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# Chasing Dreams

NAZIBA BASHER

Shahriar Abdullah, Production Designer and Art Director of Realm Pictures, a production house he founded with his friends, has tasted success since they started their work. But this success did not come easily--the struggle and effort put into their work proved to everyone how dreams really do come true.

"When I was only 7-years-old, living in the UK, I was a big fan of Star Wars. My father brought me a 'Star Wars-behind the scenes' cassette, since the show itself was not available for purchase back then. Watching the work behind the scenes made me realise that all of what I see on television is man-made. It also made me realise, I wanted to be one of the men making them!" he shares. Shahriar studied at Torquay Boys' Grammar where he and his friends, fascinated by film, learned to make their own. "At that time, my



obsession moved on to The Lord of The Rings and I used to religiously watch the making of the movie.

While he fantasised about working on movies, making sets and designing props, his father wanted him to have a more academic life. "I studied law at Keele University to keep my family happy. But two years in, I realised that I just couldn't give up on my dream,"

says Abdullah. Although his family was not thrilled that he gave up law, they soon saw the kind of passion he had for the work he did, and started supporting him in all his endeavours.

He next teamed up with his friends from high school, and started Realm Pictures. With his friends David M Reynolds as the Director, Eve Hazelton as Director of Photography and Editor,

and Jonathan Dupont as Producer and Writer, the four started working tirelessly towards recognition. Their first film- Zomblies- was an instant hit on YouTube. "We got quite a lot of exposure and even my idol, Sir Richard Taylor, Founder and Creative Director of Weta Workshops, and the set, costume and prop designer of The Lord of The Rings, had sent us positive feedback! That is when we knew that we had what it takes and we could go much further with our work," shares Abdullah. They then came up with the idea to make an underwater film. "But for that we would need a lot of money," he says. They entered a competition called the Rain Dance Film Festival, won 3000 pounds and a trip to Cannes Film Festival to kick off their project. There, after pitching their ideas to various people in film and media, they found many interested in their project who were willing to work for free only because the idea was so

thrilling. They even collected crowd funds from Kick-Starter and raised more than enough money to make their film.

Their film, The Underwater Realm, was, once again, an instant hit and they were called to Los Angeles for an interview. During their time in Hollywood, they met a lot of interested producers who showed eagerness to work with the talented youngsters. Then it happened- Richard Taylor himself invited the group out to New Zealand for them to spend some time with Weta. Shahriar's dream finally came true as he was asked to assist Richard Taylor for some new projects. Already having some hit films under their names; Realm Pictures plans to take their works further with more upcoming projects in Hollywood. Shahriar himself now, not only works with Realm, but also teaches classes in YouTube space in London, on animation, prop building and sets.



## CRACKING THE CODE

APURBA JAHANGIR

From the day she laid her eyes on a computer, it was love at first sight for Sania Kabir Liya. Though her parents wanted their daughter to be a doctor, she never gave up her dream towards being a computer engineer. After getting into Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Liya couldn't ask for anything better but she didn't know it was only the beginning. In 2014 Sania Kabir Liya was the first Bangladeshi to be awarded with the Google Anita Borg Memorial Scholarship, which is one of highest respected grants in the modern computer science world.

In May, 2014 Liya first saw the announcement of the scholarship in a website. "It was very random attempt on my part. Around 32 students from my university applied for this scholarship so I never thought of getting the award and at one point I forgot about the whole thing and started concentrating on my studies," says Liya. But an email in July changed her whole life. "I couldn't believe my eyes when I first saw the mail. After a long boring lab session at the university, you don't really expect that your life's about to change," says Sania Kabir Liya. In October she flew to Tokyo to receive the award.

"It was without a doubt a life changing experience. 28 people from all around the world were granted this scholarship that year and I was very lucky to be a part of this genius bunch," says Sania. In Tokyo, she got to learn how the most popular IT organisation of the world works from big personalities of the company. "We were taught first-hand of how Google operates and how it truly changed mankind's perspective of thinking in the modern age." After getting the scholarship, Liya is now on a mission, trying to get more women interested in the IT sector. "I think it's a whole new world out there for women who are interested to work in IT. We are talking about a sector which is developing day by day and if we get more women interested to work in this field it would be on of the best decisions ever made," said the scholar.

## With an open mind



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ANIKA HOSSAIN

Dr Omar Rahman, currently the Vice Chancellor of the Independent University, Bangladesh, is a man of varied interests, and has let his instincts guide him throughout his academic career. He began his school life at Viqarunnisa, which was in his day a co-ed institute, where he studied till class three. "I then went on to St Joseph's, and graduated from there with my O'Level's degree in 1973," he tells us. "I went to Notre Dame College for a year and half from there, but then I got a scholarship to Harvard University, and I went away to the States in August of 1975."

Dr Rahman is a great believer in liberal arts, "Young people should not be making decisions about their lives too early on, I think a really great feature of the American education system is that you get exposure to so many things you've never even heard of—you get to know about literature, history, science and you are able to think laterally across disciplines," he opines. "This is what we are promoting at places like IUB and ULAB."

At Harvard, he majored in Biochemistry but at the same time became very interested in social sciences, namely Economics. He then went on to medical school at North Western University in Chicago. After this, "I returned to the East Coast and did a residency in Newark City Hospital, which is a fascinating slice of the third world in the US," he says.

"Initially I did three years of internal medicine but I spent a lot of that time focusing on HIV, because that was the height of the HIV epidemic. I also spent six months of my third year working at ICDDRDB and I realised I wanted to do research along with my practice."

When he returned and finished his residency, he decided to take a break.

*In 2002, Omar Rahman came to Bangladesh on vacation and met with Professor Badrul Mubin Chowdhury, his predecessor at IUB, and had a conversation about returning here and giving back to his country, which changed his life.*

Still interested in social sciences, he got fellowship at Harvard for a Master's degree in Health Policy and Management. "I then ended up doing a PhD in Epidemiology. I got a fellowship from the National Institute of Environment and Health, and I was interested in the intersection between social issues and health," he says. After graduate school, he worked

at the RAND Corporation in California, which is the largest think tank in the US. After four years there, he got a teaching position at Harvard School of Public Health, a graduate programme at Harvard. In the seven years he spent there, he was promoted to Associate Professor. Soon after, Dr Rahman turned his attention from research to clinical work and trained in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He was 42 at that time.

In 2002, he came to Bangladesh on vacation and met with Professor Badrul Mubin Chowdhury, his predecessor at IUB, and had a conversation about returning here and giving back to his country, which changed his life. Soon after, this conversation, he returned to Bangladesh. "For 3-4 years I taught and did research, and then the Pro- VC position opened up, and I applied for it." He was Pro-VC for 5 years, after which in 2012, he became VC. As VC, he is trying his best to promote the true meaning of liberal arts among his students and continues his efforts to graduate well rounded, professional individuals who have interest in a variety of areas outside their field of expertise.

Although a VC by day, during his evenings and weekends, he devotes himself to counselling patients. He also remains an adjunct faculty member in Demography at the Department of Global Health and Population at the Harvard School of Public Health.

PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO