



ECHOES BY
ASRAR CHOWDHURY

On March 25, 2020 Bangladesh went under lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Schools, colleges, and universities were shut down indefinitely.

Not knowing when education institutes would open, students found themselves in an unknown territory. They had enough time to do whatever they wanted. No travelling meant a few extra hours each day. The concept of wake-up time vanished. You could wake up at 12 noon and tell yourself it's 7 AM summer-time in the UK. *"Morning has broken, like the first morning."* Get back to sleep! The platform was created for kids to have the time of their lives.

I got worried students would get bored. When boredom persists, it can deteriorate mental health. My worries were soon put to rest, though. Thanks to social media, people tell you what they're up to. I was pleasantly surprised. Young kids in Bangladesh started finding innovative ways to utilise the "gap year" they got.

Soon my Facebook newsfeed showed young people enrolling in online courses in Coursera and MIT Open Courseware to update their skills. Coursera offered free enrolment for limited time due to the pandemic. Others were busy learning professional software; photo

and video-editing and other technical skills from YouTube tutorials. Once finished, many posted in social media that they've completed. Some posted their certificates which were adding over time. What a wonderful way to utilise time with efficiency.

Those not into professional skills were busy elsewhere. Some were cooking, posting their dishes on Instagram. Dalgona coffee trended. "Jilapi or Jalebi" and "Golap Jaam or Gulab Jamun"—these were the questions. Me-hendi on the hand. People going bald, growing beards, and whatnot. Some were exploring latent talents. Painting and sketching on different media. Needlework and knitting. Singing songs, reciting poetry. And yes, there were those who started watch parties, came on Facebook Live, had Zoom sessions, and organised webinars.

Every picture has two sides. When people of the same cohort share the same activities, it can create peer pressure. How? Many of my friends are into online courses. They're utilising their time efficiently. My parents see or hear about my friends. No prize for guessing right, I'm mildly asked why am I not doing the same? Forget your parents. If your friends are debating "Jilapi or Jale-

bi", you'll soon find yourself searching YouTube tutorials on how to make the sweets.

Schools teach us to be the best. As we grow, we're measured against one unit of performance or another. How good are we against our peers? This has a practical side. It creates competition to make us tough to survive in a world that can be very cruel. But then, not all of us are designed to compete. Some of us prefer to sit on our own, gaze at the sky, and daydream while the world passes us by.

If you didn't develop a skill, read no books, watched no movies during the pandemic, or didn't do what your friends did, ask yourself: *does it really matter?* As long as you're

happy, doing what you are, and especially in good health in the pandemic—"tomorrow never dies".

Life is a journey, not a race. A journey to be appreciated and enjoyed. Stay safe.

The author teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music & radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com



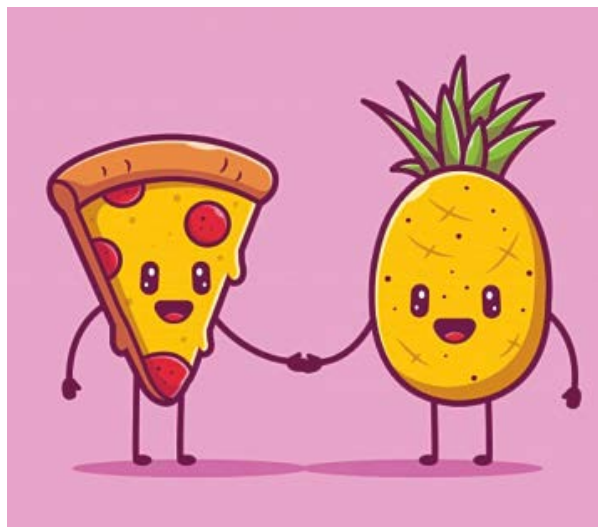
Pining for my pizza

ROSHNI SHAMIM

Hi, there. Yes, I'm talking to you. Yes, yes, all is well and fine. I'm actually going to save you from all the sharing graces of small talk and rather jump straight into sharing about how hard long distance relationships really are in fruit life. It's more along the lines of impossible, honestly, just like getting that perfect jiggle on your panna cotta. I guess when the love of your life is on the line, distance becomes only a number. Wait, or was it age? Never mind, that isn't even the point. You see, if distance was all it took to make this relationship work, I would travel across the world every weekend. Life is never that simple though, is it?

Okay, I'm spiralling. Let me begin properly, this time right from the start.

My name is Pineapple Comosus and I live with my family in Hawaii. The reason why I'm traveling halfway across the globe is to have a secret rendezvous with my boyfriend, Pie. We first met at our mutual friend, Chick's housewarming party. Mr. Pizza Do, better known as Pie, was also another guest. As I had already heard all about Pie's cryptic aura, I had naturally expected a quiet, somewhat brooding boy hovering like a wall fly at some invisible corner. So when Chick called me over to introduce to her friend who I could spot laughing loudly from a mile away, I was pleasantly surprised to meet a boy who was equal parts charismatic and funny.



I wish I could say the rest of the meeting went smooth like butter, but that ingredient does not exactly sit very well with me. I ended up ruffling a few toppings off his head, with snarky comments of how jalapeño doesn't really seem his style and if it is true that he is secretly seeing that bad boy Coke on the side. Pie seemed taken aback at a little pine cone like myself shaking off his chilly flakes. He came back at me by asking if it was true that I was dabbing with

curries nowadays. The rest of the evening was a total blur. Pie and I ended up talking the whole night, pretending to not feel the oven preheating.

Unfortunately, there were enough raised eyebrows at the party for us to become conscious of everyone around us. The next few days that Pie and I had before I flew back home were spent on secret dates with endless conversations and baking.

I know what you are thinking. Who even hides relationships in 2020? Well, this story is a little complicated. For unfathomable reasons, society won't accept Pie as my boyfriend. It is a tale older than time, but the condiments of our community have shunned our pairing forever. I guess I understand their perspective, the idea of a tropical fruit with a cheesy dough being the last straw, but how to convince the heart?

Well anyway, there you are then. It has been a very draining journey for us, mentally and of course physically. But it just makes us more certain that we want to be with each other. Perhaps, someday, Pie and I will not need to hide. Until then though, it was nice to meet you. I hope I gave you some insightful food for thought.

Also, I think it is time to fasten your seat-belt.

Roshni's fascination with pineapples largely stems from her not-so-secret wish of traveling to Hawaii. Mail her an itinerary at roshni.shamim@gmail.com