

Sri Lanka New Year Day Recognition on April 14 by the TCDSB.

My parents immigrated to Canada from Sri Lanka in 1969. They applied for immigration to Canada in search of opportunities for me, their only child. At that time, there was a shortage of teachers in Canada and my father, although a successful barrister and solicitor, was also a qualified teacher working at a prominent boys high school in Sri Lanka. However, when he arrived in Canada, no school board would hire him because of his strange accent and his lack of Canadian qualifications. He had to work as a security guard at night and attend Teachers College during the day hoping that he wouldn't be denied a teaching job once he had Canadian teaching qualifications in hand. My mother did factory work to support us so that my father could go back to school at age 45. At that time, we did not know a single other Sri Lankan person in Canada. We were completely on our own.

But today, I am filled with gratitude as I say that it was only the MSSB that would give my father a teaching job. My father was always proud to say he taught 2nd grade at St. Bruno's until his retirement. Former students describe him as being strict, knowledgeable and funny and he dedicated his life to our school board. His love for teaching was passed on to me and I have been fortunate enough to follow in his footsteps since I started my teaching career at the TCDSB in 1997.

My father passed away not too long ago, and at this time of year, I am always reminded that the only thing he loved as much as he loved me was his annual visits to his homeland. So, my request today is very personal. Acknowledging the Sri Lankan New Year would be the ultimate tribute to him. As with most teachers, my dad didn't receive any accolades for the work he did but I know he inspired many students and he even saved a few along the way. For me, as his child, this would be the ultimate gift I could give to my father. He would be so proud and also humbled by this recognition of his homeland.

Sri Lankan culture has been embraced in Ontario since at least 1898 when a town in Ontario was named Ceylon. Statistics verify that Sri Lankans have been migrating to Canada since the 1960's as skilled workers and students, and many of them, on merits of their qualifications, have been offered Canadian citizenship.

I believe that acknowledging the Sri Lankan New Year will create a fitting opportunity to showcase the contributions made by Sri Lankan Canadians to the advancement of the TCDSB while it will also create a forum for all students of Sri Lankan heritage, regardless of ethnicity, to feel seen and acknowledged. I believe

that this declaration will have a positive and lasting impression on our younger generation and will inspire them to follow the footsteps of their predecessors.

I thank you kindly for your consideration.

Kumari Sade