



Dancer Tomas Schramek  
pg. 6



Who is Gabriela?  
pg. 7



Anniversary  
with Mirjana pg. 8



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# NOVÝ DOMOV



THE NEW HOMELAND

Pravda vítězí!



CZECH AND SLOVAK BI-WEEKLY NEWSPAPER [www.novydomov.com](http://www.novydomov.com)

No other time of the year is associated with as many traditions in the Czech Republic as Christmas. Its magic is contagious and appears to affect even the most sensible people. When else is it possible

## A happy and joyous

to see a young woman in the 21st century tossing a shoe over her shoulder? Or a serious gentleman putting a fish scale into his wallet? Or an entire family eagerly watching little boats made from walnut shells sailing across a bowl full of water? Of course, this is Christmas, when unusual things are normal.

The Czech Christmas tradition is itself inseparably associated with the Christian tradition and pagan rituals, ancient local customs and the influence of other countries. Hear are some of the most common Christmas and Advent traditions followed in the Czech Republic.

### The Christmas tree

It is almost impossible to imagine Christmas without a Christmas tree, despite the fact that this tradition is relatively new to the Czech lands. Christmas trees were originally put up in the homes of burghers and aristocrats at the beginning of the 19th century.

Later, the practice became common in the second half of the century. In the countryside, the custom came from hanging a tree top-down above the banquet table. Initially the tree was decorated with red apples, nuts and other decorations made from straw or sugar. In the 19th century it became common to use decorations made from glass. Pine is the tree most often used, but other evergreens are also used. The Christmas tree is decorated on either Christmas Eve Day (December 24th) or the day before. It is usually taken down at the feast of the Three Kings (January 6th). Since the 1920s, Christmas trees have been erected in public squares in Czech towns and cities. Today, the best known Christmas tree is

on Prague's Old Town Square. **Christmas Eve**

On Christmas Eve (December 24th) families gather at home to decorate the Christmas tree and

prepare dinner. Many people choose to fast until evening. Children impatient for their dinner are told that if they are able to wait until the evening meal, they will see a golden pig.

carp can be seen on the streets of all Czech towns and cities. Most of the fish are transported around the republic from the common ponds in Southern Bohemia.

In most homes, carp, covered in flour, egg and breadcrumbs, is fried in oil. A traditional Christmas appetizer is carp cooked "blue" with vegetables and butter. A common tradition associated with the fish states that anyone who puts a scale under his or her dinner plate will have enough money in the

presents. According to tradition, these were put here silently by the Ježíšek, or little baby Jesus. In contrast to Santa Clause, the baby Jesus has no visual representation. Additionally, how he arrives in children's homes is also a mystery. In Czech, Ježíšek is a diminutive form of Jesus Christ. Children send a letter to Ježíšek before Christmas, telling him what they would like to find underneath the Christmas tree. In the Czech lands, it was originally St. Nicholas who distributed the presents, but in the 19th century the German tradition of the little baby Jesus was adopted by the

earthly and the celestial has been distorted. During this time it is possible to see into the future and even influence it. While the bits of magic associated with ensuring a plentiful harvest has been practically lost in modern times, there still exists a tradition associated with determining marriage, health and happiness.

### A healthy core

After dinner on Christmas Eve, every person present at the table cuts an apple in half, crosswise, across the stem. Anyone whose apple core shows a five-pointed star is considered lucky and can expect health and happiness the next year. If the core has four points, its owner can expect illness. And if, instead of a five-pointed star, the core shows a cross, the owner should expect the worst. One's fate can be helped by selecting a large, healthy-looking apple. A similar tradition is practiced using walnuts. The person who finds a healthy core in four walnuts can also expect to be healthy for the next year.

### The pouring of lead

The most demanding, but very telling Czech Christmas tradition is the pouring lead. A piece of lead is melted over a flame over fire and is then immediately poured out into a plate of water. The shape that the lead forms while it hardens is thought to determine the fate of the person who poured it. Single women use this opportunity to deduce the face or initials of the person they are destined to marry. It is

also possible to find an answer to a previously asked question in the shape of the lead.

### Floating walnuts

A poetic custom, which entralls both children

and adults, involves making small boats out of walnut shells. Several walnuts are opened and their empty half-shells are filled with a small candle - [pg 6](#)



After dark, when the first star emerges in the night sky, the family sits down to dinner together.

Traditionally, Czechs enjoy a Christmas Eve dinner of fish soup and fried carp with potato salad. It is bad luck to get up from the table before everyone is finished. It is also considered unlucky to set the table for an odd number of guests.

### Christmas carp

In the time leading up to Christmas, bulky tanks full of

upcoming year. Another similar tradition says that putting a fish scale in one's wallet achieves the same result. Sometimes, the carp is given a reprieve and is returned to the pond by children on Christmas Eve Day.

**Ježíšek** After Christmas Eve dinner, the moment all Czech children have been looking forward to the entire year arrives. The family gathers around the Christmas tree, under which is a collection of wrapped

Czechs. Czech children take advantage of both traditions as presents are given by both

## Czech Christmas

Ježíšek or St. Nicholas.

### Christmas Eve magic

From time immemorial, Christmas Eve has been a time when the line between the

## My 50-Year Career Comes Full Circle

by Tomas Schramek

At the end of September I returned from my native Bratislava, Slovakia, where I participated in two gala performances celebrating the 60th anniversary of SLUK (Slovak Folk Art Ensemble), a company where I began my professional career almost 50 years ago. The company was then a 180-member ensemble made up of 60 dancers, a choir of 50, a full orchestra and support staff. The company was and still is a State-run professional ensemble stylizing and performing on a high level a very diverse Slovak folklore.

SLUK is substantially smaller these days and still travels extensively around the world. From inception in 1949, the company was housed in a 19th century castle in Rusovce, just outside of Bratislava. In the 1980s, they had a new building built for them beside the castle. The plan was to renovate the castle for use by the President and the Government. Many problems have stalled the renovations and they are still renovating it.

### Love him or hate him

He sure hits the nail on the head with this! Bill Gates recently gave a speech at a High School about 11 things they did not and will not learn in school. He talks about how feel-good; politically correct teachings created a generation of kids with no concept of reality and how this concept set them up for failure in the real world.

**Rule 1:** Life is not fair - get used to it!

**Rule 2:** The world won't care about your self-esteem. The world will expect you to accomplish something BEFORE you feel good about yourself.

**Rule 3:** You will NOT make \$60,000 a year right out of high school. You won't be a vice-president with a car phone until you earn both.

**Rule 4:** If you think your teacher is tough, wait till you get a boss

**Rule 5:** Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your Grandparents had a different word for burger flipping: they called it opportunity.

**Rule 6:** If you mess up, it's not your parents' fault, so don't whine about your mistakes, learn from them.

**Rule 7:** Before you were born, your parents weren't as boring as they are now. They got that way from paying your bills, cleaning your clothes and listening to you talk about how cool you thought you were. So, before you save the rain forest from the parasites of your parent's generation, try delousing the closet in your own room.

**Rule 8:** Your school may have done away with winners and losers, but life HAS NOT. In some schools, they have abolished failing grades and they'll give you as MANY TIMES as you want to get the right answer. This doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to ANYTHING in real life.

**Rule 9:** Life is not divided into semesters. You don't get summers off and very few employers are interested in helping you FIND YOURSELF. Do that on your own time.

**Rule 10:** Television is NOT real life. In real life people actually have to leave the coffee shop and go to jobs.

**Rule 11:** Be nice to nerds. Chances are you'll end up working for one. If you agree, pass it on.

If you can read this - Thank a teacher!

If you're reading this in English - Thank a Veteran!

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Because I was underage (just 15 years old) at the time, my parents signed my first contract on November 20, 1959. I danced with this company until 1968 when I emigrated to Canada to join The National Ballet.

Over the years there were many anniversaries, celebrations and get together at SLUK but I was never able to attend. It had been my dream to dance once again in Bratislava but it never materialized. I was absolutely ecstatic when SLUK invited me to be honoured and to celebrate this milestone with them. Then my ecstasy changed to uncertainty when I learned that they actually wanted me to perform!

Over the years, they had heard of my success with the National Ballet of Canada and were always proud of me - their native son - making it in the world. I would, however, have liked to show myself off in my prime. I was not sure what they were expecting to see from me now, a 65 year old dancer.

I have visited my hometown many times over the almost 42

years I have been living in Canada. Less often, however, since my parents passed in 1989 and 1991. On my visits, I always dropped in on the dancers at SLUK, the ballet dancers at the National Theatre and the Academy where I received my Bachelor of Fine Arts just before coming to Canada. I gave some classes and it was always very nice to hear they had been following my career.

The current General Manager of SLUK, Peter Antalík, now almost 50 years old, claimed that he was present at my audition in 1959! I wondered how that could be. As it turns out, the woman who auditioned me was pregnant with him at the time. She and her husband (and a twin brother) were long time dancers, colleagues and friends of mine. I was also very happy to spend time with Juraj Kubanka, former Artistic Director of SLUK and a great choreographer. He is now 82 years old and still working.



The 60th anniversary of SLUK (Slovak Folk Art Ensemble)

On previous visits back home, I had acted as a tour guide for my family but this visit was very different; it was for me and me alone. I was picked up at airport, driven around, looked after and pampered in a way that made me feel special. There were TV, radio and newspaper interviews.

I was taken to concerts, performances and receptions. Fortunately, I still had time for my two cousins, the only family I have left there, visit of the grave of my parents and grand parents and to take a few walks through memory lane.

On my second day there, I was in the studio working to find out if I was able, without embarrassing myself, to do a one-minute solo from a dance

that I had performed in over 40 years ago but in a much different role. With the help of a massage therapist and Advil, it was going to be all right.

The Saturday night gala was attended by the President of the Republic and other dignitaries as well as alumni, many of whom I had not seen for 42 years. The second performance on Sunday was televised. Thankfully, both performances went very well.

The whole experience was priceless! It brought so many memories from my youth. The lasting memory of this trip for me is the experience of being back in the studio with SLUK dancers. It sort of closed a circle in my 50-year career as a professional dancer. Who could ask for more.



### A happy and joyous ...

⇒ from pg 5

this is best done with the help of dripping wax. Once the candle has been lit, the little boat is put into a large bowl or sink full of water. The journey the walnut takes is said to foretell the future of its owner. If the candle burns for a long time, its owner can expect a long and happy life. If the walnut boat in question stays close to the edge of the bowl, then its owner will stay at home. **Which way is the shoe pointing?**

On Christmas Eve Day, an unmarried woman can foretell her future and find out whether she can expect to be married in the next year by throwing a shoe over her shoulder. If the shoe lands with the heel pointing

to the door, she will remain at home. If on the other hand, the toe of the shoe is pointing to the door, indicating that she will be leaving her parents' home, she can expect to be married.

#### Caroling

The tradition of caroling has been practiced in the Czech lands since the Middle Ages and even up until recently has been a popular custom in the countryside. Carolers sing carols as they walk around a building. For their good wishes they receive something in return from those they are caroling. The main time to go out caroling is between Christmas Eve and the feast of the Three Kings (i.e. December 24 to January 6). The tradition of Christmas caroling is associated with the feast of St. Stephen on December 24. The carol of St.



Juraj Kubanka with Tomas Schramek

Stephen goes "What are you carrying in the jug? I am carrying, carrying a carol, I fell here on the ice, I also know children, who don't go out caroling".

#### New Year

It is often said that "how you spend New Year is how you'll spend the rest of the year". For that reason it is advisable to avoid all kinds of arguments as well as unpleasant work on New Year's Day. For lunch, Czechs will often eat lentils or soup with small peas. According to tradition, by eating these foods, a person can ensure a good financial situation for the entire year. On the other hand, it is not recommended to serve rabbit or chicken on New Year's Day, so as to be sure that one's good luck doesn't hop or fly away. *Source czech.cz*



**When did it start?**

I was 12 years old when I started to learn how to do the Bobbin Lace. That time I was attending Elementary school (Junior high). That school was for children with physical disabilities. There was a very good teacher I still remember her name, Veronika. She was very patient and teaching us the Bobbin Lace techniques. My mom sew for me a pillow, shaped of cylinder from fabric, it was stuffed with sawdust. It was stuff very hard and needed to be very firm. My father made for me a stand for this cylinder shaped pillow. It was easier to work on it.

The most basic Bobbin lace starts with 6 pairs of bobbins. The bobbins are made from wood and the tread is wound on the neck of the bobbin. The next I needed a pricking card (my mom helped me to prepare it). Pricking card was attached to the pillow. We always work by pairs. One pair is working pair, working back and forward, 2x twist, whole stitch and half stitch.

In 1993 I came to Canada I was 20 years old and I did not think about making Bobbin lace. I needed to think how to learn English. My mom made a bobbin lace pillow for me and she said that I can not forget what I already learned. The bobbins and the book how to make a Bobbin lace written by my teacher Veronika we got sent from Slovakia. That led me to do a Bobbin lace in Canada. It is my hobby it takes lots of time and patience. A few years ago my brother Robert asked me to do a favour for him. He wished for a lace in three color represented Slovakia white, blue and red. It was almost the end of November and I have had only three weeks before Christmas to make it. It was very special Bobbin lace and my brother still have it hanging and decorating his room.

**The Bobbin Lace**

The Bobbin Lace was an old history. In my old country in former Czechoslovakia, only older women knew how to do the bobbin lace. Now many young people are learning how to do the traditional bobbin lace.

Bobbins are made from wood or plastic. For beginning we need 24 bobbins and a pillow, which has shape of cylinder. The pillow is stuffed with sawdust and it has to be very hard because we are using many pins to hold the lace. Before we start to learn how to do the bobbin lace we have to learn how to wind a thread on the bobbins because it is very

important if we are right or left handed. Then we have to learn how to do a proper magic knot. The magic knot is very important because it protects the thread from unwinding from the bobbin. When we know how to prepare the thread on the bobbins we can start to learn four basic weaves. We have to memorize them because we have to know when, which of the weave we have to use in the lace. Every weave has different twist. The bobbins are working in pairs. Usually we are using thin thread. We can play with colors. We have lots of different patterns. Wider patterns need more bobbins.

**My name is Gabi ...**

I came to Canada 16 years ago from Slovakia. When we came to Canada, I didn't know how to speak English, and understanding people was very difficult for me. My biggest worries were that I would not understand the instructor and my classmates. Secondly I was concerned about going to school because I have cerebral palsy. Finally, I made my decision, and I enrolled in two months English as a

second language program. After two months, I felt sad that it was over. I wanted to improve my English some more, so I enrolled in the English Intensive Training program, at the former Alberta Vocational College for a whole year. It helped me to improve my English even more. Once I started to communicate with people I was accepted in the Community Enrichment Program. It was a program for people with disabilities. They taught us how to live independently in the community. I gained lots of knowledge.

In 1998 I found volunteer work at YWCA in their office. I liked this type of work, and I knew that I wanted to do this type of work in the future. I found out, that I needed to have a high school diploma, as well as an Office Administration Certificate to work in the office. I started looking for a school where I would feel comfortable and where my physical disability

would be accepted. Due to my cerebral palsy, my hands shake when using fine motor control, and my handwriting is slow and difficult.

I found NorQuest College. I made an appointment with the coordinator for Learning Support Services, and we talked about my future goals. I had to write the English assessment test to see what level of English I was at. I was at a grade four English.

In September 1999, I started my classes at NoQuest College, in the Adult Basic Education Program. I received invaluable help from the Learning Support Services' instructors and tutors. They helped me with my studying a lot. As I moved into higher grades of English,

I finish this program. I graduated in 2006. Besides my schoolwork I was a student Ambassador of NorQuest College. I represented the NorQuest College at many functions as well I did public speaking. After my graduation I got a job at Child Development Day Homes of Alberta as an Office Administration Assistant. I am working part-time.

**Mother Darina**

G a b i k a was born 36 years ago in Bratislava, Slovakia. She was expected in August, but decided to come to the world suddenly, at the end of June. She was tiny like a doll, and weighed only 4.2 lbs. The doctor said that everything was fine. She did not have to be in an incubator,

We started going to therapy. Of course I had to take my son Robert everywhere. He was four at the time and was very patient during all these doctor visits. They weren't happy with us in therapy because Gabika always cried and did not cooperate. So I was to exercise with her at home because she would not walk or talk anyway because

she had children's polio. On top of it all she would have bad teeth. That was too much for me to take. I did not want to accept the idea of giving up. I told myself that I would not let up. We had no car. Often I could not get into a bus with a baby carriage. So I carried Gabika in my arms or have her sit on my left hip while I held Robert with my right hand. By then Gabika was 3. We were seeing a speech therapist who taught us to control the movements of the tongue in the mouth. She had to lick herself in front of the mirror. He gave us a special gadget where I inserted Gabinka's tongue and we practiced moving the tongue in the mouth. I also taught her to chew gum to learn to swallow saliva. This was every single day. But I also had to pay attention to Robert. He did not qualify for a daycare spot because I was on maternity leave. Gabika was making progress. In a few months she started saying words. We practiced using games and used children's playground equipment outside when the weather was nice. On other days we were at home. I was afraid that one day Robert would resent me for devoting most of my time only to Gabika. The children's neurologist recommended medication for Gabika, but it was expensive. I was told that other children, not children of people whose family had immigrated to Canada, needed this medication. My parents had lived in Canada since 1968. So my child had no right to medication which would help. I was desperate, helpless and very hurt. I told myself that I would not let it be. My husband Karol and I managed to get medication from Switzerland, and later from Austria. We also had a contact to a physician treating athletes, who administered the needles to Gabika. Karol's mama made a fuss at the office of the Health ministry where she met an acquaintance. So we were able to get more needles on a prescription in the pharmacy. At the time it cost one crown. Gabika continued to make progress. When she was four she was accepted at the nursery school at my request and at my responsibility. She was accepted even though she still could not get up and down the stairs on her own. She needed help with eating and with other ↪ pg 8



*We call her "our Gabika". I don't mind telling you that I am very proud of her accomplishments. As we all know, or perhaps we don't know, bobbin lace making is very difficult. Yet, Gabinka really showed what she can do - she exhibited her work at the "Czech and Slovak Arts and Crafts" exhibition and received well deserved praise from everyone. How did it all begin?*

*Radka Mayer, Edmonton*

## CzechTourism Canada – the 10<sup>th</sup> Year Celebration of Successful Operation

The Thursday, November 26, has been a very special day for the official Czech Tourist Board in Canada – the reason – the CzechTourism Canada hosted

such as Austria, Germany, or UK. As one of the posts communist's countries, the Czech Republic was not well known among Canadians. We could not start

is also focusing on Meeting and Incentive Travel we have around 300 contacts interested in the Czech Republic as a unique destination for meetings, incentive programs, conferences and congresses. Also I would like to mention wonderful connection with Canadian media – during the decade we were able to establish communication with 400 important journalists which is a great success. I think that the attendance - over 100 participants - CzechTourism Canada trade partners who came to our Appreciation Night on November 26 showed that we have a great and ongoing support not only from our partners in Canada, but also from our Czech partners interested in the Canadian market.

### How many offices around the world CzechTourism has?

The Czech Republic is represented abroad by 26 CzechTourism offices (Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, China, Finland, France, Italy, Israel, Japan, Canada, Korea, Hungary, Mexico, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Russia, Greece, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the USA and the UK) while further offices (in Frankfurt, Germany and Yekaterinburg, Russia) are being planned. At present, 80% of tourists who come to the Czech Republic are from countries where CzechTourism has an office.

### What are your future plans?

In 2010 we are planning to introduce new and exciting tourism products on the Canadian market. We would like to concentrate on promoting



Mirjana Sebek-Heroldová and Jitka Klimová

an Appreciation Night - a very special event while celebrating the 10 years of successful operation in Canada. The event was held to express special thanks and gratitude to all the CzechTourism Canada trade partners from leisure and meeting tourism industry – tour operators, whole salers, travel agents, meeting planner and the entire media partners for their ongoing support in the extraordinary decade from 1999 to 2009.

We have had the opportunity to speak with Mirjana Sebek – Heroldova, Director CzechTourism Canada and also the Chair, European Travel Commission Canada Operations Group about her mission and the results of the past decade.

### What was the impulse to establish the official Czech Republic Tourist Board in Canada?

In 1999 the late Mr. William Baxter, born in former Czechoslovakia founder of Baxter Publishing in Canada and the big admirer of the Czech Republic came with a brilliant idea that the National Carrier CSA Czech Airlines and CzechTourism should partner together in one mission – to promote the Czech Republic as an ideal tourist destination which at that time was waiting to be discovered by Canadians.

### What do you consider to be the biggest challenge during the decade?

At the beginning we quickly realized that we have a big disadvantage in comperacy with the other European countries

promoting the destination as a great place for vacation or business adventures right after the opening of CzechTourism in Canada while they have been an huge luck of knowledge by Canadians about the Czech Republic.

We had to take it a step lower – we had to educate the Canadian public first about the stunningly different Destination in the Heard of Europe which has so much to offer to every generation, to every taste and desire. When people finely stop calling the Czech Republic - Czechoslovakia and they stop asking us if we are part of former Yugoslavia than we knew we did something right and we are ready to start the second phase of the promotion and marketing.

### How many agencies in Canada are you working with?



Throughout the decade we have established great relationship with Canadian travel industry. In our databases we have 70 tour operators, 40 wholesalers and 110 travel agencies who are offering the Czech Republic as a great leisure destination in their packages and to their clients. As CzechTourism

the Czech Republic as a unique wedding destination, paradise for golfers – with over 70 different golf courses ready to be played. Combination between Golf and a relaxing time will be offered to Canadians in the numerous Czech SPA and Wellness Resorts.

While we have been promoting the Czech Republic for



this extraordinary decade we have also helped to promote Canada as a great tourist destination, in the Czech Republic Therefore – a free tourism trade between Canada and the Czech Republic, traveling without no boundaries and no visa situation for Czech Travellers to Canada – this is also a huge point on my list to support in the next year.

But, our biggest goal is to establish cooperation with any Canadian Airline interested to offer direct flights between Canada and the Czech Republic. As I believe very strongly that a direct flight is the most important to help increase the numbers of travellers to individual destinations I'm also certain that THE CZECH REPUBLIC - A STUNNINGLY DIFFERENT DESTINATION deserves a direct flight from CANADA.

In conclusion – it has been an extraordinary decade for the CzechTourism on the

Canadian market. We are very pleased with the results and we can definitely say "Today, that Canadians adore visiting Prague and the Czech Republic where this STUNNINGLY DIFFERENT DESTINATION offers opportunity for Meeting & Incentive Tourism and incredible vacations in the 14 magnificent Czech Republic regions."

With this note I would like to invite all the readers of Novy Domov to visit and explore Prague and the Czech Republic regions, perhaps also to spend a great holiday season in THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE STUNNINGLY DIFFERENT DESTINATION – which can offer unique experience for everyone.

Wishing you all the best 2009 Holiday Season – looking forward to see you in the Czech Republic.

Questions asked and photo by Věra Kohoutová

### Gabriela Pinter ...

→ from pg 7

activities. Once she fell and had large bruises on her face. The teacher was afraid that I would sue her. However I told her that Gabika could fall just as easing on my watch. I was grateful, Gabika was hard working, repeated things and learned from other children. Even though she still could not talk, they let her perform during the St. Nicholas Christmas pageant, with her doll in her arms. She was not being marginalized.

She started school when she was seven. It was a school for physically handicapped children and youth. I managed to get a job there myself so we went together. There were only six children in the class, and each had a special seat and various aids. Because Gabika was partially paralysed on her right side, she had to learn to write with her left hand. The teaching curriculum even included special therapy, but Gabika would qualify for that only if she were placed in the Institute for physically handicapped youth for a week's stay. We paid for a week, but Gabika came home every day. At the Institute she learned how to make bobbin lace.

After she completed elementary school we were told that due to her lack of motor skills and handicapped motor functioning, Gabika couldn't be schooled and had to stay at home. This was another blow. I used my contacts to get her accepted at a vocational school of textile manufacturing, specialization sales clerk. At the school she had helpful schoolmates who were taking notes through carbon paper. I then transcribed those to make them more legible, to enable her to learn. But there were also classmates who made fun of her and put her down. She successfully completed the school but did not get a job. By now the velvet revolution had taken place. In 1993 we all moved to Canada and started learning English.

Gabika will write about that herself. She is a determined young woman who, in spite of all odds, accomplished much and never gave up.

Our son Robert never reproached us for giving Gabika more of our time than to him. He, too, was helping her and protecting her whenever necessary. He learned to be patient and just, and this is clear as he is raising his own daughter, our granddaughter Sydney.

Call 416.439 9557 Publish your Greetings of New Year, send till Dec. 31, 2009