

The Lure of Storytelling

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I am an accidental journalist, the one who sort of stumbled into the world of writing. I had a different dream as a kid. I wanted to be an astronaut, explore the stars and the universe. However, with age my ambition changed. At 14, I fell directly from the sky to the ocean as now I aimed to be a sailor. I stuck to this goal for some time; the ocean was alluring, larger than life.

A new horizon stretched before my eyes. Unfortunately, while I dreamed of captaining ocean vassals, I had forgotten to prepare for my HSC exams. The result was quite predictable for a day dreamer and my dream ship sank into the sandy shores before even embarking on its first journey. People need drive to overcome any sort of depression and to survive. So I heeded my father's advice to enrol in the Media Studies and Journalism Department of ULAB. Now I was dreaming of becoming a journalist just like my mother.

A distracted soul, my dreams were not just limited to being a journalist; enrolling in a media school meant I could be a filmmaker, photographer, writer - in short, a jack of all trades. Maybe inside my mind I was trying to be a person like my brother - sharp and creative.

Is it really easy to become an expert in every field? Is it possible to change the world with just a single man's dream? At that time my over-confident self believed that it was. The real world was still far away from my dream land.

Interestingly when I got admitted to the journalism department, the first thing I lost was my girl friend. She wasn't happy with my decision and of course with my vagabond lifestyle. So she left me with a broken heart. The second problem was accommodation. In the over-

populated Dhaka city, people don't prefer renting out apartments to bachelors. Thus began the life of a nomad. A resident of Chittagong, the capital city never felt like my own. In two months I switched over six houses from Raja Bazar to Jhigatola and Hajaribagh to Gandaria. This continuous movement continued from 2008 to the middle of 2013, becoming a habit of sorts.

By that time I started working for bdnews24.com as a contributor to its entertainment page. After my first feature was published, I realized that maybe I could think of being a writer. For the first time in Dhaka, a flicker of happiness and hope overshadowed my dejection and it felt amazing to see my name on the computer screen.

My over-protective Ma couldn't stop crying when I was about to leave Chittagong. Baba was busy helping me pack my things as he said in a soft tone, "If it's to be done, it should be done. Now you have to look after yourself." When I first arrived in Dhaka, the city stretched before my eyes with its high-rise buildings, dust, crowds and pollution. That's when I realised the magnitude of the upheaval that awaited me. I grew up in a joint family. So my chacha and phupus had spent sleepless nights and endured my unstoppable crying. At Dhaka I found that the comforts that I was so used to have suddenly vanished. I was on my own.

But I was quite fortunate to have teachers like Anis Pervez, Dr Shahnaj Husne Jahan, Imtiaz A Chowdhury and Md Asiuzzaman. Imtiaz A Chowdhury helped me to overcome my depression with his psychological shadow drills. Dr Shahnaj and Anis Pervez were always there for me in a way that I started to feel that I actually was worth something and could achieve

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something in my life. Even today, Anis Pervez never forgets to read my articles, praising the good ones and critiquing the bad ones in his straightforward manner.

June 20, 2011: my Dadi - the storyteller of my life - died and I got a job on the same day at the English daily New Age. For some unknown reason I wasn't surprised with the news of her death though it did break my heart. In a way I was probably prepared for it. A beloved person in my life had died and on the other hand, a new life was beginning for me.

Chowdhury, Saad Hammadi and lastly Aasha Mehreen Amin and they continue to remain a great source of insight in my life.

Does this journey have any connection with my experience or with my ancestors? I always asked this question. And now I believe it has. My great grandfather was a Sareng (sailor) and Dadi was so proud of him. Dadi and Nana bhai helped to raise me, showering with stories that they experience in their lifetime. The stories of nana joining the war against the Pakistani occupation army, the way my Dada left



Shunno Ayon, *Pattern of Bangladesh*.

In my four years of journalism, I have witnessed and covered so many incidents and occurrences of violence, and arbitrary killings. Labour rights worker Aminul Islam was killed for no apparent reason, thousands of people sell their kidneys to get rid of micro credit loans in Joypurhat, political use of religion in every election, the Shahbagh movement, the Ramu incident, violence as a means of entertainment or fun - these are some of the issues that I covered. In this journey three mentors immensely helped me to become a journalist - Syed Tashfin

his family home at an early age because his uncle had killed his beloved pet crow and walked all the way to Burma (now Myanmar) on his own, and different strange, metaphoric stories of our small alley—Kamli Hazir Bari - where my ancestors lived, shaped my idea about the world.

These ancestors of mine helped me realise my dream to be a writer. Dadi and Nana's stories are like legends. My strange ancestors and their stranger stories remain a huge source of inspiration in my journey as a 'newsy' storyteller.