Tales of Courage and Close Encounters

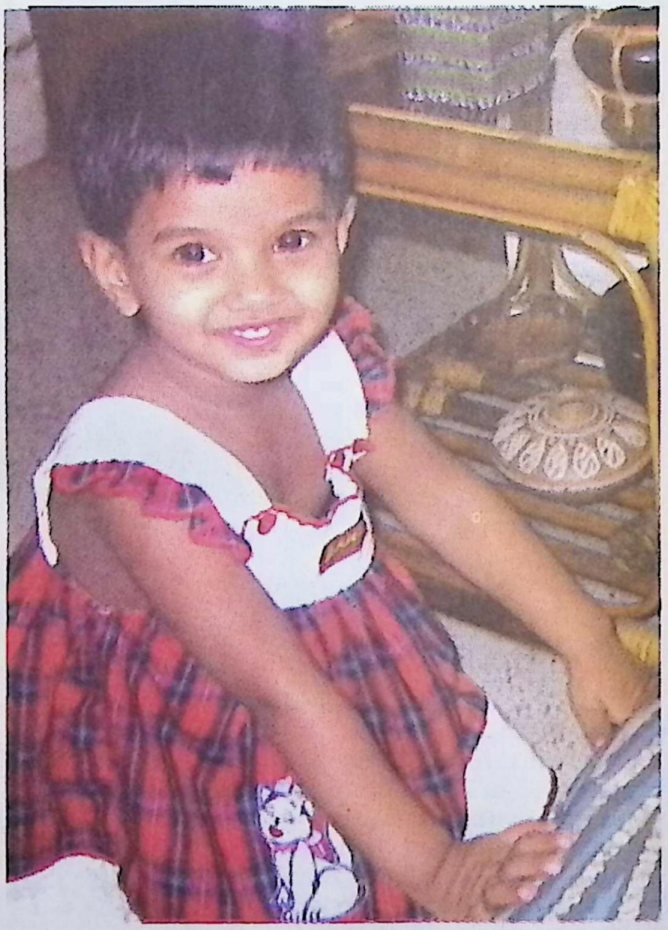
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ONE of the hallmarks of modern-day parenting seems to be a (not completely unjustified, but sometimes excessive) desire to protect children from every possible potentially harmful influence that they might come into contact with. Given that there are a fair number of scary things out there, it provides a strong justification for a degree of protectiveness. But it is one thing to avoid frightening fairytales such as Little Red Riding Hood (with its predatory wolves in dark forests) or Hansel and Gretel burning witches in ovens, and quite another to decide that children might find Santa Claus somehow alarming! And yet, one local authority in Britain decided just that last year, instructing teachers not to talk about him or allow Santa Claus visits in the classroom, in case it made children anxious...!

So given all this caution, I was quite interested when a friend of mine recently described how her four-year-old had enjoyed watching one of the Star Wars films, "The Revenge of the Sith". Wasn't she scared by all the bizarre creatures, I wondered. No, my friend reassured me, in fact her daughter simply described them as "Anaconda-r Bondhu" ("friends of Anaconda"). This of course inevitably led me to the realisation that this particular four-year-old had also seen the film "Anaconda", featuring monster snakes in the Amazon...

In the interests of my friend's peace of mind, I will not identify her, but I have to say that in all fairness, her child seems singularly unworried despite having encountered these various strange creatures relatively early in life! Indeed, it is striking to note how very differently children of the same age can react to the same "scary stuff". When I remain in favour of avoiding too-early exposure to certain influences - though I hasten to add that I do NOT include Santa Claus in that category! - I do think that some kids are more sensitive to things than others, and it's worth being aware which category of child you are dealing with, rather than instituting blanket bans on these matters.

Some time ago, I was helping friends organise an Easter egg hunt, when one of them mentioned that her five-year-old son seemed to have developed some kind of anxiety about the Easter Bunny. Apparently, when he was put to bed at night, he would ask again and again whether the Easter Bunny was around. And his tone clearly indicated that he was not excited by that prospect!



After much pondering, the adults finally came to the conclusion that this worry of his originated from a recent viewing of the film "The Curse of the Were-Rabbit" an animated film featuring a wicked rabbit, which he had clearly confused with the rather more benign Easter Bunny...! After some persuasion, this particular child was finally convinced that the Easter Bunny was