

COMMENTARY By DR. DHANPAUL NARINE

Queens Book Fair: Immigrant Stories that Inspire!

It is important for immigrants to tell their stories. These stories nourish and provide inspiration to the community. They act as signals that guide and remind us about the old values that are sometimes forgotten in the one-line responses on social media. But more important, the stories become lessons for the young that must navigate their way in an environment that is far removed from that of their parents.

The young constantly hear of what life was like in Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam, Jamaica, and other places. They hear of the struggles of their parents and of their will to succeed. But these stories are not only confined to the Caribbean, and other far-away places. They are to be found in New York as well.

Last weekend, the Queens Book Fair invited a number of professionals to share their stories with the community. The event was held at the Queens Library, Hillside Branch. The organizers thank Rebecca Alibatya and Leah Goldschmitt for their generosity. What emerged at the Book Fair was a fascinating presentation and discourse of the lives of immigrants in New York. The program began with Ariana Narine singing the National Anthem. She also highlighted the positive impact of immigration in the City. Ariana is a willing and brave participant.

Ambika Chandra pointed out that contrary to what is printed, immigration brings peoples together and reinforces what we have in common. Amelia Persaud reminded the audience that immigration is good for America as diversity brings wealth. The Nobel Prize winners in Economics for 2019 are immigrants that live and teach in the United States. Both Ambika and Amelia are excellent students.

Andrea Ogle is a practicing attorney that will make an excellent judge. She spoke movingly of her upbringing in a bi-racial family in Guyana. She said that the focus on immigration is mostly

negative. The stereotypes include statements that immigrants cause crisis and are thought of as illegals and they bring crime and drugs into America. Andrea said that the Caribbean diaspora in the US comprise about 8 million immigrants.

New York City is the mecca for immigrants while Queens County is the most ethnically diverse in the United States with 110 nations speaking over 138 languages. Andrea grew up with her four brothers with strong family values that included honesty, self-respect, and an independent work ethic. Her arrival in the United States enabled her to combine the best of two cultural realities and to make her a well-rounded person.

There were many challenges but her coping skills gave her the strength to succeed. Her mother, a registered nurse, and her father a chemist, were towers of strength. They worked countless hours in New York to provide for the children and this has motivated Andrea to succeed as, 'the American story is the immigrant story.' The lesson is that the American Dream is attainable once the person is willing to work hard.

Police Officer Khyume Khan was the next speaker. Officer Khan said that America was built by immigrants. He pointed out that Guyana has different ethnic groups and they live well with each other, except at election time. Khyume was born in humble circumstances. His mother was a seamstress in Guyana. She had a stall in La Penitence market. She wanted her children to do better and

brought them to the United States.

Khyume was able to secure employment with Guyana Airways as a reservation agent. He went back to school in New York traversing the three boroughs. He graduated with his degree and was hired by a not for profit as an accountant. Khyume decided to join the NYPD in 2000. As a police of-

time advising the community about safety and security issues. He said his interventions are varied, from a hit and run driver to a child that does not want to attend school or neighbors fighting. The NYPD has officers from over 57 countries and more than 100 languages are spoken in the police force. Khyume was an instructor in the NYPD

quarters that lacked privacy with a bathtub in the middle of the kitchen. 'I saw the struggles of my parents and of us living on a meager paycheck. I understood the significance of money being scarce. When my dad became a US citizen it was one of the happiest days of his life.' Karen said that the lesson from her parent's sacrifices is that life is a



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

about domestic violence in the community. Her advice is for people to respect each other and to practice tolerance. She says that people should not be afraid to be who they are and that they should reach for the stars and to realize the power of love.

Deuayne Crawford was born in Clarendon, Jamaica, in the West Indies. He is completing his Master's Degree and is making waves in the insurance industry. His advice is for immigrants to stay the course and not to give up. 'People made fun of my accent but I did not give up. I worked hard at school. I was very positive and I focused. I got several scholarships and I was fortunate to get a job in a major bank. Humility, hard work and keeping good friends will get you far.'

In 2008, the great recession hit and he found out that he was laid off. But Deuayne did not have to wait long. His qualifications and department stood out and he was hired after three months. Today, he is doing well and he has his feet well grounded. The lesson from the speakers Andrea Ogle, Khyume Khan, Karen Gopee and Deuayne Crawford is that if you work hard and avoid distractions you can go far in life and be an inspiration to all.

Dr. Dhanpaul Narine of the Queens Book Fair thanked the presenters and the audience for their participation.

The speakers were presented with Citations of Recognition from the Office of the Mayor of New York City. Karen brought her daughter Krista who had the honor of presenting her mom with the Citation.

The next event by the Queens Book Fair will be in January 2020.



The speakers proudly show their Citations from the Office of the Mayor, New York City. From left, Cyber Specialist Deuayne Crawford, Attorney Andrea Ogle, NYPD Police Officer Khyume Khan, and Criminal Court Judge Karen Gopee.



Some of the participants at the Queens Book Fair program on 'Immigrant Stories.'

ficer, Khyume is making a big difference in the community. He reaches out to families in times of need and they are grateful. His advice to the youths is that they should work hard and focus on their studies. His goal is to treat everyone equally. Khyume has a supportive family and he intends to stay on in the NYPD and to continue to make a positive difference. He is a valued member of the Desi Society, the Muslim Officers Society and the Guyanese-American Law Enforcement.

Khyume spent some

from 2006 to 2013. He reaches out to many organizations, including houses of worship.

Karen Gopee is an inspiration to her family and community. She was born in Trinidad and Tobago and is currently a Criminal Court judge in Queens, New York. She is the first Indo-Caribbean judge in New York, and probably the only one in the United States. Karen's parents migrated to New York in October 1973. Life was not easy for the family as there were problems with legal adjustment.

The family lived in

struggle. 'You can let it get you down or you can let it inspire you to do better,' she said.

Karen was motivated to enter the legal field to assist those that were exploited by the sharks in the legal profession. She was educated in New York public schools and was determined to do well. She entered the honors program in her high school and volunteered in the community. She duly passed the bar exam and worked in the District Attorney's office for a number of years.

Karen is concerned

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