“An Immigrant Story”

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Immigrants make their way to America for many reasons: to escape political or religious prosecution, to send money back home, or to seek higher education – but all come here in search of opportunity. My father, Nickolai Kolarov, ultimately immigrated to the U.S. to further his horizons in a field that was going nowhere in his home country of Bulgaria, and the rest of my family followed.

My father came to the United States around the time that I was born in Sofia, Bulgaria. He came over here on an F1 Student Visa to attend the Kansas City Conservatory of Music, for a Master’s degree in cello performance. In 1998, my mom and I had our visiting visas approved and we traveled to Missouri, intending to go back to Bulgaria. After living in Missouri for a year, and after my twin little sisters were born, a professor who saw him perform offered my father the golden opportunity to achieve a Doctorate in cello performance under her guidance in Minnesota – for free! Taking this opportunity meant that our family would move to Minnesota and more or less permanently abandon our life in Bulgaria. However, the prospects for my father’s future music career and the sheer financial luck of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity led my family to immigrate to Minnesota.

We lived in the University of Minnesota’s Commonwealth Terrace Cooperative program, which rents out housing units to families attending the University. Along with my father, my mother also sought out a higher education degree, transferring her credits over from Bulgaria and taking a few classes to finish her masters in history at the University. The neighborhood we lived in was
great – there were many other immigrant families and I learned a lot from growing up in such a diverse community.

This cello represents my family’s journey to America. My father’s desire to spread Balkan music led us to immigrate to the United States, and the opportunities given to him and my family helped the decision. My parents were very courageous to move their lives, especially my mother, who had a steady future where she was in Bulgaria, working as a tour guide in the National History Museum. My father and his love for music have cultivated in me a lifelong appreciation for music and performing. His journey and decision to pursue what he loves, despite the challenges that come with it, inspire me to find a path that I enjoy rather than just to doing something that has an easier future.