





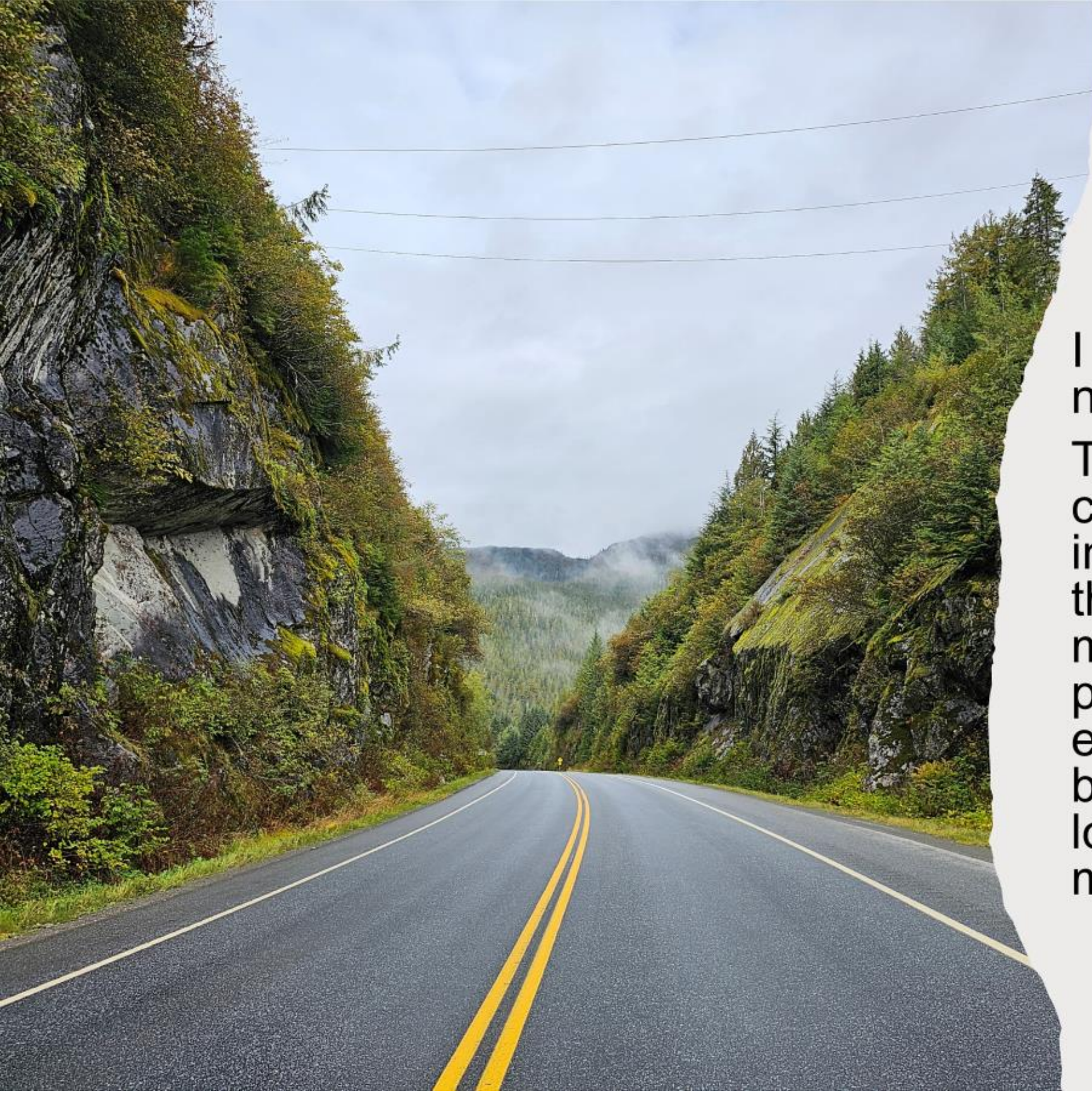
Story 1



**IENs & Giving: “If you are a nurse, you will always be a nurse”**







I am giving everything to have nothing.

This is the truth of what it is like to come to British Columbia as an internationally educated nurse. From the outset of our experience of moving to BC, as IENs, we bring a powerful sense of passion and excitement and are very motivated to be successful. Coming to Canada, we looked forward to connection, a multicultural space, and a new home.





We are eager to prove ourselves, so we tackle every challenge: adapting to a new environment, new technology, new culture, and this new identity. We must live, too—we are spouses, parents, friends, students, employees, and nurses. We work, although not in nursing roles. We long for opportunities to gain healthcare experience.





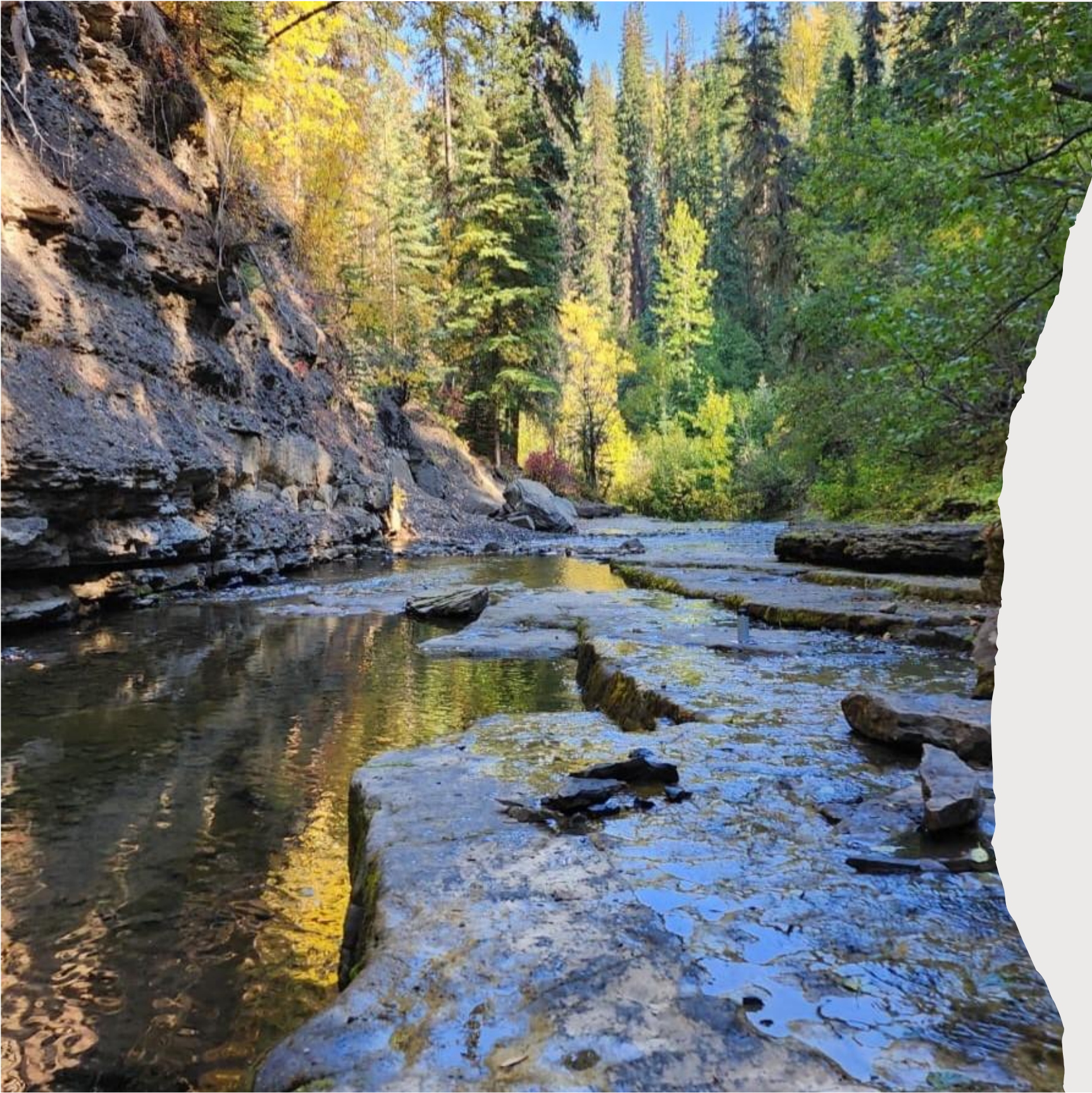
Inside, we know we have our skills and a strong commitment to our jobs. We show our patience, hard work, commitment, helpfulness, and hope - but it often does not feel like it is enough. This tenacity, in us keeps us trying; we can't and won't stop. We are not going anywhere. We send emails, make phone calls, and search online to make our dreams happen. We do everything strategically and work with what we have.





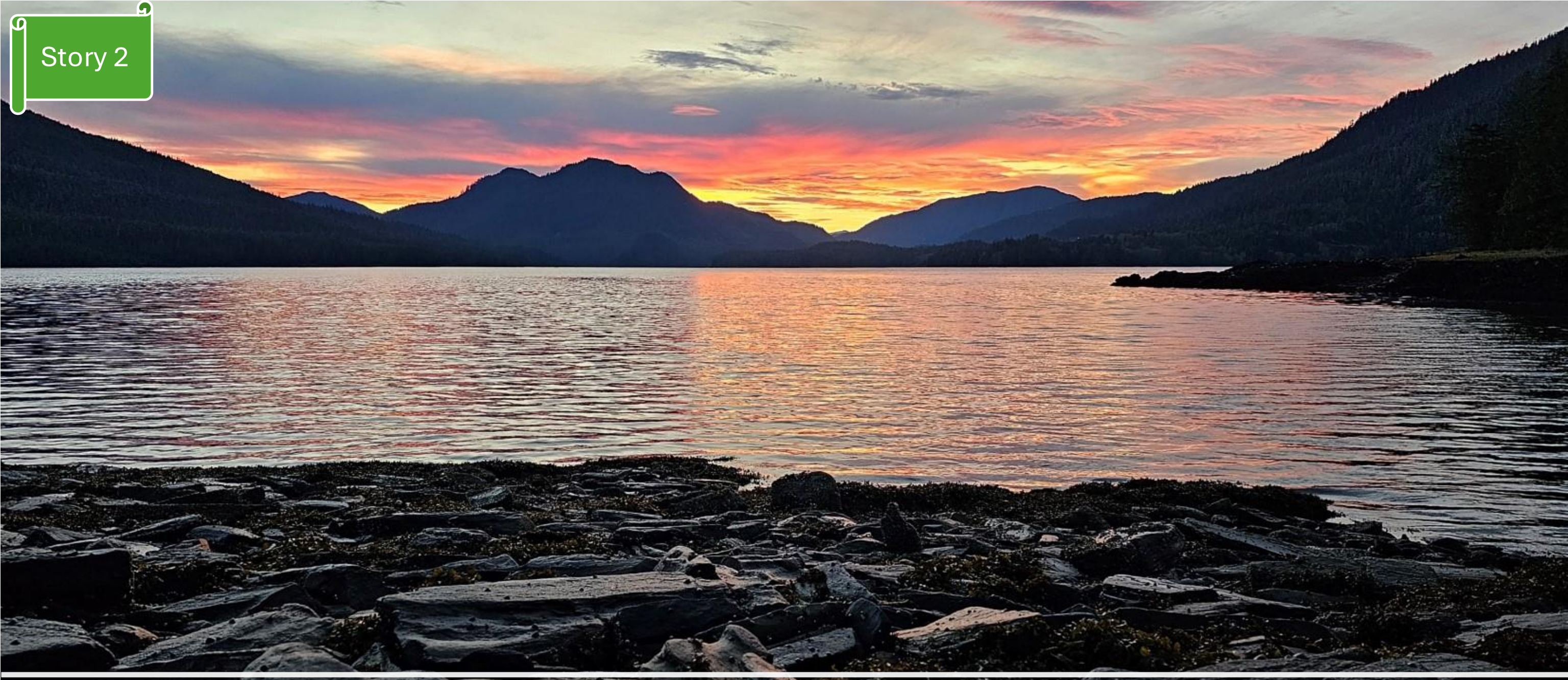
We find strength and motivation in our connections with each other, our friends, family, and mentors. As IENs, we want to help each other and know that this journey is bigger than just you or me. We look forward to the future and wish to help all the other IENs who may struggle, as we have.





Despite everything, we're still hoping that someday there will be a change. We're using all our resources, yet we recognize that we can't rebuild this on our own. I am giving everything, so why do I still have nothing?





**IENs & Living: “A very promising country”**







The nature of a place like British Columbia, which welcomes and rejects, supports and abandons, accepts and assimilates, is daunting. However, since it is *made* and *constructed*, it can be deconstructed, reformed, and changed, to help us grow and blossom. As internationally educated nurses, we must adapt to a new geographical, social, and cultural setting in BC.





For many of us, we celebrate the North for its small-town camaraderie, close-knit atmosphere, opportunities, and multiculturalism. The North feels familiar because of its cultural values. Yet, for some of us, British Columbia is not as welcoming.

Small-town mentalities can be exclusionary and discriminatory, and attitudes towards immigration can be threatening and harsh. Sometimes we feel this; other times it can be present but hidden - more subtle. To feel fully "Canadian," we feel a sense of pressure to blend into Canadian culture. We do not feel accepted as we are, but we are here and want to work in healthcare.





Living in rural places brings us exciting new experiences. These can be unexpected, such as cold weather, different social roles and connections, or exciting - for example, the chance to learn about Indigenous culture. In this foreign rural setting, we are often well-connected with other IENs, who provide support, hope, community, and kindness.





We were drawn to Northern BC for its healthcare, closeness to nature, and high professional standards. Many of us have been students here, doing health administration post-graduate studies, but still, we struggle to get back to healthcare jobs.





However, despite the challenges, we hold onto the belief that this place can be transformed for the better. We bring resilience and adaptability to this new setting. With each experience, we grow stronger and more connected. If we IENs are given the power and platform to shape our lives in this place, we may change nursing in Northern BC for the better.





**IENs & Feeling: “A heavy mental health burden”**







We experience deep pain because being a nurse is part of our identity, part of why we came to Canada, and it's been taken away from us, right before our eyes. We feel exhaustion, frustration, uncertainty, insecurity, sadness, and even fear. Moving away from home and enduring this long registration process has made us feel worthless - like we have fallen short. Being a nurse is intertwined with who we are - a part of our core that has been withheld in our time here in British Columbia.





Where do we, as internationally educated nurses belong? Some of us feel separated from our families, cultures, and ways of life, and we feel isolated in BC, too. We feel stuck between two places, two identities, and we are not given the space or acceptance to thrive in BC. Here, we sometimes feel like we need to be more wanted. Sometimes we get our license and the joy of practicing, but no one calls us.





We are stuck in a cycle of progress and then roadblocks and just feel stagnant. The process is very stressful financially, personally, professionally, and emotionally. It has drained our resources and left us feeling empty. We have made sacrifices and put our lives on hold to pursue this dream, which is why it hurts so deeply not to have made it.





We know that the healthcare system needs help. We are here and ready to step in but have yet to be seen. There is an invisible barrier keeping us from our dreams, and it has taken its toll. We hope that one day, we will be able to work here at our full potential, but the confidence and self-esteem, that damage is done. We are struggling here, but no one is listening. Who hears us?



Story 4



**IENs & Being: “A huge learning curve”**







The most important part of being an IEN is to be willing to learn and accept that our culture is different than Canadian culture. Adapting to this new culture meant learning a whole new set of cultural norms, roles, practices, customs, rules, attitudes, and values. Coming to British Columbia meant we had to balance our cultural identity with this new Canadian culture. Some of us IENs have even *studied* Canadian culture. For those of us from America, the transition has been a huge learning curve, as Canadian nurses may not fully understand the process.





Here, there are different conventions in the Canadian healthcare system than back home. While we wait in limbo, we know we need to learn unfamiliar medical terminology, metric systems, protocols, and brand names - how do we find ways to gather this knowledge? Moving here we adapt to using electronic records, simulation models, and online learning. Coming to Canada meant starting from scratch and dedicating ourselves to learning. We keep sticking to it, but, yeah, we don't really have anybody to guide us. Nevertheless, we take small steps each day toward understanding the Canadian healthcare system.





Being in Canada, for many of us, brought the challenges of having to speak and understand a new language. Learning English was complex - to be a nurse in BC, we had to learn Canadian lingo, slang, acronyms, and other informal terms. Engaging in conversational English intimidated and really scared us. Some of us have to help others navigate our accents, which our colleagues sometimes cannot understand. This makes us stand out when we want to blend in.





We know what we need as IENs to feel at home, here in Northern BC. We know what we need to make this cultural bridge easier to cross, but no one will help us get what we need, get started sooner, and find what we need closer to home. To acquire knowledge of this culture will be a learning curve but we believe it will be easier together.





**IENs & Experiencing: “Unfitting to the System”**





When the path is unclear, where do we go? Who do we turn to? As internationally educated nurses, we never anticipated becoming a registered nurse in British Columbia to be this hard. Our experience is nothing like what we expected or were told to expect. The process felt unclear and never-ending. This experience also felt confusing and contradictory; none of our journeys looked the same or followed the same path. We are willing to go through the hoops, but why are the hoops different for all of us even if we are from the same country, school, and work setting?





Some of us IENs were surprised to learn how much simpler the process is outside of BC but some of us knew this and chose BC despite this. The registration process takes time and money, and we worry about using BC funding - what if we fail? How do we pay it back? Not all of us can afford the high cost of chasing our dreams forever. For those of us who couldn't work while in this process, our finances have been overwhelmed and exceeded.





Being stuck in this cycle impacted our families, our work, our finances, and ourselves. It feels like we've been waiting forever. Will our dream of becoming registered nurses in BC ever come true or will we always be chasing it?





The system is wasting valuable resources. Our time, energy, money, knowledge, and efforts are all going down the drain when the healthcare system needs us most. Our skills, training, and experience as IENs are disappearing the longer they are unused. Not being able to work at our full potential is hard on us IENs, yes, but it's also hard on the system itself - to have people willing to help but who are held back. There is no space to value the perspectives that IENs have.





We keep on repeating ourselves. The same questions, the same discussions. But there is no resolution. Please hear this: IENs are stuck, and we need your help. We will continue to seek out support networks, explore available resources, and educate ourselves on the intricacies of the system. Together, though, we can find ways to navigate this complex process and overcome the obstacles in our path.



