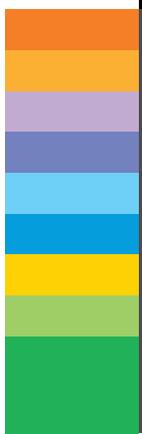


George Brown College 50 x 50 exhibition 2018



50x50



Minaz Abji Olusegun Adebajo Naheed Akhtar Monica Amenia Florentina Azimkhani Korinna Azreiq Eugene Badal Verena Brand Elizabeth Bravo Rykah Callao Chong Cao Indranil Chaudhury Folorunso Clement Bamikole Carl Diaz Leonard D. Edwards Fatemeh Ehsani Rana El-Bahrani Danusha Fernando Arlette Gonzalez Shuai (Jerry) Gou Danish Hassan Mehdi Hosseini Tatsiana Hradusava Sergio Jaua Anna Jozwiak Mazhar Kakar Tjarirove Kasiringua David Kokai Antonia and Yulia Kostiuik Shiraz Latif Daniela Levi Elaine Lloyd Robinson Victoria Luz Leyva Loayza Anton Makhinko Johan Malmqvist Sylvia Morrison Sanaa Mughal Lungile Ncube Jonathan Pagis Lina Panesso Andrea Prifti Marco Ramos Mamunur Rashid Aurora Rodulfa Walter Strasser Hengxuan (Sophie) Tian Alena Tokareva Amrita Tyagi Eyerusalem Wores Eileen Zhang

50x50

George Brown College **50 x 50 exhibition**

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50 photographers

50 portraits

50 immigrant graduates

50 years of George Brown College

From the works of Dorothea Lange to Edward Steichen to Yousuf Karsh, portraits are among the most evocative images in the history of photography. They reflect a unique collaboration between photographer and subject and render a visual narrative about a subject with immediacy and intimacy.

George Brown College is proud to present 50 x 50, a photography exhibition drawing on the strength of this collaborative tradition to tell a powerful story about immigration in Canada.

Celebrating the diversity of George Brown's student population over the past 50 years and the vital contribution immigrants have made to our society, 50 x 50 features

portraits of 50 George Brown alumni who were newcomers to Canada when they attended the college. Bringing diversity into sharp relief, the portraits portray alumni from more than 35 countries of origin, representing myriad ethnicities, ages, and occupations.

Fifty years ago, Ontario's college system was introduced to democratize post-secondary education. Since then, thousands of immigrants have walked through George Brown's doors, looking for the tools to build a new life. In the process of transforming themselves, they have transformed not only Ontario's colleges, but the image and fabric of our society.

With similar democratic intent, we sought a group of 50 photographers as diverse in experience and vision as the individuals they were shooting. The 50 x 50 photographers accepted through our juried selection process have different influences, backgrounds, and styles. We granted them complete artistic licence to encourage wide-ranging creative expression and interpretations of the vision of this project.

To contextualize the portraits, a short written narrative accompanies each photograph. In interviews with writers who asked questions about individual journeys and the impact of attending college, portrait subjects offered varied reflections on immigration, education and new beginnings in Canada.

A portrait captures a single moment in time but the frame contains multiple histories: the embodied history of the subject, the background of the photographer and all

that has informed their vision and craft, and then, the viewer's perspective as it is changed and challenged through the experience of art. The histories that these photographs evoke intersect in this exhibition to tell a story about this city and this country that is both expansive and deeply personal.

With 50 x 50, we seek to multiply the intersections – by matching 50 photographers to 50 college graduates – to celebrate inclusion and diversity – values that informed the creation of the college system itself. This exhibition, which will show as part of the May 2018 Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival, uses portraiture to tell a uniquely Torontonians story that will reveal our city in new light.

Message from President, Anne Sado



We are incredibly fortunate to live in a city that embraces and celebrates its diversity. More than 46 per cent of Toronto's population were not born here. That's a remarkable achievement in a city of almost six million. Clearly, the world sees Toronto as a welcoming place to settle and establish a new life.

As George Brown College celebrates its 50th anniversary, we're so proud to have had an impactful role in the lives of thousands of these new Canadians.

In this wonderful new exhibition, we're introduced to 50 George Brown College graduates who were once new to the country. As you enjoy their portraits, created by 50 talented photographers, I hope that you will also take the time to read the accompanying narratives. Each one has an important story to share that is both unique to them and universal in its example.

We're honoured that each of these graduates chose George Brown College to be a part of their journey. This exhibition beautifully illustrates the powerful impact of education to transform lives, preparing students for success, in the workplace and in life.

A special thanks goes to Pamela Glaser-French from our School of Immigrant & Transitional Education. Together with her husband, Graham French, a renowned photographer in his own right, she conceptualized and curated this exhibition. It's a powerful and rewarding way to celebrate George Brown College's 50th anniversary, illustrating the role that the college plays in the social, cultural and economic health of our city and province.

I hope that you enjoy the exhibition!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Sado". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, looping initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Greetings from Cindy Gouveia, President, George Brown College Foundation

Greetings from the George Brown College Foundation!

Half a century is a tremendous milestone for any institution. George Brown College's 50th anniversary gives us reason to pause and reflect on our history. We've created quite a community of graduates and students that have made, and continue to make through their own fascinating stories, significant contributions to our communities and Canada as a whole! It is only fitting therefore, that through portraits of our alumni, the 50 x 50 exhibition provides a snapshot of George Brown College at this singular landmark.

While the College as an institution celebrates its 50th anniversary, it is perhaps even more fitting to focus on our legacy through the lens of our alumni. Together the 50 x 50 portraits form a kaleidoscope of inclusion, diversity and, above all, the successes of our graduate community. Fifty George Brown graduates. Fifty immigrants. All studied, composed and captured through the eyes of fifty outstanding photographers. In finding harmony and aesthetic value through exposure, these fifty exceptional exhibition pieces lay bare the truth about George Brown College's half century legacy: that, despite differences in generation, gender and background, we all strive for excellence.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then this exhibition speaks volumes about George Brown College as an institution and as a community. As it imagines a mere fifty of our best and brightest, the 50 x 50 exhibition proves no matter the aperture through which we view the world, we all have the same stories. As we recognize our legacy of diversity and achievement on this, our 50th anniversary, I can only wonder at what new faces and stories will tell George Brown College's story in the next half century.

Cindy Gouveia



Minaz Abji Olusegun Adebajo Naheed Akhtar Monica Amenia Florentina Azimkhani Korinna Azreiq Eugene Badal Verena Brand Elizabeth Bravo Rykah Callao Chong Cao Indranil Chaudhury Folorunso Clement Bamikole Carl Diaz Leonard D. Edwards Fatemeh Ehsani Rana El-Bahrani Danusha Fernando Arlette Gonzalez Shuai (Jerry) Gou Danish Hassan Mehdi Hosseini Tatsiana Hradusava Sergio Jaua Anna Jozwiak Mazhar Kakar Tjarirove Kasiringua David Kokai Antonia and Yulia Kostiuik Shiraz Latif Daniela Levi Elaine Lloyd Robinson Victoria Luz Leyva Loayza Anton Makhinko Johan Malmqvist Sylvia Morrison Sanaa Mughal Lungile Ncube Jonathan Pagis Lina Panesso Andrea Prifti Marco Ramos Mamunur Rashid Aurora Rodulfa Walter Strasser Hengxuan (Sophie) Tian Alena Tokareva Amrita Tyagi Eyerusalem Wores Eileen Zhang

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Minaz Abji

Graduate 1975, Hotel Management

It was 1972 and Minaz Abji was in his first year of studying hotel management in North Wales when he learned that his parents had been expelled from Uganda by dictator Idi Amin. The news came as a “shock.” Africa had been a land of opportunity for India’s poor and Minaz’s family moved there in 1890. Minaz’s father was in property development and they had a home and comfortable life. “Then the rug was pulled from underneath and everything we had we lost.” For Minaz, that meant giving up his studies to join his parents in Canada, where they had been accepted as refugees.

Minaz came to realize that not all shocks are bad. “It made me grow up faster,” he says. “It made me become serious about what I wanted in life and it made me apply myself.” He chose to study at George Brown because its curriculum included a strong mix of practical and theoretical components. His family had fled with very little so his priority was being able to get a job right out of school. The seriousness of that objective didn’t prevent him from enjoying his studies. “School was just fun,” he says. They lived in Scarborough and he loved escaping into the cosmopolitan heart of the city. The campus, located at Nassau St. and Spadina Ave. at the time, was next door to the Portuguese market and the El Mocambo nightclub where acts like The Rolling Stones played. “The whole area was exciting,” he says.

When he graduated, he applied to work for Hotel Toronto, which was managed by Western International. Hospitality program chair Bob Struthers had said that that is where he would work if he was starting out – it had a good benefits

program and promoted from within. “That was all I needed to hear.” He started at the bottom, but he didn’t plan to be there long. He researched the career paths of Western’s general managers and made a plan to join their ranks. He gave himself 10 years to do it. It took him 11.

He stayed with Western International for 23 years before leaving to join a start-up real estate investment trust in Vancouver. After becoming president there, he was offered a job with a Fortune 500 company in Washington, DC. He stayed there for 14 years and was executive vice-president of asset management before retiring recently.

The plan for retirement was to “spend more time with family and friends, travel, enjoy life, and give back.” So far, so good. Today Minaz serves on the board of charitable organizations World Relief and iRead, as well as several business-related boards, and he just got back from his first-ever extended vacation, exploring countries like Egypt and Nepal.

Portrait by Brenda Spielmann (Artist Statement - page 111)

© Brenda Spielmann



Olusegun Adebajo

Graduate 2013, Graphic Design

Olusegun Adebajo moved from Nigeria with his mother and siblings in October 2008. He left everything he knew, including half-completed university studies in public relations and advertising. The abruptness of the transition was a challenge. “The news of our relocation came suddenly, and I was not as prepared as I would have liked.”

Arriving to waiting family in the GTA, Olusegun found transitioning to life in Canada easier than he anticipated. “I understood my parents wanted to give their children the best future they could. Ultimately... I think I found my feet pretty quickly.”

Settling into a job created routine, but within two years, Olusegun was itching to return to his studies and explore a field where he could apply his creative touch. Through work colleagues, he learned of the Graphic Design program at George Brown College.

Olusegun was initially drawn to the flexibility the program offered, which would allow him to continue working while studying. But maintaining grades and keeping up with the workload proved a challenge – he failed a prerequisite course and struggled with others. It was a turning point and a catalyst for change.

He credits his relationship with faculty member Nicole Dimson as having the greatest impact on his education. She showed concern about his progress – even challenging his commitment to the program. “I really appreciated the interest she showed in my well-being.” It was the push he needed

and spurred the decision to focus on his studies full-time. “I didn’t want to coast – I wanted to give it everything I had.”

Taking advantage of opportunities outside of the classroom, such as the college’s Paired Tutoring program, prompted a self-initiated study effort and a realization of the importance of continuous learning.

Work experience at a Toronto-based digital firm after graduating convinced Olusegun to move away from traditional graphic design and focus on interactive digital design, in particular, integrated user experiences. He later became part of the team that developed the Toronto Star’s Star Touch platform.

He continues to study to support his career. “We’re in the age of digital innovation. Every industry is going to be disrupted. Maintaining relevant skills to stay on top is essential. Continuing education is a necessity.”

His advice to current students? “Collaborate, connect and over-communicate. When you are open to facing challenges with the support of others – it will help you through the entire process. One individual going above and beyond their call of duty got me through.”

Today, Olusegun is a product designer with Zoocasa. He is also developing a clothing line appealing to the professional, urban male – based on his own personal brand.

Portrait by Marco Baldonado (page 102)

© Marco Baldonado



Naheed Akhtar

Graduate 2006, Early Childhood Education

In 2001, Naheed Akhtar emigrated from Pakistan with her husband and two children. "It was very tough early on – we arrived in late October. I walked out of the airport... it's so cold!"

Initially, living in Canada was an isolating experience. Not speaking the language. No close friends. A husband who worked nights. Two small children. When winter came full force, Naheed had no idea how to prepare her children, or herself. "Gloves. Boots. What to choose? Everything was new. I didn't even have pants. I had no idea how to even buy pants!"

Naheed's journey to George Brown College was the result of a series of fortunate events.

It began by taking her kids to the local library. There she discovered a flyer for a women's circle supporting newcomers. She found herself spending more and more time as part of that circle. A guest speaker introduced her to the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, a non-profit, community-based organization committed to the empowerment of women. Becoming a volunteer, Naheed found an opportunity to improve her language skills and to meet other women. Then one day at the Centre, she came across a George Brown course guide.

Although she had at one point been a high school teacher, it had been a long time since Naheed had been in a classroom. She felt she'd left that part of her life behind. With the encouragement of her husband, she took a leap of faith

and enrolled. The course load proved to be the first barrier. "In the beginning, all the reading... even understanding the professor's accent... seemed overwhelming. In the first semester I thought... I can't do it!"

Having recently given birth to her third child, Naheed considered quitting – until she discovered the network of support available at George Brown. With the encouragement of the program co-ordinator, she stuck it out, refocused in her second semester, and graduated with honours.

"The support of my husband... assuming more responsibilities to allow me the time to study. Having the support of teachers and senior students... their willingness to help. Actively participating... joining the Student Council... trying to stand out. It all made a difference."

Naheed's student placement provided a launching pad for a career. "I was one of the lucky students... who was offered part-time employment immediately after [college]." Within a few months, she was full-time. Today, she works in the Early-On Child & Family Centre, at the West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre.

Her accomplishments have helped to change perceptions within her community – attitudes that often stigmatize women who wish to work while raising children. "George Brown allowed me to give back to families through my experience and my knowledge. Without George Brown... I don't think that would have been possible. With hard work... anything is possible."

Portrait by Sofie Sharom (page 111)

© Sofie Sharom



Monica Amenya

Graduate 2006, Community Worker

Having never travelled outside of the tropics, Monica Amenya was shocked to arrive with her 8-year-old daughter to a frigid Toronto in March 2002. The biggest challenge? Finding meaningful employment. “My first job was in a factory... on the line. It was very physically demanding. After a year, I realized I wouldn’t be able to sustain myself in this kind of environment.”

She realized the necessity of improving her academic skills within a Canadian context and studied at the Emery Adult Learning Centre (TDSB) to build the necessary skills. At the prompting of an already-enrolled friend, she applied and was accepted into George Brown College’s two-year Community Worker program. The prospect was daunting. “I had been out of school for 19 years. I needed to find something to do that would put food on my table – but also ignite my passion.”

From the first day, it was an eye-opening experience – a diverse class of new immigrants, recent high school grads, those already working in the field, and others trying to find a second career. Monica knew she had arrived at a place with people just like her. “I found myself at home, based on what I was looking for both emotionally and socially at that moment.”

She directly credits her George Brown professors with igniting her passion – including Robin Buyers, Chandra Budhu, Pramila Aggarwal, Bob Luker, and Johanne Clare. “They were very supportive, very knowledgeable... mentors ready

to (inspire) change. They were also very aware of the social justice problems of our city.”

Monica’s commitment to social justice and equal opportunity began early. Operating a business selling children’s clothing, she met many women experiencing problems based on the gender inequality prevalent in Ghana. “I had this hat on before I even came to Canada.”

George Brown provided her first exposure to formal human rights study – and importantly what can be done to bring social justice issues to the fore. “George Brown really gave me the tools and the mindset to work in my field.”

As part of Monica’s second-year placement, she discovered the invaluable work being done at Ernestine’s Woman’s Shelter. Eleven years later she is still there, in the role of transitional housing and community outreach worker – making a difference in countless women’s lives. “I have the opportunity to see the transformation in women and children’s lives from the moment they walk in... to when they walk out... and after. From that stage of life... to finding their voice again, finding their lives, finding a safe place for themselves and their kids.”

Monica was recently honoured for her front-line work with the 2017 WomenACT *Soul of a Warrior Award*.

“George Brown changed the course of my life. It gave me the tools to ground myself in this country. I wake up every [day] with a purpose.”

Portrait by Andy Lee (page 106)

© Andy Lee



Florentina Azimkhani

Graduate 2006, Social Service Worker

When Florentina Azimkhani's husband suggested they emigrate from Romania to establish a life in Canada, she agreed with one condition: that the move allowed her to follow a passion that had always been with her – the desire for work helping others.

Upon arriving in Canada in 2002, she started to work towards her goal. First she studied ESL, then attended the City Adult Learning Centre to complete grade 12 English and earn her Ontario high school diploma. She'd heard strong recommendations for George Brown College, and in 2004, she made "the best decision of my life": enrolling in the Social Service Worker program.

When she looks back on that experience, what stands out for her is the consistent excellence of her professors and the value of her field placements, in particular, a placement she found for herself at St. Monaca's Place, which ran a food bank and drop-in centre for the needy. This agency had not previously made field placements available, but she was able to convince those in charge to take her on to conduct a community needs assessment with another George Brown student. Their work revealed that issues with landlords were a major concern. To address this, Florentina organized a neighbourhood meeting, which she promoted through flyers and door-to-door calls; 150 community members attended, joined by a City Council ward representative, CP24 TV, and members of the Toronto police force. Florentina credits this first placement with teaching her the skills needed to

conduct community assessments and address local social needs. When she graduated, with honours, she received the award for excellence in workplace practice.

Four months later, Florentina acquired her first job as a residential counsellor at Elisa House, a shelter for women. She also worked at Sojourn House, a refugee shelter, and at Street Haven, a shelter for women in need. Within a year and a half, she was hired by the City of Toronto as a counsellor and front-line worker for the Women's Residence. After 10 years in that position, she became a City of Toronto housing caseworker in the Special Needs Unit where she processes applications for those dealing with domestic abuse or terminal illness.

Florentina believes the 50 x 50 project is a chance to share her experience and inspire others. She wants it known that "I am here today because of George Brown. As an immigrant, I found all the help I needed in acquiring the knowledge, skills and field experience that prepared me for my job and fulfilled my lifelong passion."

Portrait by Struan Campbell-Smith (page 103)

© Struan



Korinna Azreiq

Graduate 2008, Jewellery Arts

When Korinna Azreiq joined the George Brown Jewellery Arts program as a first-time instructor in February 2018, she was on familiar ground.

Arriving from Russia via Israel with her husband and one-and-a-half-year-old daughter in December 2004, Korinna came to Canada with a skilled immigrant visa and the knowledge that she wanted to become a jewellery maker. Though a university graduate in geography, she hails from a family of artists. After researching the available training options, she determined George Brown offered the best program and she enrolled in the September 2005 semester.

“George Brown was one of the best three years of my life. I loved every single day. I have not a bad word to say about the college.” One thing Korinna appreciated about the program was that it provided the opportunity to try everything in jewellery making from sketching to stone setting. Exposure to all aspects of jewellery arts allowed her to proceed in the area of the profession that most appealed to her.

Following a two-year return to Russia, Korinna resettled in Toronto in 2010 and has worked as a self-employed jewellery designer ever since. She works out of the Made You Look studio which was established by a former George Brown jewellery graduate who modelled the space after the labs at the college. Twenty to thirty artists rent benches there and have access to a wide range of tools similar to those utilized

in the George Brown program. The studio also has a large gallery where customers can purchase unique custom-made pieces.

Being part of the 50 x 50 project was of interest to Korinna because “I like George Brown College so much and this was a way to contribute.”

When Korinna returns to the college this year as an instructor, she will teach a course on Rhino, a 3-D modelling software that has become an essential tool for intricate jewellery art. She will be among the instructors she learned from and whom she continues to appreciate for being so knowledgeable and helpful. Like them, she will “lead students from beginning to end.”

Portrait by Colin Gaudet (page 105)

© Colin Gaudet



Eugene Badal

Graduate 2011, Culinary Management;
Graduate 2017, Food and Nutrition Management

As a boy in Trinidad and Tobago, Eugene Badal always imagined himself working in the food industry, but after high school, he followed his father's advice and took a job in telecom. But his curiosity about cooking remained, and after a few years, he became restless. His sister had settled in Canada, and he knew there were better opportunities there. He made the move, and in 2009, he was accepted into the Culinary Management program at George Brown College.

After graduation, he wanted to continue at the college in the new postgraduate program in nutrition, but the timing was not right. Without citizenship, the fees were high, and after two years as a student, his priority was supporting his young family. He found steady employment in the food services department of a private school and earned his citizenship. Although he thought about the postgraduate program often, he couldn't fit full-time study around his day job. Instead, he studied part-time, earning a bachelor's degree in education.

Eugene was presented with an unusual opportunity when the private school closed and he lost his job. He took a supervisory role with a food service provider at a university in the evenings, freeing up his days to finally pursue the postgraduate program at George Brown. Pressures began to mount with work and school demanding his full attention. Rather than abandon the program, he took an unpaid leave from work and poured himself into his studies.

When asked what drives him, he says, "Preparing a meal that someone is satisfied with and bringing joy to someone's face." A month before graduating, he was offered a job with a hospital in Northern Ontario where he applies that same philosophy. "Food is medicine but shouldn't taste like it. Plate it properly, put a smile on a person's face, encourage them to eat, help them heal."

Portrait by Chris Nicholls (page 108)

© Chris Nicholls



Verena Brand

Graduate 2011, College Teacher Training

The idea of coming to Canada first occurred to Verena Brand when she was 17 years old and talking with friends about the future. "We thought Canada would be a nice country to go to," she says. The idea was put on hold as she became immersed in her studies in Germany where she completed a Ph.D. in biochemistry. Then her spouse at the time suggested it again. "I was already open to the idea," she says, "because I had thought of it before." This time she made the leap. The first stop on her journey was working in a biological lab in Massachusetts. Then they got word that their application for permanent residency had been granted and came north.

Having lived in and travelled through the United States with her brother and American sister-in-law, Verena didn't find the transition to Canadian culture too difficult. In fact, she found Canada more like home, more European. She particularly appreciated coming to a country where French was spoken; she still loves to run into people who want to speak it with her. Her first appointment in Canada was a post-doctoral fellowship with a non-profit research consortium that ended due to funding cuts. At that point, someone suggested she take George Brown's College Teacher Training program. She had enjoyed teaching in Germany and thought here might be an opportunity to gain insight into North American pedagogy.

The program proved valuable. She liked the interactive approach in the program, which helped build confidence. She found the lessons on different communication approaches and styles particularly useful – and the

knowledge applicable beyond the classroom. She came to appreciate the more playful approach to teaching taken in North America, while gaining a better understanding of how to communicate with people from other countries, a key skill in multicultural Toronto.

Her first job after graduating was as a research fellow at the Hospital for Sick Children, but a year later, she finally got to apply her learning during a contract teaching position at University of Toronto Mississauga. It was a far cry from her previous experiences teaching physiology to medical students in Germany. Instead of 20 students, she had nearly 200. "It was a good learning experience," she says, "but it was also challenging." She has since taught as a sessional instructor, but today she is using the breadth and depth of her scientific knowledge as a reviewer for Ontario Centres of Excellence. She is part of a team of subject-matter experts that evaluates applications for projects that involve collaboration between industry and academia.

Portrait by Anna Borchardt (page 102)

© Anna Borchardt



Elizabeth Bravo

Graduate 2017, Dance Performance Preparation

“At 31 the thought of having a career in dance performance comes with tons of mental barriers and doubts; believe me, it takes a lot of courage to start over and follow your passion. Thanks, George Brown College, for giving me that opportunity. Now, I inspire other women to make their dreams come true.”

In 2012, Elizabeth Bravo, her husband Carlos Montoya and their son moved to Canada for the lifestyle and educational opportunities it offered. In Venezuela, they had experience creating special events for children. They wondered, could they apply a similar business model here?

“Back home, even a newborn party is cause for a big celebration. Dozens of extended family members and friends, partying for hours in large banquet halls. Here, we were shocked. ‘You want to hire us for an hour... for a basement party?’ We had to open our minds to the ways different cultures celebrate.”

Together they created Bravo’s Party, a multi-tiered business offering entertainment, dance performances, and fitness classes.

Besides the cold weather, a new language, and trying to understand the Canadian sense of humour – one of their biggest challenges lay in unexpected cultural differences. “In Venezuela, we’re warm... with everyone. We act like we’re friends, even when we don’t know each other. Here, if you act that way, it can easily be mistaken!”

With her husband beginning studies at Seneca College, Elizabeth had an unexpected revelation – community-based musical theatre. It was a genre that simply didn’t exist back home. With no formal training, Elizabeth threw herself into the opportunity – and was immediately hooked. She knew this was the future she was looking for.

Determined, Elizabeth trained hard – private lessons, dance classes, improving her skills in ballet and jazz – for her George Brown audition. She knew the Dance Performance Preparation program was her future. The course provided valuable experience for a triple-threat performer, with its emphasis on dance, singing, and acting. Elizabeth was the oldest student in the program. “At 25, they think you’re already dead in the dance industry.”

After George Brown, Elizabeth was accepted at Randolph College for the Performing Arts. She continues her training in musical theatre – while being an entrepreneur, a choreographer, a performer and a mother.

“Your dance career is not over at 30. If you discover something you love at the age I did, it’s still possible to pursue your dream. It may be harder, but it’s not impossible.”

Today, Elizabeth continues to operate Bravo’s Party with her husband Carlos – who she credits as her most important source of support and strength. And as part of her business, she has created Bravos Diva’s, a program to empower women through dance. “My biggest goal is to inspire other women. I want to set an example of using dance to create joy – regardless of age.”

Portrait by Jeannette Breward (page 103)

© Jeannette Breward



Rykah Callao

Graduate 2014, Dental Hygiene

Sitting in the dentist's chair, Rykah Callao started to make a plan for her future. It was, after all, the perfect place for asking for advice from professionals in her chosen field: dental hygiene. Her dentist and her hygienist recommended she pursue her studies at George Brown College, which both had attended. That "word of mouth" endorsement was enough for Rykah to put George Brown at the top of her list, but the acceptance letter that arrived first was from a different college. When she did get accepted to George Brown College, she was "thrilled."

This ability to dream and plan for a better future – even from the dentist's chair – was what her parents had in mind when they emigrated from the Philippines in 2001. Rykah was only six at the time and initially scared to come to Canada because she didn't speak English, but before long, her parents were insisting that she speak Tagalog at home so she didn't lose her native language.

Going to college was uncharted territory in her family; everyone else had attended university. But it was a great fit for Rykah. She appreciated the hands-on nature of the program and all the instructors and friends she met; the highlight for her was the clinical sections where students get the opportunity to interact with actual clients. It was hard work and involved putting her social life on hold, but Rykah eagerly acknowledges that it was "worth it." Within a month of graduating, she was putting that clinical practice into action as a temporary hygienist back at her own dentist's office. That experience paved the way to a full-time position

at Headon Dental in Burlington where she works today as a self-initiated dental hygienist. She hopes to open her own dental hygiene clinic in the future.

Rykah almost didn't become a George Brown student; once there she says, laughing, she "keeps on coming back!" She stays in touch with her instructors from her program and recently returned to complete a continuing education course in orthodontics. She plans to take more courses in support of achieving another of her long-term goals: becoming an instructor in the George Brown program.

"Thankful" is an adjective Rykah uses often in conversation. She is thankful to George Brown for accepting her and thankful for the opportunity she got, after graduation, to go to an international dental conference and then sightseeing in Dubai with a friend from the program. She hopes her future includes more overseas trips but next time as part of a dental or medical mission.

Portrait by Cole Breiland (page 102)

© Cole Breiland



Chong Cao

Graduate 1983, Watchmaking

As a young boy in Cambodia in the early 1960s, Chong Cao helped his father in his watchmaking shop. Then civil war broke out, and his father abandoned the shop to take the family to Vietnam. Chong lived there until he was a teenager and the Communists took power. Like many others, he weighed the risks and decided he had to escape. In April 1979, he lowered himself below the false bottom of a fishing boat and remained in that cramped space for the five-day journey across the South China Sea. He heard about Canada at a refugee camp in Malaysia. He knew little except that it was cold and there was a sponsor for a group of four single men.

Chong landed in Kingston, Ontario, facing a foreign culture, a fickle climate and few job opportunities. He took an ESL course at St. Lawrence College, and in 1981, he began studying at George Brown College in the watchmaking program.

While his classmates were learning to remove crystals, he already knew how to take a watch apart and reassemble it. But he still had to study hard to express himself in class and write exams. It was time-consuming and challenging work. He found an outlet to relieve some of that pressure when his teacher challenged him to a game of Ping-Pong at lunch hour. He began playing daily and went on to represent George Brown in intercollegiate tournaments, winning two years in a row.

After graduation, Chong worked for a year before setting up his own shop, Doctime Watch & Clock Repair in downtown Kingston. Thirty-four years later, Chong still works behind the counter. He and his wife have four children, and he's sponsored his brother, his mother, and his sister and her family. He has been back to visit Cambodia and Vietnam, finding the region stronger over the decades. Still, he says, "Canada is the best country in the world."

Portrait by Mariam Magsi (page 107)

© Mariam Magsi



Indranil Chaudhury

Graduate 2013, Social Service Worker

When Neil Chaudhury arrived in Canada, he knew only one person: a father of twins he had met many years ago in his native India. Though he held a graduate degree in commerce from India, Neil had always felt drawn to working with people, and while living in the United Kingdom, had volunteered at a nursing home for the elderly. When his Canadian contact offered him employment as a babysitter to the twin boys to provide some income while studying, Neil jumped at the opportunity. This work inspired him to pursue his passion and was the impetus for applying to the George Brown College two-year Social Service Worker program.

What stands out about his George Brown experience was the incredible level of support and encouragement he received from college staff. He found that people went beyond what was expected, not just in terms of his education but in offering psychological support during a difficult period in his life. They took the time to get to know each student individually and develop an understanding of their deeper needs.

Neil was the only international student in his program yet everyone was so accepting of him. "I'd found a home away from home." For the first time in his life, Neil felt accepted as a member of the LGBT community. He had the freedom to be who he was in an environment that clearly appreciated diversity and inclusivity.

With his new-found sense of empowerment, Neil went on to two placements: one with the Reikai Centre nursing home and the other with Community Living Toronto, where he was offered a relief position in November 2013. Upon graduation, he was hired as relief staff at the Griffin Centre in September 2013; he became a full-time employee there in January 2014. These GTA organizations are among the most well-known care providers to those with developmental disabilities and mental illness.

Neil's enthusiasm for participating in the 50 x 50 project was largely because George Brown sparked the biggest change in his life and helped him define who he was. He recalls how various professionals within the college collaborated across several departments to assist him in his time of need and allow him to flourish. Even now, five years after graduating, the George Brown College professors have been readily available to provide professional references and guidance when needed. It is that compassion that he now brings to his own work helping others.

Portrait by George Qua-Enoo (page 109)

© George Qua-Enoo



Folorunso Clement Bamikole

Graduate 2007, College Teacher Training

Clement Bamikole knew when he immigrated to Canada with his family in 2001 that integrating into a new culture would be difficult. Arriving with a Ph.D. in agricultural science and more than a decade of research and banking experience, he indeed found the first couple of years hard going. He supported his wife and three children by working in a group home that served those with developmental challenges. He asked for the night shift so that his wife could train as a registered nurse during the day.

Clement had resolved to make teaching his career and had been accepted at Trent University in the Bachelor of Education program. Then, a friend mentioned George Brown's College Teacher Training program, a new offering in the International and Immigrant Education Department. Clement applied immediately, but his acceptance email went to his junk mail and he missed the acceptance deadline. Only when he followed up did he learn he'd been accepted and was allowed to enter the program.

Clement describes his experience at George Brown as rewarding and enriching. He credits the warm and open professors for accomplishing what the program was meant to do – providing the knowledge and skills for teaching in the Canadian post-secondary educational context. He graduated as valedictorian, and eleven years later, he says, "Everything I'm using in the classroom today, I learned there."

Practice teaching was an essential component of the program, and Clement found his experience within George Brown itself. He taught courses on environmental science and plants and society, and continued as a part-time instructor for two years after graduating, commuting from his family home in Barrie.

In 2009 he became a part-time professor at Georgian College, and in 2011 he was hired as a full-time faculty member. He is now program co-ordinator for the Georgian Liberal Arts degree breadth program. Remembering the strong references provided by his former George Brown faculty and administrators, he was eager to accept an invitation to participate in the 50 x 50 project. "Why not share my story and hopefully inspire others seeking to find their place in this country."

Portrait by V. Tony Hauser (page 105)

© V. Tony Hauser



Carl Diaz

Graduate 2015, Academic Pathway for Internationally Educated Nurses (IEN) Graduate Certificate

When Carl Diaz came to Canada, his goal was simple: to continue the nursing career he started in his native Philippines. The path to achieving that goal, though, was anything but. Carl had been working as a nurse in Kuwait when he had an opportunity to come to Canada under the Live-in Caregiver Program in 2009. He enjoyed his role as a caregiver for a couple outside Toronto. However, when his two-year obligation under that program ended, he was eager to get back to nursing and to pursue it as a professional in Canada.

To do this, however, required a number of steps and a great deal of determination and commitment. His credentials were evaluated at the registered practical nurse (RPN) level, but he still had to pass exams and demonstrate his knowledge of safe practice in a clinical setting. Meanwhile, he found work as a practical support worker at Baycrest Hospital and held a variety of other jobs while he remained focused on achieving licensure.

Carl came to George Brown College to take the Academic Pathway for Internationally Educated Nurses Graduate Certificate. The initial appeal of the program was its flexibility; like most adult students, Carl needed to work to support himself while going to school. But it soon became clear the program was a fit in more ways than one. At the information session, the program co-ordinators were warm and welcoming. Furthermore, he liked the ambiance at the Waterfront campus, including the library and proximity to the lake. "It was the perfect school for me to reach my

goals," he says. When he finished his program, he was thrilled to be chosen to participate in a pilot preceptorship project to gain experience for his license. After achieving his RPN status, Carl took bridging courses to enable him to go to Ryerson to complete his B.Sc.N. A diligent student, Carl maintained an A average at George Brown and graduated with distinction from Ryerson.

Looking back, Carl appreciates how sharing his challenges with other internationally educated nurses in the George Brown program awakened him to the incredible diversity in Canada. He quickly realized that this diversity would be mirrored among his future patients and found that speaking with people of different cultures helped him develop knowledge that has served him well throughout his career. He notes that Canada does not take away your cultural identity but enables you to enrich your identity with a broader, more open-minded understanding.

Today, Carl works as a registered nurse at Toronto Western Hospital (UHN) in the neurovascular unit. His path complete, he has become a support and guide to other internationally-trained nurses who hope to achieve RPN status in Canada. He recognizes that the process can be time-consuming, costly, and sometimes discouraging, but believes the rewards are worth the effort. "Success is not about being rich or becoming a CEO; it is knowing that you have met challenges and have stayed focused on achieving your goals."

Portrait by Walter Segers (page 110)

© Walter Segers



Leonard D. Edwards

Graduate 2008, Community Worker

Leonard Edwards immigrated to Canada from Grenada in 2005 to escape the marginalization he'd often experienced in his home country. He wanted to seek broader horizons to further his education and promote his personal growth.

Encouraged by a friend who lived in Canada and who'd spoken of the country's inclusive society, Leonard made Canada his destination. Until his arrival in Toronto, he had never left home, and he was both amazed and reassured by the diversity he discovered here.

Leonard's previous college training had been in information technology, but he'd always felt drawn to community work. In Grenada, his upper-middle-class upbringing had discouraged crossing a rigid class divide and hindered his desire to combat injustice and advocate on behalf of the less fortunate.

In September 2006, Leonard enrolled in the two-year George Brown College Community Worker program, which he credits for laying the foundation for where he stands today. What truly shaped him, and inspired him, was his Human Rights class taught by Professor Robin Buyers.

Upon graduation, his first position was in a group home working with residents with developmental disabilities. Concurrently, his professors urged him to apply for the York University Bachelor of Social Work program, and from there,

he went on to earn his master's degree at the University of Toronto. He is now completing his doctorate in Social Justice Education and is a clinical social worker at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

When the 50 x 50 project was brought to his attention, Leonard thought back to his experience as a racialized immigrant and how positive it turned out to be. He hopes those who learn of his 10-year story may realize that it is fully possible to leave the familiar and embrace the unknown to fulfil the best of oneself. He knows that it was the safe and inclusive academic environment as well as the high calibre of instruction that propelled him to excel. Today his five closest friendships are ones that began at George Brown College. It was these relationships that gave him the social context to successfully assimilate and fully participate in Canadian culture.

Portrait by Olga Kozitska (page 106)

© Olga Kozitska



Fatemeh Ehsani

Graduate 2012, Career and Work Counsellor

From Iran originally, Fahimeh Ehsani lived in the United Arab Emirates before she and her husband emigrated in 2011. She spoke English and came eagerly to a country she knew for its reputation for human rights and freedoms. Still the first six months were challenging. Despite years of experience teaching and an advanced degree, she could not find a job in her field. It was also during this time that she and her husband decided to separate.

On her own and with no professional prospects, she took a job in retail. In addition to the paycheque, the job helped her learn the finer points of Canadian culture. The importance of eye contact and the value of a firm handshake. The common courtesies among strangers: saying hello and smiling or holding the door. Her customers and co-workers were not put off by her accent as she feared at first. Between shifts in busy Yonge/Dundas Square, she was by herself, but she didn't feel lonely.

Still she needed a long-term career solution. It was a counsellor who suggested she could convert her teaching skills into coaching. With her educational background and experience, she was accepted to the fast-track Community Services program in January 2012.

"Going to George Brown changed my life," she says. Not only did Fahimeh develop the skills needed to help others, but the discussions in her class on managing change validated her experience of being new to Canada. Instructor Diane Moore made a real difference. Diane took time to get to know her students and referred Fahimeh to some invaluable volunteering experiences.

Today Fahimeh works at ACCES as an employment consultant and mentoring coach, helping newcomers find work and encouraging them to ask for help and utilize all the resources available to them. Her advice to her clients is something she knows from experience: "No one is alone in Canada."

Portrait by Katie Wyatt (page 113)

© Katie Wyatt



Rana El-Bahrani

Graduate 2002, Computer Programmer Analyst

Born in Iraq, Rana El-Bahrani moved with her family to Damascus, Syria, at the age of six. In 1999, she immigrated alone to Canada to join her new husband and his family. They had been in Canada for 15 years and were well-integrated into Canadian culture. But for Rana, who was lonely and homesick, it was a challenge to find her balance, even with an “instant” family.

“I thought it was just going to be me. I was going to be the stranger. But the neighbourhood I moved to had many new immigrants. There was an existing Persian [community] and Middle Eastern food. The good thing about Canada... it’s a multicultural country.”

The support of her husband was key to settling in, but Rana knew that the foundation of a solid future was a good education. She credits her parents with instilling this positive way of thinking. “I encouraged myself. To get beyond the home. Learn English. Finish my education. Get a good job.”

To prepare for college application, she attended TDSB’s Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program for eight months. She then moved on to George Brown College where she continued to thrive and grow. Hands-on experience. Working with a team. Integrating with people of different backgrounds and cultures. “It made me feel as though I wasn’t any different from anyone else.”

However, it was a student job at George Brown that ultimately made the difference. A job that she credits as the catalyst for the career she enjoys today.

“[My] instructor said there was a posting for a part-time student job as a technician in the computer lab. As soon as the class finished, I didn’t waste any time. I ran right away to the lab [and applied]. That was a big thing for me. I was only in Canada for a year. It was my very first job. It built my confidence. It built my language. When I helped other students, I felt encouraged. I went home feeling I had done something good.”

Rana worked elsewhere after graduating but continued to apply for jobs at George Brown. “I like the environment. I like the support and the teamwork. I feel like I make students happy.”

Rana has come full circle. She now works full-time at George Brown as an Ontario College Application Services (OCAS) admissions module administrator and loves the atmosphere of continual learning. She recently completed a three-year masters degree in software engineering from the University of Liverpool, supported and encouraged by her employer.

“I like to share my story with everyone. Most newcomers to Canada... they struggle. I tell them to try my path. Take continuing education, but while studying make sure you apply for a student job. When you graduate, you end up with work experience. I encourage everyone to apply to George Brown.”

Portrait by Sheana Puvicanthan (page 109)

© Sheana Puvicanthan



Danusha Fernando

Graduate 2011, Strategic Relationship Marketing

Danusha Fernando was born in Sri Lanka where his father taught him to pursue excellence in his chosen field. He attended university and took a good job in direct marketing. When his father passed, Danusha wanted to honour him by taking his career to the next level. With the exception of two vacations in Southeast Asia, Danusha had never left Sri Lanka. That didn't stop him from boarding a plane to Canada. He arrived six weeks before starting the Marketing program at George Brown College.

Doubt crept in within the first week of class. The educational system was different. He was solely responsible for studying and completing assignments. His professor Frances Steciuk saw that he was struggling and sat him down for a talk. "Everything changed after that," says Danusha.

His next challenge was finding a suitable placement in a recessed economy. Although the college provided leads, Danusha was intrigued by a speaker who gave a talk on business intelligence. He asked for an informational interview, and as the interview wrapped up, he inquired about a placement. He was told there were no opportunities available, but he continued to stay in touch. His persistence paid off; he began a placement in the new year. When the term ended, he stayed on, juggling school and work, travelling two hours before dawn and again in the evening. When asked how he managed, he says, "It was for my dad. He would be so proud."

Danusha was hired full-time after graduation. He remains an active alumnus, advising students in the program. In a recent talk, he told them, "Do your work in a way that leaves a lasting impression, so that even if they substitute you, they will never be able to replace you."

Today Danusha is an analyst in Direct Response Marketing at the CNIB, a job he describes as more than a paycheck; it's his purpose.

Portrait by Celina Virani (page 112)

© Celina Virani



Arlette Gonzalez

Graduate 2012, Small Business Entrepreneurship;

Graduate 2014, Sport and Event Marketing; Graduate 2017, Digital Media Marketing

Arlette Gonzalez didn't know Canada would become home when she first attended George Brown College. When she completed the Small Business Entrepreneurship program, she went back home to Mexico before realizing that she wanted to live in Canada permanently. She returned, not just to Canada but to George Brown, where she took the Sport and Event Marketing and Digital Media Marketing programs. It was not a difficult decision, not only was she attracted by the college's good reputation and the emphasis on future employment, her first experience had been great.

Arlette already had a degree in business from her home country and with her George Brown programs, she wanted to build on that while changing the focus of her career. She found studying at George Brown very different from her previous studies because the city and the college were so multicultural. Meeting people from so many countries helped her learn how to work effectively here. "When I studied in Mexico, everyone was Mexican," she says. "Here, people were from all over the world and I learned to work with people from many different backgrounds. I really enjoyed being a student here."

Her co-op placement helped her to develop the skills she needed to move into a career in marketing and design. In addition to the connections offered by her programs, Arlette took advantage of the college's Career Services. She worked with staff there to build her resumé, and the career

counsellor helped her to apply for jobs and prepare for interviews. She says they were instrumental in helping her move from being a student to getting the job she wanted.

Like many people, Arlette remembers when the college's ads used to say "George Brown gets you the job." For her, this tagline has resonance. She now works as a design and production assistant and is sure that having George Brown on her resumé helped her move ahead in her field. She loves the culture of the college and volunteers for GBConnect, helping staff ensure that events go smoothly and answering students' questions. Based on her experience, she says, "I really think George Brown helps you get the job. I thought that going to this college would open doors for me and it did."

Portrait by Philip Rostron (page 110)

© Philip Rostron



Shuai (Jerry) Gou

Graduate 2015, Business – Marketing

Jerry Gou came to Canada in October 2013 with the intention of completing a post-secondary education and eventually immigrating to Canada. As he recounts his plan, he laughs and says, “I have achieved all my objectives.” Looking at his time at George Brown, one is struck by the humility of this statement; he achieved so much more.

Having completed an undergraduate degree in China, Jerry chose George Brown because he wanted a practical post-secondary experience that would lead directly to a job. He describes himself as “business oriented” and heard strong recommendations for George Brown’s Business – Marketing program.

Jerry has two distinct memories of his first impressions of studying in Toronto. He spent his first two months in the ESL program where the college’s diversity surprised him: “People are not only respectful to each other but especially respectful and eager to participate in each other’s culture.” Jerry fondly remembers the ESL program organizing cultural sharing events where students could wander from classroom to classroom and learn about each other’s home countries. The second memory? “I also remember it being very cold.”

As he moved into his Marketing program, he was appreciative of the amount of support he received both in and outside of his academic program – he recounts getting a helping hand from everyone from faculty to senior management. An entrepreneur, he developed two mobile applications during his time at the college with support from Start GBC and

multiple departments, winning entrepreneurship awards from the City of Toronto and George Brown College’s Office of Innovation.

Jerry talks enthusiastically about the support he received, but it is hard not to notice his dedication to giving back and supporting others. For example, he acted as the Student Association’s international student representative. Running for and winning that position, according to Jerry, helped him “learn a great deal about North American democracy.” During this period, he also worked with the International Centre developing programs to help international students to integrate into local culture.

Somehow Jerry also found time to work as a Peerconnect coach. This led to his first job after graduation, working at the Waterfront campus as the Peerconnect administrative coordinator, overseeing a team of 15 students. Jerry has also joined the George Brown Foundation to organize a charity event to raise money for student scholarships.

Jerry is still on the move. He is focusing on the technology sector (in business development) for the next stage of his career. He had developed a tagline for this next chapter: “Be part of creating the future.” A big believer in the importance of the tech sector, he aims to ensure that it “creates meaningful value to our society and our humanity.” Who would bet against him?

Portrait by Matthew Trevisan (page 111)

© Matthew Trevisan



Danish Hassan

Graduate 2014, Business Administration – Marketing

Born in Pakistan, Danish Hassan moved to Bahrain as a child. When it came to choosing where to go for his post-secondary education, he decided on the University of Toronto, but despite having visited Canada once before, he had a difficult few years. It was more than just the shift in culture; he wasn't enjoying his studies. He switched programs and still didn't feel he was in the right place. A friend suggested his outgoing personality and ability to talk to anybody would be suited to a career in marketing. In 2012, he took the leap, enrolling in Business Administration – Marketing at George Brown.

The experience was exactly what he needed. Smaller classes, instructors who were seasoned professionals, and casework involving real clients in each class. In one memorable project, teams were tasked with developing ad campaigns for an indoor cycling facility. The students were told the project would be judged, and a winner declared, at the end of the term. Because they did not have the benefit of meeting with the client, Danish's group read everything they could find and then went to the facility and rented bikes for an authentic end-user experience. The owner happened to be on site and Danish naturally struck up a conversation. It was only after Danish and his group won the contest that they learned that they had edged out submissions by both undergrad and graduate student teams.

Having discovered his entrepreneurial side, Danish and a few colleagues started their own agency after graduation. He returned to university on a part-time basis to complete the degree he started when he first came to Canada and worked with Alumni Events at George Brown, helping deliver seminars and professional talks. He was able to leverage that experience to land his current role as an analyst with Cossette where he works on marketing strategies for individual customers.

Portrait by Mark Binks (page 102)

© Mark Binks



Mehdi Hosseini

Graduate 2008, Architectural Technology

Before he moved to Canada, Mehdi Hosseini was confident he knew what he wanted to do with his life – become an architect. However, his Industrial Engineering studies in Iran came to an abrupt halt when he immigrated, along with his parents and siblings, to Toronto in 2004.

Besides learning a new language, his biggest challenge was finding new friends. “It used to be tougher... now it’s so much easier. We have a bigger community of Persian people here. At the beginning... I had a hard time finding people to even play soccer with.”

After settling in, the next challenge was “re-finding” himself – discovering what it was he truly wanted to accomplish. Then, finding the right school. Or in Mehdi’s case, the right combination of schools. He knew the traditional university approach to architecture was not the right fit. He decided to take the three-year Architectural Technology program at George Brown College, followed by three years of Environmental Design at OCAD University.

Medhi had discovered the perfect mix – it gave him options. At George Brown, he learned the technical aspects of architecture and building, while at OCAD he focused on design and concepts. “Ninety-nine percent of the courses offered [by George Brown] directly related to architectural technologies, which was really great.” Mehdi’s current business reflects this reality when it comes to the application of his skills. He feels three-quarters of that business is based on his education at the college.

“I was really happy with the experience at GBC. The teachers had backgrounds in construction. [They could] answer the technical questions about being on-site that students were asking. Ultimately, if I had attended university, my path would have been very different. It was a good mix for me in the end.”

A work placement program in his final year afforded Mehdi experience at an architectural firm, and then full-time employment for two years after graduation. Soon after, he qualified for his BCN number, allowing him to sign his name to drawings for residential design. This in turn gave him the opportunity to launch a business – offering interior and exterior designs and construction management for custom homes across the GTA. His business continues to grow steadily.

“Originally, my dream was to be an architect. But the reality is... I don’t need to be. I can be the designer and hire an architect under my supervision. Both GBC and OCADU helped get me closer to the goal I had. But I don’t think I would have made it this far without George Brown.”

Medhi Hosseini is currently an AutoCAD instructor at OCAD University and the owner of Hosseini Homes, a custom home builder.

Portrait by Lorella Zanetti (page 113)

© Lorella Zanetti



Tatsiana Hradusava

Graduate 2009, International Fashion Development & Management

Tatsiana Hradusava never intended to leave her home – she had family, friends, a whole life in Belarus. But when she met her future husband, a Belarusian living in Canada, it changed everything. Though it was a difficult decision to leave, she decided to join him in Toronto.

For her first few months in Canada, Tatsiana felt lost. She didn't speak English, and while she had studied for seven years in Belarus, she realized she would have to start her education from scratch. She completed the ESL program at George Brown before enrolling in International Fashion Development and Management. The one-year intensive program was a challenge; struggling with her rudimentary language skills and the fast pace of the course, she wondered if she would be able to graduate. But she forced herself to continue and left the program equipped with the practical knowledge she needed to succeed in the fashion industry.

As she was finishing her diploma in 2009, Tatsiana got pregnant. Following the birth of her son, she took some time off to stay home. When she was ready to return to work a year later, she saw that Chanel was hiring and decided to apply. During her interview with the fashion director of Canada, her George Brown credentials set her apart.

Tatsiana was placed in sales at the Louis Vuitton store downtown, and it was here that she really hit her stride, learning how to build her clientele and take a leadership role within the business. Though she took time off to have a second child, it wasn't long before she became

the store's top seller, even securing an invite to Paris for ready-to-wear handbag and costume jewellery expert training. Now a senior sales associate with Chanel, she's found a place where she can continue to grow professionally, supported by colleagues who believe in her.

Though Tatsiana did not work in fashion in Belarus, it has always been a passion. Getting the chance to pursue something she loves means she looks forward to work in the morning. She credits George Brown with helping her find her place in Canada and hopes her experience will encourage others to explore their own talents. As she's gotten "older and wiser," she's learned something important: "If your job is your hobby and you can make money at it, you'll have a happy life."

Portrait by Shin Sugino (page 111)

© Shin Sugino



Sergio Jaua

Graduate 2014, Marketing Certificate

After completing his bachelor's degree, Sergio Jaua had gone on to establish a successful career in graphic design in Venezuela. He had worked for large international agencies before starting his own company, which attracted major clients. Sergio was at the peak of his career, but the country itself had become increasingly unstable. Concluding that the future there looked bleak, he decided to come to Canada.

Despite his impressive credentials and experience, Sergio realized that adding a Canadian credential to his resumé would enhance his opportunities. "Everyone asks you for Canadian experience, but how can you get Canadian experience if you can't get a job?" He decided to pursue studies in marketing to broaden his knowledge base. He chose George Brown based on the college's reputation and convenient schedule. Studying in English was challenging and demanded a lot of concentration, but it ultimately helped him improve his language skills.

Sergio was impressed by the calibre of the teachers at the college. "People who are professionals in their field teach you with real examples," he says. The mid-size classes were also a benefit, as they helped foster interactive classrooms in which everyone could participate. The college also provided great networking opportunities in his field.

Partway through his program, Sergio got a job in his field with Sunwing, although it was an entry-level position well below what he had done previously in advertising. Once he had some experience and had completed his certificate, he explained how his skills might benefit the company and

was promoted to brand design supervisor, the position he holds now. Sergio says that his education in marketing has given him a more comprehensive understanding of the way the creative work of graphic design connects with the rest of the advertising field and to the goals of the company. He loves design and is "very passionate about my field."

Sergio recommends the college to many people and particularly to new immigrants. "It is very challenging to be an immigrant, but a challenge always has two parts. It could be scary at some points, but it is also interesting because it is something that you need to face and see how to solve." He is glad to be moving ahead in his field in Canada, and George Brown has been an important part of that growth.

Portrait by Dimitri Aspinall (page 102)

© Dimitri Aspinall



Anna Jozwiak

Graduate 2017, Special Event Management

Born in Poland, Anna Jozwiak left her homeland more than a decade ago, living and travelling in several European countries, before coming to Canada in 2016. Anna has always had a deep interest in meeting and learning from people from different places, which led to her love of travel and informed her choice to settle in Toronto whose multicultural mix was compelling to her. “I feel rich,” she says, “because I have my own culture and I know how things are done here, too.”

Looking for something practical and career-focused to build on the degree she already had in film studies, she decided to take George Brown’s Special Events Management program. Observing the number of events across Toronto, she was confident that these skills would be in demand. Not one to take things slowly, she completed her four-semester program in a year and a half. This intense program provides students with the opportunity to create multiple events to demonstrate and refine their skills. Anna says that this hands-on experience gave her a lot of confidence as well as practical experience. Students need to adapt, work well in a group and manage the stress of the event itself, key skills for success in the workplace.

Anna felt at home at the college – “part of the club.” She is grateful for the many services the college provided – both those focused on supporting learning and those focused on students’ transitioning to their career. The opportunities to make career contacts were important for Anna, and she still gets networking opportunities through the college. She hopes to always be a part of the college community.

Anna’s college experience prepared her well for the work she is doing now, organizing events for Oliver and Bonacini restaurants. She has begun specializing in event photography as an adjunct to her role and is looking forward to starting her own business with this focus. This will combine her earlier interest in photography and film with her event management skills and knowledge of the local Toronto context and will be a career built on “the things I know and love doing.”

Portrait by Mark Sommerfeld (page 111)

© Mark Sommerfeld



Mazhar Kakar

Graduate 2013, Architectural Technology;
Graduate 2017, Honours Bachelor of Technology (Construction Management)

Mazhar Kakar has emigrated twice. In 1992, he moved from his homeland of Afghanistan as a four-year-old boy. Then again in 2006, he and his parents journeyed from Pakistan to Toronto. "I was fortunate enough when I was in Pakistan to attend an English school, so I did not have a language issue coming to Canada. However, it certainly was a culture shock... particularly as a teenager entering a new school system." Repeating a grade. Trying to make new friends. Trying to understand Canada. "The first two years here, it was really about trying to find a homeland... a place to call home."

His father's career, civil engineering, offered Mazhar a glimpse into the field of construction. More intrigued by the design aspects of building, he knew that engineering was not the right fit. Experience at an architectural firm led to working "on-site" and the realization that the physical activity of building, with his own hands, was what he was searching for. "I knew I wanted to do architecture, but I had to explore to understand what part of it was the right thing for me."

This self-awareness drew Mazhar to George Brown College. For him, the Architectural Technology program appeared highly specialized compared to other colleges. The program stressed time management and organizational skills.

It taught him to read blueprints – like one would read a book. Everything is there, if you look. "Having had the GBC opportunity, I read blueprints completely differently from those who have not had the same experience."

After graduating, Mazhar worked for two years in on-site construction and quickly realized there was more to learn to land a management position. "Looking back, one of the key benefits of my education was the strength of the relationships built between students and faculty. When I decided to further my education, I returned to GBC because of those relationships."

"I started as an assistant builder right out of GBC... then jumped to my current position very quickly... a step up the ladder that typically takes five or six years. I credit that to GBC... and what I learned there."

Mazhar's advice to future graduates? "Be honest and be yourself. Don't try to be someone you're not. Other people have the eye – and they'll recognize the honesty within you."

Today Mazhar Kakar is a warranty manager at Mattamy Homes in Toronto.

Portrait by Matthew Plexman (page 109)

© Matthew Plexman



Tjarirove Kasiringua

Graduate 2016, Business Administration

Tjarirove Kasiringua came from Namibia to Canada in 2011. Only 18 years old at the time, she finished her final year of high school at East York Collegiate Institute. Initially, the culture shock was overwhelming; it took a lot of time to adjust and make Canada her home. In Canada, she says, “everything was different.”

After graduation, Tjarirove was unsure exactly what to pursue next, but she knew that education was the key to changing her life. She’d always felt it was important to complete post-secondary studies so she could be self-sufficient and, one day, provide for a family. She enrolled in the Business Administration program at George Brown, deciding that a college education would be the most financially accessible and practical.

At George Brown, Tjarirove appreciated the “great teachers” and hands-on approach. But her program offered her more than just an academic education. She also learned the ropes of being in a new country – what was required to succeed and what was expected from her in a workplace. One thing that really helped Tjarirove during her time at George Brown was the Maytree Scholarship Program, an initiative which funds post-secondary education for landed immigrants or refugees. Through the program, Tjarirove connected with other refugees, building relationships that continue to this day. She also had the opportunity to volunteer at various events, serving food to the homeless and working with newcomer communities around Toronto.

Following her studies, Tjarirove held an internship at Bombardier for six months before moving to her current position at Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre for children with social, emotional and intellectual challenges. As a program assistant, she provides administrative support for staff and clients. The role has allowed her to learn more about mental health and the challenges facing families. Eventually, Tjarirove hopes to use her experience to move into the education sector. For her, the words of Kofi Annan are an inspiration: “Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress in every society and in every family.” She sees a return to school for further specialization in the near future. And, one day, she plans to travel to Namibia to once again see the beauty of her home country and help children attain the education they need for a better future.

Portrait by Vicky Kao (page 106)

© Plastic Canon



David Kokai

Graduate 1999, Cook II Apprenticeship – Advanced

David Kokai was born in Hungary and came to Canada as a child. Ever since going to Paris on a year-long exchange as a 16-year-old, he has felt the pull of Europe, but it is in Canada that he found his career passion.

As a teenager, he worked in restaurants for pocket money, and after high school, he enrolled at George Brown in the Cook II Apprenticeship – Advanced certificate program.

He learned the basic skills in the program, but it was the apprenticeship with Renee Foote at the Mercer Street Grill that made all the difference. “I was blown away with what they could do with food.”

He graduated in 1999 and that was when the real learning began. He earned the Red Seal Certificate, a designation that requires 6,000 hours of learning under a licensed chef and a written test. To hone his skills, he sometimes volunteered with a chef for a few weeks before coming on in a paid position. The investment and effort paid off. He became an expert in molecular gastronomy, charcuterie and patisserie.

After years of running his own catering business in Toronto, David wanted to try something new. Fluent in French and holding a European passport, he, along with his wife and young family, moved to Paris. They thought they would stay a year, but it stretched into two and then three years. He’s back in Canada now, but says that the pull of Europe never really goes away.

Portrait by Kathleen Finlay (page 105)

© Kathleen Finlay



Antonia and Yulia Kostiuk

Graduates 2013, 2014, Digital Design – Advanced Digital Design

Antonia and Yulia Kostiuk are twin sisters who have more in common than genetics. Antonia came to Canada from the Ukraine in 2012 and Yulia followed a year later. Both were interested in studying digital design with a focus on the user's experience. There were few educational opportunities to study the subject in the Ukraine, but George Brown College had an Advanced Digital Design program, exactly what they were looking for.

Although both had travelled around Europe as well as in the Ukraine, virtually everything in Canada felt new. One thing that helped Antonia adapt quickly was the opportunity to work on campus at the same time that she started her program. She also lived nearby, so her early memories of the city are concentrated in those parts of the city surrounding the George Brown campus. When Yulia arrived, she also worked part-time on campus. Eventually both sisters worked on projects through the Office of Research Innovation.

Both liked the applied nature of their studies and built good relationships with their faculty in a program that covered all aspects of digital design and web development. They took advantage of every opportunity that they could, participating in the Institute without Boundaries, Digifest, charrettes, contests, and related projects. As they completed their programs, the Office of Research Innovation helped them to find part-time jobs so they could start applying their knowledge and gain Canadian experience that would lead to full-time jobs.

One highlight of the program for Yulia was competing with a group of other George Brown digital design students in *EDF (Electricité de France) Sharing Energy in the City 2030*, an international competition with the Vitruvian Power Project. The international jury of the EDF awarded the project the "Best Collaborative Research." Afterwards, Antonia joined the Vitruvian team as well. The project prototypes were presented at the World Expo in Milan, at Lille 3000 Renaissance (Europe Pavilion) in France, at the International Biennale in Saint-Étienne, and at Digifest Toronto. They were featured in last year's School of Design book.

Antonia and Yulia have always been close and their experience in Canada has made them even closer as they learn and grow far away from their family. Both are now working in user interface aspects of web design, Antonia for BMO Financial Group and Yulia for the Toronto Star. Their studies and hard work have led them to the exciting careers they hoped for.

The sisters remain connected to the college that has been such a large part of their Canadian experience so far. They also continue to study there, pursuing some of their personal interests. Yulia takes classes in French, and Antonia has been studying digital painting to complement her Applied and Fine Arts degree.

Portrait by Graham French (page 105)

© Graham French



Shiraz Latif

Graduate 2016, Analytics for Business Decision Making

Shiraz Latif came to Canada from Pakistan in 2015, drawn by the desire to raise his family in a diverse and peaceful environment. An established professional in his own country, he wasted no time building a life for himself here.

In January 2016, Shiraz enrolled in the Analytics for Business Decision Making program at George Brown. The six-month intensive course emphasizes collaboration and teamwork, which allowed Shiraz to quickly develop personal connections and build on his expertise by learning from others. With the program's dual focus on technical skills and marketing, Shiraz was able to expand on his background in "classical IT" by gaining an understanding of the business aspects of the field. A particular highlight of his time at the college was presenting his capstone research project at a conference at the encouragement of one of his professors.

Graduating in the summer of 2016, Shiraz secured his first job immediately, as a data analyst performing forecasting, insights, and analytics at Mondelez International Inc. Since then, he has moved to an insurance company where he works as a data analyst/business intelligence consultant, helping business executives make better data-driven decisions.

In October 2017, Shiraz started an independent consultancy business on the side. He also played a key role in designing and establishing the Data Science program at Sheridan College, where he's been a part-time instructor since early 2016. Shiraz is quick to credit his George Brown experience

for this remarkable series of successes. As he explains it, "everything that I'm getting in Canada is because of George Brown College."

Less than three years into their new life, Shiraz's family has also settled in nicely. His son, now six years old, is thriving in the local French immersion program. And he and his wife welcomed their second child, a daughter, on July 1, 2016 – a particularly special way to celebrate their first Canada Day in their new home.

Portrait by Ian Crysler (page 104)

© Ian Crysler



Daniela Levi

Graduate 2017, Assaulted Women's and Children's Counsellor/Advocate

Two years before emigrating from Italy, Daniela Levi visited Canada and was struck by the inclusive culture and the freedom of expression. She returned in 2015 and began studying at George Brown College in the Assaulted Women's and Children's Advocacy program. Alone in Canada, she found a network of support at her synagogue as she got used to living in a new country.

She was still adjusting to Canadian culture when she began her first placement, but the work was meaningful, and she was learning to lead and interact with people from other cultures. "I learned a lot about myself and grew personally while gaining practical experience," she says. At the end of her first year, she was awarded the George Brown General Education Award.

While Daniela was excelling in her program, she found her electives brought unexpected value. Previously somewhat skeptical of climate change, she took a course in geography that helped her to understand the issue more fully and in the end, changed her mind on the matter.

In June 2017, Daniela graduated from the program with the highest GPA, earning her the Governor General's Academic Medal. Her advice to any newcomer to George Brown would be to enjoy the journey and take full advantage of the available resources such as the peer program.

Today, Daniela studies social work at York University. When asked what's next, she hints at an advanced degree but says it is too early to say for sure. She is certain of where that future lies. Now a permanent resident, she calls Canada home.

Portrait by Nigel Dickson (page 104)

© Nigel Dickson



Elaine Lloyd Robinson

Graduate 2007, Community Worker

Elaine Lloyd Robinson's father settled in Canada when she was still a toddler. Her mother joined him a couple of years later, leaving Elaine with her extended family in their large home in Jamaica. Eventually, they sent for her, and Elaine, bundled in a parka and nauseated from her first flight, went to live in a tiny apartment, alone with her parents for the first time in five years.

Normally an eager student, Elaine struggled at school in Canada. The teacher used her formal name, one she'd never answered to before. She was a visible minority at a time when racism was only beginning to be understood. She became pregnant and left high school before graduating.

She married and had three more children, insisting on the value of education for each of them. Her role model was Jean Augustine, also an immigrant from the West Indies, who became a school principal, a social justice advocate and a Member of Parliament. Inspired by Jean, Elaine returned to school nearly 20 years after she left and completed her high school diploma. Back to being the eager student she once was, she received the Don Robb award for academic excellence at graduation.

As a front-line community worker with the City of Toronto, she developed ideas for arts and cultural programs in her spare time. Getting them funded and integrated into local community centres was rewarding to her. It was a friend who saw her potential and encouraged her to further her education at George Brown.

In 2007, she received her diploma in the Community Worker program, formal recognition of her years of work in the area. As a sole support parent overcoming obstacles to achieve her educational goals, Elaine also received an award named for her role model and inspiration: The Honorable Jean Augustine Scholarship.

After graduation, Elaine specialized in supporting youth and, more recently, became involved in employment counselling. She also established G.H.E.T.T.O (Getting Higher Education To Teach Others). Her mission is to redefine how we use the word and to share stories of hope and overcoming adversity.

Portrait by Kathryn Hollinrake (page 105)

© Kathryn Hollinrake



Victoria Luz Leyva Loayza

Graduate 2010, Business Administration – Marketing

Victoria Luz Leyva Loayza was just 17 years old when she left Peru to study in Canada. Her parents had offered her the opportunity to study abroad and one of her sisters already lived in Toronto. When she touched down, she wasn't sure what to expect.

The first six months were the hardest, but when she would call home, her mom would reassure her, "This is your future. This is where you are going to succeed." With the unwavering support of her parents behind her, Victoria found herself not just adjusting to life in Canada, but embracing it; it opened her mind in exciting new ways.

When she started George Brown's ESL program, "I felt like I was at home," she says. "I didn't have to pretend to speak perfect English or worry if I made grammatical mistakes because everybody there was the same as I was – learning English, coming from a different country, trying to further their education." That multicultural experience inspired Victoria to continue her studies at George Brown. With a strong background in math and an interest in business, Victoria chose to buck the family trend of going into science and enrolled in the Business Marketing program.

The program was a good experience, filled with friends and instructors with valuable "real-world experience." Again the opportunity to interact with people from other cultures was particularly rewarding. She recalls how much she learned from one classmate from Pakistan who had a background in engineering genetics. It was one of many such experiences in

her program. Looking back, her college experience is one she continues to cherish: "It was my second home in Canada. I'm proud to say I graduated from George Brown."

After George Brown, she transferred to Ryerson to complete an undergraduate degree in Business Commerce with a major in marketing and a minor in economics. This led to a position in human resources at Scotiabank, where she has found a passion developing the skills and training for her fellow colleagues.

While Peru will always be home, and she still misses family and friends back in her hometown of Sicuani, Victoria is grateful for the many adventures, opportunities, experiences, and blessings she has had in Canada. "When I came here, a Pakistani lady told me the first time you fall in snow is when you know you are going to stay in this country," she says. "And it was true. The first time I fell in snow I decided this is where I have to be."

Portrait by Carlo Calope (page 103)

© CALOPE



Anton Makhinko

Graduate 2014, Culinary Management

Anton Makhinko found his career passion early and then, somewhat to his surprise, as he was pursuing his Culinary Management program at George Brown, he found a second passion. Anton, who comes from a family of artists, always knew that he wanted a career in which he could create with his hands, but he didn't know what precisely it would be until he took a high school cooking class. He pursued this passion with the three-year hospitality and tourism program, and as graduation approached, he decided to become a chef. He went to an open house at George Brown and knew he had found the right college.

George Brown was a wonderful experience for Anton. He made good friends that he still has today, and enjoyed his instructors and classes. He especially liked the dessert classes and still makes some of the desserts at home. The internship proved key. He was placed at an Italian fine dining restaurant near his home, where the chefs helped him practice skills so that he would do well in his classes as well as in the internship. After graduating, Anton was hired by the same restaurant and, except for a brief hiatus, he has worked there since.

Anton's other passion came about as a result of a general elective at George Brown. He had been interested in travel and looked into exchange programs, but nothing seemed feasible. Then he saw information about the pilot offering of the Understanding Japan general education elective, which included a two-week trip to Japan. He signed up.

"It was amazing and a highlight of my studies at George Brown," he says. "I love cooking here, but I want to learn more about Japanese cuisine. I am studying Japanese and saving money so I can go back to Japan to work in a kitchen and study their ways. Some people think it's just sushi, but... there's a lot more!"

In addition to his job and plans for future travel and study in Japan, he is putting together a collection of family Ukrainian recipes (his family emigrated from the Ukraine in 2003). He credits his grandmother with sparking his early interest in cooking, and now he wants to preserve the family recipes so they can be enjoyed for generations to come.

Portrait by Francisco Riquelme (page 110)

© Francisco Riquelme



Johan Malmqvist

Graduate 2012, Bachelor of Technology (Construction Management)

Johan Malmqvist's passage to Canada begins as a love story. He met his Canadian wife-to-be in India, and given his knowledge of English and her lack of Swedish, it made sense for them to choose Canada as a place to begin a life together. He took an 18-month leave of absence from the engineering job he'd held in Sweden and came to Canada on a youth visa. His intention was to get a job, but his arrival in 2009 coincided with the economic recession and he was unable to find employment in his field.

After considering both the University of Toronto and Ryerson University, Johan ultimately decided to enrol in the George Brown Bachelor of Technology Construction Management program because it included a co-op term. He knew this was his best opportunity to show employers who he was and what he could do.

This conviction proved prophetic; upon graduation he was immediately hired by PCL Construction, a consortium of construction companies, where he'd undertaken his co-op term. He began working on special projects, which included renovations to community centres, the redesign and installation of the Air Canada Centre Fan Base Store, and more recently, the upgrade and expansion of Exhibition Place's BMO Field to convert it to a world-class, state-of-the-art sports venue.

Currently, Johan is a project manager working in the PCL modelling department developing customized modular units for the Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital construction project.

Johan was impressed with the 50 x 50 concept of bringing together the stories of 50 George Brown alumni from different countries who have gone on to make lasting contributions in their adopted country. He was happy to participate by sharing his experience and how the college helped him find his place in Canada. Johan remembers the engagement of his professors and their passion for sharing their knowledge with students who demonstrated a focused desire to achieve their goals. He believes that his co-op experience through George Brown College was instrumental in enabling him to showcase his abilities and build a rewarding life in Toronto both professionally and personally.

Portrait by Ashlea Wessel (page 113)

© Ashlea Wessel



Sylvia Morrison

Graduate 2004, Assaulted Women's and Children's Counsellor/Advocate

Sylvia Morrison, a graduate of George Brown's Assaulted Women's and Children's Counsellor/Advocate program, is a social justice and human rights activist and advocate in GTA communities and in communities around the world.

Asked about her first memories of Canada, Sylvia laughs. "I remember the thing that really struck me as a visitor is how, during the summer, I would see grass grow impossibly fast. I would go home to Jamaica and tell the story of passing by a dug-up lot, just regular dirt, only to see a thick grass having grown in overnight." She explains the mystery, still laughing. "They had just put sod down. I did not know that could happen like that. It never happened in my world before – fully grown overnight."

Formerly a teacher in Jamaica, Sylvia moved to Canada in 1989 and began learning about the local culture through volunteer work. "I volunteered at local schools, the post office, crisis centres, the library... I was scheduled for jobs from Monday to Friday." One volunteer placement was at a rape crisis centre in Mississauga. "I learned about violence against women and it was shocking to me. Sure, it was there in the little community that I grew up in but the ways that women were experiencing sexual violence across the world was shocking to me." Morrison's passion for the work grew, and when she asked a colleague about further educational opportunities, they suggested George Brown.

The program helped her access a whole new understanding of not just her future work, but her past. "The faculty opened up my world in ways I did not know were possible.

The activist in me came alive – the program gave me language to talk about my experience and my knowledge. I could make connections with my younger self in Jamaica... my mother was a model for me in our village; our house was a safe haven. If a women in need of help made it into our yard, no one was going to touch her. Before the program, I would never say to you that my mom was a feminist activist."

During her time at George Brown, Sylvia participated in an international placement in Cuba which left an indelible impact. Inspired by a Cuban artist who had turned his house into an art museum and school, she remembered her own experience of an American doctor visiting her school in Jamaica and giving her a prize for an essay as a child. This interaction had a deep impact on her idea of the outside world and its possibilities. These two inspiring experiences led to Sylvia founding the "Links Across Borders" organization that has been building libraries in various parts of Ghana ever since. "I want to give that back to children who look and thought just like I did back in Jamaica, feeling that their world is tiny and no one cares about what they have to say... When I show up in Ghana with my black self and these little kids gets to see someone who looks just like them and coming with all these other people from Canada, it is a big deal."

Portrait by Deanna Pizzitelli (page 109)

© Deanna Pizzitelli



Sanaa Mughal

Graduate 2009, Hotel Management

Originally from Kenya, Sanaa Mughal was only seven years old when her family moved to Toronto. Initially, she found the transition difficult, and even now, she often feels like she's straddling two very different worlds. "It's just a completely different way of thinking," she says. Sometimes, she still has to explain elements of Canadian culture to her family and bridge the gap between cultures; it's part of what has made her such a strong communicator.

After high school, Sanaa wasn't sure exactly what she wanted to do. She knew that George Brown had a good reputation, and her mother had always encouraged her to go into hospitality management, so she decided to enroll in the Hotel Management diploma. Studying at a college in the heart of downtown offered a unique student experience, and Sanaa took advantage of the chance to develop strong relationships with people from all different cultures and backgrounds. She looked up to professors with industry experience as role models and started to develop her strengths as a leader in her own right.

After completing the program, Sanaa took a job in sales and, ultimately, used her customer service and sales experience to transition to the banking industry. Working as a financial sales representative at CIBC, she quickly rose to a leadership position. But after four years, she was craving a change. Taking a year off to complete licensing courses helped her complete her transition into the financial world.

Today, Sanaa is an advisor relations representative at a small investment firm, where she gets to combine her love of working with people with her interest in helping businesses thrive. Eventually, she hopes to pursue her real passion – management. As she knows from experience, "the right manager can make all the difference."

Portrait by George Simhoni (page 111)

© George Simhoni



Lungile Ncube

Graduate 2004, Computer Programmer Analyst;
Graduate 2005, Business – Marketing

Lungile Ncube was interested in participating in the 50 x 50 project because he felt his was a unique story to tell. Originally from Zimbabwe, Lungile came to Canada via the United States. He enrolled in George Brown's three-year Computer Programmer Analyst program before continuing his studies with the one-year postgraduate Marketing certificate program. What makes Lungile's college experience unique is the extent to which he embraced not just his studies but college life itself, contributing to the community in ways that are still felt today.

While at George Brown, Lungile's engagement with the college went far beyond the classroom. He was elected vice-president of the Student Association and was instrumental in spearheading a drive to qualify international students for student TTC (transit) fare rates. He worked for the campus bookstore and for the Instructional Technology Assistance Centre (iTAC). When faculty in the Centre for Business Financial Services degree program were equipped with office computers, Lungile was responsible for installation, maintenance and troubleshooting. Soon after graduation, he worked with the newly established Human Rights Office to develop a plan for promoting awareness within the college of these services by conducting a data analysis of how students acquire information of the services. As a result of his research and analysis, inquiries to the Office increased by 80%. Lungile feels his immersion in so many

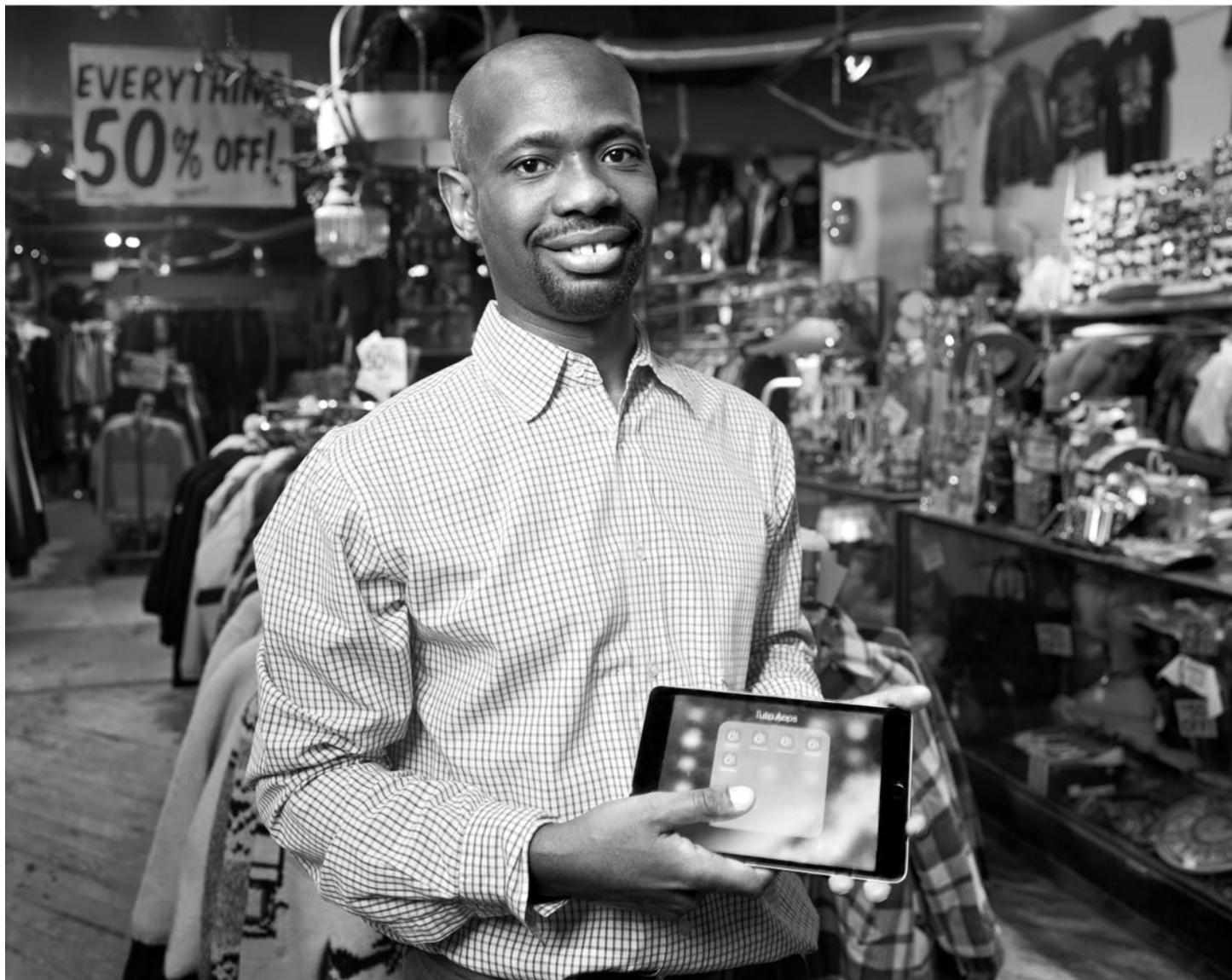
facets of college life gave him a unique perspective and allowed him to help other international students make the transition to an overseas educational experience.

Since graduation, Lungile's George Brown credentials have opened up many professional opportunities. He worked in IT for Research in Motion (RIM) in Waterloo and for the TD Bank. He currently holds a position with a Canadian enterprise, Tulip Retail, where he develops application products for prominent retailers such as Chanel, Michael Kors, Lululemon and Saks Fifth Avenue. He returned to the college in 2015 to earn a postgraduate Business Analyst certificate.

Lungile looks back on his time at George Brown as a richly rewarding experience. If there was any opportunity he wishes could have been added, it would be exposure for international students to interactions with Canada's Indigenous populations. With his passion and enduring interest in lifelong learning, Lungile is always looking for new horizons.

Portrait by Gerald Piszowski (page 108)

© Gerald Piszowski



Jonathan Pagis

Graduate 2017, Jewellery Essentials

It has been just two years since Jonathan Pagis and his family immigrated to Canada from Israel. His former occupation as a police officer had contributed to a hectic existence, and he knew he wanted something different in retirement. Together he and his wife, a Canadian citizen, thought, "Why not give Canada a try." They've never looked back, fully embracing life in their adopted home of Toronto.

Almost as soon as he arrived, Jonathan found himself interested in George Brown College, which had the reputation and program most suitable to develop his interest in jewellery design.

He enrolled in the one-year Jewellery Essentials program, and very early on, remarked to the program co-ordinator, "Everyone is so nice to you here. I'm not used to that!" There was something about the classroom atmosphere that brought out the best in every member of the class. He saw that the faculty were skilled professionals who knew how to motivate their students. They offered honest and constructive feedback that helped everyone grow both professionally and personally.

Recently graduated, Jonathan now has his own equipment and works out of his home workshop. He is grateful to have access to metals and stones with which to apply the improved techniques he acquired at George Brown, and is considering returning to the college for further studies.

For Jonathan, the 50 x 50 project is a way to give back to George Brown College and an opportunity to be an example for others who are considering the leap into the field of artistic design. He is more than willing to meet with anyone who seeks advice and guidance about a career in this creative field.

Portrait by Yuri Dojc (page 104)

© Yuri Dojc



Lina Panesso

Graduate 2015, Health Information Management

Lina Panesso came to Canada from Colombia as a skilled worker with the intention of finding work in her field. She quickly realized she lacked the necessary English proficiency, and after some initial language classes, she sought a more intensive program. Her research led her to the George Brown College ESL program. Factors in her decision included the program's reputation as well as its convenient location in the heart of the city. Lina describes her language studies as an amazing experience that motivated her to attend every day.

Her ESL education was so positive that she decided to continue on to an academic program. As a trained respiratory therapist, she wanted to broaden her health-care background with further administrative qualifications. She opted for George Brown's two-year Health Information Management program. Despite the challenge of academic learning in an English environment, she successfully graduated and within four months was hired as a patient flow coordinator at Princess Margaret Hospital. In November 2017, she moved on from her position as release of information specialist at St. Joseph's Hospital to take on the role of claim information specialist with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. She soon discovered that one of her former George Brown professors was now her manager!

Lina attributes much of her professional success to the support she received at George Brown. "The college's assistance is so important. As a newcomer, you don't know what is best for you and you depend on advice and encouragement. That's how I found my way."

Reflecting on her days at the Waterfront campus, Lina fondly recalls hours in the library reading with the view of Lake Ontario before her. The landscape as it changed through the seasons and the versatile, comfortable campus buoyed her throughout her academic journey.

It was Lina's love of photography that first attracted her to the 50 x 50 project. She also recognized that it was a unique opportunity to share her story of how the college moved her forward. "Going to George Brown College was a great step – just look at me now!"

Portrait by Shlomi Amiga (page 102)

© Shlomi Amiga



Andrea Prifti

Graduate 2003, Early Childhood Education

Andrea Prifti found more than a program at George Brown College; he found a place to work and advance his career. Today he is the manager of the George Brown College Early Childhood Education Lab School at Queen Street, but this story begins when he came alone to Canada from Albania as a political refugee in June 1999. Initially, he did not speak much English, and it took two years to negotiate the process of having his refugee status accepted to become a permanent resident. During that time, he took ESL classes every day and spent his spare time at the Toronto Reference Library working on his English; he also took up a variety of part-time jobs to support himself while he was living in a shelter. As his English improved, he started helping other refugees.

He had been a Russian language teacher and a school principal in Albania, and had studied education there and in Russia. One of his ESL teachers suggested that he consider taking an Early Childhood Education (ECE) program so that he could work with children here. After conducting some research, he chose the ECE program at George Brown.

Andrea says he was very focused on his studies, although the adjustment was hard at first and his first field placement was stressful. But he knew that he had found the right profession and the right college. In particular, he liked the program structure, in which almost half the time was spent in placements working with children and families. He also liked the opportunity to make friends with students from other countries.

Two of Andrea's professors thought that he might be a good fit for the college's lab schools and encouraged him to try for a position there. It didn't happen right away, but although he could have worked elsewhere, he persevered because he could see the value of the lab schools, which have a high level of professional practice and offer the opportunity to work with children, families, and ECE students. For two and a half years he worked contract, replacing staff who were away, until he was able to get a full-time position at the Rose Avenue lab school in 2008. In the meantime, he married and his family grew to include a son in 2004. When the Rose Avenue centre expanded to add programs for younger children, he became program lead. Last September, he moved to the Queen Street site as the manager of the centre.

Today Andrea passes on his knowledge to the next generation. "I like what I do," Andrea says. "It's a hard job, but it fits my personality. I like sharing what I know with the families and the students." He is still grateful to find himself in Toronto, an amazing city where people from other places are valued and have unique opportunities.

Portrait by Michael Rafelson (page 109)

© Michael Rafelson



Marco Ramos

Graduate 1991, Business – Accounting

Marco Ramos had an accounting degree and a good job in Bolivia when the political environment shifted, destabilizing life for his young family and forcing Marco to consider his options. He had been inspired by Pierre Elliot Trudeau's leadership and how Canada had emerged with a unique and multicultural social fabric. He made his decision; despite not knowing anyone and having only basic English skills, he arrived in Canada on May 21, 1986.

With his family still back in Bolivia, he found himself alone in a new country. He found a Spanish newspaper and looked for social events and a church with a Spanish-speaking priest. In a world before the internet, he established his own social network.

Marco still needed to refine his English skills. A government program directed him to George Brown for an ESL course. He didn't know it then, but that connection would lead to a decades-long relationship with the college.

After completing the ESL course, Marco took a contract job as a cashier in the college cafeteria. When that contract expired, he found another in housekeeping. Marco became known for his hard work and warm personality. When his manager transferred to a job in the bookstore, he asked Marco to join his team.

Working part-time made it possible for Marco to study in the Accounting program. When his wife arrived with their children, they began talking about the future. "Our original plan was to save some money and go back to Bolivia," Marco says. Somewhere along the way, they ended up buying a house in Scarborough.

Thirty-two years later, Marco does accounting for the bookstore at George Brown. "It turned out better than I expected," he says of his move to Canada. He and his wife often ponder what their lives would have been like if they never left. "It's the million-dollar question," says Marco.

Portrait by Asif Raza (page 110)

© Asif Raza



Mamunur Rashid

Graduate 2014, College Teacher Training

In 2010, Mamunur Rashid, his wife and two sons immigrated to Canada from Bangladesh.

As landed immigrants, their situation was not a typical one. Financially stable, both Mamunur and his wife had established careers before coming to Canada. Mamunur had studied and worked in both his homeland and Belgium, and had started Ph.D. studies in Australia shortly before they immigrated. He was an international professional looking to begin a new life in Canada.

“We were very settled in Bangladesh. When we first came to Canada, our thoughts were what now? Where to go? What to do? Where to start?” Settling near Danforth and Victoria Park in Toronto, surrounded by a large Bangladeshi community, helped make the transition easier.

Mamunur feels his wife faced the bigger challenge initially, acclimatizing to the Canadian way of life while her husband continued his studies half a world away. “I really didn’t settle here until July 2013.”

With postgraduate studies complete, the next step for Mamunur was finding a way to apply his education, and more than a decade of teaching experience, within a Canadian context. This is where George Brown came in.

The College Teacher Training program is specifically designed to help those with an existing teaching or professorial background. Its focus is integration into the Canadian culture while providing insight into the educational job market.

A highly engaging and challenging program – it’s based on experiential learning in classrooms and workshops. Mamunur found it “invaluable” to his life and career.

“I would say that George Brown built the foundation upon which I’m standing... upon which I built my career... More newcomers need to know about this program, and we also need to have more programs of this kind in Ontario.”

Today, Mamunur is an associate dean at the Pilon School of Business at Sheridan College. He feels it’s critical that governments continue to invest in opportunities, support and development for newcomers at all educational and skill levels. Prior to George Brown he had approached one employment agency only to be “dismissed immediately because I had a Ph.D. Because of my background, I had the confidence to continue on my own. Many others do not.”

For Mamunur, programs like the College Teacher Training program are key for newcomers to unlock the potential of life in their adopted homeland.

“Whatever your skill, Canada can provide the opportunity to leverage that skill, to create a good job or career. That’s not true in many other parts of the world. All newcomers need help.”

Portrait by Michael Cooper (page 104)

© Michael Cooper



Aurora Rodulfa

Graduate 2009, Advanced Counselling Skills Certificate; Graduate 2010, Community Mental Health Case Management Certificate; Graduate 2011, Life Skills Coaching Certificate

There's an old adage that says one's education should never be complete. It's a principle that Aurora Rodulfa exemplifies. She already had a master's degree and experience working in community development when she came to Canada from the Philippines in 2005. A one-year program at Ryerson University helped her start working in her field here, but she knew she wanted more specific education that would give her broader skills and greater opportunities.

Aurora came to George Brown in 2008 to take the continuing education Advanced Counselling certificate. Like many students, she was attracted by the college's programs but also by the convenience of being able to take the streetcar to school. She went on to complete two more continuing education programs at George Brown, including all three levels of the Life Skills Coaching certificate.

Learning from professors who were professionals in their fields was important for Aurora. She says, "They know exactly what they're talking about." When questions arose at work, she brought them to class for discussion. She also appreciated the opportunity to network with classmates who were also working professionals and could help her better understand how things are done in Canada. Over time, some of these classmates became colleagues working in related fields.

When Aurora decided that she needed an M.S.W. degree to advance her career, one of her George Brown College professors served as a reference for the program at the University of Windsor.

Today Aurora provides community support for elderly people, coordinating resources and helping to maintain them in their homes for as long as possible. This work draws on skills she acquired starting with the work she did early in her career through her studies at George Brown and her degree program. And, unsurprisingly, Aurora is studying again. Alerted to the mental health issues some older people face through her current work, she is taking an online program in current psychotherapy methods. She is looking forward to opening an independent social work and psychotherapy practice in the future.

Portrait by Evan Dion (page 104)

© Evan Dion



Walter Strasser

Graduate 1982, Hotel Management

Walter Strasser has served presidents and prime ministers. He's worked in the mountains of Alberta, the tropical island of Grand Cayman, and the capital of the United States. Today, he is executive vice president of sales for one of the world's leading hospitality companies. And Walt can trace this incredible career back to a single event: a career day during his first year in the Hotel Management program at George Brown College.

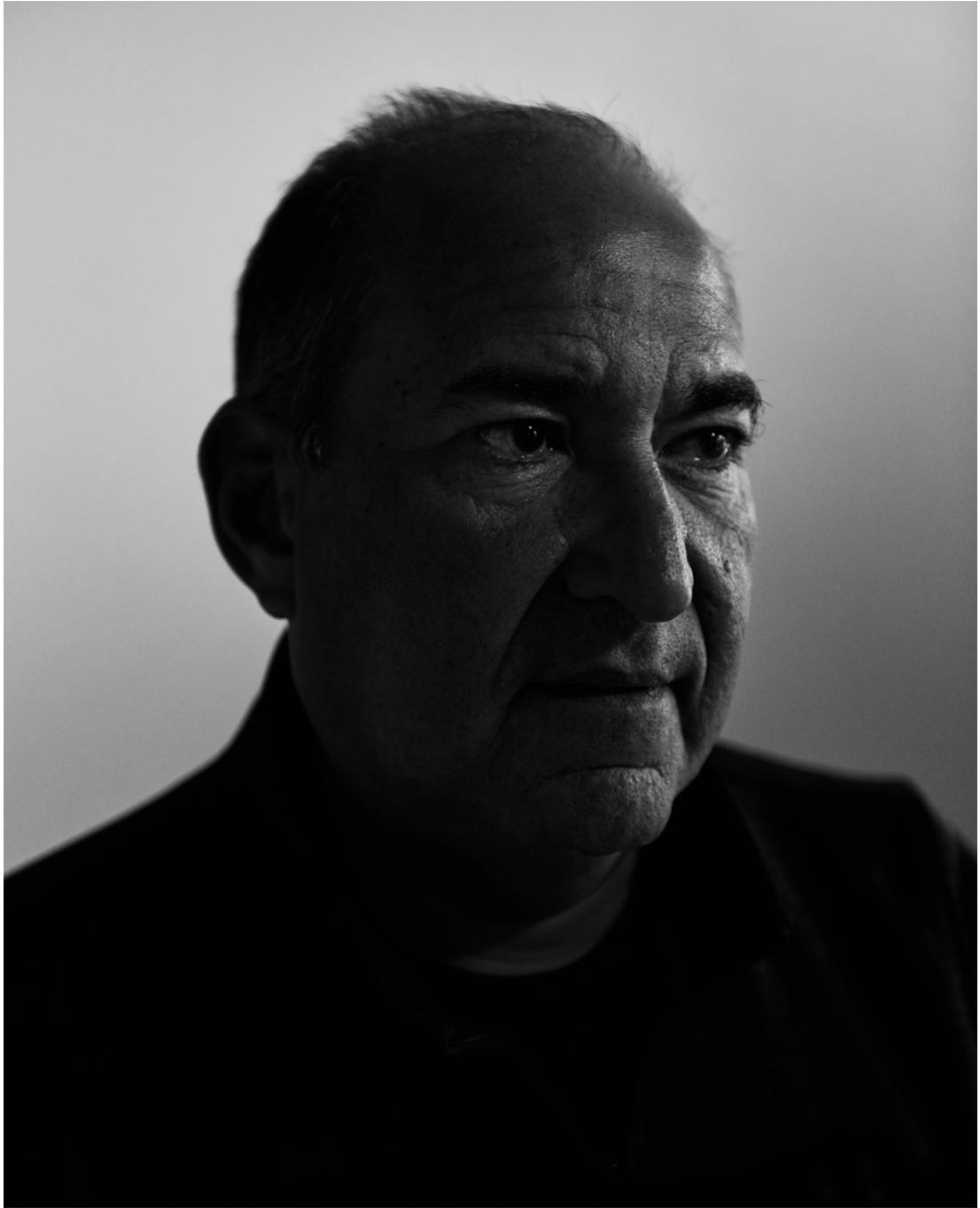
One of the booths at that career fair belonged to CN Hotels (now Fairmont Hotels), and an HR person there offered Walt two jobs: one in Alberta and one in New Brunswick. Walt couldn't believe his luck; at the time it was nearly impossible to get a job at the major resorts out west. He found himself spending the summer at Jaspar Park Lodge, a 18-year-old working long days in a first-class professional working atmosphere and then "social networking" into the wee hours of the morning with a group of friends he is still close with today. After completing his second year at George Brown, he returned to Jaspar Park Lodge, where he was promoted up the ranks from restaurant manager to banquet manager to maître-d'. At one point he nearly got to serve the Pope. "The opportunities were ridiculous," he says. He was then transferred to Vancouver where his job was to live in a hotel and provide one-on-one service to noted dignitaries such as Margaret Thatcher during the World's Fair in 1986. Burnt out after the fair and depressed by the Vancouver drizzle, he took a job with Hyatt as opening banquet manager for a new hotel in Grand Cayman. When he finally decided he wanted his holidays back, he moved to the supply side of the

hospitality business, joining Minibar Systems at their head office in Washington, DC. He has spent the last 28 years with the company, which holds over 60% of the global market share in minibars and hotel fridges.

Walt says none of that would have been possible without his experience at George Brown College. "It really is the catalyst for my entire career," he says. He got straight A's "because I was so into it." His interest in the Hotel Management program was sparked when George Brown came to his high school for a career day. The representative described a glamorous career with lots of travelling to beautiful places. Walt, who emigrated from Trinidad when he was 10 and comes from a big travel family, thought, "That's what I want to do." The first week of school, an instructor gave them the hard news: if you think you're going to travel the world and have some kind of glamorous life, you're in the wrong career. "Thankfully, he was wrong," Walt says with a laugh.

Portrait by Janick Laurent (page 106)

© Janick Laurent



Hengxuan (Sophie) Tian

Graduate 2003, Sport and Event Marketing

Hengxuan Tian first set foot on Canadian soil in March of 2002 with the ambition of starting a new life in Canada. However, her arrival coincided with the technology bubble bursting, resulting in few job prospects and making her settlement as a new immigrant extremely difficult. To advance her education, she decided to pursue the George Brown College Sport and Event Marketing postgraduate program.

Up until her enrollment, the thought of giving up and returning to her former life in China had occurred to Hengxuan from time to time. However, George Brown College not only gave her the opportunity to further her qualifications in the professional world, it enabled her to forge meaningful lifelong friendships. She remembers the college as a community, a place where she belonged. What stood out for her were the professors who, without exception, exhibited professionalism and encouragement. They played a significant role in instilling the confidence to draw on her experience and launch a new life in Canada.

Upon graduation, Hengxuan's first position was marketing manager at New Oriental Education & Technology Group. After a year, she was admitted to the York University Schulich M.B.A. program and was ultimately hired on campus in 2006 by Air Canada for its management trainee program. Currently Hengxuan works as manager of ATC Navigation Charges at

Air Canada. In this role, she oversees the budgeting, financial reporting, and global payment for air navigation charges and international operations for Air Canada, Air Canada Rouge, Jazz, Sky Regional, and Tier 3. Additionally, she negotiates with air traffic control authorities in Canada and around the world to obtain the best rates for Air Canada operations. To date, Hengxuan has travelled to over fifty-five countries for work and for leisure.

"George Brown helped me settle in this country by welcoming me to the community, providing mentors, and fostering my strongest friendships. Now when I travel around the world, landing back in Toronto is coming home for me."

Portrait by Lisa Murzin (page 108)

© Lisa Murzin



Alena Tokareva

Graduate 2013, Construction Management

Alena Tokareva has an adventurous spirit and embraces challenges. Originally from Tbilisi, Georgia, she moved with her family to Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. From there, she came alone to Canada, thinking that she had nothing to lose and might be successful here.

Once in Canada, she started looking into construction management jobs and noticed that in ads, employers expressed a consistent preference for George Brown College graduates over those of other colleges. That made her decision easy. She applied for and was accepted into George Brown's Construction Management program. Excited to get started, she found the months spent waiting for the new semester to begin were the hardest time for her.

She had been advised to "treat school as a full-time job" and Alena took that seriously. She spoke with her professors to learn how she could do better in their courses; she volunteered; and she sought advice about how to be successful from her teachers and the career counsellors. She especially appreciated the guest speakers who came to the program. In addition to telling students how useful the program would be, they encouraged them to choose their future employment carefully, based on what they really wanted to do. The concept of crafting one's career path deliberately rather than just taking the job offer with the highest salary was new to her and seemed distinctly Canadian.

Initially, "networking" and "soft skills" were a bit of a mystery to Alena. They had not been touched on during her previous degree. As an introvert more interested in technical problems, this was new territory, but she was determined to learn and worked hard on developing stronger interpersonal skills. That work has paid off in her career as a technical manager, a role that sometimes requires her to speak to large groups of people, most of whom are much older than her and almost all of whom are men. She makes sure her information is accurate and focuses on her content to feel confident in these situations. She says, "Being afraid is okay; it just shouldn't stop you."

Alena got her first job through an internship before she graduated. She started as a receipts coordinator and advanced to being a building information modelling (BIM) coordinator. She realized that she wanted to do more research and development work and moved to Ellis Don, where she is a virtual design and construction manager. She has served for three years on the board of the Canadian Association of Women in Construction.

When Alena and her fellow students were in their program, she says there was a moment when they all felt desperate and scared. They wondered if anyone would hire them. A guest speaker came, radiating energy and reassurance. Now she is a frequent guest speaker for student orientations and events, giving back to the college and inspiring the next generation of graduates.

Portrait by Thupten Choedup (page 103)

© Thupten Choedup



Amrita Tyagi

Graduate 2007, Health Informatics

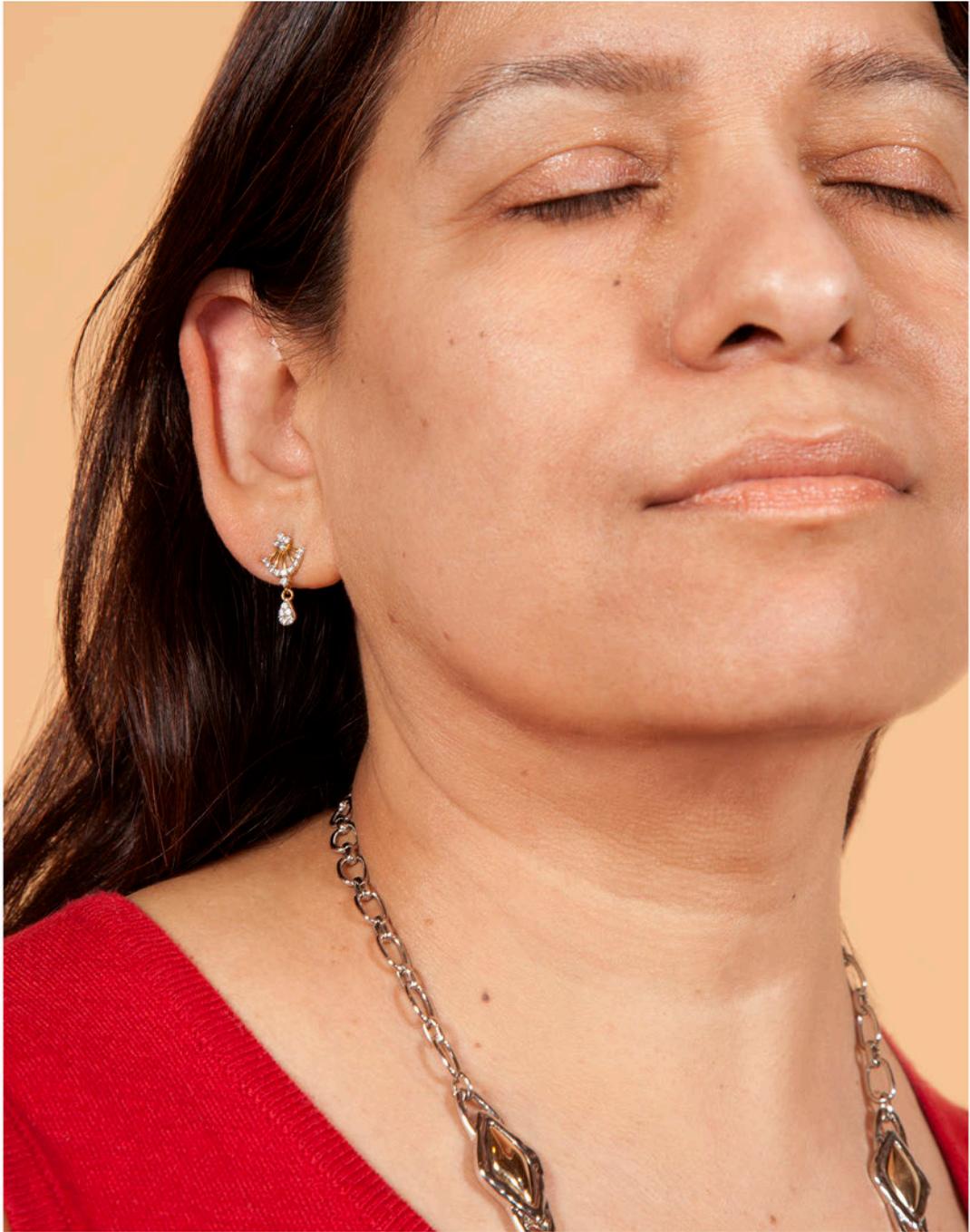
Building on her previous education and her studies at George Brown, Amrita Tyagi has forged a career at the leading edge of information technology in Ontario hospitals. She already had an undergraduate degree in medicine when she came to Canada from India 12 years ago. Interested in combining her interests in health care and technology, she enrolled in George Brown's Health Informatics program in 2007, which she says was "one of my best decisions after coming to Canada." She enjoyed learning from her professors and sharing ideas with her classmates, and developed strong relationships with her peers, instructors, and the dean. She says, "It becomes like your extended family."

After graduating, she became a clinical informatics specialist at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. She then went to Humber River Hospital, considered North America's first digital hospital, for five years as the clinical informatics lead. There, her role expanded as she managed projects related to IT and technology. Most recently, she has moved to Southlake Hospital in Newmarket, where she has a leadership position as the manager of information technology and informatics. As her career has progressed, she has been part of the increasing integration and sophistication of electronic record keeping to facilitate communication among medical personnel and to ensure patient safety.

Amrita is grateful for all the opportunities she has had since coming to Canada and, particularly, for the role George Brown had in this. She has maintained a relationship with the college since graduating because she wants to give back and calls it "an honour and a privilege to be part of the George Brown College community." She has been a guest speaker in many classes and served on the Health Informatics Program Advisory Committee for four years. She has also acted as a student mentor. She wants today's students to know that opportunities like hers are out there and that their work in health care can make a positive difference every day by ensuring the best possible care for patients.

Portrait by Stephanie Martyniuk (page 107)

© Stephanie Martyniuk



Eyerusalem Wores

Graduate 2010, Pre-Community Services; Graduate 2012, Social Service Worker

Eyerusalem Wores was a university graduate and an accomplished marketing professional when she left Ethiopia to join her husband in Canada. She was happy to be reunited with him, but English was her third language and posed a significant barrier to working. Committed to learning, she enrolled in an adult learning centre and completed her secondary school diploma.

Marketing would have been the easy way forward, but she was curious about social services. Without prior experience or education, she could not enter George Brown's Social Service Worker program directly. She would have to first upgrade by taking the Pre-Community Services program. The course content would be new territory, but the thing that weighed most on her mind leading up to entering the program was her accented English. "The professors didn't focus on that. They really listened," she says. "And my confidence grew." The following year she enrolled in the Social Service Worker program.

Well on her way to starting a new career and becoming fluent in English, she began to notice something that surprised her. She had been raised in a conservative culture, but now her perspective began to shift as she worked with students and faculty from different backgrounds. In an effort to broaden her understanding of different cultures,

she chose electives in art and world religions. The more she learned, the more inclusive her approach became. At graduation, Eyerusalem was recognized with the 2012 Commitment to Diversity Award.

Today Eyerusalem is mother to four-year-old Fikru and works to support the most vulnerable people with issues ranging from finding affordable housing to managing addiction. She continues to expand her skill set, taking workshops and certificate programs so she can offer more to her clients. When she's not working, she volunteers with the African Partnership against AIDS and Meals on Wheels. She returns to Ethiopia every other year where she lends her time and expertise as a youth and women's co-ordinator at the General Consulate of Ethiopia.

Portrait by Sonja Scharf (page 110)

© Sonja Scharf



Eileen Zhang

Graduate 2008, Fashion Business Industry

When Eileen Zhang stumbled across George Brown's Fashion Business Industry program, it felt like fate. Here was her opportunity to bring together her experience as an entrepreneur and her long-standing passion for fashion. "I was like wow," she says, "that's awesome for me, you know?"

She had just moved to Canada from Hong Kong with her Canadian husband and her two-year-old son. It was an easy transition; her son took to Canada like it was home – "He's truly Canadian. He loves the cold," she says, laughing – and she jumped into her program with enthusiasm.

In her previous life in China, she had been a chartered professional accountant. Now she found herself learning a new language and a new industry. The George Brown program delved into fashion skills, but it also emphasized the marketing side of the business, which Eileen found particularly useful in helping her understand key differences in practice in a Western country. It was during her second-year marketing class that Eileen had an idea. By this point, she grasped how difficult the fashion business was and how much competition there is. To be successful, she concluded, you needed a niche. But what niche? The answer came when the class studied action-wear brands. Eileen had never thought about making a brand before, but here was a world where she might be able to make her mark. "It just came about naturally," she says.

Eileen set out to create a brand using her instructors as resources. Her fabric course instructor spent hours helping her learn about stretch and what to look for in an action-wear fabric. Her other instructors provided advice and wisdom born of experience. "Knowledge not from a book but from their working experience," she says. "That was super helpful." She didn't wait until she graduated to launch Titika Active Couture, her line of active wear for women.

In the six years since, her company has grown to include both an online store and retail locations in the GTA. Its mission is the creation of comfortable yet fashionable clothing suitable to all facets of life for the active woman, from the gym to work to picking up the kids. "I'm a busy mom. That's basically my life," says Eileen. "It's easier for everyone if you're comfortable and looking good."

Given her business background, she thought it would be easy to run a business. "Actually I was wrong," she says. "It's a totally different world and this world has a lot of challenges. I'm still going through those challenges right now." But the challenges are not without rewards. Titika recently opened its first international store, in San Francisco, and Eileen says many of the people who walk in the door are Canadians living or travelling in the States; they are very excited to find a homegrown brand. "Oh I've never heard of this brand..." they say. If Eileen has her way, that won't be the case for long.

Portrait by Ola Walków (page 112)

© Ola Walków



Artist Statements

Shlomi Amiga (Portrait - page 80)

Just like Lina, I am an immigrant to Canada. When I first met her a few months ago, I felt that unspoken bond between two strangers who share something in common. In our case, it is the gratitude of being able to peacefully exist in a new country and be treated as equals.

Dimitri Aspinall (Portrait - page 48)

I want to portray an image that mirrors my subject's personality. For the foundation of my photoshoot with Sergio, I want to create an image which reflects his happy and outgoing demeanour. Prior to our photoshoot, he had spoken to me of how excited he was for this special opportunity. As a result, I wished to recreate the moment when he first landed in Canada.

Marco Baldonado (Portrait - page 4)

Olusegun Adebajo is a man from Nigeria. His portrait is a representation of his spirit and a remix of his country's Coat of Arms. Symbols of pride, progress and unstoppable strength make up this image. Olu also looks pretty bad ass.

Mark Binks (Portrait - page 42)

Easily my favourite part of photographing people is the conversations I get to have with them.

Danish and I are cut from the same cloth in so many ways; our conversations, which are so important for people from different walks of life to have, are what I wanted to capture.

Anna Borchardt (Portrait - page 16)

Anna was born in Sweden and grew up in Toronto. She has spent many years playing guitar in various bands and travelling the world as a model. She has a certificate in film studies at Ryerson University.

Throughout it all photography has been a constant. Shooting on film, her work largely focuses on nature and the preservation of its beauty, lending to it a delicate eye and sense of space and breath. She is currently based out of the Catskills, New York.

Cole Breiland (Portrait - page 20)

Rykah Callao's life growing up is the quiet immigrant success story. When she was six years old, her close-knit family followed relatives from the Philippines to Canada in search of more opportunity. Now working as a dental hygienist, she enjoys healthy baking, fashion, and travel in her free time.

Jeannette Breward (Portrait - page 18)

Jeannette Breward is a photographer and filmmaker whose work frequently explores humanity's relationship with the environment. Her photography often creates magical, surreal scenes, such as this image depicting the busy life of its dancer and studio-owner subject. Jeannette holds a BFA in Photography and an MFA in Documentary Media.

Carlo Calope (Portrait - page 66)

Calope's unmistakable style seizes the soul of his subjects, creating images that capture your heart.

No one understands the struggle of immigrating like another immigrant. This may explain why George Brown College alumni Victoria and photographer Calope immediately connected on such a humanistic level. Embracing the hazard of leaving everything behind to start anew, Victoria wears her Peruvian shawl. Traditionally woven by the mother to protect her newborn, every colour is chosen to represent the child's uniqueness. Simple and modern, yet thoughtful, this portrait reunites the strength of heritage and the need to participate in creating new meaning, new culture.

Struan Campbell-Smith (Portrait - page 10)

"As an international 'people' specialist, Struan's vivid, compelling Fashion & Beauty Advertising photographs are the result of a highly refined sense of style, impeccable lighting, and technically flawless shooting.

Struan uses urban and architectural backdrops strikingly, and many of his images have a narrative quality to them. His black & white work has a 'film-noir' style, stark, deeply shadowed and evocative. His ultimate skill is breathing life, emotion, and passion into a successful strategic statement."

– Applied Arts Magazine

Thupten Choedup (Portrait - page 94)

I came to Canada from my home country of Tibet in 2004. After leaving Tibet, I travelled to many countries including Nepal, India, Singapore and Taiwan, before settling in Canada. I captured many memories that I treasure to this day. After arriving in Canada I learned English, got my citizenship, graduated from High School and took photography classes at various schools. Last year I got my Digital Photography Certificate at George Brown College.

I love my photography hobby, and I have found that good pictures freeze the moment, capture memories and generally make people happy. I get a great sense of accomplishment having people pose in various positions so as to enhance their appearance and give the subject the opportunity to optimize their advantage.

Michael Cooper (Portrait - page 86)

Mamunur Rashid is a very educated, humble, warm, family oriented man.

I wanted to photograph Mamunur in his old classroom at GBC where he was lecturing but later decided photograph something personal. Mamunur was a professional cricket player in Bangladesh. Cricket is still very important to him. I created a moody, shallow focus, B&W image to capture Mamunur's athletic intensity.

Ian Crysler (Portrait - page 60)

Enthusiasm, growth, positivity. These are the motions that were present as Shiraz, his cousin and myself collaborated to create this portrait. Photographed on the George Brown Waterfront Campus, I feel that these attributes resonate through this final image.

www.iancrysler.com @iancryslerphoto

Nigel Dickson (Portrait - page 62)

Nigel Dickson. Photographer.

1949-

Evan Dion (Portrait - page 88)

Aurora Rodulfa, photographed by Evan Dion on January 27, 2018. Photographer's assistant, Neil Barbisan. Hair and make-up, Carla Dopazo.

Evan Dion is a Toronto based photographer. A graduate of Ryerson, his assignments have taken him throughout North America, The Caribbean, Europe and Asia. His work has been recognized by AIGA, Good Design Awards, AR100, Advertising and Design Club of Canada, Applied Arts Magazine, Step Magazine, HOW Magazine, Photo District News, and The National Magazine Awards.

Yuri Dojc (Portrait - page 78)

In 1968, as Russian tanks rolled into his native Czechoslovakia, the young student in London became abruptly refugee in London, and then immigrant to Canada.

Photographer, artist and witness, Yuri Dojc's expansive practice has evolved from commercial photography to his current focus on documenting history's most vulnerable.

Some of Dojc's internationally acclaimed work includes *Last Folio* documenting Slovakia's Holocaust survivors; *Honour*, a series of portraits of World War II veterans, and his most recent series, *North is Freedom: Legacy of the Underground Railroad*.

Dojc work been shown internationally in National Galleries of Brazil, Republic of Georgia, National Library of Berlin and Rome, Royal Academy of Vienna and many more. Selected works from *Last Folio* were chosen for the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Kathleen Finlay (Portrait - page 56)

When asked to photograph an alumni of George Brown who had immigrated to Canada, Kathleen Finlay found it perfectly fitting to be able to photograph her husband, chef David Kokai of *Darling* in Montreal, who had studied cooking at George Brown after immigrating from Hungary as a child. A photographer since 1992, Kathleen Finlay has worked as a commercial and editorial photographer for many years. She has exhibited and published her fine art photography in Toronto, Montreal and Paris. Her latest endeavor is a multimedia project called *The Soulfood* which includes a website (thesoulfoodjournal.com) featuring the work of creators who inspire her as well an upcoming exhibition featuring the work of these artists (*The Soulfood Collection*).

Graham French (Portrait - page 58)

Antonia and Yulia – two forceful, independent, confident young women. They say they're best friends. UNDERSTATEMENT. I say they'd go to the mat for each other. A pleasure to photograph. From the Ukraine with love.

Colin Gaudet (Portrait - page 12)

Korinna creates vibrant, geometric jewelry using 3D software and colour dying techniques. I wanted my portrait to reflect the quirkiness and eye-catching hues of her creations. We certainly surprised her when Brodine, the makeup artist, reached for the turquoise eye shadow! But Korinna trusted our process and gave us a confident and colourful image that I'm excited to share!

V. Tony Hauser (Portrait - page 26)

I envisioned photographing Folorunso Clement Bamikole on skates standing on a frozen pond near his home in Barrie Ontario. Alas, he informed me that he had never been on skates and didn't even own a pair. When he emigrated 17 years ago from his native Nigeria, skating on ice was not high on his agenda. Instead he studied sciences at George Brown College and became a professor at Georgian College. We agreed that he would be much more in his element in his classroom, surrounded by his students.

Kathryn Hollinrake (Portrait - page 64)

Elaine Lloyd Robinson did not originally make it onto the 50 x 50 exhibit's list of GBC graduate portrait subjects, so when my first assigned subject turned out to be unreachable, the path to Elaine's participation reappeared, and I got her! If I believed that things happen for a reason I'd believe this did. Not only did we quickly gel over some unusual shared experiences, but Elaine told me she knew where she wanted to be photographed, and the location could not have been more perfect. I have been working on a series of environmental portraits of creative people in their spaces and A Different Booklist Cultural Centre's beautiful new home fit my location wish list in every way. Thanks to Itha Sadu for staying open late to accommodate our shoot, and thanks to Elaine and Itha for their patience during the making of multiple exposures needed to create this final image.

Vicky Kao (Portrait - page 54)

For the last six years, Toronto based creative photographer Vicky Kao (professionally known as Plastic Canon) has set her stride as an alternative fashion photographer who strives to bring an edge to elegance. With years of technical training in photography and a lifelong love for drawing and painting, she uses her professional training and artistic upbringing to showcase her subjects as strong, fearless individuals often for magazine publications and gallery exhibitions.

Olga Kozitska (Portrait - page 30)

Olga Kozitska is a portrait and fashion photographer. She is inspired by Leo's resilience and ability to build a flourishing life in Canada, on his own. As a newcomer herself, she drew inspiration from his story to capture the essence of his indelible spirit. The bright hues illustrate Leo's optimism and vigor.

Janick Laurent (Portrait - page 90)

When I met Walter I immediately got the feeling that he was a good guy. Travelling from Washington and stopping in for lunch with his family before meeting for the portrait. It felt right just going with my instincts and capturing something that helps portray the experience of our first in-person meet. During our session he spoke of his love for Toronto and 80s movies – that's where we really connected. This black and white image hones in on his confident & caring nature.

Andy Lee (Portrait - page 8)

In the age of celebrity where popularity is idolized, revered and admired, it is ever essential to highlight the efforts of the altruistic, the substance, the real. Creating lasting affect through compassion, helping, and healing are at the core of my subject's work. This portrait is an aim to celebrate the real.

Andy Lee began his photography career by receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Specialized Honours degree in Visual Arts from York University.

With an eye for capturing striking and bold images, his passion for photography and fashion has taken him around the world, working with many distinguished editorial and advertising clients. Andy aims to photograph a sense of timelessness and alluring beauty.

Mariam Magsi (Portrait - page 22)

For the 50 x 50 Contact Festival project, I traveled to Kingston, Ontario to meet Chong Cao, my assigned portrait subject. Chong Cao migrated to Canada from Cambodia and graduated from George Brown College in 1983 from the now discontinued watchmaking program.

Chong Cao has run DocTime, his watch and clock repair shop for over 30 years. While I could have invited Chong Cao to my studio in downtown Toronto, I took the decision to capture this portrait in his magnificently cluttered workspace, as he was repairing an old pocket watch.

As an immigrant to Canada myself, it is inspiring to meet other immigrants whose careers have flourished enabling them to make vast and enriching contributions to Canadian economy, culture and society.

Born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan and currently based in Toronto, Canada, Mariam Magsi is a Multidisciplinary Artist.

Website: www.mariamagsi.com

Instagram: [mariam_magsi](https://www.instagram.com/mariam_magsi)

Stephanie Martyniuk (Portrait - page 96)

'Amrita (earrings), 2018'

Despite our differences in career fields, ethnicity and age, Amrita and I connected from the moment we met. The primary similarity, which we discussed at length, was family. Having been brought up in a large family, the importance of family was instilled in us from a young age. Amrita seemed to have that same ethos instilled in her. Her life and story are an example of it – maintaining a strong family unit, while moving countries, being successful in one's career and continuing to strive to learn more. Listening and getting to hear her story was inspiring and it is one I hope to emulate someday. Intuitively I aimed to show the woman before me, the one who entered through the door with strength, confidence and a warm smile. A belief in family symbolized in the stunning earrings she wore, a gift from her mother – the person she says has influenced her the most. I wanted to capture the story of her passion for medicine, learning, family, life – all inherent in her tranquil face – content to sit in herself without compromise.

After meeting and photographing Amrita, I believe she is the picture of a strong woman, a role model for me.

Steph Martyniuk is a commercial photographer based in Toronto specializing in portraiture. Her clients include The Globe and Mail and The New Yorker Magazine.

Lisa Murzin (Portrait - page 92)

Participating in this exhibit was an opportunity to help share the story of a newcomer who valued education as a path to greater personal success.

Hengxuan Tian emigrated from China in 2002 quickly enrolling in the Sports and Event marketing post graduate certificate program at George Brown College. While studying at George Brown College, she connected with other students creating supportive and lasting friendships. After graduation, she advanced her education with the York University Schulich MBA program and was hired on campus by Air Canada to the management trainee program in 2006. Since then Hengxuan has been working with the company for over a decade in various positions. Currently, she oversees the financial management of Air Navigation Charges and International operations.

Murzin is an active member of Ontario Society of Artists and Gallery 44, Centre for Contemporary Photography. Murzin holds a Humanities diploma from Bishop's University, Quebec and Certificate in Still Photography from Ryerson University. She transitions comfortably between her personal and professional work, between black & white and colour images and between film and digital technologies. Drawn to the slow time and solitary space of her darkroom, Murzin sees making prints as a meditative practice that manifests in her final images.

The textures and rhythms of old-school film development nurture Murzin's creativity in an increasingly pixelated world. No matter what the medium, Murzin's images foreground transition: the time and space between states and subjects. Her photographic studies have included abandoned buildings, adolescents on the precipice of adulthood, and feminine/masculine transformations.

Chris Nicholls (Portrait - page 14)

Born in England and raised in Canada, Chris Nicholls lives and works from his home base in Toronto, Canada.

Chris' work focuses on fashion photography and celebrity portraiture, for which he is well known. He has won countless international awards for his work including 20 National Magazine Awards (more than any other Canadian photographer). The Proctor and Gamble Fashion and Beauty Awards has voted him "Photographer of the Year" three years in a row (2009, 2010, 2011). In 2014, he received The CAFA Image Maker of the Year Award.

He has photographed many of the world's top models as well as Miley Cyrus, Lana del Rey, Lorde, Courtney Love, Clare Danes, Taylor Swift, Demi Lovato, Katy Perry, Michael Buble, Taylor Schilling, Aubrey Plaza, Christina Ricci, Elizabeth Olsen, Olivia Wilde, Kate Moss, Claudia Schiffer, Elisha Cuthbert and many others.

<http://www.chrisnichollsphotography.com>

Gerald Piszczowski (Portrait - page 76)

The vintage shop provided a perfect location for Lungile Ncube's environmental portrait. It illustrates how technology is changing the face of retailing. Ncube's George Brown education and training is enabling him to help retailers leverage technology, not only to improve the bottom line but also enhance customers' shopping experience.

Deanna Pizzitelli (Portrait - page 72)

As a photo-based artist, I live and work between Canada and Slovakia, and am represented by Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto. This project was a wonderful experience. During our shoot, Sylvia and I shared stories, and a meal. I was very much inspired by her life, work and travels.

Matthew Plexman (Portrait - page 52)

“When I met Mazhar, I was struck by his warmth. I photographed him at the development project where he works, making sure to capture this spark.”

Plexman has been a photographer for many years. His projects grow and feed off of one other, pushing boundaries in new and unexpected directions.

Sheana Puvicanthan (Portrait - page 34)

Sheana Puvicanthan is fashion photographer with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Photography from OCAD University. Sheana has worked with several modeling agencies in Toronto to help develop portfolios and has published work in magazines such as Fashion Weekly, Borealis, Lucy's, and Girlys.

George Qua-Enoo (Portrait - page 24)

I find deep meaning in capturing artistic photographs of people in ordinary and comfortable states of existence.

Indranil expressed to me weeks earlier that he felt uncomfortable being photographed. We met over coffee to discuss the shoot and get to know each other a bit better.

We both enjoyed creating this portrait.

Michael Rafelson (Portrait - page 82)

I met Andrea Prifti prior to our photography session to learn a little bit about him. He left Albania due to the political strife there, and came to Canada to build a better life. With the help of the ESL program at George Brown, Andrea went on to complete the Early Childhood program and today is an administrator in charge of multiple early childhood centres. After scouting a centre at CAMH, I could see his warmth and affection for the babies and toddlers there. I loved the scale of things there-so small-and decided that it should be a key element in the portrait. I also wanted to include one of the children to convey a sense of beginning. Andrea came to Canada for a new start and his success is very apparent. It was a fun and fulfilling portrait experience.

Asif Raza (Portrait - page 84)

Having made a living with photography for the past 35 odd years, I believe that I am more an explorer than a photographer and thus relish new experiences.

The opportunity of photographing Marco Ramos was a lovely experience, meeting a wonderful individual who immediately gave the vibe of someone very grounded, tenacious and yet easy going.

Francisco Riquelme (Portrait - page 68)

I see Anton as an alchemist, the kitchen as a metal fortress, a place of discipline and rigor where the natural elements turn into culture and civilization.

The challenge as a photographer is to capture the person behind the face; to go where not even the subject has been before.

Philip Rostron (Portrait - page 38)

The GBC 50 x 50 Project aims to put a face to successful graduates who were all newcomers to Canada. This led me to portray Arlette on location in an iconic Toronto background, endeavoring to capture her confidence in her new Canadian adventure.

Sonja Scharf (Portrait - page 98)

Romanticism inspires Scharf's photography. Her influences range from the great masters of the Renaissance, the Pre-Raphaelite period as well as the work of early turn of the century pictorial photographers. Sonja Scharf is a German born-Toronto based Photographer, Gallerist and Art Curator. She is also the cofounder of Akasha Art Projects.

Walter Segers (Portrait - page 28)

Walter Segers emigrated from Belgium in 1993 and currently lives in Toronto. He graduated with honours from OCAD University in 2008 and received OCADU's prestigious M.C. McCain Post Graduate Residency in 2009.

This Belgo-Canadian artist has exhibited his photo-based works in Toronto galleries such as Spin, John B. Aird, Propeller, P|M, Akasha, YYZ Window and at the Gladstone Hotel. In Sudbury he showed at Open Studio (Cambrian College), in Cambridge at Fashion History Museum and in Markham at Markham Museum. Segers has exhibited internationally at Leslie Lohman Annex in New York City (USA), Galerie AMU in Prague, Galerie 12 in Zlín (Czech Republic) and at Peter Deckers in Belgium. Publications include Pixie And Rotter (UK), Wondereur, ArtWindsor and muse (Canadian Museum Association). Walter investigates the thin line between masculine and feminine and his photography explores issues surrounding gender and identity. He questions individuality, belonging, and immigration to promote freedom.

www.waltersegers.com

Sofie Sharom (Portrait - page 6)

The true essence of a person is difficult to capture in the click of a shutter. Often someone's outward appearance does not reflect their true inner being. While photographing Naheed this moment emerged when I caught a glimpse of Her – her life's journey, her aspirations and her hopes for the future.

George Simhoni (Portrait - page 74)

Sanaa graduated in 2009 and impressed me as a strong individual. She entered into the world of finance and investment. I wanted to portray that in the heart of the Toronto financial district.

George Simhoni is known for his visual storytelling, capable of saying so much with a single frame. His landscape photographs have a powerful, ethereal subtlety that endures.

Mark Sommerfeld (Portrait - page 50)

Anna suggested we shoot in her apartment. After running up and down the hallway together, the stillness and repose of her sitting outstretched on the floor felt emblematic of her initial relationship with and confusing sense of freedom in her new city and home. Confidence despite uncertainty comes to mind.

Brenda Spielmann (Portrait - page 2)

I only have space for 50 words. I love making portraits. Minaz, his wife Shelmina and I connected immediately. That's what moves me. The tintype treatment is to mirror the slowing down and deliberate appreciation of the present moment. Minaz is retired and is doing exactly that.

<http://brendaspielmann.com>

Shin Sugino (Portrait - page 46)

Born in Japan, Shin Sugino immigrated to Canada to study Photography, and Cinema at Ryerson University. He began his career as a Fine Arts Photographer and taught photography at York University. He established a successful advertising photography and cinema production company and has won countless awards internationally.

Matthew Trevisan (Portrait - page 40)

Matthew Trevisan is an emerging Toronto-based documentary photographer whose work explores the various intersections of past and present – in people, places, industry, and society.

Celina Virani (Portrait - page 36)

“When you photograph people in color you photograph their clothes. But when you photograph people in Black and white, you photograph their souls!” – Ted Grant

Celina Virani is an emerging Toronto-based photographer specializing in artistic portraiture. Celina graduated with a BFA from Ryerson’s School of Image Arts and continues to develop her passion behind the lens capturing raw and honest images with a combination of digital and traditional film photography. Celina has always been captivated by human connection and strives to capture moments that illustrate a mood, essence or feeling. Her work has been featured at Gallery 44, The Gladstone Hotel and Art Square Gallery among others.

Website: <https://www.lust4lightphoto.com>

Instagram: @lust4lightphoto

Ola Walków (Portrait - page 100)

I am a Polish photographer from Krakow born in 1989. Now based in Toronto.

I am a 2011 graduate of the Academy of Photography in Kraków.

I presented my project “I’m 22 years old and my boyfriend almost dumped me” in Show Off Section in Krakow Photomonth Festival 2012.

In 2014 I started Sputnik Mentoring Program.

I have participated in many exhibitions in Poland and abroad (Maison de la Photographie in Lille, Galerie Claude Samuel in Paris, Saatchi Gallery in London).

In 2015 I graduated with a Photography BA at the University of Arts in Poznan and I was the finalist of Poznan Photo Diploma Award.

Ashlea Wessel (Portrait - page 70)

Though he has a sunny personality, Johan comes from Sweden, a country with a similarly cool climate to Ontario. On the day of our shoot, the sky was exceptionally gloomy, so I chose to lean into cold tones and low lighting, as we see in the winter months in both countries. The hints of buildings in the background speak to his career in construction and serve to create a sense of depth and scale.

Ashlea Wessel is a Toronto based Photographer and Director. Her still work focuses on portraiture and concept-based imagery with a dark and dreamy edge. Described as “cinematic” Ashlea’s award-winning images are often recognizable by their painterly quality, enhanced texture, and bold pastel colour treatments.

Katie Wyatt (Portrait - page 32)

Katie Wyatt is a photographer with a strong background in portraiture. Her beauty inspired portraits capture wistful and serene human expressions, often character driven and rooted in narrative. Each image is created to take you further into the imagination from which they stem.

Katie is a graduate of both Niagara College’s photography diploma program and Sheridan College’s Bachelor of Photography Program.

Lorella Zanetti (Portrait - page 44)

“Mehdi Hosseini is a visionary, a powerful presence and an intuitive collaborator. Our conversation was brief. I said light, he said mood – we understood each other immediately.”

Lorella Zanetti is an award winning photographer. The unique intimacy of her portraits have been showcased in the pages of international magazines.

The 50 x 50 project would like to thank the sponsors and supporters who generously contributed advice, expertise, goods and services to the exhibition.

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