

Kem Algu MB ChB DOH DTM&H DPH

Dr Algu is originally from South Africa, his great-great-grandfather having immigrated to Durban from Sultanpur, India, in 1890. Dr Algu lived with his wife, Reena, and his 2 daughters through the danger of the post-apartheid era, residing in communities protected by tall fences crested with barbed wire. He made sure his family locked cars, gates, windows, and doors at all times. He was careful not to stop on highways and main roads.

Seven years before the family immigrated to Canada, the Algu household was broken into. In the house were Dr Algu's 2 daughters and their great-grandmother. An intruder assaulted the grandmother and ransacked the home for valuables. The youngest daughter fled, hiding behind a headboard in a bedroom, but the eldest witnessed the assault and robbery. After the intruder left, Dr Algu eventually heard, through several intermediaries, this message by telephone: "Come home, there's a problem. One of your daughters can't be found."

Dr Algu raced home to find the house in disarray. His grandmother-in-law suffered a dislocated shoulder and his 2 daughters were shaken up but unharmed. Dr Algu reduced the woman's shoulder. Years later, the house was invaded once more, but this time the grandmother, taking care of the daughters again, shrieked and scared the intruder away.

One change in South Africa post-apartheid came in professional school enrolment: to address previous injustice, medical school enrolment became difficult for non-black candidates. Motivated by concern for the lack of opportunity waiting for his daughters, Dr Algu scanned the South African Medical Journal. He discovered a job advertisement in Rosssburn, Manitoba. Reena, an internist, was permitted to work as a family doctor in Manitoba if she undertook additional training in pediatrics and obs/gyn. Rosssburn, a town of just over 500 people, had no doctor at the time, but at a stroke, it gained 2 doctors. Dr Algu's 2 daughters went to Sherwood Park, a hamlet outside Edmonton, for schooling.

While in Rosssburn, Dr Algu met a 3-month-old infant in respiratory distress. The call came to him in bed at 5 AM from hospital nursing staff. The child had pneumonia with a low level of consciousness—the baby's parents used too much cough medicine. Dr Algu traveled by ambulance with the child to Brandon, the nearest community with significant medical resources. The trip took about 90 minutes. Dr Algu bagged the child, taking turns with his nurse. The baby was transferred to pediatrics and anesthesia care in Brandon and was intubated. Dr Algu returned to Rosssburn by ambulance, all in time to shower, shave, and make it to the office without missing a scheduled appointment. Reena had to take care of the ward rounds at the hospital by herself that morning, though.

Twenty-one months after working in Rosssburn, Dr Algu and Reena reunited with their children in Sherwood Park. Around that time they returned as a group to South Africa to visit family. Dr Algu's daughters initially did not want to move to Canada, of course, and they maintained that opinion until they returned to South Africa on that vacation. While there, they realized how much more freedom and security they had in Canada. And opportunity: Dr Algu's eldest daughter is completing an MD and his youngest is completing a family medicine residency. 🍁

Cover photo: Curtis Comeau, Edmonton, Alta

Story: Shane Neilson MD CCFP, Erin, Ont

Additional photos and the French translation of the story appear on page 894.

D'autres photos et la traduction en français du récit se trouvent à la page 894.