



COMING TO CANADA

A story of our first year in a new country

PART 1

Back in 1999, things weren't looking good for us. Gaby and her brothers were putting a lot of work in their pasta store, but everything was getting more and more difficult, mostly due to the corruption and the economic instability. In my case, I was still doing well, but I felt I was stuck. Both of us were working many hours, and we were barely seeing each other. Since Gaby worked on weekends, I would stay alone with the kids all Saturday and most of the Sunday. The family time was almost non-existent. Even though both of us were working, we were still renting an apartment, had a very small car shared with my mother in law, and had absolutely no savings. There was no way we could guarantee our kids' future. We needed a change...

One Sunday, Gaby found an ad from the Canadian Embassy on the "[Clarín](#)" newspaper, in which they were inviting IT professionals to attend an informative seminar. Gaby knew that it had been always my dream to get to know Canada, so she brought the ad home and asked me to apply. I did, reluctantly, and told Gaby that I thought it would be difficult for me to get accepted; I thought it would be difficult to qualify as a potential immigrant. To my surprise, the invitation came in the mail a few days later. Once again, and maybe for the only time, I was the cautious one, and I told Gaby "let's not get too excited here, just because they have invited me doesn't mean they have accepted me"... Little did I know that they had already determined that I qualified for immigration...

I came back home, my eyes this big, and told Gaby "we can go to Canada". Gaby thought about it and said "Let's do it". I got worried; even though I practically didn't have any family in Buenos Aires, Gaby was very closely attached to hers. We went through all the questions you can ask yourself in those moments: Are we ready? Are we strong enough? Won't we miss our family and friends too much? Will it be hard for our kids? And what about us? Are we willing to give up on our careers and start all over again in the name of our kids' future?

PART 2

Our decision was made, we were going to Canada. We then had to announce it to our families. I got all kinds of reactions from my side: understanding, happiness, anguish, even indifference. From Gaby's side, we got support, as we expected. Those who were going to be affected the most by us leaving, like Gaby's family and my brothers, were the first to understand us and back us up. But we knew that for some of them, like my mother in law, this was heart-breaking, and it wasn't easy. Once we talked to our family, I let my boss know what my plans were, in case they had long term plans for me. After all that [Rolando](#) and [his company](#) had done for me and my family, it was the least I could do.

We submitted our application and started working toward meeting all the conditions. One of them was that we had to prove that we had enough money to support our first six months in Canada, in case I didn't get a job right away. I needed C\$ 10,000 for me and C\$ 2,000 for each of my dependents, which made the total C\$ 18,000. That was a huge amount of money, which we didn't have. We went to the bank (Scotiabank) and applied for a personal line of credit for USD 10,000, which was granted to us immediately (advantages of having an impeccable credit record). Back in 2000, that was almost enough.

Once we submitted the application and got the money, we only had three more things to do while we waited for the visas: go through the medical examinations, pick the place where we would live and for Gaby to start studying English. I didn't think I needed to study, as I had been working with my colleagues from New Jersey since 1997, without a problem.



*Santi and Carolina on their first day of school, March 2000
Look how much thinner I was!*

After a very dedicated research, we chose Saint John, New Brunswick, in the Atlantic coast. We had found a place that had mountains (like Gaby likes), sea (like I wanted), close to the American border (we were 1,200 Km away from Washington DC, where my brother lives). It was a place with many things to do outdoors, and a respectable development of the IT industry; I had contacted a few companies already, and even had a few job interviews on the phone. Our case agent was very impressed when she interviewed us: we had really done our homework!

One thing was alarming me; the expectation and the stress were starting to take a toll on me. I was reacting to the pressure and the stress by eating. I would go on food rampages at 4 AM, and as a consequence, I started to gain weight fast. I gained almost 50 lb between January and June 2000!

Knowing that we were going to leave soon, we went on our first –and last- vacation together, driving 1,500 Km South to the beautiful city of San Carlos de Bariloche, in the Argentine Patagonia. We spent a wonderful week down there, and you could say that we caught a glimpse of what our lives would be like once we were in Canada...



At Cerro Catedral, in Bariloche, Argentina (May 2, 2000)

The time passed, and things at work were getting worse. Our project was cancelled, and I was afraid I was going to lose my job at any moment. Soon enough, and as we were already defining the day I would leave, I lost my job. It was the first Friday of September (remember this!), at about 7 PM, and my boss came to my desk and told me: "Gordo, I have no more work for you as of now". My situation was very precarious: I was still saving money, thinking of leaving in about two or three months, and suddenly, I'm unemployed. But that's when Destiny intervened... Only three days after that, on Monday morning, we got the notification from the Canadian Embassy: our visas were ready for us to pick up... Now that was a signal...

PART 3

Now that we finally had the visas, I had no job anymore. I had no choice but to change my plans and move my departure date ahead, so I wouldn't stay a lot of time without a job. If I was lucky, maybe I would get a job quick enough so I wouldn't stop earning money for more than a couple of weeks.

I went to talk to Rolo (my manager at IBM) and he said: "Look, by law, we're required to pay you until October 31st, so we're going to do it. If you want, you can come over and hang out here; if not, you can either stay at home, or go to Canada, and we will call your wife so she can come and pick up the paycheque". I chose the last option, of course. And as they had always done before, they absolutely kept their word.

There were three weeks between the moment we decided I would leave and the day I actually did, and I had to take care of many things I knew I had to do but I wasn't too keen about. For example, saying goodbye. We traveled to Necochea to say goodbye to my family. My grandmother was very ill already, and I felt I wouldn't see her again, which proved to be true, unfortunately. The problem was that I didn't know how many more I was seeing for the last time in my life.

October came quickly, and since it was low season, I got a plane ticket at a very reasonable price, but with a terrible itinerary: from Buenos Aires to Atlanta, GA; then to Toronto, and finally from Toronto to Saint John, NB. I flew on an Argentine airline called LAPA for my first leg, and since I was an emigrant and didn't need a return ticket, they only charged me half. Unexpected, but very welcomed savings.

My departure date was Sunday, October 15th. A few days before, as I was getting ready to go to the farewell lunch my co-workers were organizing for me, the phone rang at home. It was a co-worker calling from USA; he told me that there was this project that was just kicking off, and they needed somebody to do the same job he did -liaison- in IBM... Toronto. He then asked me if I knew anybody who could be interested, and more importantly, able to work in Canada.

I couldn't believe my ears. I even asked him: "Is this a joke? I'm leaving to Canada on Sunday, didn't you know?" And no, he didn't; he had just called me because they needed to send somebody to Toronto ASAP. I told him that Toronto was actually my stop on my way to Saint John and he said "Gabriel, you have to stay, you would be the perfect candidate for this job". The offer was very tempting, because I would still be working for the same company, in the role I really wanted to move to, and practically without interruptions even though I was moving to a different country. Problem was I wasn't going to Toronto, but to Saint John!

We discussed the situation with Gaby and decided to go for the safe bet. Since there were only two days in advance, I lost my ticket from Toronto to Saint John, and decided to stay there. I called the office on Don Mills and Eglinton and arranged for an interview on Tuesday, October 17th, first time in the morning. I had a full day to recover from the trip and find a place to stay. I left on Sunday night and arrived to T.O. after some 14 hours. Since I had no idea of where to go, I just looked for the first hotel in the area that had a reasonable rate, and rested the whole day.

I went to my job interview the following morning, and everything was looking really good at first. Even though there were some areas for me to gain more experience on, I pretty much qualified for the job. As we were about to start discussing numbers, my interviewer said "Then it would be six weeks of training here, and then going back to Buenos Aires". My heart sunk. "No, I came to Canada for good", I replied. "What a shame, because this position requires somebody in B.A., and that's all we have right now", he said, and that was the end of my job interview.

So there I was, alone, in a huge and completely unknown city. I had no job, and not a clue of where and how to begin my job search. I was in the second biggest country in the world, and there wasn't anybody I knew.

PART 4

Once my chances of getting a job at [IBM](#) went down the drain, I had to make up my mind: should I find a way to get to [Saint John](#) (after all, I knew some people there, even if it was by phone) or should I stay in Toronto and look for job there? I spoke with Gaby and we decided that it was better to stay in Toronto, first because the job market was bigger and secondly because our money was disappearing fast, due to the cost of the hotel and the rental car.

Somebody in Argentina had told me that there were many Job Fairs in this area, where many IT companies were coming, looking for people. I spent most of my days looking for an apartment, a job and places where I could eat for less money. I travelled Toronto from North to South and from East to West, but I couldn't get anybody to rent me an apartment, due to my lack of references. My job search was also going badly: nobody was calling me back or replying my e-mails, and I couldn't get any jobs that would at least bring some monetary relief while I continued looking for my opportunity. I remember applying for positions at places like [Zeller's](#), [Burger King](#), [Dominion Supermarket](#) and [Tim Hortons](#). But nobody called me. I started to think that it was because they realized that I wasn't going to last long, but then I realized that that time of the year (November) was probably the most difficult, as many people who work on construction and similar areas during the summer were looking for something to get through the winter. My chances of getting a job were very little, and I began to feel depressed.



*In Niagara Falls, on my first week in Canada
(18/Oct/2000)*

November came, and I went looking for a job to a Job fair at the [Metro Toronto Convention Centre](#). After having tried my luck in different booths, I found one that had a posting for which I qualified perfectly; let's say that it fit like a glove. The only problem was that it wasn't a Canadian company, but one based in Boston, Massachusetts. I applied anyway, and gave them my résumé; to my surprise, they wanted to interview me right away. I was even more surprised when they offered me a job right on the spot.

I could not believe it: how come I had impressed them that much? I knew that it normally took two or three months for anybody to contact you back after a job interview, so that couldn't be normal. They offered me very good money, and they also assured me that my status in Canada wouldn't be in peril, as they would issue me an [H1-B](#) visa; since Boston is only three hours away from the border, I would be able to go to Canada every second or third week to maintain my [landed immigrant](#) status. That was a relief, but still we had many doubts; we had gone through all the paperwork and interviews in order to come to live and work in Canada, not USA.

We discussed this with Gaby, and evaluated pros and cons: the area was very expensive, but beautiful, and my job looked very attractive. At the same time, I was worried about putting my status in Canada at risk, but the truth was that our savings were decreasing dramatically. With more doubts than certainties, we decided that I would accept the offer, so I signed my contract on November 22nd. They promised that I would be working by January 2001. Even more, my contract had a clause saying that I would be evaluated for a raise in January 2002, after having worked for a year. I decided to go to Boston in December, to find a place to live; in the meantime, my brother offered me to stay with them until my visa was issued, which I thanked immensely. I called Gaby, and we started to get ready for our reunion; Gaby and the kids would arrive in New York on December 20th. We would spend Christmas and New Year together with my brother and his family, and then we would go to Boston. Was that the end of my Canadian dream?

PART 5

I headed back to the Washington DC area and stayed at my brother's place while we were waiting for Gaby and the kids to come. In the meantime, I had to look for a place to live. I decided that it'd be good for me to go to Boston, and not only look around for a house, but also go to the office, introduce myself and see how everything looked.



This is the hotel where I stayed until November 2000. I don't think I talked about this one, but it had a kitchen and a place for me to work. Can you see the laptop there?

I remember I rented a car (I got a Volvo, my favourite) and drove all the way to Massachusetts. I went to the office and had the customary walk around. They gave me a whole bunch of papers for me to fill, and that was pretty much it. I drove around the region, and determined that the most convenient -and affordable- area would be north of Boston, somewhere between Lowell and Nashua, NH. That was also some 3 hours away from the border, so it wouldn't be so bad to go there every second week or so. Since I was in Boston already, I decided it would be a good idea to drive up to Saint John, NB. Not only I would get to finally know the place, but also stay in touch with the people I had contacted while still in Argentina, just in case... However, my search for a place to live took more time than what I expected, so I had to cancel that plan.



*Our first Christmas in USA
From left to right: Juan (2), Caro (4), Santi (5)*

The days passed, and I started to worry, because there was no news from Boston. I called and e-mailed these people several times, but most of the times I would receive no reply. It was mid-December already, so I knew that I wouldn't be working by January like they had promised me. Even though we weren't paying any rent, thanks to my brother and his wife, our savings were still decreasing. I became really worried, so I asked my future employer if I could go there and at least start working without a pay until my visa arrived, to which they said 'no'.

Gaby arrived on Dec. 20, after one hell of a trip. Imagine, a 15-hours flight alone with three kids ages 5, 3 and 2, and your English is not very good yet. She looked like she was going to cry when I first saw her, and the first thing she said was "Never again. I'm not doing this ever again". We stayed over my brother's for Christmas and New Year's Eve and we kept waiting. Our concern was turning into desperation by then.

By late January, it became evident that I wasn't going to get a call from this people soon. We were almost out of money, so we decided I would go back to Canada and try to get a job doing whatever I could do, so we could survive. Gaby and the kids were going to stay in DC, for which I thanked my brother once again (Santi was even going to school there already). This was the beginning of the worse month in my life.

PART 6

I got back in Toronto, and rented a room in a sordid place called Gladstone Hotel. The place was very depressing; I used to tell Gaby that at least there weren't any mice or cockroaches, because they must have killed themselves. One night, after having gone to bed, I noticed a faint glow coming from under my bed, and I wondered what it was. I looked down, and could see the guy in the room one level below through the cracks of my floor!

I wasn't getting any jobs, and became so depressed that I would cry as I was walking down the streets. I was really shattered. A few days later, I rented yet another car and drove all the way to Washington DC again. As I was parking, my brother waved at me while still on the phone. The phone call was for me, and from Toronto. They wanted me back the following morning, for a very important job interview. I wouldn't dare to drive again, so we spent pretty much of what we had left on a plane ticket to Buffalo, and then took the bus.

I arrived in Toronto the following morning, and looked so beaten that my interview was postponed until the following day. And of course, nothing came out of that. I absolutely hit rock bottom there, and told Gaby I didn't think I was going to make it.

A few days later, I had to go back to pick up Gaby and the kids, as they had to get into Canada to get their landed immigrant papers validated; also, they were on a 90 days visa, so we wanted to go out and then back in just in case, in order to get another 90 days. The moment we crossed the border, Gaby said "this feels like home, but USA does not". We don't have anything against USA, but I agreed with her, we felt different. Evidently, we had made the wrong decision, moved by the urge of getting a job quick. Once Gaby and the kids went back, it took very little for us to realize that the only way this would work for us would be if we stayed together. Gaby was lonely and sad, and I was just destroyed. I picked her up once again, and we all came back to Canada, this time for good. We were determined to burn the ships this time. We had gone through bad times in the past, and the only reason we succeeded was because we always stayed together.



In Niagara Falls, this time with Gaby and the kids (24/Feb/2001)

We got a room in a guest house in Toronto that looked like Buckingham Palace compared to that Gladstone Hotel. We had two beds, a kitchen and a washroom. We would eat on a makeshift table made with a framed poster on top of our luggage. We were definitely running out of money, so we had to ask our family for help. Many times, we would only eat macaroni and cheese, or even worse, only the kids would. Our days would pass with me looking for a job either outside or connected to the internet from our room (I had a used laptop that I had bought) and Gaby and the kids going to the Eaton Centre to walk around, read books at Chapters or watch the water fountain. It looked terrible, but we made more progress in those 10 days, than in the 5 months that had passed before.



Juan playing at Eaton Centre (24/Mar/2001)...



The kids watching the fountain at Eaton Centre (24/Mar/2001)

One night, I was on my laptop while the kids were watching TV and Gaby was making coffee. She made a cup for me; I had those travel mugs with a lid. Somehow, she didn't put the lid on this time. Juan was walking around and tripped; the poor thing hit the mug and spilled all the coffee on me and my laptop, which died almost instantly. That was it; not only had I no money and no job, now I didn't even have the means to get a job. Even worse, I had just lost all the contact information I had, and even my own résumé.



*Juan and Caro, playing in our room at the guest house.
If I'm not wrong, this is the same day I had a laptop with my coffee...*

I had no reaction. I got up, took off my shirt, helped Gaby clean up the mess and laid in bed, tears running down my eyes. I gave up at that very moment.

PART 7

I had nothing. No money, no job, now I didn't even have a computer. I had just lost the product of five months of work. All my contacts, information about apartments I could rent, all the e-mails I had sent and received, even the voice messages my kids had sent me while they were still in Argentina, everything was gone. And I gave up. I woke up the following morning and just didn't know what to do. We were absolutely broke; we didn't even have a way to go back to Argentina, if we thought that could be the solution.

Gaby told me to go to the Public Library two blocks away from the guest house. I could login to my webmail client and maybe find somebody who had replied to one of my applications. I could then ask them for my résumé and start again. I just could not believe that she would still have hope after all we had been through. Reluctantly, I put on my clothes and left.

As I was walking towards the Library, my phone rang. Somebody from a company in Waterloo wanted to interview me for a job. I had no idea where Waterloo was, but of course I said yes! Then I proceeded to ask him, very politely, if he could send me my résumé back. When I made it to the library, I found an e-mail from another guy who wanted to interview me, this time for a teaching job at a college in Scarborough.

(Pause here)

Maybe that happened because I didn't need the laptop anymore... Isn't this entire story completely unbelievable? That proves it's all true!

(End of pause)

I got back to our room, exultant. I told Gaby "I have two interviews!" and we grabbed the map to see where Waterloo was. It wasn't too far away! We had the interview the following day, and I thought it would cost almost the same to rent a car than to take the bus; this way I could take everybody along. But first, I had to go to the interview for the teaching position, and it went pretty well (though it was just for an 8-weeks Software Testing course).

We went to Waterloo on Friday, March 30th. This company was on the corner of King and Weber, so of course I got lost, because I didn't care to ask **which** King and Weber (South? East? North?). I phoned them to let them know that I was absolutely lost, and made it to the interview an hour and a half late. In the meantime, I had to stop in the middle of the Expressway twice, so Santi could get out of the car to throw up...

I went in and left Gaby and the kids waiting for me at the Burger King across the road. I did extremely well in the interview, and for the first time in all those months I actually told Gaby "you know what? I have a good feeling about this one" ... and I was right!

We spent the whole weekend biting our nails. On Monday morning, I got a call from them. They needed my fax number so they could send me the job offer! Here's where the whole week became fuzzy. I went back there on Tuesday and signed my copy; packed and left Toronto on Wednesday; started looking for a place to live on Thursday, found one -at walking distance!- on Saturday morning, and started working on Monday.

I turned on my computer on Monday at 9:00, and got my first e-mail on my canada.com account. It was from the people in Boston, congratulating me because my visa had been finally issued...

PART 8

I had finally found a job, and it was in my area. The place was beautiful, and the pay was good. Everything looked great, so of course I was waiting for something to spoil it. It didn't take long, as the e-mail from Boston came at 9:00 on Monday. My H1-b work visa was ready.

I leaned back, confused. What should I do now? Should I quit this job in a month or two, and move my whole family once again, this time back to USA? Or should I just do what my heart was telling me, which was calling them and telling them to take that 'it takes a month and a half' visa and shove it up their collective... buttocks? Not surprisingly, I opted for the latter.

But surprise! There was some fine print in the contract I had signed, so now I owed them \$1,700 (American) in concept of visa processing fees. Unbelievable. They had wasted critical months of my life, and I still owed them. I didn't have the money, of course, so once again my brother and his family came to the rescue and gave me the necessary amount; they even told me to forget about repaying it, but how would I. I got rid of my Bostonian friends, and it took time but I paid my brother back.



*Carolina at Victoria Park,
April 2001*

In the meantime, and only two or three days after I started on my new job, I got a call from Toronto. The people who had interviewed me for the teaching job wanted to hire me. I would be teaching a Software Testing course on Sundays, from 9:00 to 17:00. Of course I accepted, and then I started to think about it a little more: who would take a Software Testing course on Sundays? And more importantly, how in the world was I going to make it to Toronto and back every Sunday?



Watching TV at home. Notice the complete absence of furniture... (13/Apr/2001)



Our first Easter in Canada. It snowed that day! (15/Apr/2001)

With all that in mind, it became evident that we would need a car to call our own, we had been wasting too much money on rentals. we went to a car dealership and bought a 1997 Ford Escort Wagon, exactly two weeks after I started on my new job (and it was our wedding anniversary). We didn't have any credit history, but we still got it just by giving \$100 as a down payment. The rest went to a loan. We could not believe we had purchased a car that easily. It actually took a lot of time until we realized that: a) we had paid a fortune for it and b) it was purple, but it was still a lemon. It did last a few years, though, until it literally fell apart just as I was exiting the Expressway...

May came, and with it my first paycheque. That day, I fulfilled the promised I had made my children when we were in that room at the guest house: "the moment I get my paycheque, I'm taking you guys to the CN tower". We put them in the car, and drove back to Toronto. They all fell asleep, only to wake up exactly in front of the tower. Their faces when they realized where they were made this whole thing worthwhile for me.



We're going to Toronto, but they don't know (01/May/2001)



Santi, Carolina and Juan at the CN Tower



Carolina, Juan and Santi at the CN Tower

PART 9

Things were finally looking good. I had a good job (or should I say two jobs), a nice house, Gaby and the kids were happy and most importantly, we fell in love with Waterloo. From the moment we came here for the first time, we realized that this was our place in the world.

Waterloo is in a privileged location, one hour away from Toronto, one hour and a half away from Niagara Falls and the US border, also an hour and a half away from the surprisingly nice beaches in Lake Huron and Lake Erie. There is a lot of green around, but also little mountains where we can go skiing in the winter. There are two very important -and well regarded- universities here, as well as a college, so it's very likely that my kids won't have to travel. So many students also mean lots of cultural and sports events, so it's never boring around here!

Our house was in a condominium, so the kids had lots of space to run around. There was a playground and even a swimming pool, which we used almost daily for the whole summer. Santi started going to school right away, joining SK for just a month and a half.

We celebrated Santi's 6th birthday in an empty house, with two guests (the two kids next door). We didn't have any furniture, because we had shipped ours from Argentina. It sounds crazy, but we had a reason: that company in Boston had promised me \$6,000 to cover relocation costs. Since I wasn't going to Boston, now I had to pay for it. And boy did that hurt our finances.



Santi's birthday at home

Until our furniture arrived in August, all we had was a black bridge table with five foldable chairs, which you can see in Santi's b-day picture, and which not only we still have six years and a half later, my wife is using it right next to me as I write this. Instead of beds, we slept on inflatable mattresses, which would deflate overnight, so I would wake up feeling the hardwood against my back. The only thing we made a point in buying was a TV, as we felt it was important that the kids kept watching, so they would learn English easy. It paid off, because they never needed to go to ESL once they started going to school in September.



Our furniture arrives (02/Aug/2001)

In the meantime, things at work started to get a little bumpy. The product we were developing –a voice recognition software- was very good, but we were failing to attract investors. To make things even worse, the CEO -a spoiled brat whose Daddy founded a company for him- and the board got into a war, which caused the only possible investor to back down. Exactly a year after I lost my job at IBM in Argentina, we were all called for a company meeting and it was announced that we were all being laid off, as the company was going out of business.

I was unemployed again. But when it rains, it pours. Four days later, it was September 11th, and we spent the day calling my brother and his wife, as they worked really close to the White House and the Pentagon, respectively. That same night, we had to rush to the hospital, as Juan had a very bad asthma attack, which caused him to stay in the hospital for four days. We were in such a state that we didn't have time to stop and think about what to do next. All we knew was that bad times were back...



Juan caught red-handed, playing with Gaby's creams

PART 10

We had just gone through a terrible week. I had lost my job on Friday, and that was the second year in a row that it had happened on the first Friday of September (since then, I have always taken that day off and I still do it today). :-)

Our management got us all together and told us that, unfortunately, the company was going to cease operations effectively immediately. It was payday that Friday, so we were also told that they wouldn't have the paycheques ready until the following Tuesday; they asked us

please to understand, and come back that day to get our money. We were still living paycheque to paycheque then, so I had no money to buy food until then. It seems that they knew that because, to my surprise, they called me in immediately after the meeting.

They gave me a cheque that came from one of the board member's pocket and told me to cash it; they understood in which situation I was at that moment, so they didn't want me to go through the weekend without any money. "What do I do on Tuesday, then, when we get the 'official' paycheque?" I asked. "Keep it. We're working toward bringing this company back to life; if we are not able to do it by the end of the month, then you can cash this cheque as well". I was very grateful, but they had more in store for me: "We know that you don't even have a computer at home yet (remember the coffee thing?). So you're welcome to come to the office and use our computers to look for a job, because we don't know if we're going to succeed. The company will still be open, and the secretary will be here, so feel free to drop in". And of course I did, going there every day from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

In the meantime, I needed to apply for [Employment Insurance](#), so I would at least receive some money while searching for a job. I went to pick up all the necessary paperwork, and that's when I got a bitter surprise: the minimum number of hours worked in order to be able to apply for EI was [910](#) then; I had worked for 113 days, which brought the total to... 904! I was six hours shy, so I wouldn't be able to get any insurance! I just couldn't believe my luck, until Gaby reminded me of that teaching job in Toronto, which had ended back in June. I phoned them and asked for a [T4](#) form as quick as I could, and then got 48 more hours to add to my total...

But the EI would take more four to six weeks to come. Once I cashed my second cheque in late September, I would have to wait for a month until I received money again. We needed to do something, so we went to the City Hall and applied for welfare. To my relief, I was told that they would subtract the amount given to me from the last two EI payments; I didn't want to feel I was living off my fellow Canadians, when I was more than determined to work. We got the welfare cheque that day, and the lady taking care of our case asked us: "But have you guys applied for the [Child Tax Benefit](#)?" Of course, we had no idea what she was talking about; we then filled out all the necessary forms and to our surprise, we were sent a big cheque from the government! I was concerned, though, because it was retroactive to 1998, when we had moved to Canada in 2000 (well, 2001 for Gaby and the kids). I called and asked until they said that it was OK, that is how the amount is calculated. There was more money coming in than when I was working, but we knew it was temporary, and I was really desperate to find a job.

PART 11

While I was looking for a new job, and after having given the idea a LOT of thought, my mother-in-law came to visit us. We had to lie to her, never saying any word about me being unemployed, because we knew she wouldn't want to come, afraid of all the money we would have to spend on her. We needed her to see for herself, being unemployed here is not the same that being unemployed back in our home country.



Carolina celebrating the first day of fall in 2001

A couple of days before she got here, we celebrated our first Thanksgiving. As we were having a very late Saturday night dinner, somebody rang vehemently. We looked at other; it was 11:30 PM, who could that be? We went to the door and opened it: there was nobody there. Instead, we found three big boxes full of food and gifts for the kids. There even was a turkey in there, which we had on Monday. We just couldn't believe that they could have done something like that for us; it had to be somebody who knew what we were going through.

We had no clue of who could have done such a wonderful thing; at that time, you could say that we only had one friend, and she was in Montreal for the weekend... She had introduced us to a Guatemalan family, who had invited us over for dinner the following night, but I hadn't even met them yet. Still, they became our 'primary suspects'.

The following night, as we were having dinner with them, we mentioned this very casually but looking at their reactions very carefully. And their father was the one who became the 'case breaker', as he said to his son "Didn't they do the same for you guys when you first arrived?". They were sad that we had found out; they felt good enough knowing that they had helped somebody in need. We thanked them, but didn't make a big deal out of the situation, because we felt bad for them. Still, this is something we will never forget and they are still among our closest friends.

My mother in law arrived, and then we broke the news of my lack of employment to her. She was quite worried, but it didn't take too much time until she realized that we still were OK. I kept sending my résumé, and was selected for a couple of interviews. On Thursday, November 1st, right after having celebrated our first ever Halloween, I dropped Gaby at the ESL classes (and the kids at the daycare) and went to a job interview at a company called Mitra.



"Spider-Juan" during his first Halloween



Princess Carolina on her first Halloween

Once again, I went through the same rush I had gone when I was interviewed for that position in Boston, and then again for my first job in Waterloo. I had three different interviews within an hour, and they made me the job offer right on the spot. As desperate as I was for a job, I still felt I needed time to think, so I asked them if I could take a couple of hours, so I would pick up Gaby and discuss it with her. I did, and came back just right after lunch. I accepted, of course, and started to work on the following Monday. Mitra does no longer exist, as it was acquired by Agfa, but I'm still there, almost six years later.

PART 12 - EPILOGUE

You could say that me getting a job there marked the end of our 'first year in Canada' Calvary, but I still have something else to tell you about before I finished.

My grandmother was very sick by that time, and she finally passed away on December 7th. I remember that I was on my way out when the phone rang; it was my brother Paco who told me the sad news. Half an hour later, I was playing Santa at my kids' daycare, feeling once again that there's almost nothing you can do when you're so far away; it's the price of exile.

A few days later, just before Christmas, the surprise: we received a letter from my grandfather Pepe. In it, he announced to us that my grandma had passed away, and that he was very sad, but understood that it was the best for her, because she was suffering. The following paragraph stunned us (I'll translate as well as I can):

"But life goes on, so I'm already making plans for the Holidays. Your mother is coming to Necochea for Christmas, and then we are both flying to Calafate, where we will spend New Year's Eve with your brother Martin. It promises to be a lot of fun".

"Life goes on"? He was 90 years old, and after having been married for 62 years, his wife had just passed away. And he says "life goes on"? I was amazed: what a guy. If he won't give up on life after this, how dare I. As long as we're together, nothing bad is going to happen to us.



Our first Christmas in Canada



Playing Santa for the kids - 07/Dec/2001

We'll go through good times, but also through bad times. We will never give up. No matter how many times I had that thought during our first year here, we never did, and we're finally living the kind of life we thought we would have before we left Argentina.

My father once told me, when I was 12: "There's nothing you can't do, if you work hard enough". Well, here I am, working as hard as I can. Life has a new challenge for me? All I can say is "bring it on".

The End