

So that's what snow looks like!

International medical student Wei Jin Wong reflects on new discoveries

>> By Wei Jin Wong, '08



It's 9:30 a.m. on a cold November morning in 2006. I'm in the Nephrology ward at the Victoria General Hospital and the first snowfall of the winter has just begun. Large clumps flurry, frenzied. I am caught staring out the window by the R1 I'm working with.

"Wei Jin, what are you looking at?" he asks me as I point outside, a puzzled look on my face. "What's going on outside?" I ask, "Looks like someone is blowing clumps of dust off the VG roof. Are they cleaning it?" The room, patient included, explodes in laughter. "You're not serious are you?" they ask. "What's going on?" I implore. "It's SNOWING," they answer. "Oh. Right," I say.

In May 2006, I and five other Malaysian students left the warmth (pun intended) of our homes for Halifax. A bit of background—the International Medical University in Malaysia sends six students to Dalhousie University every year to join the current Med 3 class for clerkship and then graduation.

To say that my two years spent in Halifax were interesting is at once an all-encompassing yet totally inadequate statement. A completely different sense of humour was met with many an awkward silence, followed by my staple, "In my country..." excuse. I was quite thoroughly confused when someone first

greeted me with "What're ya sayin'?" (umm, I haven't said anything) and "How's it goin'" (how's what going?).

As I look to my future, I will remember my time in Halifax with a sense of ambivalence. I am definitely a better physician for it—I've learned to adapt quickly but I will definitely not miss the -30 degree weather, the season-long lack of sunlight and the absence of spicy Malaysian food (my cooking still leaves a lot to be desired).

My time spent in such a completely different culture has ignited a travel lust in me for new terrain, new languages and new food. Med 4 electives have opened up doors to Tanzania, England and New York. Now Zurich beckons for post-grad research, a path I would not have trodden if not for my cross-cultural experiences in Halifax.

There are so many more observations, so many more odd, poignant moments that I can mention, but I would like to end this with some thanks to Drs. Sinha and Blake, the amazing staff of the UME, the Admissions Office, the ladies of the LRC and of course, to VoxMeDAL for granting me the opportunity to write a few words. Thank you. I now know what snow looks like! □