

# RIISING STARS



## A Day at the US Embassy

by Mridul Chowdhury

I woke up very early that morning. It was a big day for me — it would decide the course of my life. It was so scary to think that so much depended on my getting the American visa.

I arrived at the Embassy on time to take my seat. It is an irony that it is only during times of severe tension that you really get to feel the presence of your heart. My pulse had challenged the second-hand of my watch and was clearly winning. While they raced, I waited and observed the people around me.

There are several places at which the Bengalis become united — the Suhrawardy Uddan, the Zero Point, ... and the US Embassy. Here, we are all bounded by a common aim, as in 1952 or 1971. Here, we all share each other's griefs, rejoice over each other's success, and most of all, forget class distinctions and feel equal. Faithful to our Bengali tradition, we unite — under a common banner: "We want to go to America."

Calling for the interviews started at around 9 o'clock. A resonant voice "Md Shamsuddin Ahmed, Pach Number Janala" suddenly changed the

mood of the room. Almost 50 pairs of eyes followed him as Mr Ahmed got up and stepped into the interview room. We anxiously waited for him to get out. Two others were called in other "windows". Tension was increasing. Everyone was worrying about the three inside. Would they pass? What would happen to them if they can't the visa?

One of the doors was opening. Yes, the moment had come. Mr Ahmed came out. Every one was a Sherlock Holmes trying to figure out whether he got the visa. There wasn't any smile on his face. He wasn't reaching for his pocket to show people that he had the token to pick up his passport after 3:30 pm. We understood what that meant. As we grieved at his misfortune, we waited for the next one to show us some hope.

Another door opened and out came a teenager with a big grin on his face. Yes, he had done it — our hero. Some went to ask him what questions he was asked, some to see how the token looked like, and some to see him from a closer distance. He answered each question enthusiastically and went out

waving his token. We wondered who our next hero would be.

This was how the day went on. Most came out with the face of defeated warriors, while a few came out waving their tokens. The Bengalis who had once waved the Bangladeshi flag after having freed the nation were, after 24 years, waving the token after having the permission to leave the nation.

I was stirred into the real world as the speaker said "Mridul Chowdhury, please come to Window 4". By now, the second-hand of my watch had given up hope, but still my pulse continued the race with fresh enthusiasm. I entered "Window 4".

At the end of the day, I found myself walking out of the US Embassy, while some beggars surrounded me. With their hands held out, they were saying, "Akta taka den, duga bhat khamoo."

A familiar face came forward and asked "Got the visa?"

"Yes", I answered "Excellent. Congratulations."

"Yeah." I begged well — Akta visa den, America jamoo.

## Tensed up about Tension

by Reefat Sultana

WHO says I am always tensed up? I'm perfectly calm, cool as a cucumber. I can lift a cup of tea without spilling it, provided I hold on to it with the waist of my other hand. Lately, I have been reading a book on how to remain relaxed and I'm completely cucumbered. I mean cured.

My friends at school actually got me started. "Take it easy," they chorused. "Stop thinking about your school work, SAT and TOEFL or you'll end up having ulcers." So I stopped thinking about my SAT and TOEFL and started thinking more about my ulcers.

The more I thought the more I noticed some symptoms I had never realized

in announcing that the application materials from Harvard and Yale had just arrived. The accelerated pace of Bangladeshis going to America and the anxiety of how to plot college essays were really causing my nerves to snap like garters.

Anyway I went to bed and I believe I slept like a top. (Frequently I spin all night).

The next day I began pacing the room faster and faster trying to come up with something good to write in the college application forms. Writers, like music composers, strive for harmony in their art, my sister said.

A discordant essay — one in which all the pieces were disconnected was the only thing I could come up with.



## Grandfather's Smile

by Rahnuma Wahid

ONE of my earliest and fondest memories of my grandfather is of his walking towards the home he had built and lived in for almost forty years. He was clad in white pajamas and panyabi, and on his head he wore the stiff, round, white cap required for prayer. The afternoon prayers had just ended, and the men were streaming out of the mosque, in a sea of white, into the humid heat of the day. The mosque is situated at the mouth of the narrow lane that runs past a multitude of houses and ends in front of my grandfather's home. That mosque is as old as my grandfather's two storey abode, and has been faithfully visited by Nana five times a day, for forty odd years.

Nana was a tall man, much taller than anyone around him, and he walked with the stature attributed to only the European aristocrats. From the gate, I could clearly see his lean figure, threading his way through the crowd. Good, he did not forget to wear his glasses, otherwise he would have stumbled over that pothole... He was carrying a packet. I wonder if it was the same thing he had bought the last time. No time to think about that! He had forgotten where he lives... he was walking into uncle's house...

lenses, and he handed me his packet. Then I felt a rapport with him that did not fade even as his condition deteriorated over the years.

Nana was afflicted with Parkinson's Disease. As the brain cells dry up and the condition of the brain deteriorates, the sufferer begins to lose touch with reality, he forgets the names of things and people, he loses control over his organs and body, and eventually he is no better than a baby. When I arrived in Bangladesh from Britain, Nana was still in the early stages of the disease, and the only indications of his illness were that he could not remember things and had frequent bouts of insanity. One day he packed a few of his clothes into a shirt, and walked out the door saying that he was going home. He reached the gate of the house and then could not remember where he was going. His frustration made him begin to scream loudly. My uncles brought him back inside, and he was put to bed. That night I remember seeing my grandmother sitting near Nana's head and crying, softly. I could not understand why she was crying. Nana had been so funny that day.

Most of the time though, Nana was fine, and he and I played games. He made

throwing things at everyone. Even in the midst of his confused outbursts Nana, however, remained gentle with me, although I am sure he did not know who I was. These experiences filled the fifth year of my life.

When I returned to Bangladesh five years later, after our sojourn in Kenya, Nana's condition had visibly worsened. I was now old enough to realise that Nana was seriously ill. I could see the pain he was in and the raw pain in my grandmother's eyes. I could sense the gloom that pervaded the house. Nana could no longer communicate with anyone, nor indeed could he recognise anyone. He could not feed himself or go to the bathroom when he wanted. He was almost confined to his bed. He simply sat upon his bed, and mumbled and sometimes screamed, a steady stream of jargon. His screams were horrible screams of anguish. It was awful to hear. The only time he stayed quiet was when I or my mother, sat with him and held his hand or massaged his temples.

I understood that there was no hope that Nana would recover and become the iron-willed and controlled man I had heard stories of, all my life. The rapport I had established with him on the second day of our acquaintance did not change. I would run to his room immediately after returning from school, and wipe his face and shirt, soaked from the uncontrolled flow of his saliva. I would massage his temples and try in vain to unclench his fists. Nana could not have known that I was his granddaughter. Yet, while he was loath to have anyone else come near him, he allowed me so much freedom. Somewhere in the recesses of his mind his love for me ruled him. Somehow, despite the long years, the descending darkness of his mind and the long separations, my Nana remembered me.

Everyone in the house had become used to his condition, but evidenced a gloomy indifference. My uncles had given up going to the mosque. My grandmother was the only one in the house who prayed, but even her strength slowly diminished, and I saw her become a shadow of her former self over the years.

That bond of love had not been diminished by the ravages of nature, it is untrue that people forget their loved ones when they are not around. It is love that gives us family, and it is a precious gift that I have learned to treasure.

Nana died on the morning of the 20th August 1991, after suffering for over fifteen years. In the last days of his life he suffered unbearably

before. My pulse sounded funny and there were fluttering sensations in my stomach. I cut my finger, trying to cut a mango. My friends couldn't have been more delighted had I slashed my throat.

"A clear case of tension", said one.

"Send her to Pabna," said the other.

"Read this book — How to RELAX," said my third friend.

So I set out with the book one afternoon. Don't worry about being worried it said. The first chapter was, "HOW TO INDUCE SLEEP" I put everything out of my mind and tried to concentrate on a small object, like an ice cube.

The trouble was that I continued thinking more about cubes until I had an entire row of them, which reminded me of my 3,500 SAT word-list. There I was wide awake again. To add to my tension, my father came

"Relax!" I muttered to myself. I recalled someone telling me to take a deep breath and then to let it all out if I wanted to feel tension free. I stood in front of my table, filled all my alveolar sacs with air and held it.

I could actually feel all my tension crawling away! My face was growing blue, my knees felt limp and my body crashed forward, my head striking the corner of my table as I fell straight on my face....

Later the doctor said that there was nothing to be greatly worried about. I should be fine in a couple of weeks and what I needed was a nice, long rest.

What I actually needed was a one-way ticket to America with an acceptance letter from a good university. "Relax," said the doctor, "keep all your worries at the back of your mind and just let yourself go."

## Island man

by Kazi Khaled Arafat

VIRTUALLY now I'm incomplete. Though I'm whole from head to feet; Black and blue solitude has me beat — Amputated my spiritual pound of meat.

My shadow — my only constant friend. Stay with me until the end. When all our love is just pretend, Loneliness invades I can't defend.

So innocent and yet I'm cursed — All sweet memories disperse. Promises grandiloquence turns so terse. The flower sours, and I end this verse.

## A Visit to the Keats and Shelly Memorial Museum in Rome

by Abee Ali

ON a bright sunny day in Rome, which was the 23rd of March 1995, I went to the Keats and Shelly Memorial Museum for a class trip. My English class and I went there to learn about Keats' life. The museum is in Piazza di Spagna on the right corner of the Spanish Steps.

In front of it there is the Barcaccia. It is a life-size boat carved out of stone with a fountain in the middle made by Bernini to commemorate the event of the sea flooding all the way up there. The Barcaccia became very important in Keats' life as I will explain later.

We went there at about 10:40 in the morning. Miss Watt, my English teacher, had booked a guided tour for us at 11:00. The museum was actually where John Keats had lived for the later period of his life. (Shelly, who was a great poet as well as a friend of Keats, also used to live in the same building, but we concentrated on Keats during this visit.)

John Keats was born in England in 1795 on the 31st of October. He lived a very short life and died in the prime of his life in Rome. He passed away at eleven o'clock on the night of the 23rd of February 1821. He died of tuberculosis, the same disease his brother, Tom, had died of. In fact, John Keats had caught tuberculosis from his brother in England.

Nobody believed that he had tuberculosis but John Keats knew he did, because one day he coughed for a long time and saw some blood on his handkerchief. At last a few of his friends believed him and they persuaded him to come to Italy because they thought that the good air would cure him. In reality, nobody knew at that time that Italy's air was particularly bad for people with lung diseases, as in the evenings the air was very damp.

John Keats had gone to live in that pink building in Piazza di Spagna after a doctor had checked him over. The doctor asked the Venetian landlady if he might reserve the top (fourth) floor for an Englishman, but he did not tell the landlady that the person had tuberculosis. After the landlady found out, she said that all the floor, the walls and furniture would have to be stripped off the room after Keats' departure because he had been breathing in there.

Joseph Severn, an artist, drew a portrait of Keats during the last three weeks of his life. Keats died in the arms of Joseph Severn, a great loyal friend of his who was buried right beside him in the cemetery. After Keats died, some people took an imprint of his face out of plaster that is called a death mask. We saw the portrait and the death mask in his bedroom. An autopsy was performed too as many people still doubted the fact that John Keats had died of tuberculosis. It was confirmed by the doctors that his lungs had completely rotted away.

Unfortunately I wasn't allowed to take any photographs at Keats' house. The main room was full of books, books of poetry written by the three great poet-friends — Keats, Byron and Shelly. Our guide talked a lot about John Keats and his life. I wasn't really always listening because I found myself gaping at the bookshelves that covered all the walls of the room. There were lots and lots of books. There

were also some fabulous posters of Keats. His signature was printed on them.

Then we went out onto the balcony. It was the only place with some open air where Keats had been allowed to go to after he started living in that building. Because he had tuberculosis, his food was always brought up by a rope with a filled basket at the end. Supposedly the food came from a small restaurant or inn — no trace of this place has been left.

After a while the guide asked us to sign a huge book with a very old and fading cover. It was a really thick book. When I glanced inside I saw that most of the pages were filled with visitors' names and signatures. On one new, clean page, one of my classmates, Francisco, wrote Marymount (the name of my school) across the top and the date by its side. Then we all signed it. Miss Watt signed after all of us. It was a way of showing that we had been there.

We also saw Prince Charles' signature in the book and saw a photo of him signing the book when he had visited Keats' museum! When we finished signing, we thanked the guide and went outside. Then we entered a McDonald's in Piazza di Spagna for lunch.

After lunch, we took our bus and went to the cemetery where Keats was buried. There was no one there when we arrived. We entered the cemetery which for some reason didn't look very dead to me. When we found Keats' tomb, we saw that there was an inscription on the tombstone. It said: Here lies one whose name was writ in water. Keats had wanted this to be on his tomb and there was quite a good reason for it.

When he used to lie down and try to sleep at the old pink building in Piazza di Spagna, he often felt disturbed and uneasy. Also, his tuberculosis sure didn't help matters. He used to keep his windows open because the sound of the water from the fountain in the Barcaccia soothed him and made him feel better. He would be calmed by the water's sound and therefore be able to fall asleep.

I really enjoyed this trip and learned a lot from it. I liked hearing and seeing things about Keats' life, where and how he lived, and where he was buried. This was also my first time in a cemetery, so it was a strange experience.

All I can say is that I won't forget this trip. It also inspired me to write some poetry. I'm not so good at it but I think I can get by. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed reading about how I passed this great day and maybe, someday, you may come to Rome and Piazza di Spagna to see for yourself all I have seen!

To finish off, I'd like to end by quoting the last lines of Keats' famous "Ode on a Grecian Urn" written when he was 23 years old. The meaning of the last two lines has been much debated and defies a simple reading. When old age shall this generation waste, Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty", — that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

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## The World is Theirs' Too

by Farhana I Khan

HOW about you being a captive inside a cage, getting to eat the same food everyday and sometimes no food at all, people pelting stones at you and you being one of the subjects in a zoo. It is absurd and impossible.

But why? Because we are human beings and the greatest creature in this world. What wrong have the animals done? Why are they being locked up and deprived of their freedom? May be they are not as intelligent or beautiful as we are but they do provide us with some help.

We make them do whatever we feel like. Don't you think they have the right to live in this world as we do?

Animals are animals. We cannot make them behave like us. They have different nature, thoughts and feelings but we are keeping them as prisoners sometimes for our pleasure, sometimes for experiment but rarely for their safety.

An example of recent news — the beauty pageant contest in South Africa, Miss World 95, was being held while on the other side of the country, seals were being killed. This is shocking and not acceptable! Where do we get the right or the licence to take their lives so brutally?

Today in this age of mad and rash development spree taking animals into consideration might sound silly but imagine you being such a victim! Let us be free and let them be free. The world is ours as well as it is theirs!

## Jokes

I stayed in a small village last summer. My landlady kept animals. On the first day one of her chickens died so we had chicken for dinner.

On the second day one of her ducks died so we had roast duck for dinner.

On the third day her cow died so we had beef for dinner.

On the fourth day her husband died, so I left before dinner.

★ ★ ★  
Police man : I am going to have to ask you to accompany me to the station.

Drunk : Why, don't you want to walk around all by yourself?

by Farzeen Saleh

## Quiz Club

Here are this week's 10 quizzes for you to crack! Hurry up, and send us the answers to win the Quiz-Club prize!

1. In 1985, which country hosted the World Conference on Women?
2. In which island France has recently carried out nuclear testing programmes?
3. What led to the heaviest NATO strikes that have ever been carried out on the Bosnian Serb positions?
4. Which country in West Africa has gained its independence lately?
5. In which years Arab-Israel war the Sinai province was occupied?
6. Which country's capital is Almaty (Alma-Ata)?
7. What is the name given to the Malaysian currency?
8. What does PEM stand for?
9. Who has won the title, "Miss Bangladesh 1995"?
10. Here is Bangladesh, which division receives the highest amount of rainfall, annually?

Answers to 8.9.95 quizzes:

1. Kenya
2. Maruroa
3. Serbian mortar attack on a market-place in Sarajevo
4. Eritrea
5. 1967
6. Kazakhstan
7. Ringgit
8. Protein Energy Malnutrition
9. Yasmin Bilkis
10. Division of Sylhet

Answers to the questions (Quiz Club) 1.9.95

1. Rabin, Arafat, Peres
2. Haris Slijdzic
3. Papua New Guinea (According to Asia Week)
4. Federal Reserve
5. Banjul
6. String — Oriented Symbolic Language (computing)
7. 80 sec
8. Membrane surrounding brain and spiral cord.
9. Paradise for heroes favoured by the gods. (Greek myth)
10. Salman F Rahman



I cannot remember what Nana said, or anything at all. In fact I cannot even remember if Nana used to speak intelligibly at the time, even all those years ago. The only thing I remember is that, when I darted over to him and held his hand, he looked down at his four-year-old granddaughter and recognised her. He smiled at me, his eyes lit up behind those thick glass

It is a tradition to bring me sweet bread from the little kiosk near the mosque, everyday following afternoon prayers. I eagerly looked forward to that treat. Then as Nana's condition gradually deteriorated, he could no longer leave the house unattended. His behaviour became even more erratic and I found it immensely funny when one day he flew into a rage and began