

The Long Road Home

The Story of Guru Bhat By: Tanis Hargrave

Sometimes the road home doesn't take us back to where we started.
Sometimes it takes us halfway around the world.

If you had met Guru Bhat when he was ten years old, you would have found him in a remote farming village in India, a curious, adventurous little boy growing up among coconut trees, cashews, rice fields, vegetables and sugar cane.

Life there was simple, and it wasn't always easy.

Electricity was unreliable. During power outages, Guru studied by the light of a kerosene lamp. Getting to high school meant walking kilometers from his village, climbing hills, crossing a river and eventually reaching transportation that would carry him the rest of the way.

Yet when I asked Guru what kind of child he had been, hardship wasn't what he remembered.



He remembered being curious.

He remembered asking questions when the adults around him were talking and being told he was too young to concern himself with such things.

He remembered having lots of friends.

And he remembered dreaming that perhaps one day he would become a police officer or join the army.

Life, however, had other plans.

Lessons from Home

When I asked what his parents had taught him that he still carries today, Guru didn't talk about ambition, education or success.

He talked about how we treat other people.

Don't judge someone by how they look, he told me.

Don't judge them by what they wear or how they dress.

Help people.

And don't help because you expect that same person to repay you someday.

Guru believes goodness has a way of travelling in circles, that perhaps you help one person today and, somewhere down the road, someone entirely different appears when you need help yourself.

"Somebody's watching you upstairs," he said. He calls it the universe. He calls some things destiny.

Listening to the rest of his story, I began to understand why.

And Then There Was Shwetha

Before Canada, before Oakwood and long before campaign signs began appearing along country roads, there was Shwetha.

When I asked her what first attracted her to Guru, she paused. There were apparently quite a few possibilities to consider. Then came the simplest answer.

His smile.

YOU'RE INVITED!
COMMUNITY BBQ
MEET GURU
CKL WARD 4 CANDIDATE
Everyone is *Welcome!*

SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2026
1:00 PM - 5:00 PM
MARIPOSA COMMUNITY HALL
1008 Eldon Road, Oakwood

SCAN TO RSVP: *We'd love to see you there!*

FREE BBQ: Hot Dogs & Burgers
LIVE MUSIC: Enjoy great tunes!
RAFFLE DRAWING: Fun prizes for everyone!
COFFEE & RESEMENTS: For all to enjoy!
SUPPORT THE LITTLE BRITAIN COMMUNITY FOOD BANK: Please bring a non-perishable food item if you wish.
OPTIONAL DONATIONS TO THE OAKWOOD LEONE CLUB: Every penny counts towards your support!

Come for the food. Stay for the conversation. Let's talk about the future of Ward 4!

ABOUT GURU
I'm a local small business owner in Oakwood and a proud resident of Ward 4. I understand the challenges our communities face because I live and work here every day.

- Small Business Owner - Serving our community with dedication and hard work.
- Community Focused - Listening to residents and working for practical solutions.
- Experienced & Accessible - Committed to transparency, accountability, and getting things done.

Real Conversations. Real Action. Real Results.

If elected, I will establish a Ward 4 Council Office so every resident has a place to be heard, ask questions, and seek help.

I believe a councillor should be visible, approachable, and available --not just during an election, but every day.

Together, let's build a stronger Ward 4.

GURU BHAT
CKL WARD 4 COUNCIL CANDIDATE

[GuruBhat.ca](https://www.gurubhat.ca)
Oakwoodguru@gmail.com
[/GuruBhatWard4](#)
[/GuruBhatCKL](#)
705-623-9323

Thank you for supporting our community!

TOGETHER, WE CAN BUILD A STRONGER WARD 4.

But there was more behind that smile.

They first came to know one another through work. Shwetha remembers Guru being introduced to her as someone responsible and kind, a person who took initiative and whom others could depend upon when something needed to be done.

They weren't initially working directly together, but eventually found themselves on the same project.

That gave Shwetha the opportunity to get to know the person behind the reputation.

And somewhere along the way, the man with the great smile became considerably more important.

They married.

When I asked Shwetha what Guru has brought to her life, she talked about something much deeper than romance.

She talked about having someone beside her. **When life becomes difficult, Guru is there. He supports her, challenges her and encourages her to see possibilities she might not immediately see herself.**

There is, however, one rather fundamental difference between them. Shwetha likes to consider the next step.

Guru would rather leap over three of them.

"Look outside the box," is how she describes his approach.

Take the risk.

Let's go.

Let's do this.

WHY NOT!!!



Shwetha laughs because she is more inclined to take one step, see where it leads, understand the difficulties and then decide on the next. Perhaps that difference is exactly why they work so well together.

Guru dreams big.

Shwetha asks how they're going to make the dream work.

And then, more often than not, she appears to roll up her sleeves and stand beside him while they find out.

There is something else I've noticed about the two of them that neither seems particularly aware of.

They often show up wearing the same colour. Not deliberately. They just do. It is a tiny thing, perhaps, but somehow it makes me smile.

Two different personalities. Two independent careers. Two people who don't necessarily approach life from the same direction, and yet, without even thinking about it, they frequently arrive looking as though they coordinated before leaving home.

Perhaps after all these years together, some things simply happen without needing to be planned. There would be quite a few of those things in their lives.



Canada Wasn't the Plan

Canada certainly wasn't.

Australia was.

It was closer to India, the climate was appealing, and that was where Guru and Shwetha initially imagined building their future.

Then a chance encounter with a Canadian immigration representative changed their direction.

They discovered they qualified to immigrate to Canada and, in 2011, **Guru and Shwetha arrived together in a country where they knew almost no one.**

There was no carefully established Canadian life waiting for them. Guru even brought food because he wasn't sure where they would shop when they arrived.

Fortunately, one of Shwetha's former classmates was already living here and offered them a place to stay in a one-bedroom apartment while they found their footing.

They had left one life behind and, together, were beginning another. For some people, that amount of uncertainty might have been terrifying.



Not Guru.

"I was always adventurous," he told me.

And then came his first Canadian winter. For someone arriving from India, surely that must have been the moment he reconsidered Australia? Apparently not. Guru loved the snow.

He remembers playing in it ***"like a child"*** and even refusing to let his landlord clear it because he wanted to do it himself.

Somewhere there is a wonderful image of a newly arrived immigrant happily shoveling several feet of Canadian snow while everyone around him wondered what on earth was wrong with him.

Building a Life

Guru's professional journey would eventually take him through telecommunications, banking, financial services and business operations. He worked for companies including Public Mobile, Rogers, CIBC and Bank of Montreal. It was a long way from the little farming village where a boy once studied by kerosene lamp.

Guru and Shwetha built their lives in Canada, and their daughter Avani is growing up surrounded by childhood friends and neighbours.

Guru established a successful corporate career.

Shwetha built a career and businesses of her own.

Life had moved forward. And then, in 2021, everything changed. Guru's mother died.

She was only 55.

Even as he told me about her, the emotion was still close to the surface. Guru had been deeply attached to his mother, and her death affected him profoundly.

The outgoing, energetic man his family and friends knew began withdrawing from the world around him. He stopped wanting to talk to people. The basement became his world. He reached a point where returning to his old working life no longer felt possible.

Shwetha and their friends became worried. This wasn't the Guru they knew. And so the woman who describes herself as the more cautious one found herself encouraging the man beside her to look beyond the place in which he had become stuck.

He had always dreamed of owning a business. Maybe it was time to try.



The Road to Oakwood

Guru didn't set out to buy a grocery store.

With his previous telecommunications experience, he imagined something much smaller, a kiosk selling mobile phones, accessories and plans, perhaps in a shopping centre.

He began working with a realtor to find a business. Then one day that realtor received a telephone call. A small store in Oakwood was for sale. It wasn't even what Guru had been looking for. Nevertheless, the realtor thought of him.

Guru drove from Richmond Hill to have a look.

The price frightened him. He didn't think he could afford it. But with some financial restructuring, advice and encouragement, what had seemed impossible gradually became possible.

And Guru Bhat, the banker, financial analyst and corporate professional who had never operated a grocery store, became the owner of Oakwood Grocery.

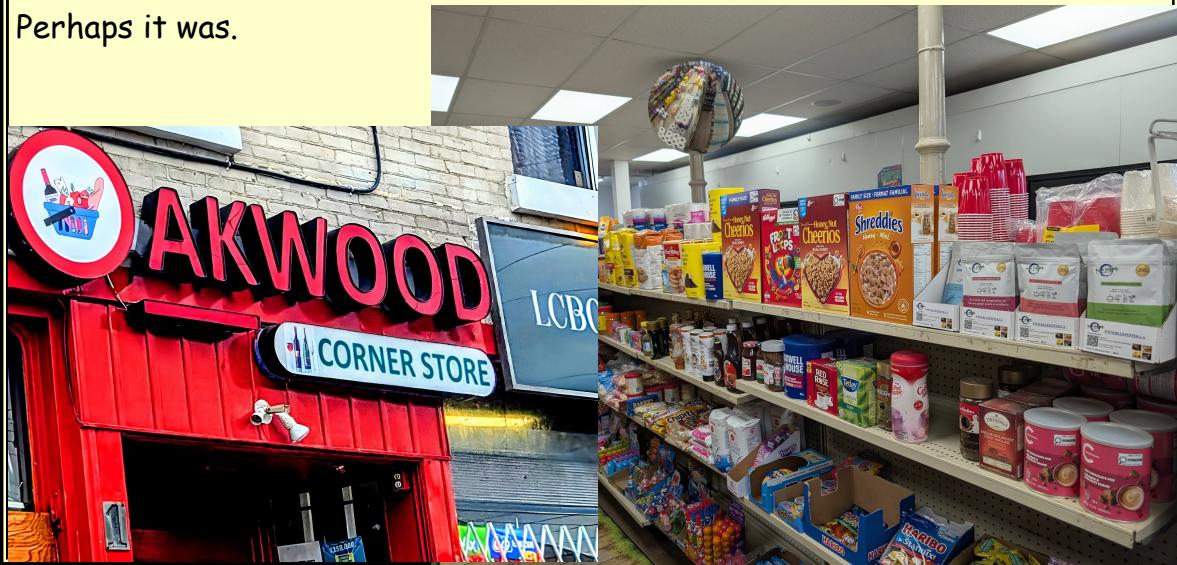
"It wasn't planned," he told me.

"I never thought I was going to buy this Oakwood store."

Then he smiled.

"It's pure destiny."

Perhaps it was.



Walk In as a Customer...

Destiny, however, apparently comes with very long working hours. Running a country grocery store turned out to be considerably more difficult than simply opening the doors every morning.

There were suppliers to find, inventory to manage, products that expired, margins to understand and seemingly endless hours.

Guru had left a corporate world of benefits, paid vacations and predictable income for days that could stretch fourteen or fifteen hours.

After about two years, he'd had enough. He was going to sell. People around him encouraged him to hang on. Growing pains, they told him.

Gradually things began falling into place. He established relationships with larger suppliers. He learned what his customers wanted. He began working with local farmers to carry some of their produce.

Most importantly, he got to know the people walking through his door. Guru has a phrase for what he wants Oakwood Grocery to be:

"Walk in as a customer, walk out as a friend."

It isn't simply a slogan.

Years earlier, Guru remembered being treated poorly while shopping. He remembers thinking that he was the customer, spending his money, and wondering why anyone would make him feel unwelcome.

He made himself a promise. If he ever owned a store, he would treat people differently.

Today there is plenty of talking at the counter.

There are jokes.

There is teasing.

There are neighbourhood children who sometimes come into the store simply because they want to talk to Guru.

He readily admits he's a chatterbox. Apparently, so do they.

Finding the Village Again

Then, during our conversation, Guru said something that made the pieces of his story suddenly fall into place for me. He talked **about how grateful** he is that the people of Oakwood accepted him.

And then he talked about the landscape.

The cows.

The fields.

The farmland.

"This is exactly where I grew up," he said.

There it was.

The little boy who had left a farming village in India had travelled thousands of kilometers, built a corporate career, immigrated to a country that hadn't originally been part of his plan, suffered the devastating loss of his mother and followed an unexpected opportunity to a grocery store in a tiny Ontario community.

And somehow, without deliberately looking for it, he had found something familiar.

A village. Not the village where his story began. But a place that reminded him of it.

Home.



Beyond the Colour

Part of what prompted me to want to know Guru's story was something much less joyful.

I encountered a comment online that reduced a man I had met simply to the colour of his skin.

It bothered me deeply.

Perhaps that is because I have always believed that everyone has a story, and there seemed something terribly sad about deciding who another human being is before ever bothering to hear theirs.

Guru's response surprised me. He didn't deny that such attitudes exist. He had seen comments before. But he wasn't prepared to let them define either him or the community in which he lives.

In fact, when I asked about his own experience, Guru overwhelmingly talked about acceptance. He talked about neighbours. He talked about friendship. He talked about people inviting him into their homes. He talked about being fortunate.

His advice to someone trying to build a life in a new country was equally simple: **believe in yourself, accept the new surroundings, look around you, get to know your neighbours, and be willing to make the first move.**

"If you go and talk to them," he said, "they also want to talk to you."

There was something wonderfully uncomplicated about that.



The Man Away From the Counter

There are other things you won't necessarily learn from a campaign brochure. Guru is vegetarian. His favourite food is a burrito. He enjoys classical and country music, and sometimes Latin music on the weekend.

He likes to dance.

He says he enjoys small moments more than big achievements. He loves talking.

And when I asked him what he was absolutely terrible at, his answer came quickly.

"Lying".

Apparently Shwetha can tell immediately. **"You cannot do that,"** he says she tells him. It was one of those answers that tells you considerably more about a marriage than the question ever intended.

And somehow, knowing Shwetha a little better now, I can almost hear her saying it.

"Why Don't You Do It?"

Politics wasn't part of Guru's original plan either.

He had volunteered on other campaigns and understood much of the work behind them, but when people first suggested he should run himself, his response was essentially:

Not me.

"It's not my cup of tea."

But the suggestions kept coming, from people he had worked with, customers, neighbours and eventually members of his Lions Club.

Interestingly, Shwetha wasn't particularly surprised. She had been listening to Guru talk about community issues and ideas long before there was a nomination form involved.

She had also watched him volunteer his time, sometimes travelling considerable distances to support causes and campaigns.



MUNICIPAL ELECTION DAY

CAST YOUR VOTE

OCTOBER 26

Practical solutions. Real results for Ward 4.

SAFER ROADS & RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- ✓ I'll fix the highest-risk roads, drainage and culverts first.
- ✓ I'll reduce flooding impacts with better planning.
- ✓ I'll fight for rural infrastructure that keeps pace with daily use.

THE RESULT?
Safer roads and stronger infrastructure across Ward 4.

RESPECTING TAXPAYERS

- ✓ I'll focus spending on core services first.
- ✓ I'll bring transparency to purchasing and decisions.
- ✓ I'll deliver clear, easy-to-track financial reporting.

THE RESULT?
Better services, stronger financial management, and accountability to taxpayers.

ELECT

GURU BHAT

FOR WARD 4 COUNCILLOR

Welcome to the

WARD 4

CANDIDATES

TRAVELLING ROAD SHOW

- **Public Request:** More Meet & Greet sessions for Ward 4 residents.
- **Meet the Candidates:** Put names to faces and hear their views and vision.
- **Ask Questions:** Give residents a chance to engage directly with candidates.
- **Informed Choice:** Help constituents decide who they believe is best suited to represent Ward 4.
- **Candidate Opportunity:** Showcase priorities, experience & vision.

EVENT DETAILS

1

September 21, 2026

Valentia Community Hall
332 Elm Tree Road, Little Britain, Ontario KOM 2C0

6:30pm Doors open to the public
7:00pm Meet & Greet Begins

2

October 01, 2026

Woodville Legion Hall
126 Queen Street, Woodville KOM 2T0

6:30pm Doors open to the public
7:00pm Meet & Greet Begins

3

October 15, 2026

Oakwood Lions Club
1008 Eldon Rd Oakwood, Ontario KOM 2M0

6:30pm Doors open to the public
7:00pm Meet & Greet Begins

To Shwetha, putting his own name forward seemed less like a sudden transformation and more like another step along a road he was already travelling. Her response was characteristically practical.

If you're already volunteering all this time trying to make things happen, why not put your name forward and find out what you can accomplish from the inside? In other words, after years of hearing Guru say:

"Why not? Let's do it."

Shwetha essentially handed his own philosophy back to him.

Why not?

So he did.

When Guru decided to put his name forward, **he needed 25 nomination signatures. He collected 80 in 48 hours.** Whether one agrees with Guru's ideas, or those of any other candidate, is a decision each voter makes for themselves.

But there is something revealing in how reluctant he initially was to become the person whose name appeared on the sign.

**Once again, Guru hadn't exactly gone looking for the road.
The road seemed to find him.**

How Would You Like to Be Remembered?

At the end of our conversation, I asked Guru one final question. Forget the election. Forget the campaign signs. Forget the qualifications and promises. Suppose someone read his story and remembered only one thing about **Guru Bhat** the human being.

What would he hope they remembered?

For once, the man who describes himself as a chatterbox had to think. He didn't say successful. He didn't say businessman. He didn't say councillor. He didn't mention a degree, a career or an accomplishment.

He hoped people would remember that he had been a nice man.

A gentleman. Funny. Friendly.

A good friend.

Someone they were glad had been part of their community.

Perhaps that takes us all the way back to a little farming village in India and two parents teaching their son not to judge another human being by how they look or what they wear.

Help people, they told him. Don't worry about whether they can do something for you in return. Trust that somehow goodness finds its way back.

Decades later and thousands of kilometers away, their son stands behind the counter of a little grocery store in rural Ontario, surrounded once again by fields, farms and neighbours who know his name.

Beside him is the woman who first noticed his smile, who arrived in Canada with him, who tempers his leaps with carefully considered steps, and who, without even planning it, may very well arrive wearing the same colour he is wearing.



And perhaps that is fitting.

Because so many of the most important things in Guru and Shwetha's lives weren't planned.

Australia became Canada.

A corporate career became a country store.

Customers became friends.

A strange community became familiar.

And somewhere along a road they never expected to travel, a little farming village called Oakwood began to feel remarkably like the farming village Guru had left behind.

Sometimes the road home doesn't take us back to where we started.

Sometimes, if we are fortunate, it takes us somewhere entirely unexpected,

And somehow we recognize it when we arrive.



A Note From the Writer

I began this story because I wanted to know more about the man behind the counter, the campaign signs and the name **Guru Bhat**.

What I discovered was a story I genuinely enjoyed telling.

I have spent enough time with Guru and Shwetha now to form my own opinion, and I am very comfortable saying that **I personally support Guru in his campaign for Ward 4 Councillor**.



I see someone who has invested himself in this community, who genuinely enjoys people, who listens, asks questions and isn't afraid to roll up his sleeves and get involved.

That is my personal choice. Every voter will, and should, make their own.

But perhaps there is something else I hope readers take away from these pages.

Everyone has a story.

It is something I have come to believe more strongly with every person I interview. Behind the face we recognize, the business we pass, the neighbour we wave to, or the person whose name appears on a sign, there is an entire lifetime we know almost nothing about.

There are beginnings and endings. Detours. Losses. Adventures. People who changed us. Roads we chose and roads we somehow found ourselves travelling.

Over the past few years, writing people's feature stories has become one of the things I most enjoy doing. I love asking the questions that go beyond ***what do you do?*** and discovering instead ***who are you, how did you get here, and what matters to you?***

Guru allowed me to do that with his story, and I am grateful to both him and Shwetha for trusting me with it.

And perhaps there is another story waiting to be told.

Maybe yours.