

OPINION

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Sun-Tribune

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Let's not forget dump mess

Re: Revisiting an ugly but necessary chapter in Stouffville history, column by Jim Mason Dec. 13.

I do not believe Mr. Mason went far enough in the column referring to the now-extinct dumpsite on Hwy. 48.

I think of it as a Stouffville legacy and it should not be ignored because it might frighten newcomers to town.

There is no doubt it was a toxic dump. The waste I now take to Roddick Road for disposal was common at our local dump.

There were oil ponds 20 to 30 feet in diameter, including solvents, paint cans, 45 gallon drums with DND printed on the outside and batteries.

The first group formed to close the dump because of concern about water quality and thus the Preserve Our Water group or POW was formed.

A health study reported there was no real cause for concern. Monitoring of the site continues and there appears to be no danger of ground contamination. The dumpsite was closed only after a mountain of garbage had been dropped, the quota had been reached and the concerted effort by Concerned Citizens prevented expansion and closed it.

Maybe I worry too much. I'm on well water and have it tested three or four times a year. I trust the government reports.

I also think it best to let the sleeping giant rest and not forget we created it.

BOB LEWIS

WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

Why not slow down?

We hear about so many car accidents lately, especially in this winter weather and the cause most often is speeding.

I find myself trying to reduce speed, especially when entering a side street, only to have a car honking its horn behind me and the driver sometimes even showing me the finger.

Why don't drivers show more patience, especially when traffic is heavy? Lots of car accidents could be prevented.

ANDREW JOHNSTONE

MARKHAM

We can eradicate poverty

Growing up in York Region my entire life I was unaware of poverty being such a major issue until recently.

The only one to blame for my ignorance is myself, however, I believe the lack of government support and awareness has enabled me to live my life unaffected for so many years.

Through a recent survey I conducted with my classmates, I was able to conclude only 20 per cent knew poverty was even an issue in York Region.

If some of us question the existence of poverty in York Region or are unaware, how can we contribute to eliminating it? 2008 has just begun, I hope individually and as a community we make eradicating poverty part of our New Year's resolution!

AASIYAH KHAN

MARKHAM



Does multiculturalism work? Yes, I say it does

Contrary to popular perception, Canada was always legally diverse.

The 1867 British North America Act recognized three racial, religious and linguistic collectivities: aboriginal peoples, French and English. Canadian multiculturalism is an evolution of that revolutionary model and carries with it similar challenges, only on a larger scale.

In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt an official multiculturalism policy.

In 1982, this advance was consolidated in Section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which instructs the courts to interpret the Charter "in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canada".

Pierre Trudeau supported bilingualism, but never multiculturalism. He wanted a Canada where ethnicity would no longer be used to rank Canadians, with the descendants

of some groups regarded as founders and everyone else as add-ons.

"Multiculturalism," he told the House of Commons, "can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all."

In this respect, fair play for all is what is at stake in Quebec's debate over "reasonable accommodation".

The Charter gives primacy to universal values such as liberty and equality, but it also balances these with the virtues of diversity, as interpreted by Section 27. Immigrants come here because of the protection of the Charter: they value the rule of law it upholds and the tolerance that forms its core.

Wearing a turban, a hijab or a yarmulke, for example, is simply a matter of individual choice and takes no one's freedom away.

While upper-case Multiculturalism is an official policy, it has taken most of the succeeding generation for native-born Canadians to fully realize most of our population comes from neither of our found-



Ibrahim Hayani

ing cultures.

It took the shock of the mid-1980s Air India crash and the 9/11 disasters for the general population to come to grips with the "others" in our midst.

The first widely reported example of "reasonable accommodation" happened when Sikh RCMP recruits were allowed to wear turbans instead of the traditional Stetson hats. Since then, many branches of civic and municipal services have accepted, to varying degrees, professional attire that

respects the cultural identity and dignity of some groups.

The fact is, we've always been multicultural, ever since "others" were brought in to do the dangerous and demeaning jobs avoided by those of British or French ancestry. Our colonial multiculturalism was also, for the most part, systematically racist.

But what makes Canada so different, according to pollster Michael Adams — president of Environics Group and author of *Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism* — is we somehow never degenerated into a cultural "war of all against all," as seems to have happened in the American melting-pot assimilation (at all costs) scenario.

As Mr. Adams contends in his book, the multicultural model has been a great success and Canadians know it, even if critics don't.

The proportion of immigrants who become citizens is higher in Canada than anywhere else.

The proportion of MPs who are foreign-born (13 per cent) is higher than in any other country.

Canadians also increasingly see multiculturalism as an important element of their Canadian identity.

Canadian Muslims, numbering about 800,000, share important traits with other newcomers: optimism, enthusiasm and to be treated fairly.

Mr. Adams dismisses the oft-expressed dismay over ethnic enclaves, noting we've always had them and they can bring social and economic benefits.

In a keynote speech at the ninth annual Gala dinner of the International Development and Relief Foundation, Mr. Adams said, "I apologize for all this good news" regarding the triumph of Canadian multiculturalism and diversity. He offered his "apology" with a typical Canadian understatement.

Ibrahim Hayani is a member with York Region Media Group's Community Links panel.

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