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NEIGHBOURS

EARTH ISSUE

An exclusive magazine for the residents of Southeast Oakville and Old Oakville

of Olde Oakville

FAMILY, FASHION
& COMMUNITY
ANU RAINA & FAMILY

NEWS FROM OAKVILLEGREEN &
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Resident Feature

Family, Fashion & Community **Anu Raina & Family**

By Deborah Everest-Hill | Photo by Karen Mak

We would like to thank Sue Heddle of Century 21 Miller for sponsoring this month's feature story.

Anu Raina has endured more than her share of hardships but she turned her life around. Today, she enjoys life in Old Oakville with her husband Gaurav, son Zuv and daughter Shirin. She also fulfilled her dream of opening a store featuring her ready-to-wear fashions and accessories in downtown Oakville in November of 2021.

Born in Indian administered Kashmir, Anu says her childhood was fun and carefree until she lost her mother to cancer when Anu was just 10-years-old.

In high school she was in a bus accident and lost full mobility of her right arm when she broke her elbow joint; then, her family lost their home as a result of ethnic violence in Kashmir. "Multiple traumas from a very young age have shaped me into who I am today," she says. "My experiences have made me resilient, humble and

empathetic towards other women dealing with personal and emotional struggles."

Anu says her grandmother Shobhawati was the biggest influence in her life. "She was a fighter who lost her husband at a very young age and singlehandedly raised her five very successful children," she says. "I learned the art of craft and survival from her. Her tenacity and wisdom continue to inspire me."

She has lost her grandparents and parents but Anu continues to have a strong bond with her older brother Sunil who lives in Maryland and her older sister Anju who lives in North Carolina. Growing up in Kashmir, Anu did not know about fashion or have plans to pursue it as a career but she was very creative. "I often spent hours making outfits for my dolls and won prizes in visual art, theatre and flower arrangement competitions," she

says. "It was only after our exodus to Delhi that I got introduced to the creative side of fashion and decided to make it my career."

Anu attended the London College of Fashion in England and later studied Textiles at Sheridan College in Oakville earning a Governor's medal in 2010. During her residency at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, her Silk screened artwork depicting her mother was exhibited at Pearson International Airport and she debuted her hand-dyed and printed clothing and accessories collection at Toronto Fashion Week in 2010. Since then, she has done exclusive collaborations with several prestigious organizations such as eBay Canada, The Law Society of Upper Canada, Keilhauer and Art Gallery of Ontario.

"I design the textile prints and have my artworks digitally printed on the finest silk and other fabrics before stitching them into clothing and accessories," Anu explains. "All my pieces are then hand-cut and stitched in Toronto."

Anu was also nominated for the Ontario Colleges' 2012 Premier's Award for outstanding achievement and her Skyline print was selected by the Textile Museum of Canada for an exhibition in New York and London. Recently, Anu was nominated for the YWCA Hamilton Woman of Distinction in Art, Culture & Design Award.

When asked about fast fashion and the impact it is having on designers like her and the environment, Anu says, consumers must start with their communities before trying to save the planet. "I truly believe in the saying that 'charity begins at home.' A community is not known by how

many fast-fashion or fast-food outlets it has. It is known by its artists, makers and local eateries."

When we choose to buy locally made products, she says we are not only supporting the local economy but designers, chefs and other artisans who might otherwise be forced to do something that is not meaningful to them. "In the long term, this robs the community of what made it unique in the first place."

And, of course, buying Canadian products creates jobs, boosts the economy and translates into fewer people relying on social support. "Supporting locally made products is a mindset shift that is foundational for our prosperity as a country," she states. "It all starts in our own backyard!"

After Anu completed her education in London, she met her husband Gaurav in Delhi. They met through a mutual friend and had an instant connection. She planned to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York City but landed a six-month assignment in Paris first. "Gaurav chased me all the way to Paris and proposed to me under the Eiffel Tower," she says. "The rest, as they say, is history." In the end, Anu never made it to New York. She got married and started a textile business with Gaurav!

Continued on page 10

The advertisement features a central image of a man (Scott McGillivray) and a woman (Sue Heddle) in a bright, modern interior. The man is on the left, wearing a dark suit and a patterned shirt, smiling. The woman is on the right, wearing a black sleeveless top and a pearl necklace, resting her chin on her hand. In the center, the text reads "SUE HEDDLE HOMES" with a house icon between "O" and "H", and "STYLE THAT SELLS" below it. Below that is the "MCGILLIVRAY™" logo with "Trusted" underneath. A diagonal banner in the top right corner says "Proudly sponsoring this month's feature story!".

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Anu's 4My Sister T-Shirt in honour of International Women's Day with profits from the sale of the tee going to the Halton Women's Centre.
Photo by Valerie Burke

Gaurav had a strong entrepreneurial spirit having started working for the family business at the age of 14. He completed his Bachelor's in Commerce degree from the University of Delhi and then the couple came to Canada for him to earn his MBA from the Rotman School of Business at the University of Toronto. "We wanted to shake up our comfort zone and be closer to Anu's brother and sister at the same time," Anu notes. Gaurav's younger brother Saurabh lives in Bronte and his older sister Leena lives in Aurora, his younger sister Shivi lives in New Delhi.

Here in Canada, Gaurav pursued management consulting and has been managing strategic business transformation initiatives for large businesses for the past several years. He says he loves the idea of developing people and strategic capabilities within large organizations. He sees a lot of potential in new graduates and believes that most don't get the exposure they need to propel them in their careers.

The Raina family has lived in Oakville for 15 years. "There's no place quite like it," Anu states. "It's a quaint town with an incredible community." She goes on to say that she feels that the community has supported her business during a difficult time. The past year has been challenging and her Wedgewood collection is a tribute to the neighbourhood.

Both Anu and Gaurav believe in giving back and have contributed to the community as volunteers. Gaurav helps co-administer a Zen meditation group that meets at the Maple Grove Church. "This group has touched our lives very profoundly, Gaurav says. "It has taught us the importance of mindfulness, non-judgment and most importantly how to be present in the moment."

Anu has volunteered for local hospices in Oakville and Burlington and was on the



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Board of Directors of the Ontario Crafts Council and is part of the program planning committee (Crafts and Design) at the Sheridan College.

She donated and hand-delivered face masks to those in need early on during the pandemic, designed face masks for Designing Minds in Toronto to raise money for children and youth mental health awareness, and auctions her scarves regularly to raise funds for Black Lives Matter, indigenous causes, food banks and youth shelters. More recently, she designed a T-Shirt (4My Sister) in honour of International Women's Day with profits from the sale of the tee going to Halton Women's Centre. The children also get involved by collecting donations and Shirin made facial scrubs and baked cookies for the holiday gift basket initiative for the women's shelter.

Anu says there are two things she has learned from donating her time. "There is bigger satisfaction in giving than in taking and love has no skin colour, religious belief or sexual orientation: love is the only thing that reaches the darkest corners of any heart."

Anu says the pandemic has brought the family closer together. One of the things they like to do is go hiking and camp out. "We have had several magical sojourns including a trip to Iceland where we drove and camped in the spellbinding Icelandic terrain and to Quebec where we tracked the mighty St. Lawrence all the way to Gaspé!"

In the summer of 2020, the family ventured to Mount Assiniboine in British Columbia. "We spent the happiest and craziest ten days trying to survive in the wilderness of the Canadian Rockies without any technology," she says. "We swam in glacial lakes, hiked up the Alpine mountains, camped in meadows, saw some exquisite scenery and cooked our own vegan food. It was the most exhilarating experience ever."

Anu and Gaurav's son Zuv, age 21, is pursuing Mechanical Engineering at Carleton University and currently interning with an engineering firm in Ottawa. Both he and their daughter Shirin, age 16, are avid squash players and Shirin plays at the competitive level and currently ranks among the top players in Canada under 17. Before the pandemic, Zuv played with the Carleton Squash team and Shirin trained six days a week at Ontario Racquet Club and the Toronto Athletic Club and played in tournaments in the US and England. Recently, she was selected to play at the US Junior Open but could not travel to Philadelphia for the tournament due to travel restrictions.

Anu says she and Gaurav have tried to give their kids a set of basic human values from their life experiences. "We strive to be their friends and give them the space to grow and learn from their own life experiences," she says. "We are proud that both Zuv and Shirin have turned out to be very humble, loving and compassionate human beings."

At Neighbours, we believe everyone has a story to tell. Get in touch to share yours or nominate someone for a feature article by emailing deveresthill@bestversionmedia.com.



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