

The THINK Club[©]

A forum to encourage
independent thinking

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Dream On

Spice of Life



**Book Review: Lost and Broken
I Am Glad My Mom Died**



www.thethinkclub.com



Editorial

Dream On

by 'Musafir'



I am a dreamer. It won't be an exaggeration to say that I am a product of my dreams. I didn't dream to achieve anything higher than what I already have accomplished in life. All I wanted was a good education and security in life. To a degree I have obtained that. Some people dream of greater things in life. All men who have achieved great things have been great dreamers. I also read somewhere that some great people found their achievements in real dream.

"The theory of relativity was given to Albert Einstein ($E=MC^2$), Elias Howe received knowledge about the sewing

machine, Robert Louis Stevenson received ideas for the book "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", Thomas Edison received the invention of the light bulb, Dr. Vivien Thomas got the cure for blue baby syndrome, and Christopher Columbus received direction to discover America, all in a dream!"

I must also add that all men who have achieved great things are not just dreamers, they are a doer also. The dream I am talking about relates to ambition, aspiration hope and desire not the dream that comes to us in our sleep only.

After my mother died when I was six months old, my custody was given to my uncle and aunt who took me on the farm in a village. They loved me and gave me a very happy childhood. I was so happy that there was no need to dream of anything.

My father took me to his home in a big city when I was five years old. Without going into much detail, I was miserable and led a fearful adolescent life in his custody. I could have become demented, misfit and distraught. What saved me was my hope and dream. I always dreamed that I'll be successful, will have a nice job, and a great family and will live in another world away from bleak and dismay. Though there are always ups and downs in life, nevertheless I got what I wanted, nothing more and nothing less.

I knew at an early age I wanted to move to the USA one day and work for a large company like General Motors. It came true along with sundry other things that I dreamt about. Though I studied engineering for earning a livelihood, I wanted to be a writer. Now after my retirement, I run an online magazine and have four published books to my credit. They are all results of my dreams.

Dreams in the context of this article can be synonymous with ambition. Usually, ambition is looked down upon as something bad. We always hear people complain that such and such person is ambitious. In fact, ambition is a strong

desire to achieve whatever goals we set for ourself. It's the spark inside us that compels us to keep putting effort into whatever we do.

Having achieved the dream is the best feeling in the world. Here are some expressions of joy of real people that I have extracted from Twitter (now X) posts:

"After many long years in school, my Master's diploma came. I am so happy and proud of myself. (Lisa Mae)"

"I'm holding my new album CD for the first time. I wrote this album while going through depression and I couldn't be happier to still be alive and experience my dream come true (Issa Rae)."

I watched the Queen of England, pass by in her car. It was a total dream come true (Tina Snow)."

"When I grow up, I want to be a more successful version of me. (Rhonda)"

"One day, I'm gonna sing the national anthem at a super bowl. Onnnee dayyy... (Demi Lovato)"

"Can't wait till play in the finals (Diamond DeShields.)"

And remember: "We Are Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On" (William Shakespeare: Tempest)

Commentary

Surviving Confinement

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'



I am confined in my house due to a serious car accident. Being an active and free-spirited person, it's harsh and annoying to say the least. I wonder how the great leaders like Nelson Mandela and Jawahar Lal Nehru spent their time in prison. Nehru, a freedom fighter and the first prime minister of India spent nearly a decade behind bars on various charges, often as a result of his involvement with the civil disobedience campaigns of political ally Mahatma Gandhi, who also spent years in prison. Nelson Mandela was sent to the notorious Robben Island penitentiary, where his 27 years behind bars left him the most

recognizable face of opposition to apartheid and a rallying figure in the international campaign to isolate Pretoria's white minority government.

Nehru spent his time in jail constructively by writing his famous book, "Discovery of India". The Discovery of India has acquired the status of a classic since it was first published in 1946.

Mandela drafted his memoirs while jailed in the notorious maximum-security prison of Robben Island, where, from 1964, he spent 18 of the 27 years he was jailed by the Nationalist Party for his part in fighting for racial equality and the eradication of apartheid. Besides that, there were musical activities in the prison that brought relief to the daily hard labor.

I can't compare myself to great men like Mandela and Nehru but I try to learn from their lives. I find the following very useful to keep my mind on track and not be anxious and depressed:

Reading and writing: Both reading and writing are great cure to loneliness. I write poems (in Hindi and Urdu) to express

myself. I have also joined online poetry clubs where I publish my poems and interact with other poets. I also try to write at least one article every week for TheThinkClub magazine.

I keep moving by walking and doing light exercises every day. Reaching out to others is a great cure for boredom. I make sure to keep in touch with my loved ones and like

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minded friends. I also stick to routine like reading online newspapers, preparing breakfast and lunch and watching a few select TV programs daily.

After all that I feel occupied and connected, the two essential ingredients to keep loneliness away. Maybe you have some other ideas. If you do, feel free to share with us.

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HUMOR

Chatting Means Never Having to Say Goodbye

Musafir

One thing good about hospitalization is that you don't have to indulge in critical work, critical reading or critical thinking. During the two-week stay as a paying guest of doctors and nurses, I completely immersed myself in the wacky world of social media. I usually use social media for TheThinkClub related activities only. For the first time, I was truly exposed to the absurd and bizarre world of insanity. Overall, it was a good diversion away from solemnity and sublimity.

For example, I came to know from chats on WhatsApp that a brawl is brewing in India over a dog biting a cow. We all know that cows are holy to the Hindus, but the dog was suspected to be a Muslim. There are arguments going on to determine the religion of that dog.

An animal rights advocate posted, "We can't assign religion to dogs. Dogs have always been secular."

"No sir, this dog belonged to a Kashmiri Muslim. Therefore, the dog definitely is a Muslim and it should be put to death," countered a Hindu zealot.

The Muslims are in arms ready to retaliate, should the Hindu mobs kill the Muslim dog.

I also found that people take selfies for no obvious reasons. We're deep in the thick of the selfie movement, and you now need no reason to post one on social media. Out for dinner? Take a selfie. Bought a new dress? Share it in a selfie. Cat sleeping on your shoulder? Selfie! It doesn't matter what you're doing. You can almost always take a selfie and post it to annoy folks who just happen to mind their own business.

Ever since Facebook introduced the Like button, almost every other major social networking site and app has tried to implement the same idea into its own platform. On Twitter (now X), it's the favorite button. On Tumblr and Instagram, it's the heart button. People determine the worth of their life by the number of Likes they receive.

I also spent a lot of time on Twitter (now X). I find amusing that someone says something about someone and Twitter immediately gets inflamed with angry responses.

Someone called @chrisbrown wrote: "HAPPY VALENTINES DAY to all the beautiful women



around the world. Know that you are loved and appreciated!! God bless.”

Someone called [@thelindsayellis](#) replied, “I bet you say that to all your victims.”

@ chrisbrown: “You don’t say that to your own father”

@thelindsay: “You ain’t my father”

@ chrisbrown: “Ask your mother. I am ready to take a DNA test.”

The most interesting thing that I found was a list of weird holidays that are only celebrated on social media. Here is a list. If you are a lonely useless guy, sending these

greetings will certainly give a meaning to your life and make you immensely popular (they are real).

January 15 is #NationalHatDay. Flood the social media with your selfie in different kinds of hats.

January 21: #NationalHuggingDay. Post your pictures hugging some beautiful ladies. They can be had for a fee.

February 7: #SendACardToAFriendDay. Download a funny card (offensive cards are more attention getting) from Internet and send to all your acquaintances on social media.

March 18: #AwkwardMomentsDay. Post a selfie wearing unzipped pants or pictures of wardrobe-malfunction of your favorite celebrities.

April 20: #NationalLookAlikeDay. Dress like Pinocchio with extended nose.

May 24: #NationalScavengerHuntDay. Send your friends on social media on a digital scavenger hunt, leaving clues over your social networks then ask them to claim prizes from Rev. Jessie Jackson.

June 4: #LeaveTheOfficeEarlyDay. This shouldn’t be difficult to do.

August 12: #MiddleChildDay. If you don’t have a middle child, hire one for the day and take a selfie.

August 27: #JustBecauseDay. Just because you are such an idiot, spread the news and feel good.

October 25: #GreasyFoodsDay. Dip your face in a bowl of Indian curry from the Taj Mahal restaurant and post that on the Internet (every city on earth has an ugly Taj Mahal restaurant).

November 23: #WorldKindnessDay. Hug a hobo and take selfie. He may charge you a couple of dollars for that, but that’s good for revealing your soft side.

December 8: #PretendToBeATimeTravelerDay. Dress like a zombie and take a selfie in front of a Tesla, if they allow you to do so.

Boy, Am I already addicted? More when we meet again. Ttfn (Ta ta for now) and remember, chatting means “Never having to say Goodbye.”

Thinking of Hell

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'



I was given the concept of hell and heaven in my early childhood. According to Hindu Code of Conduct, one should practice non-

violence, speak truth, shouldn't steal, practice fidelity, be forgiving, be

compassionate, maintain honesty, eat and drink in moderation, and uphold the ethic of purity in mind, body and speech. Those who follow those conducts would go to heaven and others will go to hell.

That was a tall order. I knew from an early age that I was destined to go to hell as I didn't follow all the dictums all the time. I used to live in fear knowing the tortures subjected to people living in hell. The sinners in hell are made to run around in unbearable heat and dropped down exhausted in a boiling pot. They are stung with nails and are tortured with hunger and thirst. Their body is constantly pricked and pierced by needles. They are bitten by serpents, thrashed on genital space with hot rods, flogged and pierced with sharp objects. They are also thrown in polluted well with excreta, urine, blood, phlegm where they are subjected to biting by poisonous insects and animals. Sinners are made to drink hot liquid molten lava; are roasted in inverted positions with hands and legs tied over fire. There are more but this should be enough to put fear in the bravest of hearts.

The solace is that there is not a single holy book in Hinduism. Many of the scriptures even contradict each other. According to the Vedas, a collection of Hindu texts, all beings are souls and thus eternal in nature. One's body temporarily houses the soul. After one die, the soul is reincarnated, taking birth in another physical body or form. Soul passes

from one life to the next. The ultimate goal of soul is to break the cycle of rebirths and become one with God also called salvation.

In the Vedas, and in particular, in the Rig Veda the concepts of heaven and hell are mostly abstract than physical. They are more spiritual states of being than actual tangible worlds. In Rig Veda only one hell is mentioned. It is a dark place but no mention of torture or suffering is there. This is in contrast to the common Hindu view that is more influenced by the subsets of the Vedas (Known as Puranas). Moreover, everything that I mentioned so far were written by human beings in ancient times. God himself didn't write those words. I had a teacher in middle school, Mr. Choubé. I considered him quite knowledgeable about religion. He told me that there were no heaven or hell. We get the fruits of our karma right here on earth.

Bhagwat Gita, probably, the most revered book in Hinduism doesn't describe types of tortures given in hell. All it says that heaven and hell are temporary abode of souls. However, in the Gita, Krishna says, "You have a right to perform all of your duties and responsibilities but are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Do what you are entitled to but do not expect anything in return for your acts. It may be because of fear but I tend to believe in this. Who, after all, wants to go to hell? Not me!



Lost and Broken: My Journey Back from Chronic Pain and Crippling Anxiety

Author: Adam Smith

Publisher: Simon and Schuster, 2023 (256 pages)

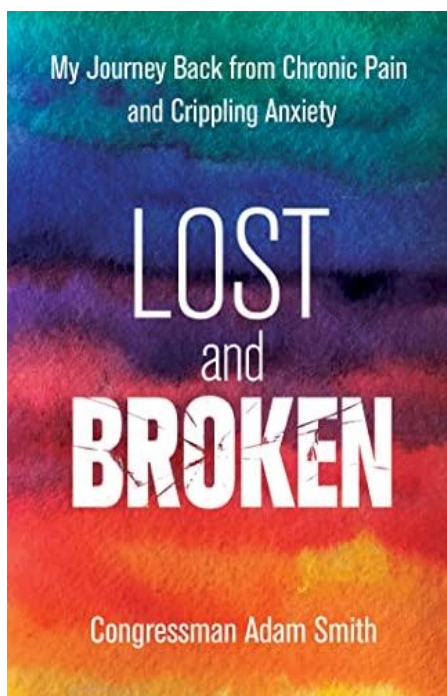
Adam Smith's book, "Lost and Broken" is an inspirational book. I could relate to his experiences as I went through same health issues both physical and mental and like the author, I also dealt with them and overcame them.

Congressman Adam Smith very candidly reveals how the healthcare system, therapy, and pharmaceuticals can dictate the kind of care we receive or do not receive. The author describes his agony and victory in an interesting way with humor and easy-to-understand information.

Adam Smith offers a candid memoir about his years-long struggle with anxiety and chronic pain and the winding path to find the right diagnosis and treatment.

Dealing with chronic pain and not getting all the answers is exhausting, so I was interested to read this book and to see how Congressman Adam Smith navigates his trials and tribulations through the healthcare

system, even with having access to good doctors and specialists.



I liked how he mentioned that it wasn't the amount of stress in a person's life that exacerbates anxiety but how we process it.

The author discussed muscle activation therapy, which I had never heard of. I found it quite interesting and will do more research on this to find out how it helps with chronic pain. The author provides links and resources.

Lost and Broken is an insightful book that details how difficult it can be to get answers about our health. I would recommend this book for anyone dealing with anxiety or chronic pain, or just a good memoir to read, as the author has a nice, engaging writing style.

I Am Glad My Mom Died

Author: Jennette McCurdy

Publisher: Simon and Schuster 2022
(320 pages)

In her book, "I Am Glad My Mom Died" Jennette McCurdy, a former iCarly star reflects on her difficult childhood.

The book is an account of her relationship with her demanding, controlling and abusive mother, Debra who wanted Jennette to become an actor and diva. Born in Los Angeles, the author, along with three older brothers, grew up in a home controlled by her mother. When Jennette was 3, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Debra died when Jennette was 21 years old.

McCurdy candidly reconstructs those in-between years, showing how "my mom emotionally, mentally, and physically abused me in ways that will forever impact me."

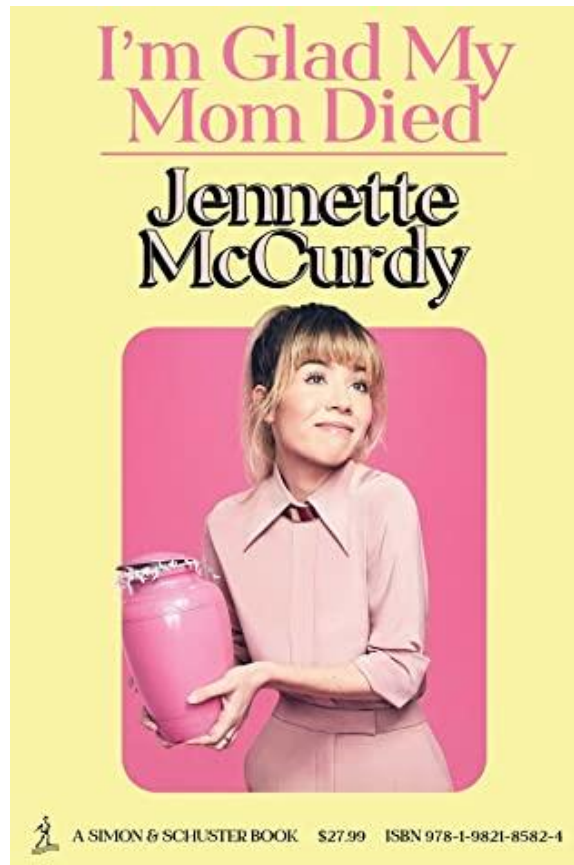
Insistent on molding her only daughter into "Mommy's little actress," Debra shuffled her to auditions beginning at age 6. As she matured and starting booking acting gigs, McCurdy remained "desperate to impress Mom," while Debra became increasingly obsessive about her daughter's physical

appearance. She tinted her daughter's eyelashes, whitened her teeth, enforced a tightly monitored regimen of "calorie restriction," and performed regular genital exams on her as a teenager. Eventually, the author grew understandably resentful and tried to distance herself from her mother. As a

young celebrity, however, McCurdy became vulnerable to eating disorders, alcohol addiction, self-loathing, and unstable relationships. Throughout the book, she honestly portrays Debra's cruel perfectionist personality and abusive behavior patterns, showing a woman who could get enraged by everything from crooked eyeliner to spilled milk. At the same time, McCurdy exhibits compassion for her deeply flawed mother. Late in the book, she shares a crushing secret

her father revealed to her as an adult. While McCurdy didn't emerge from her childhood unscathed, she's managed to spin her harrowing experience into a sold-out stage act and achieve a form of catharsis that puts her mind, body, and acting career at peace.

The heartbreaking story of an emotionally battered child delivered with captivating candor and grace. **-Reviewed by Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'**





Who Runs America?

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'



“Americans may be equal, but some are more equal than others,” said economist Paul Krugman and rightly so. Power and influence in American society are exercised by groups of people, whether Democrats or Republicans, who control the wealth of the nation. They include career politicians, top government officials, and prominent political families. They can be found at various levels of the government, from local and regional to national, and often have significant influence over policy decisions and the

direction of the country. This group includes CEOs, board members, and major shareholders who shape economic policies, control vast resources, and influence government decisions through lobbying and campaign contributions. Investment bankers, hedge funds managers, financial institutions, along with prominent figures such as Warren Buffett have significant influence over economic policies, that can shape the direction of global markets. Since the

beginning of the Internet revolution, the technological elites, a new class of influential individuals in Silicon Valley, tech executives, entrepreneurs, and venture capitalists now have substantial influence over the direction of technology, innovation, and digital policies. Recently they shook us up by unleashing the large language AI model Chat-GPT that might one day turn us into intellectual slaves. Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Tim Cook, Sundar Pichai, and Satya Nadella, for example, exercise extraordinary global influence and they can shape our future.

It's also the media conglomerates, news organizations, and powerful figures in the entertainment industry, people such as Rupert Murdoch, who have a significant impact on public opinion. They influence political discourse by shaping national narratives. They exert influence over policy decisions through their universal reach and ability to shape public opinion. Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Donald Trump, for example, sprang up from the media and entertainment establishment controlled by the corporate wealthy. They know who to promote and who to neglect.

The patronage of political families and access to networks can significantly impact an individual's ability to join the ruling classes. Furthermore, associations with influential politicians, party members, or top government officials can provide access to important political positions and lucrative appointments that create opportunities for influence within the political establishment. Several top universities in the United States, Ivy League plus especially Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Columbia, MIT, University of

Chicago, Dartmouth College, and others have historically produced a significant number of members of America's ruling classes, including leaders in politics, law, business, finance, technology, entrepreneurship, and academia. With multibillion-dollar endowments perpetually replenished by America's wealthiest, who send their children there, merit or no merit, these universities are financially untouchables, and politically important.

Many alumni of these prestigious schools not only run 500 Fortune companies, US embassies, think tanks, global charities, academia, major news organizations, and media and entertainment establishments; but also, they educate the elites and the ruling class members of many foreign nations including the Arab Muslim nations, India, China, South Africa, and others. It's the students from these nations who protested that Affirmative Action was cheating them of their merits and thus depriving them of the opportunities to join the ruling classes.

Affirmative Action had opened the doors for Blacks and other left-behind groups, as well as white women, to join the American ruling classes through the portals of elite universities - people such as General Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense General Lloyd Austin III, Barack Obama, Condoleezza Rice, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, and not least Justice Clarence Thomas, to name a few. The nullification of Affirmative Action would lead to a decline in the enrollment of these groups into elite universities, resulting in reduced diversity among graduates who go on to become part of the ruling classes. So, if you think that your vote counts and thus shapes the direction of this nation, you may be in for a shock.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Modi's Visit to the USA

Anil Shrivastava



If you depend on network news or cable channels, you probably are not aware of the Indian Prime Minister Modi's state visit to the USA. The White House has invited 7,000 guests to attend the state dinner in honor of Mr. Modi which only has happened one time before in America's history. Mr. Modi will also address a joint session of the Congress on June 22. You may be wondering why such an honor is being bestowed upon him. Here is the background to clear the matter. First, India has surpassed China to become the world's most populous nation. India's population is expected to increase for at least the next 70 years, according to the UN. By 2090, its decrease might recur. But the statements are valid only if one makes the

assumption that awful occurrences like wars, pestilences, famines, etc. do not take place. But China's situation is unique in that a reduction in its population is anticipated. It is also predicted that the Asia-Pacific region will control roughly 70 percent of world growth. Just two nations, China and India will be responsible for close to half of this growth. India's GDP growth in FY 23 will be 7.25 percent, more than any other nation on Earth. History demonstrates that increasing populations have always sparked industrial revolutions, which have subsequently contributed to growth. Western nations serve as a good illustration of this. It is possible that inflation may ensue, economic inequality may widen, democracy

may suffer, and people's lives may be disrupted. However, it is still true that people will eventually have the chance to live better lives. And that will help the nation overcome its difficult circumstances. However, fifty-two percent of Indian citizens are under the age of thirty at the moment. Any economy would benefit greatly from having so many young people. This can be a great labor force.

India will view population expansion not as a weakness and burden, but as a strength and ally if it frames itself as a manufacturing hub in many respects which India is trying. It's also true that India has some undesirable political instability, corruption, gangsterism, mafia, economic disparity, and other issues. For them to be resolved, efforts from all sides must be made; otherwise, political isolation and selfishness will tighten the noose around the nation's neck and attempts from all sides will not produce results. That is a possible risk.

India is also home to a large and rapidly growing middle class. Currently, there are around 300 million middle-class consumers in India, and this number is expected to grow to 600 million by 2030. This growing middle class is increasingly playing a role in global consumption patterns, with Indian

consumers becoming an important market for a wide range of products and services. In addition to its economic role, India is also a major political and military power. The country is the world's second-largest contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations and is a nuclear-armed state with one of the largest militaries in the world.

India is also a member of a number of important international organizations, including the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the G20.

All of these factors make India a significant player on the global stage. The country's influence is only likely to grow in the years ahead, making it an important country to watch.

Overall, India is a powerful country with a rich culture and heritage. It is important to understand the role of India in the present world, especially given its growing influence across continents. India is the world's largest democracy, with a population of over 1.2 billion people. The country's integration into the global economy has been accompanied by economic growth during the last decade. India has risen to prominence as a global player. For India, it seems that there is no looking back.

What is a VIP?

by Roop Shrivastava

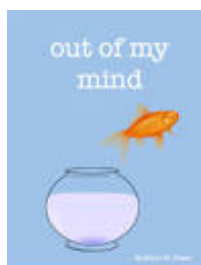
I strolled into the large convention center, searching for the registration area. I looked up and saw my picture, an uncomfortably large poster of my face, that stated I was the emcee for the night. It was a good cause. I was thrilled to be able to represent the TV station I work at as host of this outstanding event. Then I saw the three dreaded letters that make me cringe. “VIP” area here. Very important person. I have never been able to properly digest the enormity of what’s being said in these three words. Think about it. We’re differentiating our audience at any given event into a hierarchy. We are essentially telling everyone that there are plain, regular people. Then there are important people. And even more importantly, there are very important people. I disagree with this wholeheartedly. I’m certainly reading into this deeply. I believe it’s important. In fact, I believe it’s very important to bust through this strata we have created which makes “special guests” more important than the rest. The event I was emceeing was packed with 1,000 plus people. Each of them paid more than \$150 a ticket to attend. How important were these guests? They helped raise thousands of dollars. But they were redirected to the main hall while the very important people were wine and dined in a small VIP area. My script was in that area so I hesitantly obliged and walked in. There they were. The supposed, most important people in the hall. I looked around. I saw fellow TV personalities, congressional leaders, wealthy business people and organizers of the event. All of these people deserve their privacy, their prep time ahead of speaking and also a chance to catch up

with their colleagues. I get that. I believe that’s important. I’m not suggesting there shouldn’t be an area for folks to diffuse ahead of shaking thousands of hands and taking dozens of selfies.

I am suggesting that maybe we call those folks what they are. Speakers. Guests. Perhaps the organizers can have an area called “speakers” and have this area for them. It would make a world of difference. The cheese and wine would taste just as good. The relative quiet before walking into the main hall would be just as cherished. These people aren’t very important people. They are, instead, people who happen to fall into where most everyone falls into. After all, every single one of us has a position in life. All of them are important. That’s the VIP that embodies all fields. It encompasses all of us. Teachers, lawyers, construction workers, receptionists and waiters all have very important positions. The mother who is tasked with raising our future leaders, that’s a very important position.

Perhaps if we really thought about the reason we get together at these events, we wouldn’t care about what area or room we are put in. We all want to help these non-profits and groups do well. Isn’t the best way to remember that our importance isn’t based on our job but by the fact we show up to help our community do better? That’s a VERY important reason to treat your guests as if they’re all the same regardless of the rank you’ve assigned to them.

I believe there are very important organizations that do great work. Let’s treat our guests who support this work with the very important respect they deserve. Just my two cents.



Here Comes Aunty

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

In the year 1974 we lived in a small-town Indiana. We were looked upon as exotic creatures since foreigners, especially Asian-Indians, were not a common sight in the Hoosier state. Coming fresh off the boat, we had heavy accent that no one understood. We dressed differently and walked differently. Since I didn't own a car initially, I used to walk to work from my apartment every day.

People would stop me and ask questions such as, "Do you have four wives? Do you charm snakes? Do you ride elephant? Are you guys' Hindi? (Hindi is a language. They meant Hindu)."

One day some curious boy asked me, "Hey Indian Fella! Where is your feather?"

Things changed rapidly by the 80s. I moved to a metropolitan city where Indians were no longer an uncommon sight. As a matter of fact, they started moving up the corporate

ladder without making waves. Most of the immigrants from India were well educated and they put a lot of emphasis on education of their children. That was the only way of success known to the Indian immigrants. For the children born to Indian immigrants in the

USA, every Indian man was an uncle and women were aunts.

Talking of aunts, they were one of a kind. They emphasize a lot on maintaining Indian culture. For them Indian culture meant getting into top colleges and marrying among Indians only, preferably in the same cast. For girls there

was an additional requirement, they were expected to dance on Bollywood beats and perform in parties and marriages to make their parents proud..

I remember aunts talk that sounded something like this:

Aunt: "Hi Vijay! Just wanted to wish you luck on your SAT! We'll pray for you in the temple. I know you're a smart boy. Don't stress too much about the score. Just do your best. Remember

our son, Pappu got 2400 on his sat."

Vijay: "Thank you aunt. Just keep me in your prayers. Bye now!"

It's common to hear aunts introduce someone in parties, "Meet my friend, Minmin Singh. The Singhs are very successful people. Their son, Chirukut completed college with a perfect grade point average and also married an Indian girl. Three cheers for the Singhs!"

Aunts were busybodies who considered it their duty to bestow advice on the youngsters whether they liked it or not.

Beta (son), how old are you? Do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend otherwise I have someone in mind suitable for you!"

Aunts didn't just give advice; they took it upon themselves to make sure youngsters lived within norms and standards set by them. In case they ever strayed, aunts were always around to catch them and shame them in their gossip circuits.

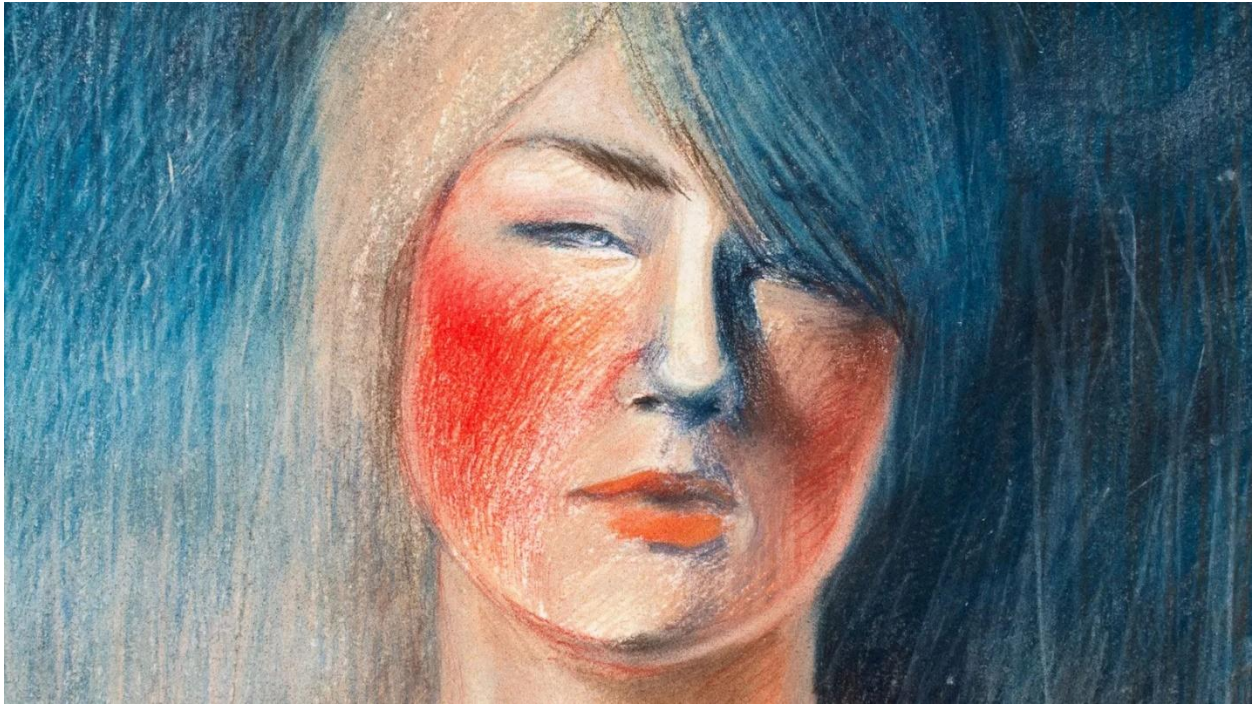
This is 21st century now. Those aunts are now grand moms. They adore their grandchildren.

The aunts of the 21st century is mostly born in the USA with a different outlook, but I miss the aunts of the last century. Just thinking!



Spice of Life

Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir



I used to get embarrassed very easily during my childhood and youth. My parents were very strict disciplinarians so I became very conscience of how I looked and behaved in front of others. I was expected to greet the guests in the living room and then disappear. Sometimes when asked to come and sit with special guests, I didn't know where to look, what to do with my hands and what to talk. That made me completely ill at ease in front of others. I remember one time accidentally entering the powder room where a female guest was fixing her bra. I couldn't face her ever again. Ironically, she was fine but I felt embarrassed in her presence. This kind of behavior and feeling of shame continued

till my school years and college. That was a very uncomfortable feeling to say the least.

Now that I have overcome and overgrown the negative emotion of easily feeling embarrassed, sometimes I try to think about my years of living with self-inflicted shame. The root of embarrassment was the anticipation of negative evaluation by others that included my parents' friends, teachers and my supervisors.

In my youth I particularly felt awkward in presence of girls who had no qualms about conversing with me. Then I came to the USA where women rubbed shoulders with

men in every field. I felt no inhibitions in talking to them or working alongside with them. I was busy raising a family and keeping a job that, probably, stopped me from feeling embarrassed easily. As a matter of fact, I spent the whole of my teens and my 20s in a state of permanent embarrassment.

My barber once asked me, "What do you do for living?"

"Nothing and how 'bout you?"

"I am a barber," he replied. I was embarrassed for asking such a stupid question.

Once I was at the airport when the TSA agent asked me to put my license face down. I didn't hear the license part so I put

my face down on the scanner. Everyone laughed.

When I first joined General Motors, my neighbor, Mary asked me to water her plant every day while she was gone on vacation. I followed her instruction but everyone laughed at me. Later I found out that it was an artificial plant. I knew it was a set up when my colleagues gathered around and laughed at me.

I analyzed the reasons for my embarrassment and concluded that they were mainly due to the fear of not meeting others' expectations and ruminating past mistakes. As I aged, I learned my lesson. I hardly feel bashful now in any situation. If I do, I take that as the spice of life."

QUIZ

1. What is the fastest bird?

- ☐ Peregrine Falcon
- ☐ Hawk
- ☐ Eagle
- ☐ Stork

2. Which of these is the shortest time span?

- ☐ Century
- ☐ A dozen years
- ☐ Millennium
- ☐ Decade

3. Which of these is the shortest measurement of length?

- ☐ Inch
- ☐ Gramme
- ☐ Metre
- ☐ Centimetre

4. Of the following, who was the Shortest U.S. president?

George Washington

- ☐ William Henry Harrison
- ☐ James Madison
- ☐ Abraham Lincoln

5. Which of the following U.S. presidents served for the shortest amount of time?

- ☐ Abraham Lincoln
- ☐ James Madison
- ☐ William Henry Harrison
- ☐ George Washington

Answers: 1. Peregrine Falcon 2. Decade 3. Centimeter 4. James Madison 5. William Henry Harrison