

Dhaman Kissoon - a man with many hats who wears them well



From left to right: The Dean of Queen's University Law School Bill Flanagan, Dhaman Kissoon, Martha Bailey, Don Stuart and Gerard Kennedy, President of the Law Students Society. Kissoon received the Teaching Excellence Award.

By Rishma Lucknauth

You can't help but wonder how one of the most prominent immigration, family and criminal defense Guyanese lawyers in North America still finds time to host countless charitable events, lecture at a major Canadian university, amuse his buddies in a game of golf and beckon to his family's every call.

Dhaman Kissoon, guilty as charged, knows how to make it work. Perhaps it's partly attributed to excellent time management skills. Or maybe, Mr. Kissoon is simply able to do what he does because of years of commitment and self-discipline. "I've always had a drive," said Mr. Kissoon. "Things that I want I get because I never give up." His primary call to the bar resonated when his uncle returned from London and began practicing law in Guyana. A young boy in his elementary years, Mr. Kissoon looked at the impact his uncle had and decided that he "wanted to make a difference at that level." His gravitation towards law strengthened and he decided to try his wits in the field. "I was honing my skills at public speaking," added Mr. Kissoon. "In high school, I was winning debating competitions. I knew what I wanted to do and nothing was going to stop me."

In 1979, Mr. Kissoon left his hometown of Beehive, East Coast Demerara and move to Toronto to start his post-secondary education. Shortly after, his father passed away bringing his education to a standstill while he worked to help his family migrate to Canada. Once his family migrated, he was able to resume his studies at the University of Kent in Canterbury, England followed by Queen's University where he achieved advanced standing and graduated early in 1989.

Just a short year later, he began teaching at his alma mater. He sat in a quite rare seat, as there were very few visible minorities in teaching posts during this time.

Twenty years later, he continues to teach the Racism and Canadian Legal Culture course as a sessional lecturer where some of his students have moved on to numerous senior positions in the law community.

"What struck me most about his teaching style was his ability to facilitate discussion and bring out sensitive issues in a respectful environment while still having fun in class," said Andy Singh, a student in Mr. Kissoon's Racism and Law course. "His anecdotes about how things work in practice and his personal experiences with

racism in the law allowed for invaluable discussion.”

Singh nominated Mr. Kissoon for the Law Students' Society Special Guest Lecturer Award, which is given annually to a salient lecturer. “This award was a way of recognizing that his hard work and contributions to the larger Queen's community is being felt and very much appreciated by the students,” said Singh.

“What I tell them is that eventually they will be in the position of power somewhere, but do not be consumed by that power,” says the same man who has helped to raise over \$100,000 for a single madir. “Let the knowledge that you have acquired in the course of your training guide you and make the right decisions.”

If you ever get a good look into the face of the man who has helped countless community organizations and hundreds of immigrants turn a new leaf, you'll notice that he has a distinctive stare—a stare which many soak up with intimidation but really translates as a deep kindness. Behind his spectacled eyes, you can tell that he's planning his next move, his next thought, the next thing he can do or say to offer his assistance.

“Nothing pleases me more than when I help someone and they have come to this country and they do very well,” said Mr. Kissoon. But even with the support of a force like Mr. Kissoon, there are the odd few who are not receptive to the doors to advancement he helps to open. “What disappoints me the most is when they come here and they break the law. When they get in trouble.”

What he finds most heartbreaking is seeing the youth in the custody of criminal law because of their wrongdoings. “It means we're failing as a community,” he said. He's a strong believer that one cannot separate the practice of law and community involvement. “They are linked closely together. You help people because you are in a position to offer assistance to them.”

“I've not built the practicing law in a vacuum,” states Mr. Kissoon. “The fact that I have been able to give back to the community that's the most pleasing thing.” This summer Mr. Kissoon will be hosting another golf tournament, this time to raise funds for the Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto.

Pranav 5-day Ramayan Yajna

Pranav Ashram will be holding a 5-day Ramayan Yajna from April 21-25 at the Ashram, 102 Rivalda Rd (Weston/Sheppard). Hours of service are: Apr 21-24 - 7 to 9 pm; Apr 25 - 9 am to 12 noon. Officiating: Pt Rajin Balgobind on New Jersey. Call 416-741-4335.

Bhajan evening to remember Gossai

Join in celebrating the birth anniversary of the late Shri Prakash Gossai on Sunday April 25, 2010 at The Centre, 6765 Invader Crescent, Mississauga with a bhajan evening from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm to be followed by dinner. Please make every effort to be seated by 4:00 pm. For further information call Nirvan and Sarah Balkissoon at 905-362-0320 or Kamo and Omkar Persaud at 905-840-3717 or email omkar@rogers.com

