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# COMMUNITY

## Deaf teen educating others through poetry

By **Stephanie Thiessen**  
 CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

**H**e might be deaf, but don't ever mistake Nazim Bhimani for being dumb, or anything less than the vocal, intelligent, eloquent 13-year-old poet he is.

If you do, you might just find yourself being given a passionate reminder of his abilities through a self-written rap/poem, like the insensitive store clerk Naz met recently in Brampton.

Naz said the cashier wouldn't respond to his repeated inquiries of the price of a pack of gum, and was generally dismissive of him.

Not one to back down, Naz returned the next day and performed his rap 'The Deaf World' for the man.

"I am deaf so do not shout, learn ASL or let me see your mouth," one line of the poem reads.

No, Naz certainly isn't dumb; he has a voice, and he uses it.

In September, Naz started at E.C. Drury School for the Deaf. What makes his story particularly interesting is that he came all the way from England to do it.

Together with his mom, Shelu, Naz relocated so he could take advantage of what he calls "the best school in the world".

"The school has helped me so much and I feel that I belong to the deaf community," said Naz.

He's had a tough life, to say the least. Naz was born with cerebral palsy and a number of other conditions including a heart defect and asthma.

Naz has severe to profound hearing loss, although he can communicate well because he lip reads and can speak.

But his hearing loss is degenerative, so what little hearing he has diminishes day by day. Naz and his mother don't think he'll be able to speak anymore once he loses the rest of his hearing.

"I don't know what I'm going to do when I can't hear (anything)," Naz said.

Although Naz has always used poetry and rap to express himself, it's become even freer-flowing now that he's at E.C. Drury.

Shelu, who's a single parent, said that's because of the newfound freedom and confidence he feels in his identity as a deaf person.

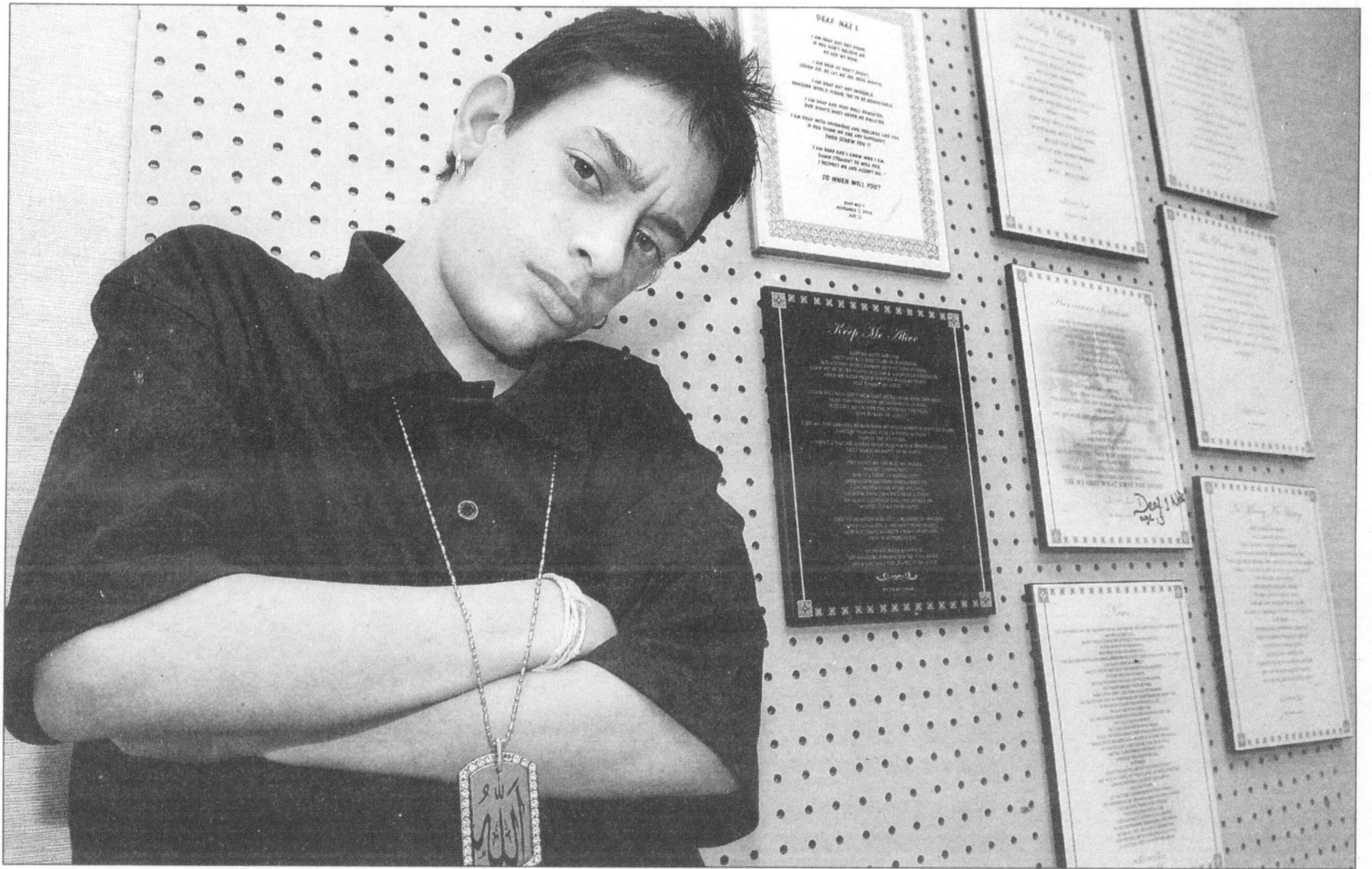
He even has a stage name, Deaf I Naz.

Naz said poetry makes him feel powerful.

"A word that can be heard can make a great difference — and I want to see the world changed," he said.

Many of his poems are about deaf people, although not all.

When Naz performs The Deaf World, he



**EXPRESSING HIMSELF:** Nazim Bhimani, a 13-year-old poet and rapper who's deaf, poses with some of his prized pieces. Bhimani recently came from England and moved to Milton to attend E.C. Drury School for the Deaf.

closes his eyes and seems to summon up any anger he's ever felt.

"I am deaf and very well educated, our rights must not be violated," he recites.

His facial expressions convey intensity and passion, and his eyes remain closed as he signs along with the words.

Then, after the last line is delivered, Naz opens his eyes, looks at his mom for approval and breaks out into a big smile. The tough guy is gone.

"Every time he performs, there are tears," Shelu said. "It makes me so happy to be alive and to be his mom. I'm so blessed."

The wheels for the Bhimanis' move were set in motion about a year-and-a-half ago, when Naz and his mom visited her brother in Canada. Naz loved it and didn't want to leave.

On the plane ride home, Shelu found herself talking with a teacher, who told her about E.C. Drury School for the Deaf. It seemed meant to be.

Naz moved to Canada about a year ago and attended a school in Brampton until he was accepted at E.C. Drury.

For a boy who was bullied mercilessly at

his school in England, his new school seems like a dream come true. Suddenly, everyone's just like him.

"We have good fun and respect each other," he said.

E.C. Drury School for the Deaf, on Ontario Street, is comprised of an elementary and a secondary school. It was established in 1963 and is the largest of the three deaf schools in Ontario.

The elementary school has 106 students ranging from junior kindergarten to grade 8.

Some of the students are bused in, while others take advantage of the school's residential program, and come from as far away as the Niagara Region.

Paul Bartu, principal of the elementary school, said the school is for students who are severely deaf. He refers to it as a bi-lingual — American Sign Language (ASL) and English — and bi-cultural school.

"It's a cultural centre for the deaf," Bartu said. "One of the main tenets of the program is students see themselves as a cultural/linguistic group, rather than an impaired child."

Something that makes the school special

is the fact most of the teachers are deaf themselves, providing the students with true role models.

As someone who came knowing British Sign Language, Naz is quickly picking up ASL and is fitting in well.

"He's very outgoing and does wonderful poetry," Bartu said.

"He's feeling comfortable with his new friends and likes the identity of being a deaf person and a deaf poet."

Bartu said Naz is a student who'll have every opportunity to go to university and become "a successful bi-lingual, bi-cultural adult."

It's clear Naz has quickly found his place at the school, and has even undertaken some fundraising ventures — giving poetry readings at Milton Mall — to raise money for a trip to Quebec his class will be taking next year.

He's a happy boy with purpose. A line in one of his poems says it all:

"I see my deafness is really a blessing in disguise."

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