

# LIVING

## Aiming at More Mobility

by Mary Frances Dunham

"ROADS and roads everywhere but no way to go," complains a Dhaka dweller about the city's traffic congestion. His cry like many others seems to fall on deaf ears. Poor mobility persists, not only hindering individuals but threatening the city's welfare as a whole.

### A New Approach to Traffic Policies

As a bicyclist from New York City, I notice that in Dhaka discussions about traffic often seem to come from a car user's point of view — that is, looking at mobility from the top downwards. What about considering traffic from the bottom up — through the eyes, say, of a rickshaw cyclist or a mere bicyclist like myself? Maybe improvements that serve the weakest road users, including pedestrians, can serve the other members as well.

Dhaka's flat terrain and compact size are ideal for pedal-powered travel. Unfortunately, transportation policies in cities frequently favour private cars rather than humbler modes of transportation. As in New York, Dhaka's rickshaw cyclists, in spite of all their valuable service, are blamed for congestion and often treated like outcasts.

### False Remedies

Taking into consideration the harm caused by "heavy" vehicles and the virtues of "light" transportation, what can Dhaka do to preserve its high ratio of human-powered transportation?

First, Dhaka's city planners and traffic engineers could re-examine common solutions to congestion that have proved detrimental to "light" travel without significant improvement to mass mobility. In Dhaka planners and traffic engineers have relied too much on such remedies as 1) widening roads, 2) segregating non-motorized sectors of traffic into specialized lanes, or 3) banning these sectors from chosen roadways. Such medicines improve mobility mainly for motorized sectors in low-density areas of cities where congestion is mild to begin with, but in commercial areas these remedies unfairly restrict the mobility of non-motorized travellers and bring only short term relief to the motorized ones.

This is especially true in



Riding a cycle — pleasant for children too

the case of widening roadways. Taking the case of New York, enlarged road space generally invites more traffic than anticipated and sooner than expected. Newly widened roadways re-congest within a few years. On widened avenues in Dhaka — New Eskaton Road, for example — shops, vendors and parked vehicles encroach on the added space; today's increased volume of moving traffic is, confined to the same lanes as before, after such avenues were widened.

Channelling vehicles into traffic lanes, a time-honored way to organize the flow of traffic, is an unrealistic solution where traffic is as highly mixed, as in New York and Dhaka. The variety of traffic sectors, each with its own style of motion defies orderly formation: Watching the traffic on many Dhaka avenues, I wonder why anyone bothered to paint lane lines there. In order to maintain momentum, I myself fail to

the accumulation of traffic at that point. Meanwhile, rickshaw cyclists are forced to make lengthy detours that would be easier for cars to accomplish. Pedestrians, the most abused travellers in Dhaka, in order to cross a virtual expressway, must walk a long way to reach an intersection, or else risk their lives dodging through fast flowing traffic.

### Traffic Balance in Dhaka

Unless conventional measures improve mobility significantly for all traffic sectors, why should the "heavy" vehicles be favoured by them, while the needs of "light" ones are neglected?

Dhaka still has time to answer this question with more balanced transportation policies and with time for traffic to adapt to them before more cars fill the city. At relatively low cost, the government could show moral if not material support for "light" mobility. Rickshaws could be re-instated on roads where they have been banned. In addition to the guidance that traffic agents currently give at intersections, other agents could be stationed at strategic points between intersections to monitor speeding vehicles, to help pedestrians cross, and to assist human-powered vehicles to make their necessary U-turns and short runs against traffic.

The traffic circles in Dhaka where traffic behaviour is particularly complex could be furnished with additional agents to guide vehicles as they join and leave the circular flow. Other ways for Dhaka to achieve equitable mobility are too numerous to mention here and their utility depends on individual site conditions: what works in New York or other cities may be unsuitable for Dhaka. However, the concept of sharing roads fairly appeals to most humans (even to motorists when they think about it) and the idea is worth applying here as much as possible. It can protect Dhaka's human-powered mobility before a growing quantity of cars bring increased accidents, more jams and more air pollution — ills from which car-congested cities around the world now long to escape. Dhaka deserves to avoid these plagues in its further development and to enjoy transportation that is efficient, economic and healthy for generations to come.

## Helping Those in Distress

A single-minded postcard campaigner K L Vishwanathan, who spends a large portion of his life soliciting donations for people who cannot afford medical fees for badly-needed treatment. He never phones or calls on potential donors, but simply bombards them with cards and letters.

by Atiya Singh

WHEN K L Vishwanathan saw a four-month-old baby who was slowly dying because a throat obstruction prevented her from swallowing, he collected money from office colleagues for her treatment.

The 1,560 rupees that he had raised and sent to Projith Mariam's impoverished parents did the trick. She was treated and recovered.

The money that saved Mariam's life also changed Vishwanathan's.

As soon as the grateful parents wrote to express their thanks, he recalls, he knew he had crossed the barrier between good intentions and active assistance, and he embarked on a new phase of his life-writing postcards for a cause.

Every month he writes literally hundreds of postcards to celebrities, philanthropists, welfare organisations and anyone else who might help pay for medical treatment for people, especially children, whose families cannot afford it.

To find needy cases, he scans the newspapers every day.

That is how he noticed 13-year-old Sunil, who could neither stand nor sit after injuring his back. Facilities for the specialised operation which would help him were not avail-

able in India and travelling abroad was beyond the means of his parents, who appealed for help through an advertisement in the press.

Vishwanathan wrote to Sunil's parents asking for X-rays and medical reports. He took the documents to a specialist, who confirmed that the case was genuine.

Vishwanathan moved into action. He wrote hundreds of letters to celebrities, politicians, businessmen, actors, sportsmen and charities. He also kept writing encouraging letters to the family.

Within weeks, two airline tickets had been donated, for Sunil and an attendant. Money was also sent to a pay for the operation and the stay in New York.

Today, Sunil is grateful to Vishwanathan for drastically improving his life. Hundreds of others who have been helped share the feeling.

Now 69, Vishwanathan, lean and slightly bent-backed, works for a transport company whose owner not only allows him to write postcards and letters in his free time at the office but also allows him use of the photocopier.

The owner's son helps with the letters and also contributes

to the purchase of stationery.

"I am a correspondence-oriented man," says Vishwanathan, explaining that he does not make telephone calls or call on people personally to solicit funds.

Nor does he handle donated money. Contributors are asked to send cash directly to the hospital or individual concerned.

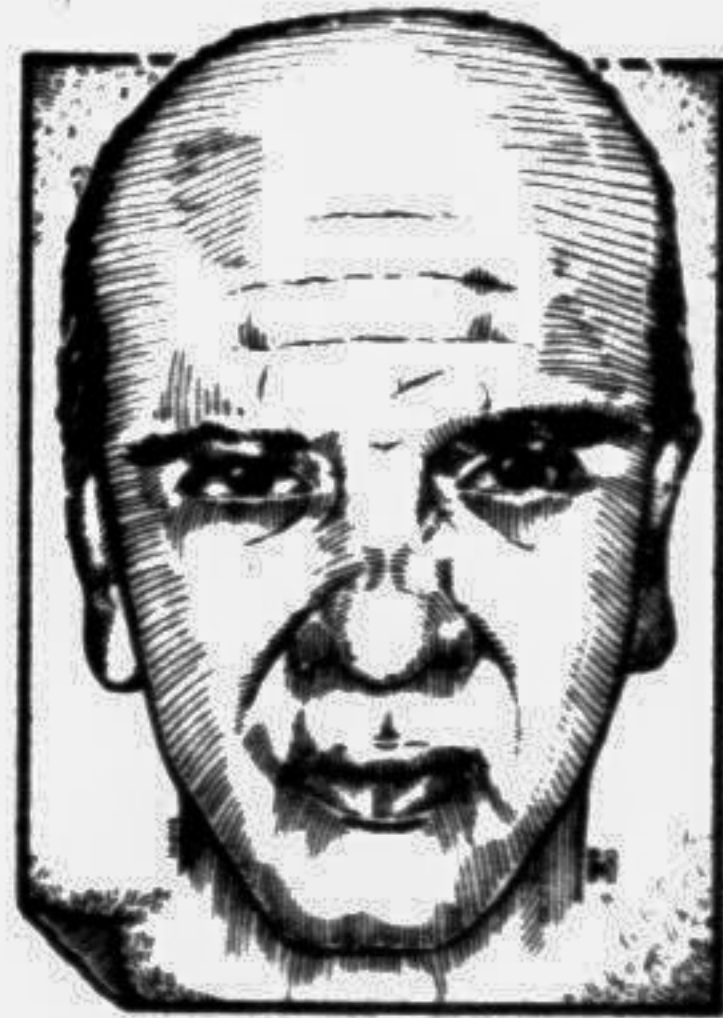
The only time he gets to hear about the outcome of his efforts is when he receives a letter of gratitude from a beneficiary.

He also gives his own money-small amounts, whatever he can afford at the time, together with a letter of hope and moral support. He records the donations in his "grey file."

"This is my most precious possession," he says, pointing to the letters from a plethora of people and organisations, including Mother Teresa, the Prime Minister's Office and scores of hospitals.

Among those he has helped are a blind research scholar, a Second World War veteran fighting for his pension, an orphanage and a home for the mentally disabled, for which he persuaded the Governor of Maharashtra state to donate a television.

Currently he is writing postcards to raise money for post-kidney transplant medi-



cation for eight-year-old Payal Sarkar; for seven-year-old Reshma Gawade in her fight against blood cancer; and for a multiple skin-grafting operation for 14-year-old Krupal who was the victim of an acid attack.

For Krupal, he wrote to Romi, entrepreneur wife of cricketer Kapil Dev. She responded with Rs 30,000 and a promise to ask her friends to donate.

His latest target for funds is the wife of United States President Bill Clinton. The letter was addressed: Hillary Clinton, Washington DC, USA.

He believes here is much goodness in every human being. "They only have to be motivated to help."

— Gemini News

Atiya Singh is a freelance journalist and Lecturer born in Hyderabad. She was awarded a Ph D in English Literature in 1989.

## Late, Great Romances

So much for the power of youth. The Duchess of Windsor, Coco Chanel and many other women made their greatest love matches after 40, and you can too!

by Kiki Olson

IMAGINE what would have happened had Juliet not decided to end it all when she discovered her young Romeo bad. Like most women, she probably would have absorbed the emotional impact of a romance gone wrong and put it aside as a bittersweet memory of youthful passion. When she hit her stride — say, in her mid-thirties — she would have become a more complex and fascinating woman, attracting the sophisticated and interesting men of Verona, who would have appreciated her age-earned worldliness and wherewithal.

Oh, if poor Juliet had only stuck it out! She would have realized that the great matches come long after love has lost its callow young bloom.

If you have doubts, consider the marriage of the century. At 41, Wallis Warfield Simpson, hardly a raving beauty and twice divorced, landed the most eligible man in the world, the bachelor King Edward VIII of England.

Baltimore-born Mrs Simpson (never underestimate the power of a Southern belle, wrote her cousin, novelist Upton Sinclair) was known for her great charm, flawless taste in fashion and furniture, and, according to some biographers, equally flawless amatory skills picked up in the Far East, where she lived with an earlier spouse. Whatever the



reason for his stubborn passion, the King, who was idolized by scores of noble English debs and could have chosen the fairest in the Empire, opted for a mature (and worse, American) bride the first and only time he walked down the aisle. So much for the power of youth.

Jacqueline Kennedy was near 40 when she married the 62-year-old Aristotle Onassis, the billionaire shipping tycoon. And while the then Mrs Kennedy, pretty, slim, the most famous woman in the world, and the most highly thought-of woman in American, certainly had her share of potential suitors, the competition for billionaires was difficult, no matter how exalted the contender.

Besides, free-wheeling Ari, who collected celebrities like tanker ships, could have easily gone for the gorgeous starlet route, but instead opted for a classy former First Lady, who was hardly a fresh face on the jet-set circuit.

When the infamous (and now largely discredited) Yale study prompted the media to proclaim that a woman over 40 had a better chance of being struck by a terrorist than being led to the altar, it helped to reinforce familiar stereotypes: The older a woman gets (and the more career-driven she is), the lower her chances are of finding romantic bliss. Just about the only thing the research showed was that Ivy League credentials do not guarantee knowledge of the ways of the heart. The Yale numbers crunchers ignored the case histories throughout time that prove repeatedly the greatest romances in many women's (and men's) lives occur after 40.

There is something about this pivotal birthday that brings out the best romantic impulses. Coco Chanel, the in-

genious French Fashion designer, encountered the love of her life, Bend'Or, the Duke of Westminster, then the richest man in England, when she was in her early 40s.

Shy, family-dominated poet Elizabeth Barrett married the English bard, Robert Browning, at 40, and glorified their late blooming passion in "The Sonnets from the Portuguese". Emily Dickinson also fell ecstatically in love in her 40s. Her grand, although it is believed, platonic amour, Otis Lord, a widowed family friend, served as muse, inspiring Emily to write some of her most expressive poetry.

Turning 40 serves as romantic catalyst for many, but great liaisons flourish well beyond this milestone. One need not look in library archives for later in life romantic inspiration. Liz Taylor never disappoints. At 59, she married 20 years-her-junior Larry Fortensky, Democratic fundraiser and ambassador to France Pamela Harriman linked up with super rich statesman Averell Harriman in her early 50s. Barbara Walters married Lorimar honcho Merv Adleson when she was 54 (they have since divorced). But even now, at 61, Barbara isn't sitting home reading Proust. She has been very much out on the town in New York and Washington with Virginia Senator John Warner (yes, the same John Warner once married to Liz).

By now you are convinced. If you are rich, famous or beautiful, age enters little into the romantic equation. But while good fortune never hurt anybody seeking a mate at any age, it is not a prerequisite for a rewarding romantic life beyond 40, 50 or even 60.

In fact, the chances for finding a fulfilling romance are greater as you get older. There may be fewer men from which

to choose, but the self-knowledge that comes with age helps to eliminate and lot of the trial and error, which is an inextricable part of the dating game in youth.

"When we were young, we fall in love with love," says clinical psychologist and author Georgia Witkin, Ph.D. "We walk on air, need no sleep, pretend that the smallest coincidence is an omen that it is meant to be. As we get older, we still love romance but we don't confuse it with the real thing. Perhaps the reason we make romantic choices in movies, books and TV shows is because we've become so practical in our daily lives. When we're in our twenties, it's exciting to have Cupid strike us; when we're in our forties we prefer to do the choosing."

Self-knowledge may focus our romantic involvements, but self-doubts about later-in-life attractiveness can hinder their development. One fifty-something woman dating a successful Wall Street broker her own age says, "Often I would look in the mirror and think the same thoughts I did before our first date. What does he see in me?"

"Well, one day I asked him. He seemed surprised by the question. He said I was terrific looking, clever and bright. 'Why do you think I've been with you for over a year?' He asked, and then added, 'Because I can talk to you about anything. Because you've got a mind and a life of your own. You don't need me to make you happy.'"

An intelligent woman's capacity for cogent and interesting conversation should never be underestimated as a source of great allure. Robert, a 50 year old tax attorney, met his wife when they were both 44, and says, "I haven't looked at another woman since. Except for the models in the swimsuit issue of 'Sports Illustrated'. Sure, I'd be flattered if any one of those beautiful young women found me attractive, but I doubt whether we could sustain an evening's worth of conversation. Looking at a gorgeous model and wanting to be with her are two different things."

John, a 43-year-old investment broker, relates, "After my divorce, my friends used to 'fix me up' with a bevy of women, most of whom were in their twenties. Maybe they thought I had regressed. While the women were very lovely, they lacked something — it went way beyond intelligence and wit. I guess it was a certain savviness that comes with time and experience. I met my second wife, Muaren, who is two years older than I am, quite by accident and it took me two days to realize that she was 'the one'. She knew when to take my arm, the right places to laugh in a story, what it's like to go through a divorce, how to make mashed potatoes and fresh croissants. She was the ultimate excitement in a comfort zone a woman I admired and respected. I think that's what most men are looking for. At least I was."

Courtesy: "Women's Day"

## A Taste of Italian Ice-cream in Bangladesh



Akku Chowdhury (left) at the counter



Salesmen attending customers

by Lenin Gani

AKKU Chowdhury is no ordinary person. He is a person with a vision.

Seeing the substandard quality of locally made ice-cream which Akku calls nothing more than an exercise in 'commercial exploitation', he decided that something had to be done to change this trend. In 1990 he visited Italy (the land of ice-cream), where, after only two months of intensive training he finally mastered the necessary skills required to run such a business.

After completion of his training he returned home and got to work on locating the site for his first ice-cream parlour. And in April, 1991, the first outlet named Dolce Vita Gelato (Italian for sweet life) was established in Banani.

Instantly it became a huge success. But Akku resisted the temptation of going for another outlet so soon because it was impossible finding the appropriate spot. "We had a choice between Dhanmondi or Shantinagar", he said.

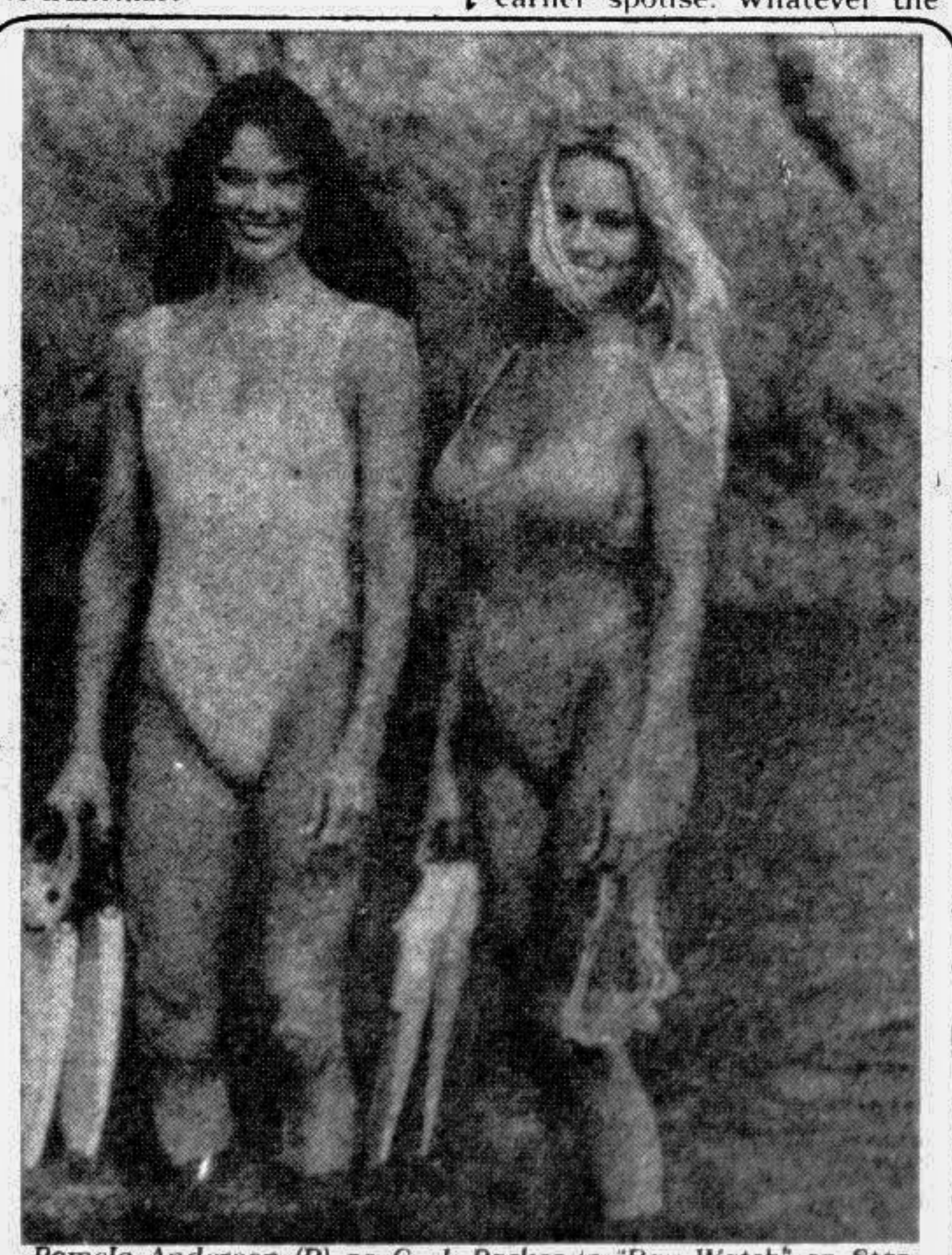
After weighing all the pros and cons, Dhanmondi was selected and on Jan 26, 1995 and Akku's dream was fulfilled.

Commenting on what makes Dolce Vita so special, Akku said: "It's basically down to the careful preparation using only the finest ingredients available together with fresh pasteurised milk. Also our continued commitment to offering our esteemed customers newer flavours every time."

Nevertheless, when he was asked whether there was ever a case of a dissatisfied client, he simply smiled and re-

marked: "If you lick it you'll love it," a reference to his trusted motto.

Presently, Akku a Chittagongian and a proud freedom fighter is quite content now. However, in the future, it is his intention of setting up yet another parlour in Chawkbazar area of the city and even plans to franchise.



Pamela Anderson (R) as C. J. Parker in 'Bay Watch' on Star Plus

## Risky Business

by Nico den Tuinder

Something like a decade ago, I received a training in interviewing. My first victim was a mountaineer. Asked why he risked his life climbing up and down big lumps of rock, he said that life in Holland had become so dull, predictable and safe, that it had lost much of its attractions. Mountaineering was a good escape from this, a test of his worth. Stockcar racers, mountaineers, deep-sea divers, bungy-jumpers, parachutists: you may think they are nuts; they think we are the vegetating part of society.

I would like to advise all these dare-devils: come to Bangladesh. You will get all the thrills of exploring the edge separating life from death for free. The whole of Dhaka traffic is one big stock car race. Participate in it for ten minutes and your adrenaline level will shoot up to excitement level. Try to hang on to the moving, rocking and vibrating window frame of an overloaded bus: this is much more fun than spidering up and down the rocky mountains.

The locals will be happy to enter the competition. Bangladeshis have no fear. They sit, stand and walk on fast-moving trains and buses; wire their houses as if they like a good short-circuit every now and then, and preferably

build their house without a proper foundation.

In the West we shun every possible risk: we check up our babies' before they are even born, and conclude a burial insurance policy soon after. We insure ourselves against everything: disability, unemployment, and old-age. Whole tribes of people only go on package tours for holiday, just to be sure the hotel, food and amusements will be fine. One of my favourite Dutch television programmes was a show of holiday complaints. Sunburned tourists blubbered to the cameras about the bumpy ride to the Spanish coast, the long walk to the beach, and cockroaches in their rooms. It's great fun to see other people suffer, especially when it is due to their own stupidity.

The ability to avoid risk is a privilege of the rich. We still need some excitement, though. We have safely delegated this to the idiot box: we love to see other people breaking their necks. Quite recently live recordings of fires, crashes and hijacks have become the most popular shows on television.

I don't have a television in my home. I don't need one: every day eight million stunt men perform their business right in front of me.