

## The Shopkeeper`s Tale

### NAYAB HAIDERS

*Nayab and his wife Bushra were both born in Pakistan, though they met in Saudi Arabia where Nayab worked as an accountant for two years after qualifying at Newcastle Upon Tyne. Due to the instability of the Middle East he decided to come back to Britain, and they lived briefly in London before moving to Milton Keynes. Nayab found a good job with a locally based firm of accountants. He also helped Bushra run the corner shop on the estate where they live.*

In 1980 we were living in London, In Islington. The housing wasn`t very good. You couldn`t park your car outside your house, you had to have a resident`s permit. There was no open space at all and it was so expensive to live. Going to work was terrible, getting squashed into the tube, and the transport costs of getting to work were very high. After four months we couldn`t take it any longer. We wanted to move out of London but we didn`t want to go too far.

### Ah That Is The Place to Go

We`d heard about Milton Keynes in the national newspapers and T.V. commercials and when I saw the advert for the job here I thought: "Ah, that is the place to go." I would say that Milton Keynes was much better than we expected. We moved into Conniburrow and couldn`t believe it was a council house because it was such good quality. We were used to seeing council houses in London that are dilapidated and run-down. We were quite excited about it all.

I`m a chartered accountant with Peat, Marwick, Mitchell Company. The work involves audits, advising on tax, VAT and income tax returns. The opportunity for business came along when MKDC were offering shops on the different estates and we thought it would be a very good idea to get one because my wife could run it. She was looking for work anyway and that would be an ideal job for her. There were a number of different shop premises that MKDC had built and we contacted them about taking this shop in Bradwell Common. It was brand new. We negotiated the rent and the lease terms and out of a few candidates they selected us to run the place. I think they were impressed by the opening hours we were proposing. But neither of us had any retailing experience, so I`d be interested to know why the Corporation selected us. The hours we open are completely up to us. It is specified that this is a general store i.e. groceries, meats, tobacco and confectionary. We try to provide everything the local community needs, which includes the traditional things and on top of that we do video films, collection of pools, we are an agency for a dry-cleaning company, the same with shoe repairs. On an estate like this the corner shop plays a central role. We know everyone and are quite responsive to people`s needs. We`ll definitely look into any suggestions and see if we can provide the

service, within the economic restraints, obviously. People don't rely on this particular shop, it's more for odds and ends because we are so close to the Shopping Building. Because of better choice, competitive prices and all that people do their main shopping there.

Business is what we expected, nothing more than that, really. As an independent retailer you cannot compete with the national multiples. If we could beat the prices, yes we could do very well but there's no way we can. There's plenty of demand for the goods we sell and I wish we could be more competitive, we try our best. The business is financially viable as long as we run it ourselves but if we started employing people it probably wouldn't be economically worthwhile. We've never been broken in to but the mesh is there in front of the windows as we are being cautious. The shop has large windows and they are very tempting. If the windows were smaller we wouldn't have bothered with the mesh. The whole of the shop-front is made of glass. I find it a very surprising design for a purpose-built shop.

I would like to live for the rest of my life in Milton Keynes. It is such a nice place. It's modern and all the amenities are here. You see all sorts of people here too. What we do miss here are places to go for an evening out. If you want to go to the theatre you have to go to Northampton or Luton. We go out quite a lot but mostly we invite friends to the house or visit them.

### **A Very Friendly Place**

Milton Keynes is a very friendly place but the only problem here is the constant movement of population. Especially being in the shop we notice. People move in and out, you never see people settle in. That's a characteristic of Milton Keynes. I think people move about within the city usually from a rented house into one which they are buying. But from what we hear thirty to forty per cent move right away from the city. You see some faces every day and you get to know them, you chat and you pick up the local news, who's doing what. We have to be very careful to keep things to ourselves – we don't want to offend anybody. But because of this influx and outflux of people you don't get the village atmosphere.

Having qualified in England it would be difficult to fit into accountancy and tax practice back home. Legally there is no difference but in practice things are very different. I could have studied and qualified in Pakistan but I wanted to come to England because basically English qualifications are considered to be the best in the world. I'd like to go back and see the parents sometimes, and I miss my parents but really there are other considerations that come first. If I make my future come first, then homesickness must come second. There's a big distance between us but we write or telephone. But they can't do a lot to help us. If they were nearby they could look after the children sometimes. I wish we had our family or relations or even good friends who are sincere near us, people who could help us if we needed it.

My ambition is to have a very big business or possibly a factory of my own where I would be looking after the financial side and using my accounting and tax

experience. I work for a very big company anyway and I'd rather work with my own company.

We are Moslems, but I wouldn't call myself a practicing Moslem. However, we wouldn't do the things that are prohibited by Islam. We wouldn't drink alcohol or eat bacon, pork or ham. But having said that, we try to mix with the local community as much as we can – dress-wise and in our day to day living. We're sociable, I'll go out to the pub and drink orange juice. We are supposed to pray five times a day but we find that with my wife looking after the business, my job, and the children we find no time. We would like to pray and when we do we feel really satisfied. If we pray once a month I feel we've achieved something. There is no mosque in Milton Keynes or anywhere like that where we can go.

Our children are growing up and we would like them to grow up into good Moslems. But as we are not practicing Moslems they will never know what it is to be a good Moslem, or what the principals of Islam are. If there was somewhere you could send children to learn the way of life then we would want them to go. Or if there was, say, a teacher at their school who had special duties who would teach them what Islam is. It will be very hard for them to ever learn. It will never come into their lives at school and at home they don't really see anything about being a Moslem.