

MUSINGS

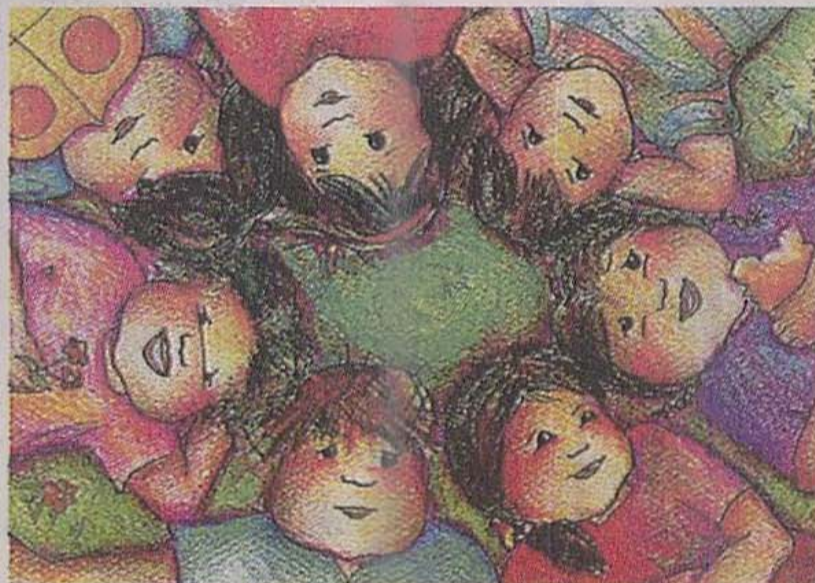
A bubble burst

LAST week my friend invited me to her son's fourth birthday party and for a change, I was looking forward to attending the event, so much so that I bent my no-partying-on-school-nights rule, shelved a crucial meeting at work, and actually hitch-hiked to the place because my driver wasn't available.

So why was I so gung-ho about an event I normally avoid? My friend was celebrating her son's birth in an orphanage in Azimpur, with children who never knew their parents.

What a novel idea! Many in my office had their own opinions about my excitement, but the invitation touched a chord

nourished child, small for his age, lying in a dirty crib, wearing a dirty red woollen cap, wrapped in dirty sheets, with an equally dirty half bottle of milk lying next to him. The child was sleeping peacefully amid the chaos and noise around him. I was flabbergasted; I used to make such a fuss with my own baby, no compromise on hygiene even if that meant spending thousands on detergents alone. And when she slept, no noise, phone off, no talking, and as a result she's become a total crybaby. At the orphanage, this loveless baby, abandoned at birth, has a slim chance of survival.



in me. I knew I had to take my daughter there.

It was an unusual experience, peopled with remarkable children. There was this small boy of four or five, running happily with others, playing with the balloons like any other child his age, only he was doing it all on one leg. He had lost his limb while he was abandoned on a railway track; the police found him and brought him to the orphanage. The birthday boy, who never knew life could be like this, asked him innocently 'where is your other leg? Where did it go?'

There was a three-month-old mal-

It's amazing to imagine that such precious lives come to light everyday, and the fortunate few who make it through, do so by sheer luck and hardiness. Those of us who are born into better circumstances lack the talent to be thankful for it.

One thing that touched my heart was the manners of these children. When the cake was cut they spontaneously sang Happy Birthday, only they said 'Happy Birthday toto you'. They said thank you after getting a piece of cake, and picked the litter and threw it into the bin. They merrily sang songs like 'Amra shobai raja', 'Amader deshta

shapno puri'. When the goody bag was handed to them they didn't snatch toys from each other or throw tantrums if the others got a toy they personally coveted.

I was not expecting this! I thought a government-run orphanage could not under any circumstances be reasonably clean, and the children would be happy and well fed. I had gone to the party looking for some stained, dirty faces. I was looking for sickly looking children. The idea of a teacher never crossed my mind let alone a music teacher, and the buas, well I thought they would be matronly and unkind. I was pleasantly surprised when my expectations turned out unfounded.

The orphanage was not sunshine and roses, but it wasn't something out of Jane Eyre either. It had a cheerful look about it, a look that said that people who are running it truly care.

We promised to come back and next time with more stuff. But when my other friend's husband threw a challenge asking if we could take one of the kids home and care for him/her, we had nothing to say.

It is easy to see pain and sympathise but to actually feel and share it takes a lot of courage the kind that our pampered souls lack.

Gestures like the one Kader Siddiqui made recently by adopting a two-day old who was pecked by crows, are very rare indeed.

I was so proud of my friend and her husband. For she made me realise that I live in a bubble of superficiality. She made me feel ashamed of my incapability to appreciate my privileged life. She made me realise the pleasure of bringing smiles to the less fortunate ones. It is so easy to be happy and to share happiness. Being content or, dejected is all but a state of mind.

The party was a total success and more so because while returning my daughter told me that she gave her goody bag to this child she became fond of.

I remained thoughtful for the rest of the week.

By Raffat Binte Rashid

Ageing Gracefully

RECENTLY I had the privilege of being invited to a tea party where I found myself surrounded by a bevy of the most gorgeous females I have come across in a longtime.. As I walked in, I found myself being acquainted with only a handful of the lovely ladies. Me, being my old gregarious self, I slowly made the rounds to make my acquaintance with the ladies. Soon we found ourselves engaged in an animated conversation about "Women and Age"

You see readers, I come from a family where my parents never thought of reducing the age of my siblings or me on different certificates like a lot of parents do here, no doubt with good reason. So we grew up to be exactly the age we were supposed to be and learned to accept it with good grace. At the tea party, while engaged in conversation, some of these lovely ladies inadvertently gave out the years they passed their different levels of education and at the same time they seemed to be quite desperate to make sure that people thought they were at least five years younger than they actually were. I nearly choked on my samosa,

in order to suppress my laughter, when I heard one of my batch mate reducing her age.... so much so that she would have to be born after the liberation war. At that point I realized that these ladies were 'absolutely' afraid of 'ageing.'

But, readers, why should we be afraid of ageing? It's a very natural process! We should be proud of our age. As we were in our teens, the 'twenties' seemed old, when the 'twenties' arrived with a bang, the 'thirties' looked ominous. Now that we are in our 'THIRTIES', I think it's time to give in to ageing gracefully...

We should be considering ourselves extremely lucky. If we go down memory lane a bit, we can see how our grandparents and parents struggled to raise their children, provide them with proper education, so on and so forth. We do not have to face half the challenges they faced. Women had to bear a number of children, they did not have much control over their bodies- cook, clean, take care of the house while the men themselves had their own share of responsibilities..

But hurray for the 21st century. Though we are going through life, juggling our careers, families and children

along with our hectic social life, the innumerable choices that women have these days, have made life easier than that of our mothers or grandmothers. We have managed to come a long way...There is no longer any need to hide our age. We should be proud of what we are. The trick to look your best is to wear your age like an ornament. Carry yourself with your head held high in the air. By all means avail all the opportunities to maintain your spirit and health. When you feel good, you look good.

We should marvel at the amazing capacity of self-expansion, we can reach out and go beyond our emotional and intellectual boundaries to become more and more enlightened. We should strive to keep transforming ourselves to become who we ought to be at a certain age. Beauty doesn't have to be only of the physical kind, beauty of the mind and heart should also be cultivated.

Live your life to the fullest, there is never an end to learning...Its all up to you. There is no need to hide your age...For your beautiful inner self will help you to "Age Gracefully".

By Shirley Momen

HOROSCOPE



ARIES (Mar. 21-April 19)

Get involved in activities that will be fun for the whole family. Don't confide in anyone for the time being. You need to challenge yourself. You can dazzle members of the opposite sex with your quick wit and aggressive charm. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.



Taurus (Apr. 20-May 20)

Take care of chores that have been hanging over your head. Don't hesitate to take short trips. You can meet new and exciting friends who will provide mental stimulation. They may cost you dearly. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Be professional, and you will advance much more quickly. You could overreact to emotional situations regarding your relationship. You will learn a great deal from people with different cultural backgrounds. Minor accidents could occur if you don't take precautions. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Lay your cards on the table regarding your personal direction. You should channel your efforts into getting rid of bad habits. Take time to do some writing, whether it's correspondence, poetry, or keeping a journal. Try not to hang out with coworkers if you wish to avoid problems later. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

Put all your energy into moneymaking ventures. Difficulties with your mate may lead to isolation. Children could cost you more than you can afford. Your attitude could be up and down like a yo-yo. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

You should be trying to clear up legal contracts that have been pending. Be careful not to show your temper when dealing with the boss. Proceed with caution if operating equipment or vehicles. Your tendency to dramatize may be a little much for your partner to take constantly. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.



LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

Travel will also entice you. You may be uncertain about some of your coworkers and your boss. You will have splendid suggestions for fund raising events. You will have no trouble getting things to fall into place. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

Make changes to your living quarters that will please the whole family. You may find that purchases or entertainment could be expensive. You may feel that someone at work is holding you back. Don't be afraid to lay your cards on the table. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Try not to let relatives or friends cause any friction with your mate. Hold on; your time will come. You will find good buys and you will lift your spirits. You've been in a rut and you need to do something that will help you break the pattern you've fallen into. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

You'll be prone to tears if your mate is harsh with you this week. Put aside any decisions concerning your position at work. Confusion could result when communicating with others. You may be frazzled this week. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



AQUARIUS (Jan. 21-Feb. 19)

A new relationship can be yours if you get out with friends. Expect your workload to be heavy. Social events will be rewarding. You'll have problems with authority figures if you don't play by the rules. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.



PISCES (Feb. 20-March 20)

Loved ones may be annoyed if they feel restricted. You can get the attention of important individuals but it might not be the time to get them to help or to back your ideas. New love connections can be made through group associations. Don't let children or elders put demands on your time. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.