

'I HAVE ONLY ONE SON AND I DIDN'T WANT HIM TO BE IN THE ARMY'

From Russia with love, hope and ambition

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Back home in the Russian republic of Dagestan, Guseyn Guseynov lived in relative comfort.

A chemical engineer by training, he was deputy manager of the state's recently privatized electrical company, in charge of a staff of 24 and earning the equivalent of \$300 US a month a princely sum by Russian standards.

But with little knowledge of the English language and no employment prospects, he packed up his wife and teenage son and moved to Edmonton.

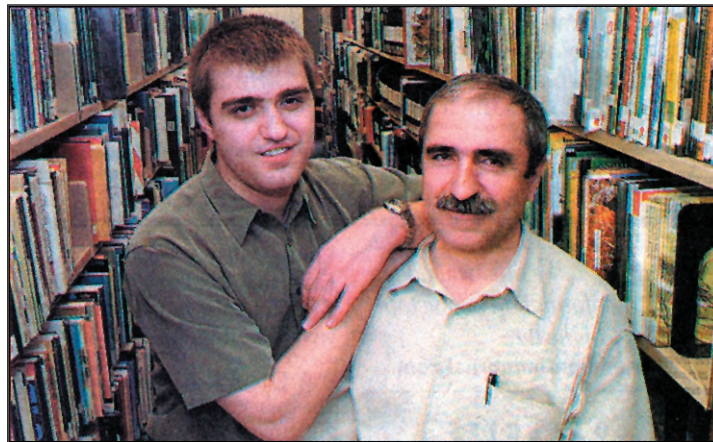
His reason was simple: "I have only one son and I didn't want him to be in the army," he said.

As his son Nurichi neared college age, his only prospect for a university education came with mandatory service in the Russian Military.

Although Guseynov served in for a the former Soviet army in the university education came with 1970s, including a two-year posting in northern Siberia, he did not want the same for his only child.

"Since the collapse of the Soviet empire, Russia has become a very cruel country," said Guseynov, 47.

"I'm not saying the people are cruel but the system is. It's the rule of the gun. Property



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Guseyn Guseynov and his son Nurichi, 17, stand in the NorQuest College library, one of several libraries where they spend a lot of time.

belongs to those who can take it. The army is a mirror of society."

With people dying in a separatist rebellion in Dagestan's neighbouring republic of Chechnya, Guseynov was worried his son would be sent to fight.

"I'm an engineer and I like to build things rather than destroy them," he said.

He moved his family to Edmonton in the fall of 2001. He picked Canada because of its multicultural nature and Edmonton because of the educational opportunities it offered.

Father, son learn English fast, start college courses

Neither he nor his wife

Patima could speak a word of English. Nurichi knew only rudimentary English from high school in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan.

But in his year at Jasper Place high school, the younger Guseynov developed an impressive command of the language, graduating from Grade 12 with a 100-per-cent average.

Now 18 years old, he recently completed his first term at the University of Alberta studying mathematics. He plans to transfer to computer engineering.

"There is a lot more freedom in the Canadian system to choose the subjects you want," said

Nurichi, who bears a striking resemblance to his father but is taller and huskier. "In Russia, everything is chosen for you."

One holdover of the

Communist era is that university education in Russia is free. But the catch is anyone going to university can be called into military service at any time.

That was the case when Guseynov went to university. He received a master's degree in chemical engineering from Mendeleev University in Moscow in 1981 but had to pay for it with four years of military service, split between Siberia and a chemical weapons plant in Stalingrad, now called Volgograd.

After moving to Edmonton, he took an English language course at NorQuest College and speaks passable English.

He is now taking a 10-month engineering technology course at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in hopes of turning his chemical engineering training into a career here.

He and his son are supporting their educations by working as security guards.

By an uncanny twist of fate, one of Guseynov's former university classmates from his youthful days in Moscow has his own company in Edmonton.

The man is a Cuban national who was educated in Russia before fleeing Cuba for Canada. They were reunited through a mutual acquaintance.

"Who can believe that after 22 years we would meet up here?" Guseynov said. "This is a great country."

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