

Comparative Cultures



A Step Stool by Any Other Name...

By Kinjal Dagli Shah

The best part about being on social media groups is that you don't need to venture far from home to feel completely inadequate and ill-equipped — you can now savour those feelings from the comfort of your home and couch.

Since I spend a good part of my day writing online and from home, it's the perfect

set-up for me. I'm part of a few, mostly children-and-parenting-related groups. All the wonderful DIY projects and amazing stocking stuffer ideas topped only by the super-digitalized and personalized children's-everything, just makes me glad my children can't read or go online yet. I'm not saying I would do or buy all of those things if

I had the time and money, but it's still enough to make me feel like a completely non-performing mommy.

Like when I read a post about a learning/standing tower, and some 352 parents comment on how they are interested in buying what I saw as the glamorized step stool. I'm all for Montessori toys and tools but this is essentially a step stool with railings so a little one can watch or help you in the kitchen. I'm not sure I would value it at a couple hundred dollars. I'm glad there were two people who mentioned they just use chairs. But,

like I said, there were two and then me.

What a disservice I've done to my four-year-old. I thought, I've only let her stand on an ugly white step stool to help me put toppings on pizza or watch me chop tomatoes. And instead of giving her a 1,000 piece play kitchen, I only handed her a small rolling pin and board with real dough to get herself messy. For my toddler son, I had an even plainer idea — I didn't put child locks on my kitchen cabinets so he could romp free and find entertainment in rearranging the different

plastic jars of lentils and flour. Sure, it created more work for me to put them back but it was a lot easier than building a tower or spending my already paltry monthly salary, and I don't think his learning has been greatly affected.

Be it extra-spill-proof and non-lethal lunchboxes, or sixteen-door wardrobes for dolls, there's scope to feel a sense of lacking in everything we do as parents. And I'm not even getting into kids' activities and preserving their memories. Especially with the holiday season upon us, there's

such a prolific exchange of ideas and purchases that it's difficult not to get swept down the black hole of shortcomings. So here's to the simpler and plainer things in life.

Happy Holidays, everyone.

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TREASURES AND HEIRLOOMS

'Fake' Eskimo Artwork Marketed as the Real Thing

By Rob Reid

Here we have a couple of interesting souvenir items that were sold in Anchorage, Alaska. Both of these pieces are signed "Nuguruk" and this was meant to give the impression that they were genuine hand carved scrimshaw (the name given to carvings, engravings and scrollwork done in bone or ivory), signed by a Native Eskimo.

In reality any pieces signed Nuguruk or Nunuk were made by several American companies including the Herman

Krupp Co. and the James L. Houston Manufacturing Company, both of Seattle. The Krupp Company began marketing "Alaskan" souvenirs as early as 1910 and obtained cutlery blades and fittings from Germany and England and used both elephant ivory as well as manne ivory. The Houston Company became well known for its gold-nugget jewelry. They employed local people to etch fake Eskimo items with patterns supplied by the company. They were tagged as "Genuine Ivory" and "Hand Made and Etched" and were



sold in the company store in Anchorage Alaska, where customers mistakenly thought they were buying genuine Eskimo-made walrus ivory.

The oval piece is a brooch with an etching of an Eskimo in a kayak harpoon hunting. It still has its original display backing which depicts an Eskimo, a husky dog, a walrus and a bear and is probably produced from walrus ivory. The second item, would have been a handle for a knife or letter opener and shows an Eskimo ice-fishing with a dog. It has a gold nugget that represents the sun and most likely is made from elephant ivory. These companies made many ivory items for the tourist market including carving

sets, jewelry, cheese knives and other assorted cutlery and as a result they are fairly common and command a fraction of the price that a piece of true Native Art would sell for. In today's market one can generally find pieces like these for under \$50 and sometime for much less.

I welcome inquiries about any objects and look forward to seeing and perhaps writing about them. Please forward a photo and a description to me through Stouffville Free Press or drop them off at Reid's Antiques, 6397 Main St. Stouffville during regular business hours or via Robert@reidsantiques.com.

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