "But he was ok. He didn't mind exploring there, which was great.

He is happy now", Raj continues. "He is lovely. But in the first six to eight months it was difficult for him to go out and explore something new and make friends. When we came to New Zealand he was kind of studying for some time, understanding the people, scanning things around him before he got into things. It depends on the personality as well", he adds. "He's a different person - not really introvert, but more like that 'extra work' kind of person. He wants to be in a safe zone all the time. He will 'wait-wait-wait-wait-wait' till whatever he wants to do, and then he will show a bit more openness. Now he's up and running, absolutely. No problem. "We enrolled him at Fitzroy Primary School. For the first couple of months he didn't have many friends there. But when he shifted to Central School where there were many more Asian children, so he got a lot of friends there", he says.

I want to know if during the early years the children were seeking out more friends from their own or from foreign cultures, rather than from New Zealand. "Pretty much", Raj tells me. "But once they get their feet on the ground, they change", he says. "I think it all depends on how you encourage them as a parent as well. If you encourage them to be with those kind of people, then that will be their comfort zone. If you push them a little bit, as we have with our elder boy, he is happy to go with anyone. But the younger one is

still not really getting out of his safe zone. It all depends on how we encourage them, I would say, which friendships there can be.”

It is good to hear that Raj’s wife Priya is enjoying her life in New Zealand too. “She is loving it”, Raj says. “She’s always loved it. She’s an independent girl, all the time. Going back to India was definitely not a choice for her. 2011 to 2015 was definitely more stressful for her because she didn’t want to go back. It was ok to be in Singapore as sometimes we have to look at the financial side of it as well, so that was a no brainer. But when we started thinking about having to go back to India, that time she said no. Again, it was for work but she wasn’t very happy. That was a really difficult time, those four or five years we spent in India. It added another element I would say because she was taking care of two kids while I was in Mumbai. Though she had parents beside her, it still wasn’t the same. That put pressure on her as well. It caused a bit of discomfort between us in those years in our personal relationship. Finally we were able to sit down to sort this out and decided to go back to New Zealand. We had a fresh start again pretty much”, he says.

“As the oil and gas industry had a ‘downtime’ in 2015 I decided to look for jobs anywhere in New Zealand”, Raj continues. “We all had citizenship so I had that on my side, but getting a job was difficult. I searched for six months, and Priya also started putting her applications through. She used to work at the TSB bank when we lived here before. The TSB called her straight away. No big deal. They said yes, so that was fantastic. She definitely left a good report with everyone there and that was really helpful”, Raj says.

The first time they came to live in New Zealand, Raj was the only income earner. “Priya decided to do some voluntary work here and started at Tui Ora which eventually led to paid work”, he tells me. “After this she went on to Puke Ariki as a part time librarian”, Raj continues. “She was pretty confident in communication and talking

to people was not a problem for her. She did voluntary work for six to eight months before doing a Small Business Management course in 2004/2005 at WITT. She also did voluntary work as a committee member, as secretary at the kindy", Raj says. "She was good at finding voluntary jobs and she was a go-getter. She was quite happy." One way Priya found out about these voluntary jobs was through Geetha from Settlement Support, now called Migrant Connections Taranaki. "Priya definitely values it. Absolutely. She says, 'If you connect with the local community, get some voluntary numbers on board and get your foot in the door, it will be really easy then. You don't have to wait at home. Get out there, in person. If you are outspoken, you'll find something.'

I was quite active within the Indian community from the moment I arrived in 2003", Raj continues. "I met many people there so we got a lot of contacts. That's how we met Geetha, mid 2004. It's going back a long time", he says. "Then we got involved in the Multi Ethnic community as well. That was end 2004, beginning of 2005. We continued our active involvement in various community activities and events. Through those events we got connections."



Raj, Priya and their two sons at one of the functions

We arrive at the topic of social and cultural differences or similarities. Religion, for example. "We have a strong background of Hindu", Raj tells me. "It's about personal values. Because of our involvement with the Indian community we organise some things together, as part of the Hindu group. Some of the things we do are prayers and activities for the kids. I am involved in those now." He continues: "Going back to when we came here in 2003 and thinking about our connection with the Indian community, we definitely have different ways now as we are comfortable with any other religion. But we always thought we should stick to what we have been taught, with what we have learnt and know. Another forty years down the line, our kids may not be able to recognise it as Indian, but for us, it is important that we should keep those values and beliefs and practice these. It's a good backbone for the kids. We actively practice our religion here. We invite other people home as well, for the prayers and all that. Quite actively."

I ask if there is anything that stands out compared to his own culture. "I think there is more respect between people here", Raj says. "I think that is a major thing which I noticed personally although I'm not sure if my wife has had the same experience, in that way. It's interesting. In India we respect elders, or the person whom you are talking to and all. Because of the relationship, the age difference, and so on and so forth. But here, it doesn't matter whether you're an adult or kid. Whether you are talking to an elder, to your colleague, or subordinate. There is respect." Thinking back of India, he continues: "There probably was respect, a long way back - maybe a hundred odd years ago. But it's kind of gone, over the years. Quite a change has taken place now, but twenty years ago, people, even parents probably didn't respect kids that much. It's more collaborative here than in India, for sure. That was very hard to accept at first", he tells me. "It is not uncommon in India or most of the Asian countries to give physical punishment to children. They don't mind that. But here, it's more of 'Sit down and talk to

them' - make them understand why it is important. Teach them values. That's what's probably most missing, back home. We kind of punish them, and that's what we have been taught. Teachers taught us to do as directed. That's how we were taught in the schools. That's how we grew up. It is a cultural difference. You were not allowed to counter question. Do as directed", Raj says.

I point out that you can still counter question while being respectful at the same time. You can still ask intelligent questions. Raj agrees. "Absolutely right. But that was not acceptable. Especially questions about the legends. A legend is an extension of beliefs, really. So if you asked parents questions which would make them uncomfortable - questions they cannot answer, those questions were not tolerated. It was the same with the teachers in the schools. You were not allowed to ask those questions such as: 'Can we do something another way'", he says.

"At school, were teachers allowed to hit children?", I ask. "Yes, they were allowed to do that back when I studied", Raj answers. "But now it's been reduced. There is a more collaborative approach now with the kids, where they don't stop them asking those good questions. That's why I think personal development lacks in India because you couldn't counter question. Because we think that 'This is the way it is, this is the way you should do it, this is the way it has to be done and has been done, and don't challenge the system.' Don't challenge the system", he repeats with emphasis, and adds: "It takes time to change."

He goes on: "There are a few things they wanted to change over the last ten to twelve years. It's getting to a stage now that they are giving good ear to the kids now. It's much different. Absolutely, absolutely. The parents have started respecting their kids' views, if they have any views. In my opinion, Indian kids do not have their own views because they have not been taught to do that. There is

so much stuff as far as academics is concerned. For example an eleven or twelve year old has seven or eight subjects to handle in a year: their own language - Marathi - the national Indian language Hindi, English, history, geography, maths, science.... From the perspective of the teacher and the education system, and when you have sixty or seventy children, you haven't got time to talk about things. You just teach them something, and that's it", he says.

I wonder if there is a shortage of teachers in India, or if it is a deliberate choice to have so many children in one classroom. "I think it's a bit of both", Raj tells me. "There's more shortage of space, I think. They may have fifty odd classrooms in their school, and they go on top of each other - not horizontal. It's only vertical. Because space is a constraint in India, there were five or ten floor schools. If you have that restriction, you have to accommodate fifty or sixty students in one class. Things are different nowadays because there are a lot of private schools now", he tells me. "But when we had our education we had a limited number of schools, and again, fifty to sixty students and no grounds to play. Those things we really missed I think."

"Now your children are growing up in New Zealand, do you find that they have quite a different view on the world?", I ask, and add: "With respect to having lots of nature around them and playing outside." The answer is clear. "Absolutely. They are not scared to ask questions. And if you can't really find the answer - and this is the way we learn as well as a parent in some cases - parents need to go and find the answers. Whether it is religion, schooling or anything else. If you can't answer and satisfy them, you fail yourself really", he says.

He acknowledges that their experience of living in New Zealand is definitely different from living in India. "Here, we find it so easy", Raj tells me. "That's one of the things I liked. We treat children with

respect when we talk, give ear to everyone, even if they might have different views. It's the same in husband and wife relationships. Respecting and giving ear to wives was not called for in India when we got married. For example when we got married twenty three, twenty four years ago, it was changing a bit. But there was still not that respect for the girls."

"Do you think that your relationship has improved?", I ask. "It has", Raj says. "It's much more improved now. In my view, maturity also adds and makes a difference and adds an element to it, compared to when you're young. It's realising that things can be done another way." He continues: "I think the major shock culture wise was basically respecting the person whatever race or age he would be, and still listen to him, give him that sort of respect. In India we used to cut down the conversation straight away if we didn't agree. Here, you can talk and decide that there is a better way of doing things, rather than dumping someone's ideas into the dustbin."

In relation to being respectful towards another person, I want to know how that is taught in the Hindu religion. "Going back maybe twenty to a hundred years, it deteriorated along the way because people exploited it", Raj tells me. "Some people really thought it is not necessary to show kids respect. Older ladies or women in the community should not be respected. No religion tells you not to respect a person. But some people exploit their religion or some teachings or beliefs from the religion to suit their convenience. And that's what makes the difference. That's what happened over two to three hundred years.

Now they are awakening in India as well", he adds. "A lot of things such as how to behave with their spouse for example. So there's a lot of movement happening in India. But it's about behaviour I think. That needs to change. Thinking and behaviour. It is changing now.

What we saw thirty years back is not the same anymore. It's a big country. It'll take some time to really adapt to those things."

"It's interesting that your move to New Zealand has made you see things differently and you have become more pure in your own Hindu religion", I observe. "Absolutely", Raj replies. "I fully agree with that. More pure - what is purification. Again, I think it's an age factor. I think I started looking into religion with a more spiritual approach rather than with a religious approach just for the sake of religion. It's a better way", he says.

"If I get questions from a kid, my own kids or others', we should be able to answer them", he continues. "Otherwise the roots are not strong enough. And you need to ask yourself those questions. If I can't satisfy him, he will not go and study the spiritual aspects of religion. As they have been brought up in a different culture here they are not refrained from asking questions. There is a kind of eagerness or keenness to know what you are talking about. That's a different thing. It's good. So we have become a lot more open now, wanting to discuss and talk about things", he says.

Talking about discussion, Raj tells me about the Hindu group they have set up. "Two of us, we work with boys or girls", he says. "About eight to ten kids join us on alternate Sundays. We do some Indian prayers, bring those spiritual aspects back and answer questions which might be there.

It's not that we know everything - if we don't know we go back and search and find the answers to what they want to know. It's a kind of interactive conversation and we tell them to go and find out about so and so. We talk about Indian mythological or religious stories, scientists or freedom fight, whatever it could be. Something in between there. We both share it with the people. It might grow - that's what we try to do. We call it the Taranaki Temple Trust and do

this at Central School. Then we have our own prayers for the elders as well. On alternate Saturdays we do that at the same school. Then again singing and dancing. So that's our way of giving back to the community." I am moved by the integrity of Raj's story. "It is not attached to any community or Indian community", he adds. "We kind of opened up, since coming here. It's totally different from what we were used to. We really discovered that for ourselves."



Sanskar Class at Central School.

Sanskar teaches Indian philosophy, religion, spiritual solidarity, and culture. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

We move on to other traditions they may have taken with them from India. "We still follow most of the protocols in India", Raj tells me. "A few of them we dropped off because we were not comfortable with that. For example when girls go through their monthly period that was taboo in India. Those were days they were asked to sit out of the house, or in a room where they are kind of 'untouchable', those four or five days. Those protocols were not acceptable to us, because it's not necessary. These were restrictions given to women. Of course, now, nobody follows it - we're going back twenty five,

thirty years. It was major. It was pretty normal. Those are things which I think we were able to grow up from", he says.

Other customs the family has brought with them are some Indian national holidays. "We have Independence Day which is on the 15th of August", Raj tells me. "That's when we got independence from the British. We always celebrate that here in the Indian community. In India it's always on the 15th, but here we celebrate it on the weekend before or after, whichever is closest because everyone is busy during the week.



New Plymouth children celebrating Indian Independence Day,
2006

We have a big Diwali festival as well which we celebrate at the end of October or beginning of November", he says. "That's the Festival of Light. Back home it's a five day festival. Basically, the monsoon in

India starts in June, and ends by September or at beginning of October when the harvesting is done. It's more of a harvesting celebration really and goes back many years. For people in the state called Gujarat it is also the beginning of the new year", he says, and continues to explain the course of events of the festival to me. I notice that counting the days of the celebration starts with zero.

"The festival starts with cleaning and colouring the house. That day itself is about worshipping the holy cows, and all animals for that matter, because they helped the farmers during the harvesting process", Raj tells me. "On this day people wake up in the morning at four o'clock and shower before the sunrise. They put rangoli in front of their houses", he says. "Rangoli is the kind of designs we put in front of the houses", Raj explains. "It is a white powder. I think it's made of calcium carbonate or something like that. With that powder we throw fantastic designs and all that sort of stuff in front of our houses. It's welcoming gods and guests to our place, and then colour the powder as well. You might have seen that", he suggests. "It has to be colourful when you are welcoming gods. Anybody is welcome. We put garlands of different flowers tied on the door. Colours definitely bring life to us. It represents that we are welcoming and we're happy. Heaps of sweets are prepared during the Diwali, which is part of welcoming everyone for these days.



Two examples of Rangoli
(left, above)

The next day is called the first day", Raj continues, "and is what you call 'Good over Evil'. Mythological stories will tell you that demons were cleared and killed by the gods. The second day we call 'Laksmi Puja' as Laksmi is the goddess for worshipping wealth. Because the farming industry was the main industry in those days we worship that as well. After harvesting and selling the farm produce the farmers celebrate the money, gold or silver, or any asset they have acquired. It symbolises the end of the year. The third day then, is the new year for Gujarat. The fourth and fifth days are kind of relationship based", Raj says and elaborates: "The fourth day is about respecting your sister. So realistically speaking the sister calls her brother and makes some sweets for him and so on, whereas the fifth day is celebrating the husband and wife relationship.

Then we burn crackers and fireworks on all five days. Nowadays they're getting really strict about this in India, because of the noise and smoke pollution all these fireworks can cause.



Diwali at home
with younger
son (left)

I want to know how Diwali is celebrated in New Zealand. "What we do at our place", Raj says, "We invite our friends and a number of families home even here as well. We offer them some sweets - of course we can't burn crackers unless it falls on Guy Fawkes day". He laughs, and clarifies: "Diwali occurs at the end of October or at the beginning of November, normally. We follow the lunar calendar. So it depends on the moon movement rather than the sun movement although in some parts of India people follow the solar calendar. It gets real difficult when you start to look into that part of it. It is interesting. We follow more of the lunar calendar, because we are from the Western side of India. So New Moon day, is our first day of the calendar. We offer sweets to our friends on that day and all the five days. So anytime you are welcome. The second day is Laksmi Puja, a very important day. It is the most important day. That is the night before the New Moon day. That is the time of new beginnings. I personally feel, that was more of a harvest ending time, because the winter kicks in as well at the end of October. Later on there's a new harvest festival, which comes in during the winter time", he adds.



New Plymouth boys and girls performing, Diwali 2017



New Plymouth ladies dancing, Diwali 2017

I am trying to imagine what the season is at that time of the year, and ask if the area they come from is located in the Southern or the Northern Hemisphere. "We're verging on the equator zone really", Raj says. "So it's very tropical of course. It is the time when the monsoon finishes and we are getting into winter. Transition from the rainy season or wet season, to winter. In India we have four seasons. Roughly, from June to the beginning of October is the monsoon or rainy period. October to mid January is the winter, mid January until the end of March is spring, and April to June is summer, pretty much."

He tells me that they became acclimatised to the New Zealand temperatures quite well. "For me, it doesn't matter", he says. "I really like cold weather. It never bothered me. I was not really comfortable with the warm sun out there. First when we moved in we had a house with a wooden floor, and that was really cold so we shifted to carpet." He laughs. "You don't want to be cold. No no."

We have neared the end of our interview. It has been very nice to listen to somebody who shows real humanity towards people. When it's not just about money, it's not all business. When the person

you're talking to really cares about people, adults and children alike. "We need more people like you in the world", I say. "There was a message going around on social media", Raj responds. "I don't know if you heard about it. It says: 'We don't want successful people, we want people who care. We have plenty of successful people. But we need people who care about people.'" It's a lovely message, I agree.

"I am a business consultant, that's what I do for life. Apart from the other activities I do". He laughs. "We came back here in 2015, so the circle is complete. We're not going anywhere", he says.

Cheryl Mudawarima



ZIMBABWE

When I am waiting for Cheryl at a local cafe and see her walk in I am immediately in awe. She is tall and comes across as sophisticated yet modest. She has the most beautiful skin, perfect white teeth and amazing long, thick tresses of hair which I absolutely adore.

Originally from Zimbabwe, Cheryl came to live in New Zealand from England in 2007. "My motivation I think just quality of life", she tells me when I ask why. While living in England Cheryl happened to hear about an expo in London promoting New Zealand. She decided to check it out. "I was quite impressed with what New Zealand had to offer", she says. "I had young children at that time. So when I heard about the quality of life here I thought that it would be better for my kids - like, they're safe. And it looked like there are more opportunities for them here." It was an important factor for Cheryl. She told her husband she would go to New Zealand to give it a try so that the family could join her if she liked it.

"When we went to England we were looking to make money", she says. "But when New Zealand 'came on' and everything that happened, I had the feeling this was meant to be for me and my family. When I touched down at the airport in Auckland I really felt home, I never felt like that before. It was like 'I finally arrived'. I just felt this joy within myself. And everything kind of flowed. Like you're looking for a job - the job is there for you. When my family came they helped me set up everything - you see what I mean? Everything was falling into place. Nothing like that ever happened to me before. There was everything. Like a puzzle - finding the pieces so easily", she says.

"Initially I came on my own", she tells me. Cheryl is a nurse by profession and registered with an agency in Wellington through which she got her first job in Foxton. "I was promoted to be a care manager for one of the rest homes in Foxton Beach", she says. Cheryl's husband Victor and two children joined her after eight

months. Her husband didn't have a job organised when he came here. "It was a bit difficult for him to begin with as there was no work in Foxton in his kind of work, engineering. Initially he was just doing this and that, but it was okay because we could manage on my salary. I mean we were not looking for money when we initially came here. We were just looking for the lifestyle."

Cheryl fills me in with a little bit of her background: "I grew up in Gweru, one of the larger cities in Zimbabwe and did my nurse training in Bulawayo. Then I moved to the capital city, Harare which is where I worked. But Gweru of all is the town I call home. That's where I was born. My mother still lives there and most of my family. It's almost like New Plymouth because if you remember, Zimbabwe was colonised by the British."

Cheryl met her husband Victor in 1990 in Zimbabwe. She qualified as a nurse in 1991. Victor and Cheryl married in 1992. "I was still a student nurse when we met", she tells me. "Victor had been living in Scotland. His father was a methodist reverend. After Zimbabwe gained official independence in 1980 his whole family moved back to Zimbabwe in the 80's." Looking back at that time, she says: "For Vic I think, he didn't really like Zimbabwe because he spent most of his adulthood overseas. He couldn't really fit in, which was quite difficult for him. It was alright for me because I was born there."

But I always had a niche for travelling, always loved to travel", Cheryl says. "I went to England in 1996, initially on a holiday with a girlfriend. That's the first time I went to England. I liked it. At that time Vic was still working in Zimbabwe." 'Zims', as she calls it. "After six weeks holidays at the end of summer I decided I wanted to work", she says. To qualify in England as a nurse Cheryl did her induction through an agency which took her about four weeks. "It was just an extended holiday for me, before I got my papers. It was quite easy." She then worked in England for some months. In 1997

Victor joined Cheryl and got a job in instrumentation. "To me it was an adventure", she tells me, "I loved it. For him it was more like going back home because he grew up in Glasgow.

It took three or four months to decide what we really wanted to do, where we really wanted to be", Cheryl tells me. To get experience she worked for other people for two years before starting her own nursing agency. "My going to England was alright because it opened doors for me", Cheryl says. The children who were living with Cheryl's mother in Zimbabwe only came to visit them during the holidays. "I didn't want to bring them to England - I didn't like the life there", she says.

At first when the family started their life together in New Zealand, it was quite a culture shock. "My children who were born in Zimbabwe, initially were not impressed I think", Cheryl confides. Daughter Michelle was thirteen when they moved to New Zealand and son Kiki was only six and a half. "I think that was kind of a problem", Cheryl says. "When they were in Africa they went to private schools. They didn't know any different. And they travelled a lot like when they would come to England. We always traveled everywhere, anywhere. But then when they came here, I think it was kind of a culture shock for them. Acceptance for example. It was very difficult for them at school because they didn't get that acceptance at first. There was a lot of bullying, which was very hard for them. It kind of changed things for me as well."

Instead of focusing on work, Cheryl had to focus on the children. "I had to give up my work here", she says. "Just so that one of us would be there for the children. At first I thought the bullying was a 'small town syndrome' in Foxton. But after two months, we decided we had to move out of Foxton so that Victor could get a job. One of his friends who had come here twenty years earlier was working for Mighty River Power in Taupo. Victor gave him a call and was told

they were looking for people. So we drove to Taupo where he went for his interview. My children liked Taupo. They found it much more upbeat compared to Foxton. They loved it. Victor got the job so we moved there, at the end of 2007."

Cheryl became aware they needed to be flexible to be able to integrate well. "I think I found that much easier when we realised we needed to do that", she says and explains: "The whole thing here, what I had realised is you got to follow where the jobs are. If you don't, then it becomes difficult. Being an immigrant sometimes you don't form attachments until a certain period. It all depends on what you are looking for as well", she says.

"When we moved to Taupo, I worked nights mostly so that one of us could be there for the children. I found even when we went to Taupo it was very difficult for them to fit in." Cheryl explains how the family engaged in order to integrate harmoniously within the community. "For me, I speak with an accent", she says. "But if you meet my children - we call ourselves 'United Nations'. Vic's got a Scottish accent. Michelle and Kiki - Kiki is more Kiwi, and Michelle drawls more like an American accent, you know that sort of drawl. I think that they sort of put that as a raincoat around themselves as if saying: 'If I don't have an accent, people will be more accepting.'"

It is definitely an eye opener for me. "It was very difficult for them at school", Cheryl recalls. "It was hard. Kiki my son became more attached to immigrant children - more than mixing with other children. He made it one of his jobs of welcoming all the new kids at school." I can feel how proud Cheryl is of her son. "He was there for them. So I had a lot of new kids, new parents, coming to my house. He said to me: 'Mum, I know how it feels to be there in that corner and no one is talking to me. I don't understand why they don't accept them. Maybe with me, because I'm black, but with them, is it because they are coming from somewhere?'"

Cheryl is able to remain levelheaded about it though, and approaches it from an objective viewpoint: "Bullying only starts, I think, especially from home. If you tell your children to love everybody, then it makes life easier. But then if you start talking about differences to children they tend to take that outside. They learn those things from us."

It affected the children mostly for their first two years in New Zealand. "Even for my daughter who was in high school", she remembers, "It was difficult. People trying to burn her hair, because they wanted to see what happens, those sort of things. That's why I had to take a big step in my nursing as well and focus on the children. At the same time they really had to find a way for themselves. My daughter especially found that education here was very easy. She said: 'Everything is there for you. If you can use the stuff they give you, then you can get somewhere.' I told her: 'That's the only way you can fight back. By doing the best you can.'"



Michelle wins scholarship to Victoria University



Michelle as Taupo youth representative at the Model United Nations conference, Wellington

"My son, I realised, was very good at sport", Cheryl says. I said to him: 'That's the only way you can do it. The only way you can get respect. By doing something you are successful at.'" It really helped the children. "He can be very competitive", Cheryl tells me. "Which sort of helped a lot. It brought respect. Then people started looking at him differently."

On asking how long the bullying lasted she says: "I think it really never stops. My son felt safer when he was around other immigrants he spent most of his time with at school. That's when you see that demarcation. Everywhere my children seem to have been they have been a minority. The kids went to a Catholic school where my son was the first African there. By the time he left for high school, there were only two of them in the whole school.

In 2009, I decided to start my own business. I bought a commercial cleaning franchise", Cheryl tells me. It gave her flexibility as she was able to employ staff. She didn't have to be at work all the time and was able to concentrate more on her children. "At the same time I was involved with a lot of activities", Cheryl continues. "We started our own football team. When my son came here he only played rugby and cricket. With the bullying, kids would say: 'Oh, you're African, how come you can't play football?' So I decided to start a team for beginners. Vic and I started teaching them. Kiki was seven or eight years old. We just built up the team every year. As they got better, the bigger team started taking them away from us. Our team actually made up most of the Taupo Junior Football team. They came through Vic and me. That was really awesome. It was the children we trained", she says proudly. "The children did get more acceptance too", she says. "The thing for me was, besides training the children and teaching them how to play soccer, we were actually teaching them how to be a team. That helped as well." She adds: "You can't really change people. It's the people you are around. For me it's all about choice. I go somewhere if I feel they accept me.

That makes me comfortable. That's why I always think in a team you're a team, you're one, at that particular time. If you can't get that, it becomes difficult."



Colgate Games, Taupo Athletes Club 2011
 "Our own Usain Bolt!", Cheryl says.



A much more mature Kiki in action!



Zimwise football tourney, Wellington 2017

The family stayed in Taupo until the end of 2013, which is when they moved to New Plymouth. "When we first moved here my husband got a job in the oil and gas industry". Cheryl says. "I was looking at what I could do in New Plymouth, because I was feeling new and didn't know anybody here. I joined a nursing agency called Geneva. I was just doing casual work for them, which for me at that time sort of worked because I only had Kiki with me at home. I still wanted to be there one hundred percent for him, and just wanted to be flexible - at the same time making money as well as getting more and more experience.

"The first thing we did when we arrived in New Plymouth was to get to know the area first before anything else which was very good for the children", Cheryl recalls. "They have finished school. My daughter has been working now for three years", she continues. "My son finished high school last year, and now goes to the School of Graphic Design in Wellington and is into fashion. He's into designing his own clothes, and even for his friends. We bought him a sewing machine at nine years of age. He taught himself to sew and has always been designing things. Now he's in the right place, in Wellington. He's been invited twice now, and made his own money designing clothes. Somebody asked him to do a design which he loved. He is very happy to be paid for something he loves to do", she says. "The children have been enjoying their studies. I am quite impressed because they have never had so



Kiki with Victor in Tiger jacket,
New Plymouth Boys' High School

much pressure", Cheryl continues. "We always say you should do what you really love to do so that when the world stops, you can say: 'Fine, I can do something I love.' It has made it quite a lot easier for them and relieved them from a lot of pressure."

In 2015 Cheryl had an injury at work which she is still recovering from. "Right now as I get better, I am trying to think of what I really want to do with myself", she says. "I can't really go back to nursing because of my back as I've got an implant in my spine. I can only do up to ten kilograms of lifting. I have to be careful now. That's why now I'm just thinking of something else. We love to travel now the kids are older", she says. "We've always wanted to do voluntary stuff. We saved money for our children's education. Then we realised our children don't need that money as Michelle went to university and Keith opted to go to graphics school, so it's going to our retirement." She laughs. "Once we retire we will go out and meet with the Red Cross abroad for three or four months and then travel", she says.

"Sometimes I feel like I could do more in the community", Cheryl continues. "There is a lot of voluntary work available for immigrants. Some people find that very hard because you want to be doing something and getting paid for it. I think that is what confuses us sometimes. Most of the girls who meet at the Migrant Women group still feel uncomfortable about that." She goes on: "I used to go to the winter meetings with the council. You find certain activities have been stopped because of lack of funding. Being African, I come from very little. When I look at it in a different way - with very little, you can actually get more." It's a refreshing viewpoint. "You can create employment from that", she adds, and offers an example: "When you've got young children like my son right now. If he finishes his studies, if he really wants a career, he has to stay in Wellington, or Auckland. There's nothing for him here. But then there are ways of creating employment. All these voluntary

positions, if we turned them in to paying jobs, I think that should keep the young people here."

Cheryl tells me that she's always been very open with her children. "At the same time there are certain things which are really hard for me to accept", she says. "Especially with my daughter now she's twenty five. I can see we're very different. She's young. Family values are very important, you know. It's all getting pushed aside. We say we don't do cultural things but there are certain things we still do. Like with relationships, marriage, it's just part of your culture. But now I find with the children it's very different because we live abroad. So there's that clash. Now I'm always like: 'What will my grandchildren be like?'" She laughs. "I'm looking forward to it."

Michelle's fiancé comes from Zimbabwe but grew up here in New Zealand from the time he was ten years old. "He went the proper way about asking us for her hand in marriage and for the engagement", Cheryl tells me. "My culture is not as steep as Vic's one", she says. Victor's background is from Zimbabwe, whose people are called 'Shona'. Cheryl's background stems more from South Africa, from her mother's side. Cheryl explains: "The Shona's are very African. Especially in things like marriage and children. Those family values are very important to them. My culture is more laid back. We believe in the dowry. But the man does it, so my husband had to ask for that you see." That in itself was not a problem. "The problem was my daughter, because she says she's a feminist". Cheryl laughs heartily. "She's very independent. So that was a big issue. She thought she was being sold and stuff like that. With dowry and that sort of thing. I've been trying to explain to her that it's not like that. I told her: 'Me and your dad we could never put a price tag on you. The only thing is, these things we only do because this is how you connect the families - it's bringing two families together. You see, that's how you open the dialogue.' But she had come up with this thing that we should exchange mirrors.

She got very expensive mirrors for us and the other family and wanted us to exchange them. I told her we can still do that, but we still have to do our culture. Their relationship to us is the one towards marriage. The only way it can make sense to us is if we follow our culture. Those are the times when I think: 'Did we do right, bringing the children up here?' Stuff like that. But I think there are more advantages than disadvantages, bringing up children in a Western world. I still think we made the right decision bringing them into New Zealand, rather than England", she says.

Cheryl tells me that there are cultural differences they have brought with them. "We have food, we cook, I try to maintain that", she says. "Just for my children. We have our staple food in Zimbabwe. In Shona language it's called 'sadza'. It is made of maize meal, or corn meal. They grind the grain into powder and make a thick porridge. In Ndebele it's called 'itshwala'. The South Africans call it 'pap' in Afrikaans." She goes on: "At home, other than Western food, I do a lot of sadza. I do 'samp', because we love a lot of starchy food. Samp is almost like the corn but this is dried corn", Cheryl explains. "You mix it with sugar beans. You soak it overnight and then you simmer it on a low heat. Sugar beans are the brown beans here. You can get them from the South African shop. They opened one here in the Richmond Centre. Then there's a big one in Auckland. You can actually order online which we do quite a lot as we like a lot of stews. It's quite easy when I order stuff from the South African shop", she says.

"One lady I met saw an advert in the newspaper from Migrant Women", Cheryl continues. "She rang me and told me they were meeting in the library. That's how I got involved in the Migrant Group. It was quite good for me", she says. "With Migrant Women we have a shared cuisine. I did a South African/Zimbabwean cuisine. I brought everything for that and taught people how to make the pap. I kind of improvised", she adds. "We used sausages because I

wanted them to taste the boerewors (South African sausage). I brought all my African attire as well so the girls were wearing that."

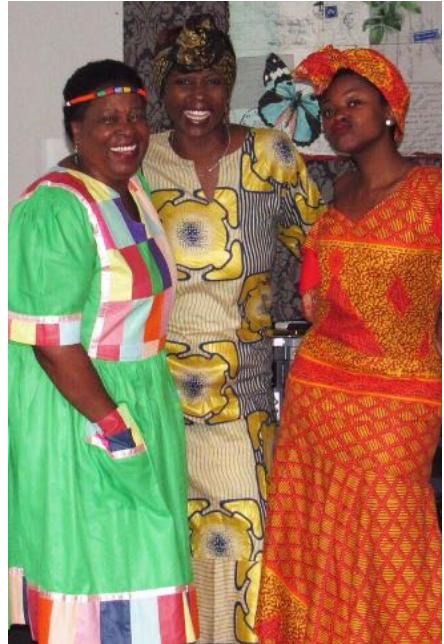


Shared cuisine with Migrant Women
Boerewors and pap (left)
'Masterchef' Cheryl embracing Russian cuisine (right)

We talk about other cultural differences and similarities. "Clothes are mostly Western", Cheryl tells me. "I don't think we've got one traditional outfit. I think most of the stuff has been copied from the South Africans and Nigerians. In their own traditional outfit the men used to wear a piece of cloth or something, and the women just went bare. That sort of thing. So they're not wearing that anymore. It's just Western now."

She continues: "We've lost quite a lot of our culture because we decided to live abroad. You only realise it when you go back home. For example ceremonies, you can't do them here. One, you are a minority. I have never celebrated Zimbabwean Independence Day since I came to live here, or Unity Day." I ask what Unity Day is. "It

was when they joined two parties - the coalition. The Zanu PF (Patriotic Front) and the Zapu", Cheryl explains. "They were two political parties that joined together. Then, we've got Heroes Day. It was a celebration to mark those people who went to war, who liberated us. Heroes is celebrated in August", Cheryl tells me. "Traditionally, for me, I didn't have a lot of traditional stuff. My people actually immigrated from South Africa to Zimbabwe, and most of the customs they just left behind. They didn't want to integrate it into Zimbabwe. I've tried to keep away from politics", she says.



Grandma, Cheryl and Michy, three generations (right)

We talk about religion. "I tried a few religions. In the end I settled more for the Catholic. But I'm not really fussy", Cheryl tells me. "To me God is just love. I do go to church, I mean, for my kids. They lived in Zimbabwe with my mother who is a very religious person. They never missed Sunday school. Never missed church. They went to a Christian school. So, when I brought them here, I just tried to keep it that way. That's why my son went to the Catholic school. It makes things easier. It's another place where you kind of meet people. What I found in the Catholic church is that you have something in common, it's just accepting. I wouldn't say I'm a staunch Catholic, I still eat meat on a Friday, and I don't do my rosaries as much as I am supposed to. I'm more flexible. So it's more like a support system for me.

And then our languages", Cheryl says. "My children speak my language as well as Vic's language." She explains: "Vic and me we speak different languages. I speak Ndebele and Zulu (both South African) and Vic speaks Shona (Zimbabwean). That's the most popular language in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe you've got Ndebele, and Shona. Ndebele speakers are mostly from South Africa. My middle name is 'Nomvula', a Zulu name. It means 'The one who came with the rain'." The memory is illustrated with a lovely recount: "When I was born there had been a drought for some time. The night my mum went into labour it started changing during the day. The clouds started collecting and the minute I came out, it poured. I was named by the nurses working that night. They just called me 'Nomvula'.

In Zimbabwe when I went to school we learnt everything in English and got Shona as a subject", Cheryl recalls. "When you start high school you can choose whether you want to do Shona, or Ndebele. With languages like Shona and Ndebele it also depended on where you lived. If you lived in the South part of Zimbabwe they speak a lot of Ndebele. In Bulawayo, they speak Ndebele mostly", she says. "Shona is mostly spoken by three quarters of Zimbabwe. They might speak it in different dialects but that's the most common language."

Cheryl explains that in their own languages communication is very polite. "I would never call somebody by first name, unless they ask me to", she says. "When my children came here it was the same thing. They would call everybody aunty/uncle. And then people said: 'But I'm not related.' I would tell them: 'They know. It's just a sign of respect.' And we don't look at people directly. Especially if they're older than you or if their station in life is slightly above you. It's the same, it's a sign of respect. You look down. I have found that difficult here when I interact with people. Then you have to explain to people that it's a sign of respect - 'you are above me'."

In retrospect she says: "I think I have changed now. If I look at you directly like this, in my culture that's very challenging. Even with children, it's just how they grew up. I had a friend who said to me: 'Why is it when you give me something, all the time you do this?'" She holds both hands palms up, one supporting the other, and continues: "I said: 'That's a sign of respect. We don't give things one handed like that. I support my hand. If I give something with one hand, to me, I've put you under my shoes. I see it even when I go back home on holiday. Even when I did my business it was different. Others admired it. And others at the same time complained about it because it's very different from what they're used to. You find even at home when you interact it's different. When I speak to my grandmother and I'm looking at her directly she tells me that she doesn't like it when I look at her like that. And with the children, it's no different. When we sit here my son says to me: 'At school they tell me if I'm upset or angry I should tell you.' But in our culture my son is not supposed to talk like that to me. It doesn't matter if I'm right or not. Where I come from, a parent is never wrong. It's very different", Cheryl says.

We continue to speak about other subjects in relation to culture. "When I was growing up I was an asthmatic. I stayed away from sports although when I went to high school, I played netball as I went to boarding school. I liked kicking the ball like soccer, or football." She mentions that she never knows which is the right term, soccer or football, and we have a little discussion about the terms used in different parts of the world. "I liked it because of my neighbours, where we lived", Cheryl says. "We had a lot of boys and girls, so we used to play that and we used to make our own ball from plastic. That's how I learnt how to kick the ball." I ask Cheryl where they got the plastic from. She describes this in more detail: "In Zimbabwe everything is reusable. Like plastic bags from Pak'n Save. You can make a ball out of that. You put whatever you want inside, and make a round ball. Then you take an old T-shirt and tear

it up into strips, so that you make the outside thicker, and harder. This way you can make it into anything. You weave the strips around. That's how we used to make our balls. Everything in Zims is reusable." She continues: "I never really played sports very competitively, because of my asthma at that time. But I was always good on the sideline", she adds. "I'm a good cheerleader. I am very observing. It's easy for me to notice things to talk about", she laughs.

Continuing on the creative track, she adds: "I liked making things, like toys for children such as cars from metal wire like barbed wire and stuff. Little cars for children, little bicycles. I liked doing things with my hands. I was more of a hands person." She still is a hands on person, now. "Now I love gardening, since I came to New Zealand. I grew up around people who loved growing their own food. My family did a lot of that. We never bought vegetables from the market. We grew our own stuff: beetroot, carrots and other things in our own garden. That was one thing I always did. I still do that.

I loved to dance", Cheryl continues. "When I was at boarding school I used to play the drum. I used to love the traditional dancing. The real African traditional dancing. I was a member of a traditional African dance group. I still like to dance. I love that. I joined Dance Dance Party Party, which we do once a month here at the Alchemy Hall here. Music is played and then you do your own dance. I'm getting back into it. I love it. I used to teach people how to do the African twerking", she says and adds: "For African dancing you can make your own costume but it's different depending on where you come from. I think the only specific thing of the costume is that they might have bells tied on their ankles.

African music is quite different from here", Cheryl tells me. "We got our own music. They play a lot of drums and have the Mbira. I've

never seen it here. It's made of wood, actually made from the bark of a tree." She shows me a picture on her phone and points out the parts. "You use your fingers or your thumbs", she says. "I remember my grandfather he used to make them. You get the big bark of a tree and then you take out the inside. He made the entire instrument himself."

Reflecting on her earlier years in Zimbabwe, Cheryl says: "When I was growing up, I liked writing which is something I still do quite a lot. I find it easier for me to write than to talk. I write about anything I remember. With my children I used to write poems and stories. When I traveled, I saw things which I wanted to share with my kids. I would write about that, and make it into a poem or a story. My children can tell you about places they have never been, because I wrote about it to them. I would do that by letters and used to send those aerograms like a poem. Everything I wrote we kept. Even now I still do it. I am mostly a visual person. I see, and then I write", Cheryl says. "I find my written word is much better than my spoken. When you speak three or four languages, most of the time you think in your first language. My mind, the first thing it speaks is the Ndebele part, which is the Zulu part. Even when I speak to my husband, he says to me: 'Are you thinking in Ndebele or Zulu?'" she laughs.

I am surprised to hear that the climate is just like New Zealand. "No different", Cheryl tells me. "We've got four seasons in Zimbabwe. The only difference is just that here in winter it rains so much. Otherwise it's just the same really because we've got the four seasons." At the time of our interview at the end of June, it's winter time in Zimbabwe as well. "The only difference is in South Africa you do get snow in some areas but it doesn't snow in other places", she says. "It's the same in Zimbabwe. We hardly have snow, but I come from the midlands area in Zimbabwe. Because it's right in the middle, it's very coldest area. Temperatures are quite similar to here

in New Zealand. To me what actually makes a difference is when I compare the Zimbabwean weather to the weather in the UK. I can say that's very cold."

For building usually bricks are used in Zimbabwe. "In the suburbs people have the main house and what they used to call a 'boys cottage'", Cheryl tells me. "This was for the maids. It is something you don't really find here. We used to use a lot of wood fires, so most of our houses have fireplaces", Cheryl says. "Most of the plants in Zimbabwe are the same as here in New Zealand. The only thing I haven't seen is the Kauri tree in Zimbabwe. And then the birds. I have never seen a Kiwi bird in Zimbabwe."

We talk about the differences in celebrations from country to country. "In Zimbabwe Christmas is celebrated quite differently", Cheryl tells me. "It's done by the whole community. It's a big thing. We sort of all converge in the locations on the Saturday before Christmas", Cheryl tells me. A location is comparable to a suburb. "You have a huge Christmas party for the location, for the whole area", she says. "And you all meet at a hall. They might kill maybe three or four beasts. You don't bring anything, just yourselves. Then lots of bands come to play music, and Father Christmas, Santa Claus comes, who will be giving children presents. These presents are just toys and sweets, that sort of thing. It's all about love and sharing. That is what I really miss the most", Cheryl says. "On Christmas day you open your doors to everybody. Your neighbours, they all come. So everybody's coming in and going. I miss that. I really miss that. We have summer Christmases as well because we live in the Southern Hemisphere. We eat plenty of rice, chicken, salads, and maybe a braai which is a barbecue at night. And then a lot of baking. It's not as commercialised as it is here", she says. "We don't do Christmas presents. It's not a big deal, but since coming to New Zealand this really has changed, as the children really have got into celebrating Christmas as well as birthdays", Cheryl continues. "It's a

big deal now if they don't get a Christmas or birthday present", she says. "But before it wasn't. It was all about getting together, sharing, eating. That was us."

Cheryl tells me she tries to go back to Zimbabwe every two years. "The last time I was down there was in 2012. Usually my mum comes here. She was here last year for nine months", she says. "My mum loves New Zealand. And I think out of the places I've lived, she loves New Plymouth the most. There are so many people and the people here are very friendly. She was meeting people here and went to the New Plymouth Club because I was a member there."

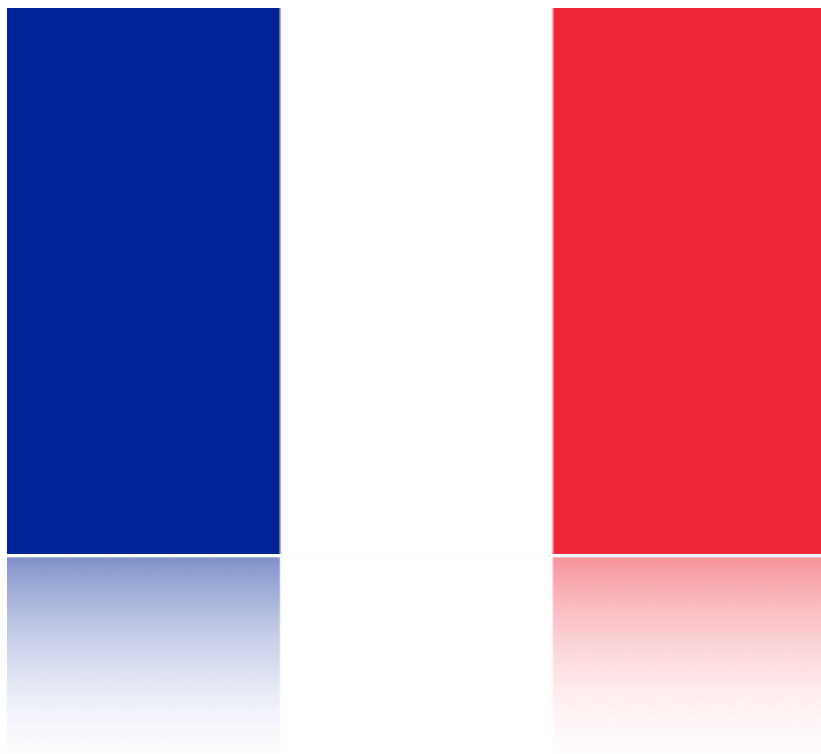
"We got citizenship in 2014 which was a big decision for us", Cheryl tells me. "I love it here, the opportunities that are here. And for my kids it's still good. They have been thriving. There are small issues here and there like anybody else but I think I've been one of the few ones who settled here quite alright. With the bullying, it is better as a parent as it just brought the children closer. It's just life. I see it all in a positive note. It's about the country for me. It's just a different world until you get yourself involved in it."



New Zealand
Citizenship
ceremony, 2014

I came to this country, and I am very adaptable", Cheryl adds. "I have decided this is where I want to be and I don't see myself going back home. This is now my home. That's why I'm very passionate about making things work here." She adds: "A passion I have is just to help people, make people comfortable. When I was growing up I didn't have that sort of attention and I know how it feels when you can't fit in. Or you are there, but nobody really sees you. So that's why I'm passionate about such things. There's always a way of making things better."

Océane Smith Cômont

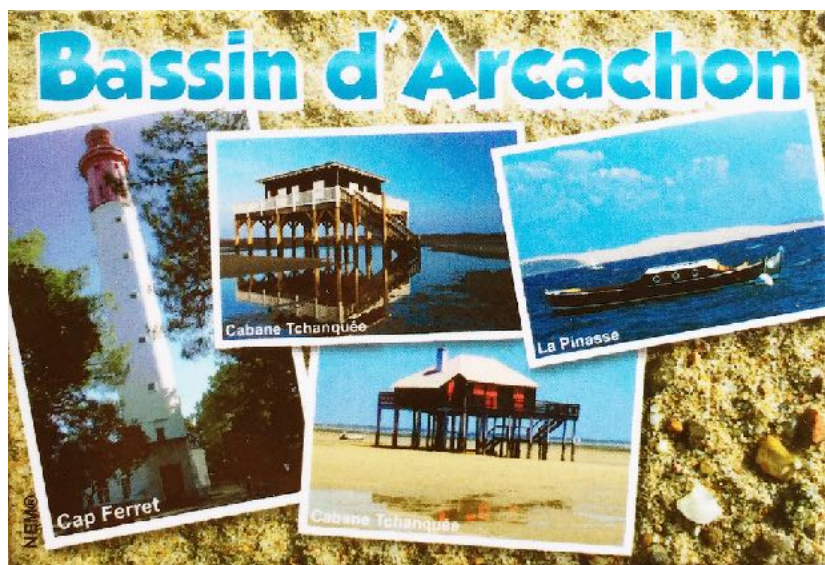


FRANCE

Océane, who wishes to be called 'Ocean' to simplify pronunciation for those not familiar with the French language, comes from Arcachon, a city in the South of France, forty five minutes South of Bordeaux, by car: "Driving at 130km per hour", she tells me. "I moved a lot and lived in many places in the area such as Le Teich (pronounced 'Luh Tesh') and other places", she says.



Postcards from
Le Bassin
d'Arcachon and
Cabane
Tchanquée (left
and below)





Dune du Pilat, Arcachon (above)

"Huge", Océane says. "110 metres high. It's the tallest dune in Europe. So many people want to see it but it's not very easy to climb. Fortunately in summer they put up a big staircase. At the top the view is breathtaking. It's the main attraction around."

She tells me that Arcachon is very famous for the seaside and nice walks. A long time ago the city was created for people who had tuberculosis because the smell of the sea and the fresh air was helping people. "It had a big centre for tuberculosis. But it's closed now. People were coming from Paris or anywhere in France by train or horse drawn carriage." Arcachon is very popular to many people. "In summer we probably have four times more people than in winter. It's crazy", Océane says.

She continues: "Arcachon is probably like New Plymouth. Imagine Taranaki: If the volcano (Mount Taranaki) was a big open lake on the

seaside surrounded by Opunake, Oakura, New Plymouth, Waitara, Stratford and Hawera, which would only be houses after houses. And in the middle of the lake we have these two cabins called Cabane Tchanquée. They are standing on poles so when it's high tide, the water flows under the cabins and when it's low, we can walk on sand. It's a paradise for birds and that's why people call the area 'Ile aux Oiseaux' (Birds' Island). You have to go there by boat or kayak, so it's a big activity to go to and see it."



"This photograph was taken around 2002 in front of the cabin tchanquee. My parents used to organise these activities for eight children each week on summer vacation, where we just enjoyed the beach and the sun. We went there with a boat. My brother in the front was about five years old and I on the far right, was fourteen. We did a lot of activities during the day - boat, scuba diving, banana boat. It was big fun and we had a good time", Océane says.

In France Océane studied 'Animation Social' and 'Socioculturel'. It is difficult to give an easy explanation but it can be translated as 'sociocultural community development'¹. This can be done by employees of retirement villages preparing activities for the residents there, or by people who work in the community, organising activities for people of any age. "For example with the YMCA, preparing activities for kids", Océane explains. "Animation is a big thing in France. Parents send their children on holidays very often. You can send your kids away as young as six. There are all sorts of camps to accommodate different interests such as sport, nature, theatre and dance - there are even computer camps. The children stay overnight in a tent or in a real hotel. Personally I was more interested in working in holiday camps or in a hotel to create activities for people." At these holiday camps Océane used to take care of children from six to eighteen years old, usually in little groups of twelve, of the same age. "My job was to take care of children during holidays", she continues. "Children would go to camps for one to three weeks. And I would be there to do the activities and all the basic things such as plan the meals or put the children to bed."

In her work it was Océane's job to make sure the children would be okay and to do activities with them every day. She would prepare the food and do the planning. "Usually it was pretty hard because we would go to bed after midnight and would wake up before everybody else", she recalls. "It was a fun but intense job."

¹ source: PERSPECTIVES ON FORMATION OF SOCIOCULTURAL ANIMATORS: ESCOLA SUPERIOR DE EDUCAÇÃO DE LISBOA vs IUT MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE BORDEAUX, <http://www.iut.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Animation-Bordeaux-Lisbonne1.pdf>

She remembers one of her best camps: "There were twelve children and myself. We were by ourselves for seven days with kayaks and canoes and had big buoys to protect stuff from water and would put things inside of them - the tent and everything. We would then go on the river with the canoe and every night we would set up camp and make dinner. Every two days usually we would go to the supermarket because we didn't have enough room to keep everything for a week." I could see how energetic this would have been and how involved Océane had to be in these responsibilities, in every way imaginable. "I had to plan the meal for the week, be sure to have enough for everybody, and cook for thirteen people", she says. "Usually we would arrive at the place at around one, two o'clock so we had all afternoon to do a game or to go to the supermarket. Sometimes the only available shop would just be a little bakery at a little place." She remembers some times when they forgot to buy some supplies, only to realise this when already back at camp: "Sometimes we would forget something and everything would be closed - 'We don't have any bread!'"



Océane with one of her kayak groups in 2008

Early in 2011 Océane tried a job in a big hotel. She explains: "When you go on holidays in this type of hotel you pay once for everything - food, equipment, club for children or parties at night...You usually have a baby club, a club for children until ten years old, and you have a teen club." She was doing the middle age. "I really enjoyed it", Océane says.



Superbagnères is one example of a holiday hotel club/camp for children. "You just pay once, and you have the roof, the food, the ski equipment, the price to go up and down, and activities - everything is paid for", Océane tells me.

"In New Zealand you don't have holiday camps where you send kids for one or two weeks to do activities. I was kind of sad because I don't know where to send Logan (Océane's one year old son) if he wants to do some activities during holidays once he is old enough. Children love going to this type of camp."

Deciding it was time for a big change, wanting to learn more English, changing her routine and in addition being a fan of 'The Lord of the Rings', New Zealand seemed to be the best destination to do that! Océane knew that she would have a better chance to be employed after spending time in an English speaking country.

"Coming to new Zealand was a challenge so I decided to come as an au pair", she says and elaborates: "You have security with the agency and the family and you can learn the language more easily."

Océane first made contact with a family in Auckland in November 2011. She moved here and started her job as an au pair in February 2012 and worked for them for seven months. During her stay in Auckland Océane met her future husband. "I was supposed to work for one year", Océane recalls, "but I met my husband less than two months after I arrived. We started dating and saw each other every weekend." They reasoned that if they were living together before her visa expired it would be easier to apply for a work visa with partnership. "More importantly, we would know if we could live together", she says. "In June I asked the family I worked for if it was possible to finish a little bit earlier. They found someone to replace me and I left at the end of September so everyone was happy."

Océane and her partner started living together in September 2012 in a little batch in her partner's home town of Matarangi in the Coromandel. "In the Coromandel I worked in kiwi packaging, putting kiwi in a little container. It keeps them well and nicely packed. Not the kiwi bird!!" She laughs when she sees I am getting confused.

In 2013 they went to France during the holidays. "I showed my partner where I am from", she says. "He used the time to ask my mum if he could marry me". She reveals a shy smile when exposing this event so close to her heart.

Summer holidays
in France, 2013

Famous Palais
de la Bourse
with water mirror
in front,
Bordeaux - "Very
refreshing when
it's so hot",
Océane says
(left)



Océane and her
partner hiking in
the mountains
called Les
Pyrenees in the
South of France
(above)

At Hossegor
Beach, famous
for surfing (right)



"After we came back I worked a little bit with his family and helped them make fishing gear in Matarangi. In the summer I did some work at the flower factory with orchids and worked in a fish and chips shop and a mussel restaurant. It was a busy summer."

Later that year they visited Wellington to go to a wedding. She looks back: "On the way back we decided to come to New Plymouth for a couple of days because we hadn't seen this part of the country yet. This is when I fell in love with the city. I thought: 'This is the city I would like to live in if we move. It has the surf and the mountain - he is a surfer'", she says, referring to her husband. "When walking on the street in town I heard the bell from the clock tower. That's when I knew I wanted to move here because it reminded me of France. We have so many churches and so we have the bell sound every hour. It made me feel special, kind of as if I was back in France for a second. It was the clock tower, but it has the same sound. It is a nice reminder of France."

In August 2014 they came to live in New Plymouth. Océane's mother came over from France and helped them move to New Plymouth. "My partner who was a plasterer managed to get a job here. He realised he actually had more opportunity to work here in New Plymouth." Océane herself found a job as a waitress in a restaurant. "Then I worked at New World for a year until taking time off for our honeymoon. After that I did work a little while at a restaurant in a caravan in Oakura, for a couple of months. I did the winter season with a friend and a couple of months for summer."

Océane (born as Océane Darnon-Cômont) and her partner were married in 2016 in their own garden at home in New Plymouth. Hence the name 'Smith' in her last name, she points out. It was lovely to hear that Océane's cousin and her family were able to come for the wedding, while Océane's mother and her sister attended the wedding by Skype for the entire night. Océane and

her husband now have a one year old son Logan, who was born in 2017.

One difference Océane has noticed between France and New Zealand is breastfeeding. New Zealand is so much more open to it than France where people are much more private about it, especially in public. "When my best friend had a one month old baby she breastfed her baby in a coffee place. She felt bad vibes from the people around her and knew they were looking and talking about her. Myself I can stop in the middle of my shopping, sit anywhere I want and breastfeed my fifteen months old baby here in New Zealand. Nobody would say anything, people would only give me a little smile and politely comment - it's so refreshing. I'm actually a little afraid to go back to France and breastfeed outside - it's quite sad", Océane says.

She emphasises that she misses her family more than the country she comes from: "I miss France, but more my mum and my sister and my brother." In saying that, she does acknowledge other differences in culture such as the history in France which is centuries old and shows me a postcard of Carcassonne.

"Carcassonne is a city which is still intact and is about twelve hundred years old. It is a very famous city where I have been a couple of times", she says. "Quite far from where I lived. It's a medieval city still intact. People live inside and outside (the wall), and people come to visit the city. It's very well preserved. The people who live there live from tourism. They have souvenir shops, restaurants and hotels."



Visiting Le Mont Saint Michel, summer holidays 2013



The postcard from Carcassonne

Océane points out to me: "Nothing is old in New Zealand. I miss the old places with histories you don't have here, like Le Mont St-Michel." She shows me a magnet from the fridge door, adding: "I'm a magnet fan, I have a collection of magnets." I understand, as it's one of the ways Océane is able to keep her memories alive. "People still are living here too. First time when we went back to France I showed my partner this place. He loved it. A lot of little villages in France are old and look like that, but without fortification. They are all original and people live and work there. Here in New Plymouth St. Mary's cathedral is the oldest building. I quite miss the old places, like that. It's very special."

Another aspect is the landscape. "In France when you go to the beach, there is beach, and lots of it", she says. "If you go to the mountains, there's just mountains. If you go to the city, there's just city. The big difference here is, In France you have to travel a lot and far. You only have mountains, or only sea, only land. But here in New Plymouth you can have the sea, the mountain, and then the land in a day, in the same place. Everything is nearby: town, the mountain, the sea, rivers, farmland. Here you have every type of... a lot of different types of views, in one wink." I agree. It's one of the things I personally love about Taranaki.

"We used the train a lot to travel. It's a shame the train is not accessible anymore. I would go to Auckland all the time if the train was easier. Imagine a train from here to Auckland." I notice a look of wishful thinking in Océane's eyes. "A bus takes so much more time. In France I used to take the train every day to go to university. It takes about three hours to go to Paris from Bordeaux. It's like from Auckland to Wellington in three hours. In France there is a multitude of trains and buses people can take every hour of the day to any destination and at an affordable price."

Climate wise, France is colder in winter and hotter in summer, compared to New Zealand. "Here it's maybe not that hot in summer, but it's less cold in winter so it's quite nice", Océane says. "And when it rains in France, we know it's rain for days. Here in New Zealand there's always hope it's going to change. You know it may be sunny and blue sky in an hour. At least it's possible."

She loves the playgrounds for children here and the equipment they have and how many there are. In comparison the playgrounds in France are much smaller and simple in the cities and are just on concrete. They don't have many trees on playgrounds. Océane thinks that this is possibly one of the reasons why it is so common for the French to send their children on holiday camps where they can do activities they would otherwise miss out on. "In France we don't have so many playgrounds like you guys have like really monkey things", she says. "We do have some playgrounds but they look dead compared to the choice here."



Océane at the beach in Brittany, or 'Little Britain' in 1992 as a four year old.

The first time Océane came here, there were different things which shocked her: "You have clean toilets! I know it's stupid but that really makes a big difference. Your toilets are cleaner compared to France. You are always prepared. There's always water, there's always soap. Public toilets - clean", she exclaims. And she is impressed that there are always toilets in the playground.

Another typical New Zealand observation was that so many people and children go barefoot or on jandals which is considered normal, whereas that is something you just wouldn't see in France. "So many people walk barefeet. Even in the supermarket. You would never walk barefoot in the supermarket." She laughs at the idea, and continues: "Or in a restaurant or in a place like that. You wear shoes. You can have jandals yes but even in a place like the beach there's concrete next to the beach so you wear sandals. Children here go barefoot to school and even in winter." She laughs. "In Auckland I saw a man running barefeet. But not like catching a bus you know, really running as in exercise. How can you run?? So crazy."

She was surprised to see plastic bags in here in the supermarkets: "In France we stopped using plastic bags in supermarkets years ago. And New Zealand was supposed to be a green country. Green and natural and then I see plastic bags in the supermarket." It's nice to know that recently the local supermarket chains in New Zealand have been working on minimising and ending the use of plastic bags too. No doubt this will support the clean green image New Zealand is known for in the world.

Océane is now a member of the women's support group called Migrant Women Meet in New Plymouth. They meet every Tuesday and talk about stuff - what's going on in the city and the activities they can do. Sometimes they cook together. "We share information about what's going on in our life. We are all from different countries so we care to help one another."

The subject of cooking brings us to food: "With food I find here we need to be more creative" she says. "In France you have so much choice of meals already prepared which you put in the microwave, or even in the oven. Not necessarily typical French food, but food from everywhere. Here you need to make everything from scratch. Not every single thing but most of the stuff. Here you can do supermarket in half an hour whereas In France you need a good hour or two. The supermarkets are huge there. You have an aisle just for cheese, for butter, milk." I can visualise it. She continues: "You have two aisles just for yoghurt. One aisle complete for cheese, and another one for all butter and milk. There is so much choice in yoghurt. There are lots of different types of yoghurt such as sheep yoghurt, cow yoghurt, goat yoghurt, soya yoghurt. So many different types. I used to use a lot of soya yoghurt. I really miss cheese from France. It's everything, French people always say." She tells me how expensive it is to buy French food here: "The Rustic cheese, a Camembert costs \$20 here or \$16 if it's on special. In France it costs 2 Euro, or around \$5." She laughs in desperation. "The most expensive cheese in France must be probably around \$5. The cheese is definitely a big big thing, I miss the most."

She tries to make everything herself. "I try to. It's nice to cook. But some stuff we don't have like duck liver pâté or it's hard to find blood sausage or black pudding. But there is other food too which is more expensive in France and cheaper here, like kiwifruit or nashi pear."

I ask her if she still listens to French music, like I listen to Dutch music, even if I rarely do. "Of course I do", she says. "I love French music. I miss hearing new French music a little but I can count on my mum and my sister to look up the latest music on YouTube." She still enjoys watching French movies, too. "The funny thing is, Netflix offer quite a lot of choice in French movies. And I found out that I

could watch the latest shows of two French humorists who do their show on Netflix. So cool. That's awesome."

I can feel the strong connection Océane still has with France. "I want to keep my French inside of me but I'm still wondering when my visa and my passport expire, if I'm going to ask for Kiwi nationality or not. I have another four years before they expire so I'm wondering, maybe it would be simpler to ask for a Kiwi passport. And now my son is Kiwi too. He's both a Kiwi and French so it's kind of well eh... It's a valid question and they are going to be significant decisions once she is ready to make them. "The French and New Zealand passport are recognised everywhere. There are no restrictions", she says.



Carrying the French flag at the Taranaki Multi Ethnic Extravaganza!

I want to know how important religion is for her. "You have way more choice here", she says. "In France we are centrally Catholic. Every tiny village has a church. Even if it has one house, it has a church and a mayor. I'm not a practicing Catholic but I did get Catholic education. For two years I went to a Catholic high school and used to have nuns as teachers." She enjoyed the group at school where they discussed theological questions. "We might give my son religious education as a general culture to teach him all religions, to know how they differ, to learn and know what every religion talks about such as Muslim or Protestant. But here in New Zealand you have so many different churches. Crazy. It's like: a church, a church, a church. And all different. Protestant, Catholic, facing each other."

Thinking about her future Océane tells me she still loves working with children and is now working as a nanny with two little girls. She is doing this through 'Nurtured at Home' as a home based early childhood facility. She is able to do this because of her past work experience with children in France and started in July this year. "It's a good feeling", she says. "Now, finally success to do my nanny business. I will probably have to do some training with Nurtured at Home still, but as a nanny I will be working full time and I'm able to keep my baby at the family's place and that's just perfect."

Stephan Vogel



GERMANY

Stephan is one of the local vets in Waitara. We meet early in the morning for our interview at a popular cafe in the little town. It's his day off, today. A large camera sits on the table. He is an avid photographer and tells me he has recently bought himself this new 'toy'. He shows me a few photographs, followed by a discussion about photography. Out and about with his camera everywhere he goes there are certain things he has noticed: "I'm not sure whether it's more Taranaki or anything else", he says, "but I have seen so many 'special' number plates." He is talking about the personalised number plates you see around on cars.



One of the photographs Stephan shows me.

As Stephan is German, I wonder if he will say something about the fact that I was a few minutes late for our appointment. I feel guilty and it was on my mind while driving. To my knowledge it is very common for Germans to be extremely punctual, and I can't help smiling when indeed he does point it out! But he reassures me that

in Bavaria, the area he comes from, people aren't as strict as in other parts of the country.

Stephan was born in Munich and grew up in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, situated in the South of Germany. He met Anne in his second year of study in South Africa. "She is third generation South African of Italian extraction - all four grandparents came from Italy around 1900", he tells me. "I had a double immigration", he continues. "First from Germany to South Africa, and then to New Zealand. I stayed in South Africa because I met Anne. We lived around Pretoria, the thirty years we were together in South Africa.



With mother Hannelore (Anne) and sisters Monika and Bea in Germany



The motivation for New Zealand was", he says, "We wanted out of the country. My wife is South African, third generation. She got to the point where she thought that there's really no future. Did we

really want to grow old there? - With the way the security and the medical system etcetera was developing.”

With regard to education, the older two children had completed their schooling. One of them already left the country and both of them were married. They only had their youngest daughter Erica left to consider if they decided to move. “Her schooling was internationally recognised and she was at the point of going from primary to high school, so it was a sensible point to make the break there so the timing was right”, Stephan says.

“I did my veterinary studies at the Veterinary Faculty of the University of Pretoria, Onderstepoort, a degree recognised by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) in the UK”, he says. RCVS is the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons in the United Kingdom, through which there are interchangeable agreements between some countries on the veterinary degree. “Both Anne and I being vets it essentially put it down to these countries. So from a work point of view, if Immigration was happy, we could literally walk in and start working in Britain, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand”, he says.



The family in South Africa

"I'd worked in Britain for some extended periods and neither weather nor people were inductive - 'Do we really want to live there', we thought. My wife having had her entire upbringing in South Africa was a bit scared of Canada weather wise. And she had family who had already moved from South Africa to Australia before, so a couple of years ago we did a bit of a 'look-see' tour. We visited Melbourne, Perth, and Adelaide. During that trip we went on a family holiday for a week in New Zealand. Everywhere we went for that week in New Zealand we felt at home, so it was almost a no brainer. New Zealand is friendly and welcoming", he says and adds: "And vets are on the shortlist. I had a couple of interviews I prearranged before Christmas so I was here for about two weeks, in 2014. I flew over to Sydney to have Christmas with the family. Anne arrived from South Africa and then on the second of January, the whole family, the three of us came over.



We got a room at a motel in Auckland which had a little back porch. We stayed there for six weeks and in that time I found a job", he says. While job searching the family did a bit of travelling and went

from Auckland down to Hamilton. Stephan describes the trip in detail. "We discovered Matamata and Hobbiton on that trip. We then went across to see friends in the Bay of Plenty, and went over to Gisborne for an interview. After that we came down here, before going to Palmerston North and then up the Desert Highway, so we saw a bit of the country." After several potential job offers, Stephan accepted the position in Waitara. "I'm as happy as a lark here", he says.



Discovering Hobbiton

"I carried on from my last fifteen years of experience as a vet in South Africa, where I ran my own small animal clinic" he continues. "I was hired here as a small animal clinician. It's an 'eight to five' job. I enjoy being a vet - I always have. And I live close enough so that I can cycle to work in Waitara."

Another guest notices Stephan in the cafe, and interrupts our conversation: "I did notice ya, hello, how are ya?" Stephan laughs

and replies: "I'm alright and you?" It's a friendly exchange. He turns back to me and clarifies: "One of the clients. It's when one is a vet in a small place like this... A lot of people like to see you. It happened in my clinic in South Africa too." He almost has the air of a local celebrity here in Waitara. "For fifteen years I had my own clinic and knew granddads, their children and their children - their children had children and pets and were my clients. I had at least two families with three generations as clients. When you see so many people come in... you become a generalised healer. You give advice", he says.

"In South Africa we had a plot. A lifestyle block, they call it here", Stephan tells me. He laughs heartily. "Here, a 'plot' translates to something in a graveyard, we were told. It's a little glitch of language you need to become aware of." He has noticed it's the same with terms such as 'deposits' and 'home loans'. "That sort of thing has a different usage from one English language to another", he says.

"Did you find that difficult to get your head around?" I ask. "If you're multilingual, it's just one of the words you find and tick it off", he answers, casually. "For the people that come from a different system where buying houses and laws are completely different - ways of getting the loans or whatever it might be a lot more difficult", he says. "South Africa is English speaking, it's colonial, and in the Southern Hemisphere. There are so many parallels, it's a fairly easy job."

Stephan starts to speak what sounds like German to a man walking past in the cafe. I do have some knowledge of the German language but I can't understand a word they are saying. "That gentleman, he's my friend", he says. "He's Austrian. I'm Bavarian. We both speak our dialect and pretty much even the Germans don't understand us", he says. I find that very interesting, amusing, and



also reassuring. He goes on: "I speak High German to my children, Bavarian to him, English to my wife, probably Bavarian to my sisters when I phone them, a little bit of French, probably get smatterings of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Dutch I can read if I need to. French I can read but there's a lot of vocabulary I miss." It's a mouthful. "So Italian", I ask, "Does that come because you were close to Switzerland?"

"I think, as kids we went on holidays to Italy and France", Stephan replies. "I had French at school and I was exposed to that. I just haven't used it for long enough. And when you fly to Europe on Portuguese airlines, you pick up one or two words - there are enough similarities between the Latin based languages anyway. As an outsider you notice that. When we went to my daughter's wedding in Mexico where she was living at the time, we found that if an accidental Italian word slipped out the locals would not understand it, even though it's so similar that an outsider can't miss it. But they only know one language and if it doesn't come exactly the way they are used to it, it's incomprehensible for them. There is not that language flexibility and I think that's something if you're multilingual you become a lot more mobile, mentally." It's a good point he makes, especially when you consider that we live in a multilingual country with Te Reo Māori currently being debated as a compulsory subject in schools. I'm all for it.

There is more to the Italian connection than holidays, and Stephan is not the only one who's multilingual in the family. "My wife's mother

tongue is English", he continues. "But she is of Italian extraction. And both my sisters married Italians. My oldest daughter is half German half Italian genetically, carries a German and South African passport, and her husband is half Mexican, half Swedish. They spent three years in Mexico where she studied and now they live in Sweden. Her language skills are extraordinary", he says.

It appears to have been very easy for Stephan to adapt into the New Zealand culture and mix with the local people. He tells me that while in Europe, he also spent some time in the Netherlands and in Britain for work purposes. "The year I spent in Holland my wife had just given birth to one of our little daughters. She was stuck between the four year old and the newborn. In between being at home, going to the nursery school and doing the shopping, she found herself really isolated. It was a difficult time for her, whereas I was in a work environment. I had contact with people. I was happy being at home but while I was happy at work she was under stress.

As we made the decision together to come here, it was much easier for her. She found the immigrant women's group in town quite early on, which gave her support. Through the group, some other people from our circle of friends and through my work she was able to build contacts. Then she started finding foot in her own direction of work and started up her own part time business. She is doing what she loves to do", he says. He tells me she is writing a novel based on her family history.

"Writing was a project she already had going", Stephan continues. "I think she was somehow energised again. She's a vet. She then specialised as a pathologist, and studied animal virology in a disease that doesn't occur in this country. Before she did veterinary, she got a degree in biology. She's far more into the research side of the veterinary field than I. But at some point she started to practice craniosacral therapy. She started getting interested in working with

equine therapy as well. Since then she has expanded craniosacral therapy to work on horses as well. Through the web she found people here in New Zealand who do Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP), and then the next thing you see several people in Taranaki who do this kind of work. It was quite a surprise because we wondered whether these new techniques had actually managed to get this far into the province and it just happened", he says.

Stephan himself has an interest in other healing modalities as well and has used homeopathy in the past on his own patients. At the moment he is learning about rongoā. He is starting to make his own mother tinctures of traditional Māori medicine. "From an environmental point of view", he says, "If you can get almost the same effect with a homeopathic dilution, why would you want to actually destroy the resource? Wild Arnica in Europe has been harvested to smithereens in certain areas. Now you've got to know where to look for it", he says.

"I think there are quite a few farmers who use homeopathy", Stephan continues. "Because it does away with the withholding periods. That was one thing that was so mind boggling to us. We come in and we don't know what the coloured tops mean on the milk shelves. I was used to skim milk, or low fat milk. Then you get homogenised, pasteurised, and full cream milk. You get the type of milk processed to fat content and you get your pasteurising or ultrahigh temperature treated long-life milk and the homogenising which allows it not to separate. At one point I asked: 'What does it mean - standardised milk?' Then I found out that the dairy industry here runs similar to a beef herd in South Africa. Dairying in South Africa is year round. You have a couple of cows coming into season every week, and they get fertilised by artificial insemination. You calf all year round so you have an even spread of dry cow - early, middle and late lactation throughout the year so that your production is all year round. That's why you have full cream milk, skim milk and the

extra low fat milk. But here, you run it biologically correct - you have a breeding season, a calving season, and a milking season. Milk that's available all year round is basically reconstituted milk from separated out bits and pieces and therefore you can standardise it as a protein", he says. "What I am really happy about, is the way they allow raw milk to be sold. Essentially we've got other milk only if we don't have 'Dolly's milk' in the fridge. It's just a completely different product.

With regard to the cows, dairy farming is very intensive in South Africa", Stephan continues. "You need to buy in or grow your own feed. When I went to South Africa in '85, they had just gone through a seven year drought. It was almost a shock to the system.... Dams were dry, the percentages of rain filling in the dams were in the news every day."

I ask how the weather in South Africa is different from here in New Zealand. "South Africa is a big country. The Western Cape would be similar because they've got the West wind weather, so they get nice summers. It's similar to the Mediterranean climate, as is most of the North Island. You've got nice summers, and the rain happens in winter. Where we lived in South Africa, on the high plateau, it's monsoon area so you get summer rains. Winter is all dry and cold. Normally there is three months without rain - that's winter", Stephan says. He tells me that he enjoys living in Waitara. "Some gentleman told me Waitara is good - 'The micro climate is way better than Bell Block'." He laughs.

"We found a rental when we first arrived in Waitara", Stephan tells me. "The dogs were already on their way, and the cats, so ... "

"Did you bring them over from South Africa?" I ask. "We brought two dogs and three cats. They are family and they had to come", he says. "Initially we didn't intend to bring dogs but one of our older



South African
scenery



dogs died and the neighbour gave us a Labrador puppy so we suddenly had a youngster that had to come. We also had a middle aged to elderly German Shepherd. Pinto, which as a two year old, declared herself personal playmate and body guard to our younger daughter. It was very important in that initial phase. A thirteen year old being pulled out of school having had a nice group of friends where they did things together at school and out of school. She knew no one but her parents. The dog gave my daughter the initial moral support, other than us.

While the dogs were in quarantine, the rental agency told us 'No dogs or cats"', Stephan recalls. "We explained that we are the local vet, and that we have pets. I offered to fix the yard and they allowed us to have our animals. After two years we bought a place of our own, in Waitara. "I enjoy my gardening", he says. "I'm trying to get certain flower beds up and running. We started our own vege patch but between my not having enough time and Erica being in her teenager phase, I haven't quite got the production line going sufficiently yet. It's fine. We had a good crop of butternut pumpkins last year but it takes up a lot of space. This year I'm going to train them onto the wall. I'm still trying to get the composting in a way so that I can actually cope with the amount of lawn clipping coming off and make compost. I don't like chucking stuff away. Whether it's leaflet or grass, it ought to be composted and go back in the ground", he adds.

"It is a good country to be in", Stephan continues. "The school system is one of the best I have ever come across", he says, and adds: "I like the small classes and the whole philosophy of teaching being to cater to the strengths of the individual. If somebody is good with his hands and not academically minded it is possible to get practical experience in the woodworking or metal workshop available at school."

Daughter Erica was thirteen years old when the family came to New Zealand. "In South Africa she went to the German school", Stephan tells me. "When we got here she had to jump a year to get into her age group. We talked to a fair number of people we knew who worked in the education system as teachers and head masters themselves and also other people that were there. We always heard: 'Make sure they're in their age group'. It's interesting - with the Migrants' Men, one of the first things that was mentioned was: 'Why are you here? What are the good and the bad points about this new country?' And I would say ninety five percent of anyone who had family and children at school, said the schooling system here is pretty much exceptional", he says.

"The initial couple of months in New Zealand we home schooled Erica. We were forced to wait with a final decision to enrol her at a school until the immigration paperwork allowed us to do so and we had completed our medical certificates and examinations", Stephan tells me. They decided to enrol Erica at Spotswood College. "At the other end (of New Plymouth)", Stephan says. "It was quite interesting. We found out there are so many high schools in the vicinity", he says. "In the end it was my daughter's decision that she grew up in a co-ed school. With the co-ed factor, in the end the kids don't just learn academics. Girls or boys only may be more successful academically, but are we trying to just stuff academic knowledge into them, or are we trying to make people out of them? If you consider that you want them to learn life skills, co-ed is probably more important than any of the academics", he suggests.

"Even with the school system being slightly different we found it made no difference", Stephan continues. "They had just started with French when Erica started. She had already had that for a year in South Africa with a poor teacher, so it was good for her to do the repeat although she was a bit ahead of her class. The way they taught science however, in South Africa they concentrated way more

on physics, while chemistry would come later. Here, they teach both along as they go so she was way behind on the chemistry side. It's just the way things pan out. She worked her butt off and she was really good. She started at year 9, her first year at high school, and essentially her mother tongue is English", he says.

In the process of getting to know New Zealand Stephan has made some interesting observations. "In this country you've got a small population, but the majority of the people work", Stephan says. He comes up with a detailed analogy of age structure, unemployment rates and beneficiaries in relation to other countries, supported by numbers and percentages.

"In South Africa day to day life with precautions is perfectly feasible", Stephan tells me. "But you take completely different precautions to what you take here - you've got your fences, security alarms, you've got to make sure that if you drive into the complex you stop to be certain that the gate closes behind you, with nobody slipping through. The security industry in South Africa is larger than the combined military and police force together", he tells me and adds that it would be so much better if you wouldn't need them anymore. "People wouldn't spend the money on all these security measures", he says. "They would be able to have a meal at a restaurant. You would have people employed as restaurant waiters and cooks, rather than as security guards or night patrol men. It would be a much more positive environment for a mindset", he reasons.

"Have you noticed any similarities here in terms of racism?" I ask. A straight 'Yes', is the answer. "Coming from Germany, post war, I grew up in the 80's", Stephan tells me. "It was probably the most equal society that Germany even had. It's still a good country to be in. New Zealand feels very similar to what I came from. After thirty years of South Africa, very much so. But from the South African side

one notices a lot of institutionalised racism in New Zealand, which had the advantage of the Treaty of Waitangi. So at least on paper the indigenous population here always was equal, which Africa never had. The British justified the Anglo-Boer War by saying the fight was against the Boers who didn't want to let go of slavery. But the Brits were really quick to institute laws that essentially created dependency and modern day slavery with the labour. A poll tax situation especially in the gold mines was instituted in Africa right at the beginning. They had the Zulu uprising because of that." He explains: "Essentially you declare people your subjects, you then put taxes on them - that's how you create a bonded workforce. Here the situation was never that extreme. The more recent political developments in New Zealand definitely take cognisance of the historical inequalities but the subliminal inequalities are difficult to address", Stephan continues. "No rich country should have starving people, so a social safety net is important. I think social grants are important. They should be high enough so that somebody can live decently."

Stephan tells me he is always been interested in history. "One of the first things I did when we came here was buy a little book, a two hours' worth of reading summary of New Zealand, a little bit of background geology and then going into the Māori history", he says. It's nice to hear when someone from another country takes the time to do some research about the place they have moved to. It shows real interest in the local community they live in, and the effort they put in to integrate into the area as much as possible. He shows me a little book about Taranaki about our local history, which includes old archived images from the area. "I was reading up on the local activities and went down to the archaeology day in Hawera", he tells me. "They have meetings and field outings."

He now goes to the Migrant Men's Support group, set up by Migrant Connections Taranaki. "I think there are a lot of things

immigrants can contribute, apart from the energy they bring. It's the 'having seen similar things done differently'", he says. "By just providing that information - if you get it to the right people, you open up. It doesn't mean it has to be done that way. But it doesn't mean it has to be done the way it's always been done either."

We talk about cultural similarities. "I think what we've found is", Stephan says, "Auckland is a interesting city. As a city it probably can even hold water to Sydney and Cape Town and other famous big cities. Simply because its a little bit smaller, it's still got a bit more of a family feel to it. But it still is a big city. We've lived in big cities for so long. 'Been there done that', got the T-shirts. We're happy being out of a city. I didn't realise how lopsided New Zealand is, with a quarter of the population actually living in Auckland. That's quite extreme."



Mount Taranaki

Thinking more local, Stephan sees New Plymouth as being quite cosmopolitan due to the oil and gas industry, even if it's a relatively small place. And he likes the fact that we have easy access to beaches here. "Going to the beach back home would have taken a six hour drive", he says.

We talk about the population here, coupled with our traffic. "'Rush hour' in Waitara, where you have to wait for six cars before you can turn, I can live with", he says. We laugh. He recalls when South Africa had blackouts where the power supply collapsed. "And you know what Auckland traffic is like. Now imagine what it would be like when the entire suburb is without power - there are no traffic lights", he says. "We were also really impressed two years ago, when there were major downpours here. There was a big pothole washed out on State Highway 3. Within minutes to maximum half an hour there were cones there and it was fixed within a few days."

He compares that to South Africa. "There were radio races", he tells me. "People phoned in potholes to the radio announcers who would announce them on morning radio. Johannesburg had three municipal offices, it was sort of split into three municipalities. They essentially did the public a service as a way of getting some of them fixed. There were private businesses that offered to take over road repairs. They were told that the officials weren't interested because they would still have to go through the process, meaning they would have to go through bribes. There were farmers that offered to fix rural roads. They were basically told they couldn't because the council would hold them responsible if there would be an accident. Those farmers offered to repair the roads because it affected their business. They couldn't truck things in and out anymore as the potholes caused severe damage to their vehicles", he says.

"Would they fix these potholes in the end?" I ask. "Yes, but there were desperate people", Stephan answers. "Some private people

bought a lot of bagged trees from the nursery and put them into the potholes to mark them and also to just get some sort of publicity to get something done somewhere along the line. It has improved I think. On our last visit we found some roads better than we remembered them and others at least not deteriorated further to the same degree. New Zealand is not a paradise on all fronts, but when we hear people complaining here we sometimes smile", he says.

On food, Stephan is unapologetic: "Our family is funny - even if we're trying to get off the starch now for my tummy's sake, Christmas is a period where you get fat in five nationalities. From special recipes for English Christmas pudding, German cookies, speculaas and panforte, we eat it all."

He highly values the effort people have made for the family when they immigrated. "And when some friends from South Africa came to live in New Zealand, we organised one of my wife's friends in Auckland to look after them. She is now 'aunty Moira' to them", Stephan says. "They came around and inherited some furniture from us that with our move into our new home was superfluous. We were helped ourselves when we came here - I still have a borrowed lawnmower. A table we borrowed has now gone to somebody else further down the line, and that's nice because these bits of furniture acquire their own bit of history", he says, pleased to having been able to return the favour.

In conclusion

In acknowledgment of and gratitude to Geetha Kutty, Coordinator, and Trustees, of Migrant Connections Taranaki Charitable Trust and thanks to the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board for making the publication of these amazing stories of change and transformation, adaption, integration, courage and determination, possible.

I am especially grateful for all the migrants I had the privilege of interviewing for this book of which the aim is to give us an insight into the backgrounds and motives of these migrants, who made the decision to move to another country, and into another culture. In addition my personal wish is that the reading of these stories will lead to greater unity in the community. I feel truly inspired by each one's drive to succeed and especially humbled for the opportunity to meet these amazing people; for letting me into their personal lives and their trust to have their stories shared.

It is so important to have these stories told so that we may view these people from all over the world from an insightful and perhaps new perspective, in the hope that our emotional and cultural awareness may be raised and immigrants are welcomed with an open mind.

I invite you to enrich your vision and look forward to all the future has to offer. After all, we all are human beings and if I may say so, not so different.

Ingrid van Amsterdam

About the author



Ingrid van Amsterdam is a migrant herself who arrived in New Zealand for family reasons in 1988. After gaining Permanent Residency in 1990 she became a New Zealand Citizen in 1999. Through her own experiences Ingrid has been able to identify well with the migrants she interviewed for this book and has enjoyed learning about their cultures.

In day to day life Ingrid interviews people from all walks of life on behalf of government departments. She is also a complementary healthcare practitioner and is a certified auric magnetic energy healer. A former real estate sales consultant, she wrote 'A handy guide to Buying Property in New Zealand' following a presentation on the subject.

We live in a multicultural society. With ever increasing migration and the blending of the peoples of the world it would be nice to think that one day borders will become meaningless and superfluous. At this point in time in New Plymouth alone more than fifty nationalities are represented. The six people interviewed here reflect some of these nations and are the stars of this book. Let us celebrate humanity in every sense of the word and allow it to shine in all the corners of the world.



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