



## Comparative Cultures

### A Balanced View

By: Kinjal Dagli-Shah

Only since I became a mother have I realized how the mommy brain becomes a hyperbolic storehouse of baby milestones.

I use the term hyperbolic on purpose because according to the all-knowing Wikipedia, it denotes an extravagant statement or figure of speech *not intended to be taken literally*. The italicized part is particularly important in this context, where babies get potty trained at six months, or start speaking entire languages before their first birthday.

For first-time moms like me, such achievements either induced the 'Wow' response or, in my case, a hasty mental retreat into why Ayaana wasn't behaving in superhuman fashion. Or superinfant as the case may be. My mind would dart back to a video I saw on YouTube in which a little girl could accurately point out every single country on a world map. And predictably, she was Asian. But let's not get into stereotypes.

My wonder at how advanced all the babies of the moms I knew seemed to linger for a long time, until I realized it was to be taken with a dash, or a fistful, of salt. Thankfully, it didn't affect me beyond a sense of wonderment because my euphoria at becoming a mom kept those doubts at bay. The only 'milestones' I really cared about at that point were her gaining weight, and pooping the required number of times a day. And she was achieving those with alacrity.

So am I a relaxed mom who merely sits back and watches her child achieve her full potential? Far from it. In fact, I believe a relaxed mom is an oxymoron, relaxation and motherhood just don't go together. As my daughter develops, I do wonder why her vocabulary is pretty scant at close to 15 months. Sometimes I worry about her getting overly possessive or stubborn when she doesn't want to part with an object in her hand.

But I definitely don't worry about why she isn't 'performing' in her baby gymnastics class. There's a bunch of equipment aimed at helping babies master their gross motor skills and a few fine ones as well. They teach balance and co-ordination and all that jazz that my mother says came naturally to kids a few decades ago.

I see babies readily wiggle into and out of those toy tunnels, and merrily hang from monkey bars. But all Ayaana wants to do is collect little beanbags. Or, as she did last week, put a few on my head and watch them fall. There's a good lesson in balance and innovation, I thought. But I guess I was the only one who thought it.

The real reason I put her in a 'class' was because she's our first child and needs to interact with other children in the absence of siblings. But as luck would have it, she's busy walking right past her peers and doing her own thing.

I wonder if I can call that a skill.

*Kinjal Dagli-Shah is a mommy and a writer, in that order. She understands that children can sometimes alter our sense of reasoning and reality. Write to her at kinjal.dagli@gmail.com.*

## Rearview Mirror



### Unique Buildings Tell Unique Stories

By Maurice Smith

Like many of my friends who travel far and wide, I am fascinated by unique places, structures or buildings, but my interest is focused on Whitchurch-Stouffville.

One building that always catches my eye is the small white structure on the south side of Main Street, a few yards east of Ninth Line. Take another look next time you pass by. Ever wonder what purpose that little white box-like building served?

Well, if you were looking to buy eye glasses in the late 1960s, that is where you would have shopped. Originally erected in the 1950s as a real estate office, it was changed to an optician's store in 1967 by a local gentleman named Howard Mills.

Mr. Mills had been making the daily trek to the optical department of the Toronto Eaton's store for over 35 years. Can you imagine the stories behind some of those journeys during the 1950s and 40s? One day, he left Eaton's to open his own business in his hometown of Stouffville.

He successfully operated his business in these premises until about 1994. The store was locked one day and Mr. Mills retired. It has remained locked since and now just sits there as a reminder of the past. Members of his family still live in Stouffville.

Another interesting place is the former school house north of town at 5582 Vivian Road. If you were a child in the late 1800s and your family lived in the vicinity, it would have served as your school. The property, along what was then just a one-lane dirt road, was donated for this purpose by local businessman and property owner Robert McCormick.

Some 40 children from local farms and lumber camps, who had previously been home schooled, attended the one room school house, with its small baseball diamond and a few acres of land outside, where students could play. The school was closed in 1954 when a new, larger, structure was built 2 km west of the original site.

Shortly after it closed, the property and building were sold to the legendary Canadian stained glass designer/manufacturer, Yvonne Williams. The premises became her summer studio, where she designed and created some of her most precious pieces.

Eventually she sold it to stained glass designer and sculptor Gus Weisman. It was here he designed and constructed his unique windows for many churches, including the United Church on Main Street in Unionville.

Next time you drive along Vivian Road, slow down and take a look. You can still see the remnants of the school with its separate entrances for boys and girls and the baseball diamond where children played over a hundred years ago.

Another interesting fact concerns the graduating class of 1907. In those days the person who attained the best marks throughout the year was awarded a two-year scholarship, with free tuition, at far-off Newmarket High School. In 1907, Gladys Brooks attained that honour. Unfortunately, farm work beckoned and Newmarket was too far for a young lady to travel each day, so she never attended the high school.

After school, if a child was sent to the local store for household supplies or to pick up the mail, they probably went to Mr. McCormick's General Store and Post Office on the southeast corner of Hwy 48 and Vivian Road. The building is still there, although in some disrepair.

What if you were a farmer who ended up in Ballantrae about 1900? You would possibly have built a home for your family and cleared land for crops on a homestead along a path now known as Aurora Road. If you were the parents of Edward "Buster" Nesbitt, that is exactly what you would have done at about number 5601 Aurora Road.

The farm house is a unique metal structure and remains on the property to this day. Family members lived there until about 1988 and the house has never had either running water or electricity. It did, however, have a telephone.

One phone for Buster and his brother and sisters growing up in this house so close to their Ballantrae school, was that they could lie in bed until the second bell rang and then make a dash across the field and laneway, so as not to be late.

So when your friends return from trips describing unique buildings they have seen, you can join the discussion and describe some others, right here in your own community.

Maurice Smith can be reached at [mauricefp@rogers.com](mailto:mauricefp@rogers.com)

### Kinjal Dagli-Shah Writer & Journalist



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