

# OPINION

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## COLUMNS

### Spirit of Christmas sprouts amid potatoes

**I**t was 33 years ago today I made the discovery — in the produce aisle, of all locations.

I grew up in a small city and went on to live in Canada's largest. Christmas has always been the highlight of the calendar, for religious and family reasons.

But I pity those who have not experienced the small-town Christmas I came to know that day.

It was the afternoon of Christmas Eve 1982 and the aisles of the old Stouffville IGA were abuzz. Apparently, I wasn't alone in leaving work early to pop in for some replacement eggnog.

There, on opposite sides of the sweet potato display, two women talked. One was experiencing her first visit from her first grandchild, the other the return of kids from university.

They both acknowledged me kindly, which I assumed gave me some licence to eavesdrop, and report on this more than three decades later.

They went on to speak of mutual friends and Christmas parties, parades and other events where community connections were re-established beneath the backdrop of the holidays. Similar smiley conversations were going on at the checkout and in the parking lot.

A few days previous, I'd taken in a sight few single people without children do — the classic elementary school Christmas concert.

Four of them in three nights in sweaty little school gyms. I didn't get it. I was an interloper, a tall guy blocking views and cameras — way before the cellphone.

Didn't get the joy on the



### Off The Top

with *Jim Mason*

faces of parents and the grandfolds, room permitting, watching their offspring dressed up as a wise man — that was allowed in our public schools back then — or a spruce branch.

Suddenly it hit home at the supermarket. That Cheers-like camaraderie that's more difficult to find in Scarborough or Sudbury.

I still see it annually in the nativity scene outside Stouffville United Church or on Rudolph's nose atop the Morrison family's home, on Main Street west of the Tenth Line.

The population of Stouffville is five times what it was then.

The IGA is now Stouffville Fine Furniture. You can no longer buy produce, hardware, men's shoes or baby clothes in downtown Stouffville. The big banks are long gone. The council chambers? An arts centre.

But hopefully, you've found that same Christmas in your circle of friends, neighbourhood, hamlet, house of worship or community organization.

Merry Christmas, Whitchurch-Stouffville.

*Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune. Follow him on Twitter @stouffeditor*

## Ethiopian lad 'home' for Christmas

**T**im and Andrea Jones recently received the perfect pre-Christmas gift, a gift so perfect they couldn't wait until Dec. 25 to break the good news.

And little wonder.

Six-year-old Chala Jones, a native of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, has a new home following approval of his parents' adoption application heard recently by a judge in the East African capital. The three arrived back at Pearson International Airport Dec. 10 where they were joyously greeted by Andrea's parents and a niece.

Tim and Andrea reside in Markham. Tim is a director at Stouffville's O'Neill Funeral Home. Andrea is an ultra-sound technologist and clinic manager in Toronto.

It was five years ago, after taking up residence in Markham, that Tim and Andrea began thinking seriously about obtaining a child through adoption.

They first contacted the Children's Aid Society, but found the process extremely long. Hoping to speed things up, they decided to go internationally. They discovered an adoption agency in Toronto that suited their purpose.

Since Andrea had travelled extensively in Africa, it was her desire to embrace a native child, boy or girl, from that continent. The agency recommended Ethiopia.

"Sounded like a great idea," said Tim, "I was all for it."

But neither had ever visited that particular country before. Within a year they made two trips.

After the very first flight, a time period of 14 hours, they came face to face with their future son. He was then residing in an Addis Ababa orphanage. Through a means of match-up, the agency endeavoured to bring together those qualities exemplified by both the parents and the child.

"(The agency) simplified everything," Andrea said. "We knew instantly Chala was the one."

A court date was set for July. Although the language of



### Roaming Around

with *Jim Thomas*

native Ethiopians is Amharic, Tim and Andrea encountered few barriers. To their relief, the adoption court judge spoke English.

"Within minutes Chala was ours," said Andrea.

But the waiting period for a visa took four months. This caused the parents some concern, because the expiry deadline was fast approaching. The federal government's refugee program further log-jammed the procedure.

That's when the office of Health Minister Jane Philpott stepped in and speeded up the process. Both Tim and Andrea praised the Markham-Stouffville MP's assistance.

Chala's departure from the



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

**Tim and Andrea Jones and their new son, Chala Jones.**

orphanage was unpretentious, Andrea recalled.

"Holding his teddy bear, a book and a laptop computer, he simply waved goodbye and left — a really brave little guy," she said. "Remarkable," agreed Tim.

It was much the same during the long flight home. "He slept most of the way," said Andrea.

While the new dad has already picked up a few words of Amharic, son Chala is similarly employed learning English. He's been registered at Little Rouge Public School and will enter Grade 1 on Jan. 4. The school and an adjoining park are directly across the road from where he now lives.

"We reside in a very multi-cultural neighbourhood," says Andrea. "This is in our favour."

"It's also important that Chala maintain his roots," adds Tim.

"The fact he was wearing a Blue Jays cap when we arrived indicates Chala has already accepted one area of Canadian life. He also has his own hockey stick. Pizza, his favourite food, is also popular in Ethiopia," notes Tim.

Together, Tim and Andrea honestly feel the adoption "was meant to be".

"Chala's everything we could have wanted," says Tim.

"The best Christmas gift ever," agrees Angela.

### Combined chorus

One had to hear it to believe it — student choirs raising their voices in unison at the intersection of Millard Street and Glad Park Avenue.

It occurred Friday, as boys and girls left Glad Park Public School and St. Mark Catholic School to begin their Christmas vacations.

My crossing-guard stop sign served as a seasonal baton.

The children, aged five to 14, filled the air with beautiful music while parents and bus drivers looked on.

"Like nothing I'd ever heard before," said one mother.

*Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.*