

## **Bubli's Beginnings Part I**

Last year I had started a column called 'Bubli's Beginnings'. The reason I started this was to share my life journey, my background and my beginnings with our school families. Parents seemed to enjoy it and asked for more each month.

Here we go. I was born in (195?) in Rajasthan, a beautiful, historical, culturally rich desert state not far from New Delhi in north India. Both my parents were transplants from the part of India that later became Pakistan once the country was divided in 1947. It was a traumatic time for everyone. Many families had to flee overnight, leaving behind their belongings, homes and properties either from Pakistan to India or India to Pakistan, to save their lives. Displaced and traumatized, it took my parents several years to feel the ground under their feet.

In my younger years, our home was reminiscent of the nostalgia that my parents felt for the grand lives they had back in Pakistan. Both my parents were educated professionals. My father started his life as what they called the 'Commandant' of a huge encampment of displaced families who were yet to find a roof over their heads. He worked for the rest of his life working for the Department of Rehabilitation (a cause after his heart) as its Executive Director. It was remarkable that my mother had received her post graduate degree back in those days before the 'partition' came about. My memories of her are those of a beautiful, articulate working woman which was highly unusual in those days for Indian women. She eventually rose to the position of Executive Director for Tourism for our state. In fact I remember her with Jackie Kennedy and many other dignitaries who visited our state. I share this with you so you know that I grew up with a woman with a strong character as my role model.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part II**

My parents eventually accepted India as their new home after the 'Partition' (between India and Pakistan) in 1947. Slowly they began to reconstruct their lives over the first decade of this traumatic time. My brother was born a year after me and since my mother needed to work we were home with a nanny who took great care of us. As we grew up and were ready for school (which was around 5 years old) we were enrolled in two different Catholic schools, one 'all girls' the other 'all boys', in our hometown.

Interestingly soon after the British rule came to an end, there were several American missionaries who traveled to India and made it their home. They became educators and started Catholic schools all over the country converting many Hindu (our religion) people to Catholicism. In fact Maria Montessori traveled to India as well and lived in Calcutta for several years during World War II. She started many Montessori schools there. These schools (both Catholic and Montessori) were sought out by educated families who wanted to give their children a sound education.

In school our first language was English and all subjects were taught not in Hindi but in English. Hindi, our national language, was taught as a second language at these schools (interesting!). Since my parents both spoke fluent English having gone to British run schools back in their days, we spoke the two languages fluently. In fact we spoke a very interesting language which could be easily called Hinglish (Hindi and English) where the two languages came together seamlessly and a sentence could easily have five English words woven into it and seem like one language. As a young child I certainly did not know the difference and could not tell you which words belonged to English and which belonged to Hindi. Both my brother and I spent our entire school careers at the same school before we entered our undergraduate programs.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part III**

My parents were settled in by now and my brother and I started elementary school in the 60s. After a solid education in Catholic schools run by nuns, we entered the next phase of our lives. We set out to seek admission in schools (all boys and all girls respectively) for our undergrad studies.

Back in those days, students traditionally stayed at home while getting their degrees and had an ample choice of colleges to choose from. In fact, very few colleges offered dorms; if I were to go out of state, I would have had to make my own arrangements for living with a family as a 'paying guest' (a very commonly used term the British had taught us) for a minimal rent. Typically, girls attended colleges locally and the boys had the option of going away from home.

I majored in English and minored in Public administration. While I was in my 3rd year of college, I met Rohit, (my husband) who was in his 3rd year of medical school. Unbeknownst to me, he announced to his family that he had met his future wife and that his 'search was over.' In retrospect, I think it was rather brave on his part to make that proclamation after meeting me once! I was flattered but taken aback at the time.

While going to school I started working part-time at a fashion house run by a British woman who trained me to work on patterns of dresses she designed. My job was to create patterns from S to XL for her entire range. This company exported apparel to Europe and the U.S. I loved my work and sometimes modeled for magazines (several decades ago!). My life was perfect: I loved being a student, I loved my work, and I had met my future husband.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part IV**

So here I was working hard as ever during my undergrad years and loving life. I was the Valedictorian in my final year and was happily surprised. In those days, our grades were posted on a designated board at our school and I remember sending Rohit my husband (then boyfriend) to check on it as I would be far too nervous to do it myself. I lived at home and it was easy to focus on studying while everything was done for us at home. We were raised with around three servants as help in India is very reasonable. I grew up with a personal maid who took care of my clothes, my room and anything I needed. With all that, how could you not be a focused student? Seeing how hard it is to take care of one's day to day life in dorms I have a real appreciation of what it takes to be a successful student here in the U.S.

I graduated from college and enrolled for a master's degree in English at the University, still living with my parents in the only home I had ever known. Stability in one's family life was a given in those days and I think back and realize how we all took it for granted. Re-locations and divorces were unheard of and everyone I knew had a wonderful stable life while growing up in India. Television was still not big there and we entertained ourselves in other ways. Going to the movies was a big thing for us and we looked forward to it with great excitement, especially on Sunday mornings when American movies were shown at our local theaters. We all dressed up in jeans and shirts trying to be modern and 'with it' getting away from our Indian saris and other traditional attire which is what we mostly wore to school. I continued to work part time for the clothing company I mentioned earlier. Life was good and I felt 'immortal' as we all did at 20!

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part V**

So here we are in the mid 70's and I am 21 yrs old, deeply focused on getting my Master's degree. Life is good and my parents are beginning to worry about finding me a husband. As was typical in those days, there were a few 'proposals' as we called them for an alliance initiated by families with eligible sons who had reached the ripe old age of 24 or 25 yrs old (LOL). These are known as arranged marriages in India. I was in a panic as I had already found the man I wanted to marry unbeknownst to my parents. I quickly asked him to talk to my parents and ask for my hand in marriage in a formal manner. The following week a meeting was set up. Rohit was brave enough to show up alone and tell my mother that he would like to marry me. My brother and I hid behind the closed door to hear the conversation between him and my mom. We were nervous and eager to hear the outcome. We could hear him being put through some rigorous questioning regarding his plans for future, his vision for our lives together, etc. After about half an hour it ended and we could hear laughter and happiness in his voice. At this point my mother who had known all along that we were eave's dropping, said, 'Kids you can come in now!' We have never since been as embarrassed. So it was decided that we would get engaged shortly and the parents would all meet and discuss the details of date and location. We had a traditional engagement luncheon with all our extended families and friends at our home.

Soon after this Rohit who was now 23 yrs old, had finished Med School and decided to head to Zambia for his internship. He always had a bug for traveling and wanted to experience other cultures. I stayed back in India to complete my Master's and it was after a year and a half that he returned to get married in 1978. Within two weeks of our wedding we both left for Zambia where I spent the first year of my new life.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part VI**

So here we were, a young couple in our early twenties traveling to Africa to start a new life together. We picked the islands of Seychelles and Mauritius (in the Indian Ocean on the southeast coast of the African continent) for our honeymoon. After a week of enjoying these breathtakingly beautiful islands we proceeded to Zambia where my husband had spent the last 18 months working at the Lusaka hospital.

I was both excited and anxious especially because this was my first time traveling out of India. Having lived an extremely protected life as most girls do in India it struck me after a couple weeks that I was probably not going to see my family for at least a year. This thought threw me for a loop and I remember breaking down in tears with my sweet helpless husband watching me, not knowing how to comfort me. As time passed I got over it and braced myself for my new life away from home. Now this was to be my new home. We found a nice house in close vicinity to the hospital. Rohit (my husband) was doing his residency at the Lusaka general Hospital and was often called in to the hospital in the middle of the night. I remember going with him partly because I wanted to support him but mainly because I was afraid to be alone (LOL).

After a few months I began to feel the need to do something more meaningful than just stay home all day with not much to do. I applied for a position at the University of Lusaka. With a Masters degree in English I managed to find a job as an assistant professor there. I was merely 23 and terribly intimidated at the thought of teaching students most of who were a good 6" taller than me. My husband promised to support me and did so in a very unusual way. He accompanied me for my first class and stayed right outside near the door from which he would peak often to let me know he was still there. In retrospect I think of it as the sweetest most supportive thing he has done for me ever since. I taught for that school year after which we decided we needed to move on from Zambia in order to pursue his dream of practicing medicine in the United States.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part VII**

We decided to move out of Zambia due to the unsafe climate there. We had a terrible armed robbery where we were put down on the ground and robbed of every precious possession we had. This happened in February of 1979, and by March of that year we left for U.K. My husband's travel bug was far from being over. So once again he had to go down to the bottom of the totem pole starting a residency in a new country. He didn't seem to mind it at all and saw it as an adventure. We settled in the north in Yorkshire, a far cry from London but beautiful and scenic as ever. I was not allowed to work there due to visa restrictions, so I spent my time decorating our little house trying to make it home like and somewhat Indian. I remember thinking that since things were so expensive to buy in U.K. I would have to be creative especially because I wasn't sure how long we would live there. I did something quite crazy that I will share with you. I had some beautiful Indian pillows with rich embroidery and beautiful colors which in my mind would immediately pull the whole look I was hoping for together. After much thought I decided that since the inserts were so expensive, I had to find a substitute for them. I collected all our woolen sweaters /shawls/stoles and whatever else I could find that was light and fluffy. I stuffed each pillow with a few of these and made sure each pillow looked nice and square. Now my tiny living room lit up with a burst of color and I was ecstatic. A few days later it occurred to me that I would be in trouble when the winter rolled around because all my sweaters were used up and worse than that I would never know which pillow had what. So one day at a time I opened a pillow and wrote down its contents so I wouldn't have to look for a particular piece. I had a running inventory which helped me tremendously when I needed something. Now that is such a fond memory for me and nothing I buy to decorate my home gives me the same joy as that day. To make something out of nothing became my forte and I got better at it as time went by as our nomadic lives would continue for a few more years. I loved every minute of it.

Life in England was sweet as ever. Every weekend I would take the bus (for 25 pence) to go to the flea market to look around and enjoy looking at the antiques, clothes, and all kinds of goodies. I wouldn't buy much as we really could not afford it with the modest salaries paid to doctors doing their residencies at the hospital. Rohit (my husband) would be on call every other night and had to run to the hospital across the street and be there within 5 minutes for different kinds of emergencies. It was a hard life for him. He worked long hours and the nights were mostly busy as well. He had to also take the local exam within a certain period of time and had to study for it the first few months. It was a relief once he passed it as that was one less thing to do. His grit and resilience was an inspiration to me. All I could do was to give him moral support and hot Indian meals both of which I did happily and enthusiastically. His heart was still set on practicing medicine in the United States and we had a long way to go.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part VIII**

So here we were in the U.K enjoying our time there, experiencing snow for the first time and simply loving it. It was 1980 and by then we had been married two years and getting used to our new life in a new country. Having studied English Literature for my Masters degree England simply fascinated me. All the classics I had read came to life and seeing life in the poorer areas with thick accents transported me to another world. Having acted in Shakespeare's plays in college I was curious to see his birthplace. We visited "Stratford-upon-Avon" and I had to pinch myself to believe I was there. In all it was a fascinating time for me.

My husband by now had the traveler's itch again and having spent a year there was already looking to live in yet another country. He found a job with N.A.T.O. in Germany and was eager to experience life in that country. We packed all our belongings in our car and drove to a Ferry so we could cross the English Channel (which in itself was a first time experience for me especially to see our car was on the same ferry with us). We then drove to Amsterdam and spent a couple of days there.

Finally we drove to Germany to a small town called "Illesheim" in northern Bavaria, a of couple hours from Frankfurt. We visited the "American Base" as it was called, met several Americans and had a sense of relief when we could be understood without sign language as very few Germans spoke English in this area. We were shown our house which was sweet and reminded me of Hansel and Gretel's house, as it fit my vision of it as a child. Once again Rohit, my husband, started his new routine of working at the clinic at the Base and I got busy with my decorating (pillows et al) and making it more homey and cozy.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part IX**

It is now 1982. In the month of January we decided it was time to move on to the next and hopefully the final step. We travelled to the United States to try our luck in the country of my husband's dreams. We landed in New York (of course!) and found it to be a completely new world. There were some, though few, similarities with London. However it was a different world than Europe. It was overwhelming yet fascinating.

Everything seemed bigger and on a larger scale in the U.S. The fruits and vegetables looked larger than what we were used to seeing in Europe. The gallon containers of milk and orange juice were huge compared to the U.K. and Germany and we realized quickly that 'Bigger is better' here. Another thing that was new for us was the Drive through windows at banks and fast food restaurants. This we thought was the most incredible invention.

We found the people very friendly and accepting of other cultures which helped us integrate very quickly. Thankfully we both spoke fluent English and felt at home within a few weeks of arriving. We were very fortunate to have a couple who were very close friends (both physicians from the same medical school my husband went to in India) in New York. They were eager to have us as they needed help with their 3 year old daughter while they worked and were more than happy to share an apartment with us and this helped both families financially. Interns in those days made a meager 28,000 or so a year in exchange of giving the hospitals up to 70 hours a week. Life was tough back then for the young physicians who had to complete a 3 year internship followed by a 2 year fellowship in a specialty of their choice. While all three of them (including my husband) went to work I stayed home with their daughter who I loved dearly. Being fond of children I found joy in having this beautiful child in my life (she is now 31 and married) and spent hours playing with her and teaching her little things. After a year we felt that we needed our own space and found a small apartment in Mt. Vernon N.Y. We were ecstatic to have our own little place and of course out came the pillows and the decorating began all over again. It was an exciting time for us. Rohit worked at the Lincoln hospital in South Bronx which was a tough neighborhood and therefore easier for foreign graduates to find jobs and sponsorships. Our sweet little life started in this tiny apartment and I cannot remember a happier time.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings Part X**

We were now in North Palm Beach and our older daughter Pia was born in May of 1987. Rohit, my husband bought a practice in Palm Beach Gardens and started his practice there shortly after. Life was good and we had finally come out at the other end. By now we had been married 9 years and to this day we feel we wouldn't change a thing. All those years of dreaming, hoping, working hard, facing challenges, overcoming them and keeping our sights on creating a good meaningful life, had finally paid off. We were both happy and enjoying our roles, mine as a new mother and his as a new practicing physician.

My Montessori training was not completed yet and I had to take a break till Pia was a little older. Rohit's practice gradually took off and we felt blessed in every way. We decided to build our very first home and it was very exciting to have a say in the design and building of our new home. When Pia was one, we moved in and thus began the next chapter of our lives. I resumed my Montessori training and was inspired by other Montessorians I met during this time. Needless to say I had created a Montessori room for Pia in our home with low shelves and many learning materials. I had my own little class going with her. As she turned three I had completed my training and needed to intern under a certified Montessori teacher. I found a small school in a church near Palm Beach with a very experienced Head of School. I started my internship and took Pia with me and this became her very first school experience. This little school went on to become the 'Academy of the Palm Beaches' on Flagler Drive. I remember dropping her off in carline, saying goodbye and sneaking back into the building to work in the other room where she never saw me. It was at least 6 months before she realized I was there all day. Fortunately by then she was so comfortable and happy there that it did not matter anymore. I worked at this school for 2 years before getting tired of the long drive. Having searched for another school I brought Pia to a local Montessori in our area. Soon after this I was expecting our second daughter Sonia and life changed once again.....

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XI**

Our second daughter Sonia was born in 1993 and we felt our family was now complete. A strange thing happened after we had children. I noticed that we always referred to our trips back to India as 'going home' until Pia our older daughter was born. 'Going home' now meant coming back to the U.S. from India. The U.S. was now home to us and our children. Both my husband and I never lost sight of the fact that we were blessed to be in a country that gave us the opportunity to fulfill our dreams. This is the beauty of the United States and this is what makes people from all over the world come and live here.

We built our first home right around the corner from the main campus in Maplewood. I found a Montessori in Jupiter and was delighted that Pia could go there. In a short time a few parents (including me ) felt the need to create our own group and run it like a co-op as we were looking to have our children in a more holistic environment . It was 1994 and Sonia my younger one was only 1 ½ years old and I wanted to be home with her. However I was willing to head this little operation with 7 elementary age girls amongst our families. Pia was the youngest in this group. We found a great spot in a courtyard setting in Tequesta and rented it immediately. Jamie Stuve, who is President and CEO of the 'Loxahatchee River Historical society (which oversees the Jupiter Lighthouse and Museum), was one of the parents in our group and had been teaching Montessori for a while. She agreed to take on the classroom and I decided to work on all the logistics to get it off its feet. Jamie was an incredible teacher who was indeed a natural at it. The kids loved her and she made sure they worked hard and enjoyed themselves while they learned. She was a gift to all of us.

It was indeed an exciting time for all of us. We had so much hope and saw so many possibilities for our children and got to work immediately. We set up the classroom with some furniture from our homes, some that we bought and before you knew it we had created this cozy little room where our children would spend the next year. It would be no exaggeration to say it was simply a magical year not just for the children but also for all of us who were involved. That is where I first celebrated the Indian New year with children. They wrote and produced plays. During spring break the moms got in their cars and drove them up to North Carolina for a hiking trip. The girls made their Year-Books themselves and I assembled them in my garage. It was an incredible year for everyone and we were delighted that this dream we all had collectively had materialized so beautifully.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XII**

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XIII**

We were now in May of 1995 and my quest for a space to house our school was not bringing much success. However I was not about to give up and continued my search fervently hoping everyday to find the perfect spot. With great difficulty I found a Daycare in Jupiter that had two buildings, only one of which was full. I convinced the owner that our school was not in any way competing with his business and was a whole different methodology. He understood and found in himself the courage to take a chance. The condition was that we would never be able to have our sign in the front. As a result we would be stuck in a location where there would be no frontage or visibility. This did not faze us as we were not concerned about that at that moment. All we needed was a nice clean building where we could expand our school.

We proceeded to lease 2000 sq. feet and got down to furnishing and decorating the classrooms. Word got out that our little school was expanding to include a 3-6 yrs. class and there was excitement in the community. We continued our work quietly, ordering learning materials, having the furniture built, and creating a generic brochure to explain the Montessori Method. There was so much excitement in the air. I worked late into the night painting shelves to match the big beautiful rugs we had purchased for circle time. In fact some of those rugs are still in the Primary classrooms and needless to say have worn extremely well. The school started to come together very nicely.

The hardest part was to get the license for operating a school. I had no idea how hard that would be. The rules were very specific and stringent and there were so many regulations to be followed. This was all new to me and I made several rounds to the Department of Health in West Palm Beach trying to comply with every last detail to facilitate the formal opening of Turtle River Montessori. To me this task was the most daunting so far in my journey. It felt as though no amount of compliance was enough and every time I felt I had made progress there was something else and I had taken a few steps back. However, thanks to some good genes from my parents I persevered to the point that they realized I wasn't going away and eventually made it an achievable goal. I have to say by far this was the part that truly built my character. I had to learn to be patient, have perseverance and most importantly to learn how to manage people and their personalities. At the end of summer we were in great shape and we had all the licenses we needed to get this project off its feet. Phew! So there! We had it all and were ready to open our door mid-August.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XIV**

Turtle River Montessori opened its doors in August of 1995 formally in Jupiter after a year of its birth as a small home-school with 5 students. We opened with two classrooms, one for 3-6 Yr. old children and the other for 6-9 yr. olds. Both our daughters were now able to experience a true Montessori environment. We enrolled 12 children in the Primary classroom and 7 in the lower Elementary program. Diana Murray who was a Montessori veteran and had taught for over 20 years joined the school. I had begged her to re-locate from Gainesville where she had lived for a year prior to living in Jupiter. She was Pia's (my older daughter) teacher and I felt if she agreed to join us we would be in great hands. It was indeed a great honor for us to have a distinguished teacher like Ms. Diana to be part of our school.

The year went by quickly. I carved out space from a classroom and created an office for myself with bookshelves and had to be very quiet when answering phone calls so I wouldn't disturb the classroom. Needless to say it was an interesting year. Word got around that a new alternative school had opened and before the year was over we had enrolled a dozen more children. I felt encouraged and hopeful that we would survive with relatively few challenges.

It was delightful to see the classrooms doing so well and the children seemed happy and eager to be at school. These were all good signs. We introduced 'Parent education nights' right away and I felt it really helped us establish our commitment to bringing our families together and sharing the philosophy we so deeply believed in. 'Parent involvement' was required and we found that most parents were eager to stay involved. Gradually the blueprint for Turtle River evolved and we established ourselves as a school that was dedicated to providing excellence in 'Whole education'.

I still had to pinch myself to believe that a small little school had finally taken off, was successful in its first year and had earned a good name in the community. By the next school year the enrollment had reached 45 and we felt very blessed and grateful for what the universe had bestowed upon us.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XV**

The school did well in its first year at this new location and we more than doubled our enrollment the following year to 45 students. We now had a large Primary and an Elementary program in place. The word was out and parents who were searching for this model specifically, found us tucked away behind a Pre-school building. We were not allowed to have a sign with our name on the street and that turned out to be a fortunate thing as it brought us families who had really searched and sought us out. This helped us establish a school community that was deeply committed to the Montessori philosophy.

We continued to have our parent education nights and found that it really helped our mission in sharing the philosophy and curriculum on a deeper level with our families. We also started having Parent socials hosted by a parent for both classes. This gave everyone an opportunity to meet other families and strengthened the community further. We were well on our way to expansion and decided to lease another 800 square feet in the same building. By our third year we grew to 65 students and needless to say we were very pleased with our steady growth. We needed more teachers and had to sponsor some from Ireland through a program that issued three year visas to bring in trained Montessori teachers from Europe. Subsequently we sponsored more teachers from UK and France. It was wonderful for us to have such diversity within our staff.

The school had by now developed a good reputation and we were well on our way to becoming a force to reckon with. It warmed my heart to see how beautifully our children were doing and how pleased our families were I was beginning to feel confident that we were certainly on the right track and continued each year to look for ways to improve. To this day deep down I believe that there is always room for growth and improvement no matter where you are. Therefore as you may have noticed we are always finding new ways to enrich and improve our programs. Excellence can only be sustained with a constant effort to bring it to the next level.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XVI**

It was 1997 and we had entered our 4th year. We expanded our space with another 800 sq. feet and added yet another classroom for 3-6 year olds. Our enrollment was now at 65. I started to explore the possibilities for a larger space for the following year. At the rate we were growing it would behoove us to move into a considerably larger building as our current one changed hands for the third time since our first lease. Each time a new owner came along they threatened not to renew the lease, and this created much anxiety and stress for me. However we kept renewing it as apparently they could not give up the revenues being generated for them to sustain the front building that housed their daycare. They were not yet ready for expansion as they had hoped for their program.

After a few months I came upon a beautiful piece of property on Center Street. My husband and I made an offer contingent on approvals by the town. We put the wheels in motion and hired an architect to have preliminary drawings we needed to submit to the town. Needless to say we were very excited at the prospect of building a school based on our vision for a Montessori environment. Things were moving quickly and our hopes were up. The design began to fall into place. We had to pick all exterior colors and elevation before submitting the plans for approval. The first meeting with the town staff was very positive. They felt confident that the location would work and presented it to the Town Council at the next meeting. This was my first experience with town municipalities and I quickly learned that this was not going to be easy. It would be a long drawn process with many hurdles and I braced myself for this daunting task.

By the second meeting we encountered some opposition from nearby residents who came in swarms. This was very intimidating for me and I started to feel dejected. At the time I did not realize that this was just part of the process and these hurdles could be overcome with time. By now we had invested a considerable sum between the down payment and the fee paid to the architect. As the opposition to the project grew we decided we could not win this battle. The residents around the area felt it would disrupt the flow of traffic. This property was on the corner of Center Street and Loxahatchee River Rd. We decided to walk away from this project and lost our money. I was heartbroken but not willing to give up hope. Once again I sent my prayers to the universe and waited to hear back.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XVII**

It was 1998 and we felt we had outgrown our space. We now had 3500 sq. ft and needed more to accommodate our growing population. We had barely recovered from the disappointment from losing the land we were hoping to build on and a very interesting prospect came our way. A couple who had retired and moved from the Northeast had a dream of starting a school and were brought to our door step by the broker who had helped us find the building we were in. They loved our school and were interested in buying it and housing it in a building they were buying which happened to be an existing school. We also had explored the idea of buying the same building at some point but had decided against it due to the location. We did not feel it was a good fit with our operation. Although we were not interested in selling our school it was interesting to see that it had become a force to reckon with. Having said that I still was not able to draw a salary and we were in our 4th year. However this was never a concern and I was more than happy to go on this way as long as we did not compromise our passion to sustain an authentic Montessori environment.

We found out through my husband's friend that a 6000 sq. ft. building on Indiantown Road was going to be available the following school year. This was an existing 'Kindercare'. They were interested in subletting this building as they had 4 more years on their lease. I jumped on this and started negotiating with them somewhere around March of 1998. Their headquarters were in Portland Oregon and the negotiations continued through August as they tried to get as much from us as possible. I stuck to my guns knowing our financial capabilities and eager not to over extend ourselves and jeopardize the school's stability. In hindsight I realized they were still exploring other possibilities with other schools to see if they could get a better deal. We were willing to sign a 4 year lease and apparently they did not succeed in finding another school as a stable, dependable tenant.

Meanwhile the school year was upon us and we were in our prep-week. Our teachers were feverishly getting the school ready for open-house and my heart was in my mouth waiting to see if we managed to get into this nice spacious building. As luck would have it, exactly two weeks after the first day of school 'Kindercare' was willing to have us sign the lease and turn the building over to us. It was now the last Friday of August 1999 and the pressure was on. As I drove back from West Palm Beach from the attorney's office around 6:00 p.m. I stopped on the way and bought a 14 passenger van in order to continue picking up students from neighboring schools for an after-care program, following in the footsteps of 'Kindercare'. We needed to generate more revenues and this seemed to be a good way to do it. We had inherited the group that came to this building in the prior years.

The next challenge was to inform the parents and hope they would understand. I got on the phone and called every parent at the school telling them about the beautiful facility and asking for their help to move. Much to my surprise parents were excited and jumped in to help in any way they could. We closed the school on the following Monday and the children were back in their classrooms that Tuesday. This was a magical feat we had all attained collectively and it still gives me goose bumps to think about that incredible weekend.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XVIII**

We were now in the new building. It was 1999 and we had made our second move in 5 years. Needless to say we were ecstatic with the extra space. Our move began punctually at 5:30 p.m. right after school ended for the day. We started packing and consolidating so we could physically start the moving on Saturday. The parents who had so willingly and graciously offered to help came in and took pictures of all the shelves so that the teachers would not have to be bothered when they set them up again in the new building. To this day it gives me goose bumps to think of the love and support we saw coming to us from all directions. What transpired can only be called 'pure acts of love'. We had dads painting the walls, creating instant partitions with tall shelves to carve out spaces for classrooms and offices for administration. The building had only two rooms and the rest was a huge I-shaped hall with 3 foot high partitions that separated the previous school's classrooms. Moms were busy unpacking and setting all the lessons in the right order on the shelf based on the pictures they had earlier taken. We all did our best to shield our teachers from too much work as we knew how much they had to do once the classrooms were ready to go in a the new environment. There was feverish activity all weekend. We closed school on Monday and miraculously the children returned on Tuesday and it was 'business as usual'. I had to pinch myself to believe we had collectively attained this feat. It showed me the power of love, the power of a common mission and ultimately it showed me how our children inspire us to give our very best at times of need.

The school looked beautiful with pictures hanging everywhere, it looked cozy and welcoming and we welcomed the smiling faces once again that Tuesday morning. We had three Primary classrooms and one Lower Elementary classroom. We had a total of 80 students and felt the space was sufficient. It felt really good to be in our own building and to have a beautiful playground. The school was nicely fenced around and we felt very secure and sort of tucked away almost to a point where people did not know we were there. Since we had come from a similar situation in the first building we were rather relieved to have our own space in a high profile area and yet be in a spot that was not very visible. It did not bother us that we were not easily noticed in that location because our enrollment had grown simply by word of mouth and we valued our safety and privacy more than a desire to be visible from the street. In fact this was one of the reasons we loved this property. Interestingly I had lived in this area for 11 years and frequented the 'Fisherman's Wharf' often and never noticed this facility for the first 10 years or so. When I did, I remember thinking 'How I wish we could have a nice building like this'. Little did I know I was going to have my wish come true within a year. I certainly didn't have to be careful about what I wished for....in this case. The universe had heard our prayers and bestowed this wonderful opportunity upon us. For this we were deeply grateful.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XIX**

Our first year in the new building on Intracoastal Pointe Drive was wonderful. We were enjoying the space and the beautiful playground and with every break we renovated a little more. By the end of the school year the classrooms came together very nicely and the school looked charming. We filled the classrooms easily. Within a couple of years we had found our core staff and most of them are still with us. The biggest challenge I faced was finding teachers who not only had the Montessori training and certification but also were philosophically aligned to the Montessori approach. It took us a while but sooner than later we were blessed with a great group of teachers, who were committed, dedicated and put their hearts into their work.

The following year (2000) we added another classroom. The school continued to grow steadily and we crossed the 100 mark very quickly. Needless to say we were delighted as we grew only by word of mouth and therefore attracted many like-minded families which only strengthened our school community further. We focused on building and sustaining the school community all along. I believed that it helped our children thrive and brought about wonderful energy when parents were encouraged to stay involved and participate in the school activities. We had already instituted a few events each year to get our parents to get to know each other. Each classroom had their own parent socials hosted by one of the families. We added family picnics which was yet another way to meet other families.

Before we knew it we were a formidable group of families who whole-heartedly believed in the Montessori philosophy and shared the same vision I had for my own children. A few years into this adventure I found myself surrounded by many wonderful families. That was the greatest blessing besides being surrounded by our incredible teachers.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XX**

It was year 2000 and we were settled in the new building celebrating our space and enjoying the feeling of expanse. The building was on a  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre and both the playground and the classrooms felt spacious. We again got ourselves to a point that we were running out of room which was a problem, albeit a good problem. The school grew by leaps and bounds and once again we were scouting the area for a bigger building or a small building to add to ours nearby.

By 2007 we were bursting at our seams and decided to move our offices to the next door building so that the space could be used as part of a classroom. This was not very convenient but a necessary evil and we tried to make it work. By now parents were eager for us to expand to higher grades and after resisting the pressure I finally succumbed to it. We happened to see a lot for sale (through Kim Cuomo a parent at the school who has done real-estate for a long time) and within a week of seeing this lot my husband Rohit decided to put in an offer. Apparently there were many other schools eyeing this property but unfortunately could not move as quickly as they had Boards to deal with. I was extremely fortunate not to have to consult anyone and have a husband who was very supportive and moved quickly in the direction of the purchase.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XXI**

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XXII**

It was 2007 and we were very excited about the new property we had acquired. Little did I realize how much work it would take to complete this project? I set out to apply for permits with the town of Jupiter. I found out rather quickly how arduous and slow the process was going to be. We hired a land development company to help us with it. It was months and months later that we made some progress. Our parents were extremely supportive and showed up at all the crucial meetings to rally for the school. Needless to say there is always some opposition to a new project and we had our share. We had to convince different groups that we were not going to disrupt anything in the area; in fact we felt we were offering a great service to the town of Jupiter.

Somewhere along the line we decided that we were going to build a LEED certified (LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) green building, the first private school to do so in Palm Beach County. I worked very closely with the architect to create the schematics based on the needs of a Montessori classroom specifically. It took us a good part of the year to accomplish that. We now started the process of bidding the plans for construction. We found a local builder and decided we would hand over the project to him. It was the end of May and we were ready to break ground. Much excitement was in the air. We had a ground breaking ceremony following our graduations which was well attended. We buried a time capsule with notes from the children, that day's newspaper and a few other items. We could not wait to see the building go up.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XXIII**

There was much excitement in the air. The word was out that we were moving in the direction of building a larger home for our students. My most precious memory is that of the last day of that school year (2007). I had invited the staff to a dinner that evening and it was here that I announced the purchase of the property and the plan to build a larger (20,000 sq. feet) building to meet our needs. They all screamed with joy and disbelief as it was a dream-come-true for all of us. After dinner I drove them to the empty lot. They all jumped out of their cars and ran to the lot dancing and singing, celebrating this gift we had received. It was the most beautiful moment for me to witness. I was surrounded by laughter, happiness and excitement all around.

Now came the hard part. We had to acquire permits from the Town in order to use this property for a school that would accommodate 250 kids. The grind of filling out applications and making our rounds to the town council meetings, started soon after we purchased the land. Little did I know that I was in for a long winding road with many obstacles and months of hard work to finish out the permitting process. It took us around eight months to get the permits. Once this was accomplished I set out to find an architect who would help us design a Green building that would become LEED (Leadership in energy and environmental design) certified on completion. We were intent on building the new school with all the green features possible within our budget so that we could continue our mission of educating our students about this important aspect of our world today. We wanted them to be responsible stewards of the environment, teaching them good practices from a young age.

We were fortunate enough to find a wonderful firm that designed only Green projects. I had a clear idea of how I wanted the school to be laid out. That made it easier for us to put together a floor plan that works best for a Montessori school (needless to say this process also took a very long time to finish). It was a good 11 months between completing the drawing of the plans and getting the final approvals from the town.

The next step was to find a builder to take on this project. We sent the plans out for bids and the process lasted a good three months. We were getting impatient to break ground and had a beautiful Ground-breaking ceremony on the lot with all the families at Turtle River. We buried a 'Time capsule' with many notes from the children, and a newspaper from that day. I do hope one day we will retrieve it and enjoy its contents.

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XXIV**

We started building in November of 2008. There was a flurry of activity. I was being warned by many that the economy in the US had taken a dive and questioned my prudence for taking on such a big project at this time. Needless to say I had many sleepless nights; however I was steadfast in my belief that as a school we were poised for growth. My sense was that it was too late to change plans of building at such a late stage especially after months of hard work that had gone into reaching this point.

The building started around end of November and I couldn't contain my excitement. As the building began to go up I had to pinch myself that it wasn't a dream. At every step we had to jump hoops with regulations and codes but I kept at it, working diligently, trying to work with the Town of Jupiter. I learnt a lot in those months about how municipalities worked and mainly that if you did not have grit and patience you had no business taking on a huge project like this. I must say though, that I felt I aged a few years trying to get this project on its feet from 2007 to 2009 when the building was completed.

Within eight months of breaking ground we had miraculously completed the task. Since there was no other building being built around this time except a bank on Indiantown road, the inspectors from the building department visited us almost every day to see if they could point out something that needed to be changed. This extreme focus on our building kept us in the spotlight and we had to be on our toes making sure we were complying while not losing time. We had to remember that precisely because there were not that many building jobs at the time we were able to hire sub-contractors very quickly and efficiently. So the cloud did have a silver lining for sure and for this we were grateful.

It was now July of 2009 and we were waiting to get our approvals from the Health Department which was yet another cumbersome process. Once we got through that we were allowed to start moving our furniture and materials from the old building and the storage where a lot of our stuff was stored for over two years. Now the real excitement began. The classrooms began to take shape and become a reality. Again there was a flurry of activity and our dream school was coming together right in front of our eyes

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XXV**

It was July of 2009 and after all the tedious work of getting final permits from the Health Department and the Town of Jupiter we were ready to start furnishing the building. This was an exciting time for all of us. We started moving the furniture and all the Montessori materials from our previous home which we now refer to as the East campus. As we started furnishing the classrooms we realized how large the rooms were and we were elated to have these well lit (with natural light) large classrooms for our children. While we were building there were two schools in our vicinity that decided to close as the economy was very bad. We purchased a lot of furniture and materials from them that we stored in a rented space. We made several rounds of this storage and realized we had more than we needed. Somehow, we did house everything and I must say the school looked rather well furnished and wholesome. My biggest concern on building and moving to this building was that we may not be able to replicate the warmth and homey feeling of our charming little building (the East campus) considering this was 4 times larger.

Jennifer Gonzalez who was a parent at the school had taken an important role in this entire project helping me pick color schemes, carpets, flooring, fixtures etc. The two of us made a good team and we plunged ourselves into the decorating part. If I had not been in the field I am today I most definitely would have turned to interiors, decorating and space planning. Having designed, built and decorated our own home I had also had enough experience in all these areas and loved every minute of the process from the beginning to the end. We would both stay past midnight running up and down giving the building some nice simple homey touches. Another parent, Marcia Harrell (who later became a dear friend) gave us all she could in time energy and ideas. The team had gotten stronger and bigger. Atlanta Visker, another parent with a Library science degree had guided us with building a beautiful library/Media center and was to take over the project for several years as the Media specialist. She retired in 2014 and needless to say we were beside ourselves as we had had such a wonderful Media program for the entire school led by her. She had twin boys who went on to higher grades at another school and that made it hard for her to balance her life from thereon.

We ended up with a gorgeous building which would later be certified green by an agency called L.E.E.D which stands for 'Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design'. The playgrounds looked beautiful, resplendent with Bronze statues of children playing all over and big trees to shade the area. We were very pleased with the outcome of the previous years of planning, and orchestrating the plan, stressful as it was. It was worth every moment of stress we went through. We had to pinch ourselves to believe we had done it!

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## **Bubli's Beginnings..... Part XXVI**

Lets fast forward to 2015. We are now in our 6th year in the new building. Our older building in the Fisherman's wharf has been converted into a Toddler building and looks charming, quaint and perfect for our littlest students. It was renovated to suit their needs and is working beautifully for that program.

Our new building on Maplewood Drive, is flourishing and full of students from 3 to 15 years of age. The oldest ones (Middle school students) are upstairs on the second floor and everyone else is on the first floor divided in two separate wings, one for the Primary and the other for the Elementary. We love the feeling of calm all over with music playing in the hallways, with children busy, engaged and learning joyfully. I still pinch myself when I look through the one-way windows into the classrooms. I see a perfect Montessori environment in action and it brings tears of joy in my eyes. The playground is bustling with activity as the children run from one end to the other laughing and socializing with each other.

I could not end this series of articles without saying that we have been blessed with the most amazing staff. Several of our teachers have been with us for 12 to 16 years. It took us a while to find our core group of teachers who shared my vision and were naturally philosophically aligned to approaching each child with unconditional respect, nurturing their spirits and allowing them to be who that are as opposed to imposing themselves on them. Thanks to them our children who have stayed through Middle school are shining in High schools like Suncoast High School, Dreyfoos High school, Oxbridge academy, Jupiter High school and the Pine school. It warms our hearts to see how well our students carry themselves wherever they go. Since this is our 21st year there are several of our students who have graduated from reputable schools including Pratt, Harvard, Stern Business school at NYU and more.

Indeed we cannot thank Him enough for the blessings bestowed upon us not only with the superb staff but also with incredible families who work hard to keep our school community strong and are willing to give the school their time and energy despite their busy schedules. Our school is what it is today because of all of you and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for it. God bless our children, our staff and our families for all the good energy they bring to it!

This is the culmination of this series of 'Bubli's Beginings'. I hope you have enjoyed reading not only about my personal journey but also the school's which has spanned so far from 1994 to 2015.