

## **Onkarbir Singh Toor Memorial BCGA Scholarship Application Essay**

**Applicant:** Janie Goh

Life is never easy for those who dream.

My interest in aviation started when I was a kid. Living opposite the military air base, I would always sit by the window and enjoy the view of the supersonic fighter jets flying by while doing my homework.

When I was in college, I stumbled upon the local youth flying club. Due to the high membership fees and training costs, my family was unable to support my interest to join the club.

Upon graduating from college, I applied for a scholarship with the local armed forces, in the hope to pursue a career with the local military airforce. I was awarded a study award which required a six year bond with the military upon graduation. Filled with excitement, I approached my family for their support and sought my parents' consent which was a criteria for acceptance into the military. However, having grown up in a conservative and traditional family, this idea was frowned upon. My brother and my mother sat me down for a talk to dissuade me from joining the military. Their argument was that I'd be too old to settle down and start a family by the time I complete my bond.

Faced with stress from the family, I succumbed to family pressure and pursued a degree at my local university in Computer Science. Upon graduation, with no interest in computers, I started to work in a local call centre which specialises in emergency services, healthcare, evacuation and repatriation services. The most enjoyable part of my job was dispatching air ambulances and working with flight services. My passion in aviation was still burning within, waiting for an opportunity to spark.

After working for 5 years, there was an opening for air traffic controllers at our local airport. I enthusiastically breezed through the application, interview processes and aptitude tests. However on the first day of training, my trainer feedback that my speech was not clear and I was dropped from the enrolment cohort.

My heart was shattered. When I was young, my school had sent me to an orthodontist to correct the misalignment of my teeth and open bite problem. However my family did not have the financial means for me to seek treatment. As the orthodontist had assured my mum that there will be no any major problems in my growth even without braces treatment. However he did mention that due to the misalignment there might be some speech unclarity. Never would I thought that this would affect my career application later in my life.

I decided to save up for my orthodontic treatment and eventually landed myself a job at the local hospital. I told myself, that once I completed my treatment, I will pursue my interest in aviation. Meanwhile, I started giving tuition after work in order to build my education fund.

In 2016, 6 months after a major maxillofacial surgery, my braces treatment was complete. Coincidentally, it was at the same time I had accumulated just enough savings to start pursuing my dream in a Flight school. However at that point I was doing well in my career at the hospital with several progression opportunities.

I applied successfully to several flight schools at the end of 2016, most of which were along the coastal areas in the United States or in Australia. Eventually I chose Canadian Flight Centre (CFC) as the program it offered included aerobatic flying and the school had a base in Kamloops where it'd mostly be mountain flying.

Even throughout my Visa application process, there were several objections from my family. My father commented in front of relatives that I was wasting my time and money, and how silly I was to give up a good career. My Mother was reprimanded during a family dinner by my Grandfather for not being able to stop me from going and that I should be settling down by now.

Despite these challenges, I felt the most difficult part was leaving a "safe" and comfortable life to pursue a dream in an unfamiliar land with no friends or relatives. There was a lot of insecurities within.

On 29 March 2017 I arrived in Vancouver at 2130hrs after an 18hour flight. I was greeted by CFC's Chief Flight Instructor Anna who drove me to my hotel accommodation for the night. Anna picked me up the next morning at 8am for my orientation of the school. I attended my first ground school lesson 15 hours just after landing in Vancouver.

The school student coordinator, Maria, started booking my flight lessons for the week ahead. However a check on Saturday, I realised that the flights she had booked was not saved in the system and my instructor was fully booked for the week ahead by then.

Not wanting to stay grounded, Anna suggested that I could go up to Kamloops earlier. Hence I started to search for a homestay host online and made arrangements for Kamloops. By Tuesday, I started having lessons in Kamloops.

Kamloops was a beautiful place and I was flying at least 3-4 days a week, sometimes several times a day. Just as I was preparing for my solo flight, I got chased out of my homestay home one thunderstorm day. Reason being I was at home instead of being in school and she had arranged visitors to the house. After which the host decided to chase me out and called the school informing them that she had packed my luggages.

Left stranded I sought help from my instructor and also thankfully with the help of my current landlady, found a safe haven and roof over my head which allowed me to continue my flying lessons safely.

Leaving my comfort zone at mid-30s was probably the hardest part of this journey. I had to start adapting to a new lifestyle in a foreign land with no friends or relatives. There were times of doubts if pursuing my dreams and forsaking everything back home was the right decision. However during each flight, as I look down from 5000 feet high, the amazing views become a constant reminder of why I'm here and that enduring all these made it worthwhile.

While the road ahead continue to be a bumpy ride filled with its challenges, I will sit back, relax and enjoy this ride and the amazing views while it lasts. And looking forward to returning home as commercial trained pilot. As the saying goes, it's never too late to follow your dream and there's no time like now to begin.

Cheers  
Janie