

LIVING

How I Wish I Had Some Savoir-Faire

by Fayza Haq

I have heard reliable stories about how members of an entourage of diplomats got away with pilfering soaps, ash-trays and towels from a five-star hotel. Once I attempted something similar, but being the clumsy and naive individual that I am, I got caught red-handed by the lady room-cleaner — who told me off, in a towering temper and a tone of supreme contempt.

Women are known to smoke in the privacy of their rooms, even in the east, but once when my confidante and I attempted that, her five-year old son caught us looking guilty and 'red to our gills'. We attempted to cover it up by saying that I alone was smoking and giving a sly peck on the cheeks. But the sharp lad would not fall for that obviously glib concoction, and in turn, scolded his mother and me in his cute voice for inhaling tobacco which leads to cancer — a lecture that he had heard repeatedly from his grandparents and which he can rattle off like a walking tape-recorder.

I appear to have little savoir-faire as I fail to have the ready excuses that some of my friends can conjure up in seconds. If they are caught taking French leave, or if they are late in the morning at their bureaux, I have known them to get off with white-lies if they fail to turn home on the expected time. As for me, I stutter and stammer, cast my 'Chinky' eyes down, looking like some over-cooked lobster, and stumble and bumble with some half-baked excuse, which no person in his/her right mind would ever fall for.

I have known my colleagues at some schools that I have taught at, who have got away with even the bank clerk's pen, having transferred their accounts from one type to another, thus getting more interest in the process. As for me, I give away my bank account number, in simply trying to cash a cheque. I have been endeavouring to transfer an account from one branch of a bank in Motijheel, to another at Dhanmondi, but I have failed to do it for the last three and a half years. I get repeated reminders from my bank that my current account is being decimated in fractions but I have no knowledge as to how to go about rectifying this, in my occasional 'baby-taxi' trips to Motijheel and back.

I meant to be polite when I said 'Oh, I simply love kot-machh' to my hostess, to please her for a certain dish offered at dinner. I was then served kot-machh in the form of cutlets, soup, curry and even stew. For quite some time I failed to get invited to that same house again and I wondered why that was so. I came across my friend at a library, where she looked at me gently, smiled with genuine camaraderie, and explained, 'We would certainly like to have you over for a meal again, but my husband and children got biased with kot-machh, served in all possible forms every time that we have you over at our place.'

My friends, relatives and acquaintances appear to know all the news, views and gossip going about in town — which

they somehow gather over the telephone, during shopping sessions, club-meetings, gah-laluds, bau-bhats, milfads, lunch and tea-breaks at whatever places they work at. This is apart from their serious readings of newspapers, magazines and books; listening to the radio; and viewing various channels on TV. I appear to be always behind the time with not just the important goings-on in the country or overseas, but am way behind the other women I know, as regards the latest hem-line of kurtas, the new trends of draping the saranchal, or even the a la mode make-up or hair-do. My closest friends repeatedly advise me as to how to smarten up and 'fly right', but I have failed to do so for the last twenty-two years.

Most people of my age have managed to acquire numerous overseas scholarships and fellowships, have completed various courses like those of computer-mechanism; the Quantum theory; yoga expertise; ikebana; horse-riding; doing cross-stitches as fine as silk tapestry; oil-painting; mastering Uchchanga Sangeet and dance-dramas, or even performing on stage as part-time thespians. As for me, I can not even balance myself on a bicycle, which I saw all the other women do at a neighbouring Subcontinental country. When I attempt gardening, I cut my hands with the thorns of stems and the necessary snipping of gardening shears. I get layers upon layers of tan, while my elbows and knees get so jet-black that some vehicle with-

out proper head-lights could knock me down in the dark. I attempt to light the kitchen fire and am smookey and puffing as a result, hopping and skipping to smother the hem-line of my partly-synthetic night-gown. Being all-thumbs, you can never expect me to turn out souffles, achars, eclairs, or mouth-dripping layered chocolate cakes that other women my age do.

One sees endless foreign garments, accessories, cosmetics, costume jewellery, and household crockery that flood the local markets such as in Dhaka and Chittagong, but I cannot even bring my portable type-writer with me, having arrived at the Dhaka Zia International Airport, without paying a heavy tax on it. This is although I am well aware that a journalist is allowed one without being harassed or intimidated. I get so baffled with a single jet-plane trip, that I look as if I had carted numerous dowry items for my various cousins and nieces, and 'flummoxed' my way through to the airport exit.

I have come to the conclusion that it is my destiny that I cannot 'sneak in' a birthday card or a get-well bouquet of flowers before everyone at home and my office know exactly what I am doing. Thus I fail to achieve the pleasure of ever giving a surprise gift to anyone. Such is my fate, I must learn to live with it. No lectures, pleadings, gentle reminders, or repeated advice appear to improve me. I have accepted the fact that I will remain a blunderbuss all my life.

How Louise Conquered the Amazon on a Bicycle

by Charles English

Pensioner Louise Sutherland has just handed over a cheque for \$9,000 to buy a mobile clinic to bring primary health care to the Amazonian Indians. The money came from sales of a book in which she tells how she cycled across the Amazonian basin.

Sutherland's travels



Just myself on a little bicycle...that's not a threat



There wasn't a large hotel, y'know



Please where can I sling my hammock?

A Jaguar. He ran away. He had never seen a bicycle before. So he just stood staring at me from the side of the road. Probably — do not tell anybody — but probably quite frightened. And I crashed as soon as I saw what it was. I crashed off the road. She throws back her head

never takes any spare parts — are more than compensated by stamina and an ability to enjoy dangerous situations.

The year I went round Iceland there were five other cyclists — all men, all different nationalities, and they all broke down. That was the year Mt Hekla was in eruption. Have you ever tried camping out beside an erupting volcano? That can be quite exciting, believe me.

In the Amazon she was equipped with one phrase of Portuguese, which translates as: 'Please madam, is there a place where I can hang my hammock so that I can sleep for the night?' They always said yes, blubblubblubblub — I could not understand it. As far as they were concerned I must have come from Mars.

Sutherland would arrive at a hut and after a couple of hours there would be a gathering of 20 or 30 people there. Heaven only knows how they knew, but they must have bush telegraph saying 'Something interesting down at Joe's — let us all go down there for the night.'

'And then, of course they found that they could not take to me. Took them ages to realise. They did... whisper, whisper, whisper.'

Eventually they would chat among themselves and ignore me completely and they did have a baallli (she shouts the word at the ceiling) of an evening. Everybody would catch up with everybody's news, you see, and about midnight, they would all slope off back to where they came from.

Of all the problems that Sutherland was told she would have, she had two. One was her lack of Portuguese and the other was the channel of mud that the road became when it rained.

There was not a large hotel. Or a Lyons Corner House to go and have a feed or anything, you know what I mean? Nothing like that.

'My experience is that the more primitive the people are — for want of a better word — the greater the hospitality I had no bad incidents. Most countries are much nicer than most other people think they are.'

'I have been to 54 different countries and I have always been told all the dreadful things like I am going to be raped. 'I'm going to get my throat cut.'

'But I have always maintained that my vulnerability was my best protection by far because most people and animals do not attack unless you threaten them.'

'The Indians can tell the difference between me and six hefty persons carrying shot-guns and going in and saying we are going to destroy your village because we want to put a road through here. But heck, I am five feet tall, under eight stone. Just myself on a little bicycle? That's not a threat.'

—Gemini News

PEOPLE are constantly being lumped into categories, and the world is thus divided into finger-feeders, chopstick feeders and fork feeders predominate in Europe and North America; and finger feeding is the order of the day in much of Africa, the Middle East, Indonesia and the Indian subcontinent.

In fact, there is nothing new about the fork's minority status. It was first introduced by King Henry III of France (1551-89). In order to protect his snow-white lace collar while eating meat with his fingers, the king stumbled upon an idea which was to revolutionise the art of dining. He prepared a crude fork made of tin and sent the dummy model to the manager of a Parisian restaurant. Out of deference to the royal patron, the manager instructed a local tinsmith to prepare a dozen copies of the crude implement. The king was the first to use it in a royal public dinner in 1582. The innovation was a success and the

From Fingers to Forks

Shahid A Makhfi writes from New Delhi

utensil was popularised. Prior to this, the Europeans were eating with their fingers because even when eating with forks did make sense, they were at first regarded with suspicion, if not as being downright decadent. The French historian Fernand Braudel has recounted a medieval German preacher who labelled the fork a diabolical luxury. God, he said, would not have given us fingers if he wanted us to use such an instrument.

The condemned fork must have eventually crossed the English Channel. As late as the second half of the 16th century, Good Queen Bess was still

eating with her fingers. And as recently as 1897, sailors in the British Navy were forbidden to use forks because they were regarded as being 'pre-judicial' to discipline and manliness.

Another innovation is credited to John Montague, the fourth Earl of Sandwich (1718-92) who once spent 24 hours at the gaming table subsisting only on thick slices of meat placed between slices of toast. Other accounts place the origin of the sandwich during a long day's hunting by the Earl.

In the Indian desert town of Bikaner, a museum has on display an interesting invention of Maharaja Ganga Singh — a spoon to keep the fluffy mous-

tache dry while sipping soup.

Chopsticks did not have a hard time making the grade. They were in wide use in China as far back as 1200 BC — the Chinese being way ahead of the Europeans in discovering the advantages of eating hot food without burning one's fingers. Historians are divided when it comes to whether chopsticks are the cause or the effects of Chinese cooking, which is characterised by 'small tidbits. Was the chopstick invented to cope with small bits — or was the food cut up small to enable it to be 'picked up with chopsticks?'

The finger feeders do not have to worry about historical backgrounds. They just do what comes naturally to them — and this applies to wealthy, educated Asians as it does to the poorest African. In fact finger feeding is undergoing enthusiastic revival.

SHAHID A MAKHFI is a freelance Indian writer-cum-photographer.



A scene from 'Anything But Love' being shown on Star Plus

Privacy

by Nico den Tuinder

ONE of the pleasures of being white in Bangladesh is the feeling of ingurgitation. The colour of my skin opens doors, offices and mouths of 'people. Rickshaw-wallahs consider it unfit for me to walk and always try to get me into their, by the way rather shabby, vehicles. Young children want to practice the things they learned from the textbook Beginner's English and ask me 'What is your name?' or 'How are you?'. I am better than the famous rat-catcher from Hamilton. I do not have to play my flute to gather a crowd of children.

'You'll neevcever walk alone' was the applicable song of a Dutch artist imitating Frank Sinatra. Indeed, but I would rather make it 'You'll neevcever have any privacy.'

Privacy is the right to be left alone. Holland respects that. If I have to transact some money matter at a bank, there will be a red line some two metres from the counter, in front of which the other customers have to queue up. I can then handle my affairs privately. The Dutch always close their curtains at night, so that nobody will be able to peep in and see what is taking place. Of course, you then start thinking that there is something taking place, something that should be kept secret. Restaurants try to create intimacy by strategically

placing big potted plants and screens.

Privacy is virtually unknown in Bangladesh. Whenever I have to get some money, all other customers can delight in the spectacle I described in an edition of 'Dhaka Day by Day.'

Just across my street there is a collection of huts, and whenever the inhabitants are having a row (and that is quite frequent), the whole neighbourhood enjoys the fight. Within a couple of minutes a whole crowd gathers.

Some weeks ago a friend invited me for dinner at his place in Sadatpur. Not only he enjoyed the meeting but the whole neighbourhood as well. Everybody twisted their neck to get a glimpse of the foreigner eating in their area. I felt like a movie star acting a love scene in Gulshan park with the whole crew around. By the way, in Bangladesh privacy is not a precondition for doing tricky business. I know of a man who went to a bank to change some dollars. With something like ten people around, the clerk asked him whether he wanted to change them officially or unofficially.

Privacy gives more freedom. But is that always a good thing? You can read more and more stories in the Dutch newspapers about abuse of children, mentally disturbed people making a garbage heap of their houses, and people lying dead in their houses for months. Loss of social control, loneliness, and neglect are the flip side of individualism and privacy.

FAMILY life has changed dramatically. Two decades ago, most children had a working father and a housewife mother. Today, many have two parents who work outside the home or live in a single-parent household where the father lives abroad and the mother works.

Tips for Working Parents

by ASM Nurunnabi

What does it mean for children to grow up with no parents available at home, all day? Presented below are some tips suggested by experts.

Children say that they want to understand what the world of work is like. One eight-year-old remarked 'I don't even know what my mother does at her work.' When you talk about your job, your child can develop an image of how you spend your working hours rather than wondering where you disappear to every day.

Even at age four or five, children can understand 'mommy teaches kids' or 'daddy works in office' kind of things. By nine or ten, children can understand aspects of work-duties, frustrations, regulations and schedules. And they can learn something even more important — the rewards of a satisfying work. When you come home smiling over some aspect of your work in spite of

your obstacles, your child knows instantly that your job makes you happy. You might even take your child to work with you occasionally, if possible.

Don't overwork. 'My father works all the time' said Shifat, 12. He leaves at around 8 a.m. and doesn't come home until 8 p.m. By that time we have eaten and he eats alone. Even on weekends he goes to the office. 'Many children believe that parents value professional success more than being a good parent.'

Children also resent it when parents are at home but working. They want to play with their parents but can't, and they must avoid disturbing the parent. If children listen to repeated parental statements like 'Don't bother me,' 'Can't you see I am busy?' and 'What do you want to know?' is it any wonder if so many children feel rejected?

When you come home from work, your child wants in many occasions, deserves your attention. He or she hasn't seen you for hours and there is

so much to share, they think. The child needs to know that you care enough to be near and listen to them.

Don't come home grumpy. In a research survey, 37 per cent of the children described their parents as being in a bad mood at the end of the work-day. Your child needs comfort and attention. Like you, he may have had a bad day, and he may need to talk. If you focus completely on your own feelings, he will feel cheated. When you first get home, take a few minutes to unwind before plunging into the role of mom or dad. It is important to defuse your upset feelings and restore yourself so you can enjoy your child's company.

Don't go out too often. Ask yourself how often you're home during the week to have dinner with your kids, check their homework or just spend a pleasurable evening together. Ask your children how they feel about being home without you. If you're usually out more than one evening during the week, you're absent for what seems to a child to be a long time.

The children generally want to talk about their feelings. They especially want to tell their parents when they're afraid. But many parents brush aside all these sensitive subjects as being 'unnecessary'. Listening to your child and answering questions can make an enormous difference in his emotional security and will thus strengthen your relationship with him.

If you pay heed to the following suggestions, your child will know you're really listening. 1) Set aside time for each child. 2) sit close to him. 3) pay attention to your child's tone of voice. 4) let him choose the topic of discussion. 5) express understanding and sympathy, and 6) avoid being too picky about his feelings or opinion.

Don't criticize unfairly. Parents who rarely make time to listen still find time to criticize. Children don't know how

to respond to a parent's verbal assaults. They complain particularly about unfair or embarrassing criticism. Just as no one is flawless, no one is consistently imperfect. And children have an unwritten rule: parents shouldn't say anything that causes the child to lose face, especially with his peers.

Instead of harping on the negative, focus on your child's good points in order to build his self-esteem. If he needs to be reprimanded, do it in private and in a way that maintains his dignity. Above all, don't use your child as a target when you're frustrated in another area of your life.

Start the day right: The time you spend with your child in the morning sets the tone for the day. When parents speak harshly to kids before school, the words echo in their minds throughout the day and affect their school-work. You can create a calm morning with your children by rising 15 minutes earlier and going through your routine at a slower pace. A good start in the morning gives your child greater confidence to face the day.

Make your home safe: Children are sometimes afraid to be home all by themselves. If you decide your child is mature enough to be home alone before or after school, you should make sure your house is safe and teach your child how to handle various situations. When your child is home alone, the phone is a vital link. A parent or the designated adult to look after them should always be available by phone. Children should know where to find emergency numbers, and how to answer the phone and take a message without letting an unknown caller find out no one else is at home.

If you help your child understand the precautions you've taken, he will feel more confident about staying alone. Children growing up today in most cases accept as normal having both parents at work but they still expect their own needs to be met. By paying close attention to these needs, parents can successfully balance the responsibilities of both children and the careers.

COOKERY

- Butterfly Cakes**
 - 1 Half-fill paper cases or greased patty tins with the mixture.
 - Bake at 190°C, 375°F. Gas mark 5 for about 20 minutes, until firm.
 - When cold, cut a slice from the top of each cake, cut this in half.
 - Place a little Butter Cream on each cake and arrange 'wings' on cake.
- Chocolate spice Cake**
 - 100g margarine (4 oz)
 - 175g caster sugar (7 oz)
 - 50g plain chocolate (2 oz)
 - 2 eggs, separated pinch of salt
 - 1x2.5 ml spoon cinnamon

- 1/2 tsp mixed spice
- 1x2.5 ml spoon pinch ground cloves
- 150g self-raising flour (6 oz)
- 120 ml milk (8 tbsp)
- 25g cut mixed peel (1 oz)
- 1 Cream margarine and sugar until light and fluffy.
- 2 Blend in melted chocolate and egg yolks.
- 3 Sieve salt, spices and flour and stir in alternately with the milk.
- 4 Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites and peel.
- 5 Place mixture in greased 20 cm square tin.
- 6 Bake in a moderate oven, 180°C, 350°F. Gas mark 4 for about 45 minutes.
- 7 When cool, spread with Chocolate Butter Icing.
- Leave out spices and peel for a delicious chocolate cake.