



I AM A NEW CANADIAN

My name is Ramzi, and, as of July 1, 2006, I am a new Canadian. For the past two years, my parents, my two sisters and I had been preparing for the swearing-in ceremony. Still, I was overwhelmed by what I saw, heard and felt on that day.

We drove to the Canadian Museum of Civilization, in Gatineau, right after breakfast. We were accompanied by three uncles, aunts, as well as friends of my parents. The ceremony was not until ten o'clock, but we wanted to be there early. We gathered in the Grand Hall, near the entrance of the museum. We were fifty new Canadians being sworn in as citizens. By 9:30, the hall was almost full. Most were family and friends of the new Canadians, and others were local patrons of the museum. I recognized several citizenship and immigration officials who worked with us when we first moved to Ottawa.

At 10:00, the hall filled with music as the officials walked in. They were accompanied by an RCMP officer in uniform. First, there was the Honourable Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, followed by the Citizenship Judge. The mayor of Gatineau was the last person in the procession. An official welcomed us to the museum. The mayor congratulated us and welcomed us to Gatineau, to Quebec, and to Canada. The Minister talked about some of the advantages of living in Canada. He then pointed out the great contribution made by newcomers to Canada. This made me feel good.

Next, the Judge talked to us about the significance of the pledge we were about to make. She emphasized that we needed to do our best to serve the country. She had a good sense of humour as well. After reciting the pledge of allegiance, we were invited to sing "O Canada." It was a very proud moment for me. I thought of the Governor General, whom I had seen on television. She holds one of Canada's top positions, yet she speaks proudly of her humble origins in Haiti.

The rest of the day was filled with special activities at the museum. Storytellers from various countries made presentations. There were several exhibits and special programs just for us. My parents' friends invited us to the restaurant for supper. There was a festive atmosphere because the restaurant was decorated for Canada Day. After supper, we walked to Parliament Hill for an evening of concerts. The evening closed with a spectacular display of fireworks. I liked the ceremony and the festivities, but what I remember the most is the joy and pride on our faces as we congratulated each other on becoming Canadian. I was happy to be "officially" home...

