

## A Magical Experience

Colombian intern 'a real treasure'

By Kinjal Dagli Shah

Witney Bautista grew up in Bogota, Colombia, where people often said, "Canada isn't interesting because the weather is terrible."

While facts can't be ignored, 26-year-old Witney's one-year internship at the Care & Share Thrift Shop in Stouffville has been more joyful than she'd ever imagined.

"I am so happy to be here. Winter is a little hard but it is so beautiful. This is the first time I experienced snow and it is magical," she said, adding that she has been able to greatly improve her English language skills after arriving in Canada.

As part of a program run by the Mennonite Central Committee, a worldwide charitable ministry, Witney had the opportunity to live with a host family in Stouffville and volunteer at the Care & Share Thrift Shop. She belongs to a family of pastors and is the first person in her family of six to have visited Canada.

"I am also a flight attendant and I love travelling. I have previously been

to Chile and South Africa on different missions but Canada is wonderful. People are so friendly and they live really comfortably. It is different from Colombia where we see so much poverty. I would like to move here in the future," she said.

However, Witney made sure she saw the downside of the country too - people who aren't living so comfortably.

"I went to Toronto and worked for three days with homeless people. In Colombia, (they) are considered dangerous but here they aren't. It is really sad to see the homeless here because the weather makes it so hard on them," she pointed out.

Witney is the eldest of four siblings, and when she has a chance, she regales them with stories about her experiences.

"I told them that snow is like magic falling from the sky. I return home in July but I plan to travel to Miami next to work in a church there. I know a pastor there and would like to study with him. I like helping people, it's a passion," she said.

Deborah LoPatriello, operations manager at Care & Share, couldn't be happier to have had Witney on the staff for a year.

"She has fit in quite well with us. We have enjoyed her company in many ways and she is a dedicated worker who is delightful and beautiful and helpful. She is a real treasure," she said.

Write to Kinjal at kinjal.dagli@gmail.



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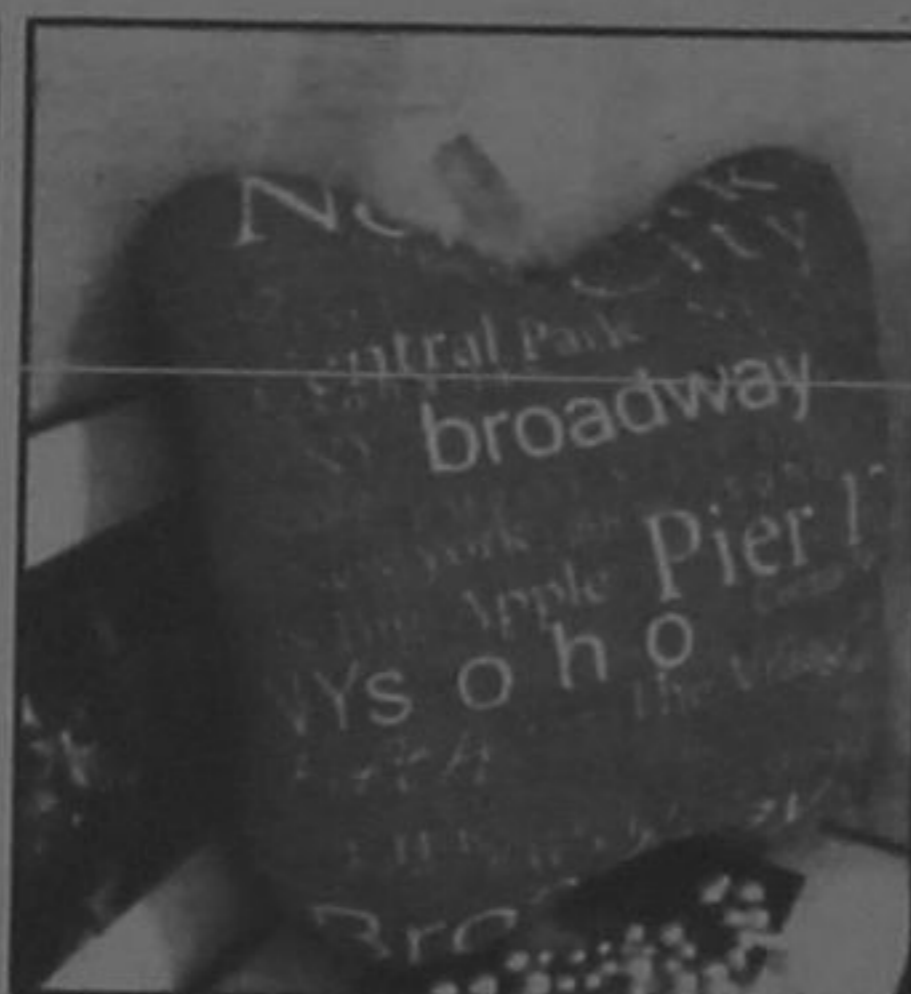
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## The Upcycle Of Life



By Kinjal Dagli Shah

When Erin Bracken-Sewell moved into a century home in Stouffville, she couldn't bear to throw out a big pile of wood that the previous owners had left behind. So she decided to paint it, and ended up with a home venture called the The Wee Art Nook.

"There was a lot of random old wood in the basement and garage - things like old doors and mouldings," said the 38-year-old, who now lives in Uxbridge.

"We eventually sold the house and planned on leaving (the wood) for the new owners in case they ever needed it, but they didn't require it. As moves go, we left it till the last minute and all of a sudden, our new garage had a big pile of wood in the middle with no home. I couldn't bring myself to throw it out or use it as firewood," Erin recalled.

"I had in recent years taken up painting as a hobby, so I decided to make some Christmas signs and donate a portion of the proceeds to Plan Canada." She had also learnt to sew in previous years and had started collecting old t-shirts and sweaters with a plan of turning them into upcycled pillows.

"After Christmas, I thought, why not make a go of this and make other upcycled stuff? I love pillows and often didn't like to part with clothing, so I figured this would be another way of turning them into a piece of 'art' that you can easily swap out in your house," she said.

"Upcycling is basically just transforming something old or not useful into something new. I've always loved to find new uses for things. I've often been on the verge of tossing something and then, lo and behold, it finds itself a new home."

In the family's Stouffville home, "the previous owners left a lot of random bits in the basement. One was an old kitchen

cabinet that we turned into a kitchen island. My husband and mom took one look at it and were about to toss it to the curb. I said it just needed a lick of paint, some new knobs and a new top. It turned out to be one of my husband's favourite pieces."

Erin put some creativity into thinking up a name for her business as well.

"I have an Irish/Scottish heritage, which is why I included the 'wee', and also the space I use in my home is literally a tiny corner of our office-cum-art area and sewing space. So it is a kind of play on words," said the mother of two.

She believes inspiration can come from anywhere and from everyday things.

"Some ideas just pop into my head. I often use old and perhaps clichéd sayings that everyone loves to hear anyways, or by request on custom pieces. Anything goes when it's customized. It's nice to be able to think of a personal touch to go along with something if the person doesn't have a specific idea in mind," she noted.

"I have great friends that I made a cottage sign for that reads 'Rayners' Outback'. The owners are a Canadian and Australian couple so I printed off a map of Canada and a map of Australia and stencilled on a silhouette of both countries and they loved it."

Erin said she hasn't registered her business yet because it's fairly small at this point. But she is proud of the fact that there is an environment-friendly element in her work.

"I launched it by starting the Christmas signs in December last year and have been using social media and word of mouth for publicity. I love the fact that I'm trying to re-use things for my business. I practise that a lot in my own life and like that someone's art might have been an old door or shelf or shutter."

Write to Kinjal at kinjal.dagli@gmail.com

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