



GREATER BLACK KRAIT

What was your first reaction when you saw this photo? Probably one of shock, hopefully accompanied by a dash of intrigue.

This is a Greater Black Krait which is native to Bangladesh and most areas around the Himalayan foothills down to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It's classified as an "elapid" which means it's closely related to cobras. So yes, this snake, unlike most in Bangladesh, is venomous. Does that mean it's dangerous though? Usually not. Now let me explain as you

probably just scoffed at such a seemingly absurd claim!

This snake, like all species on this Earth, has an important purpose. Even if you can't think of a purpose for a species' existence, the fact is, is that it wouldn't exist and be able to survive in the wild if it didn't play an important role. This snake actually specialises in eating other snakes and does everything it can to avoid humans. If it didn't exist, then other snake populations would skyrocket which then throws the whole natural balance – which

took eons to establish – off. Unfortunately, when we pile a bunch of bricks or wood around our houses, to a snake that looks like the equivalent of a Hollywood Mansion! When we unwittingly entice a snake to live around us, that's when they become dangerous. Even then though, you'll have an extremely low chance of ever actually seeing something so elusive like this Krait. When you do, the absolute safest thing you can do is to let it be. By far, the most snake bites occur while trying to handle, harass, or kill a snake. It

may then come as a surprise to you to hear that as a professional, I have handled this species for extended periods of time and never had it even attempted to bite me, but this does not mean you should do the same! They will only ever bite you and waste their precious energy reserves when they feel you are a threat to their life. So do yourself and the snakes a favour and live in peaceful harmony; don't risk your life trying to kill them.

PHOTO: SCOTT TRAGESER/NATURE STILLS
TEXT: CREATIVE CONSERVATION ALLIANCE (CCA)

STRANGE HISTORY

BANGLADESH'S FIRST BALLOONIST

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

One of man's most favourite adventures is flying with balloons. The exceptional experience of tranquillity, non-movement and bird's eye view can never be found in the fast aeroplanes. The first balloon flight with passengers occurred in France in 1872. Just two decades later, a balloon flew over Dhaka carrying brave women from the USA. This spectacular incident happened in 1892 when two professional balloonists Jenny Rumary Van Tassel and her daughter Jeanette Van Tassel were invited by Khwaja Ahsanaullah of Dhaka's nawab family. Famous for his love for entertainment Khwaja Ahsanullah made public announcement in the city that a daredevil woman from America would fly over the Nawab's palace, the Ahsan Manzil.

At 6:20 pm on March 16, 1892, the show began. Jeanette Van Tassel started his flight from the southern

bank of Buriganga River to reach the roof Ahsan Manzil lying across the river. A newspaper from that time reported that thousands of Dhakaites gathered around the palace to see her flight which was completely a new experience for them. However, after floating for some time, when Tassel tried to come down, a fatal accident occurred. All of a sudden, a gush of wind carried her off to the Ramna garden in Shahbagh and to the utmost shock of the spectators her balloon got entangled with a bamboo thicket. While climbing down, holding on to a bamboo, Tassel fell on the ground and got critically injured. She died a couple of days later in a hospital. Jeanette Van Tassel was buried in Narinda Christian graveyard where her tomb can still be seen today. Thus, the first flight over Bangladesh's came to such a tragic end.



PHOTO: INTERNET

WHO IS YOUR MORRIE SCHWARTZ?

PHOTOS AND TEXT: NAZIBA BASHER



Morrie Schwartz

PHOTO: INTERNET

"Death ends a life, not a relationship."
— Morrie Schwartz, *Tuesdays with Morrie* (by Mitch Albom).

I thought I never had a Morrie Shwartz. I thought I would never have one. Ever since I finished 'Tuesdays with Morrie', twice in a row if I might add, I was on the look out for my Morrie. What do I mean by that? Allow me to explain.

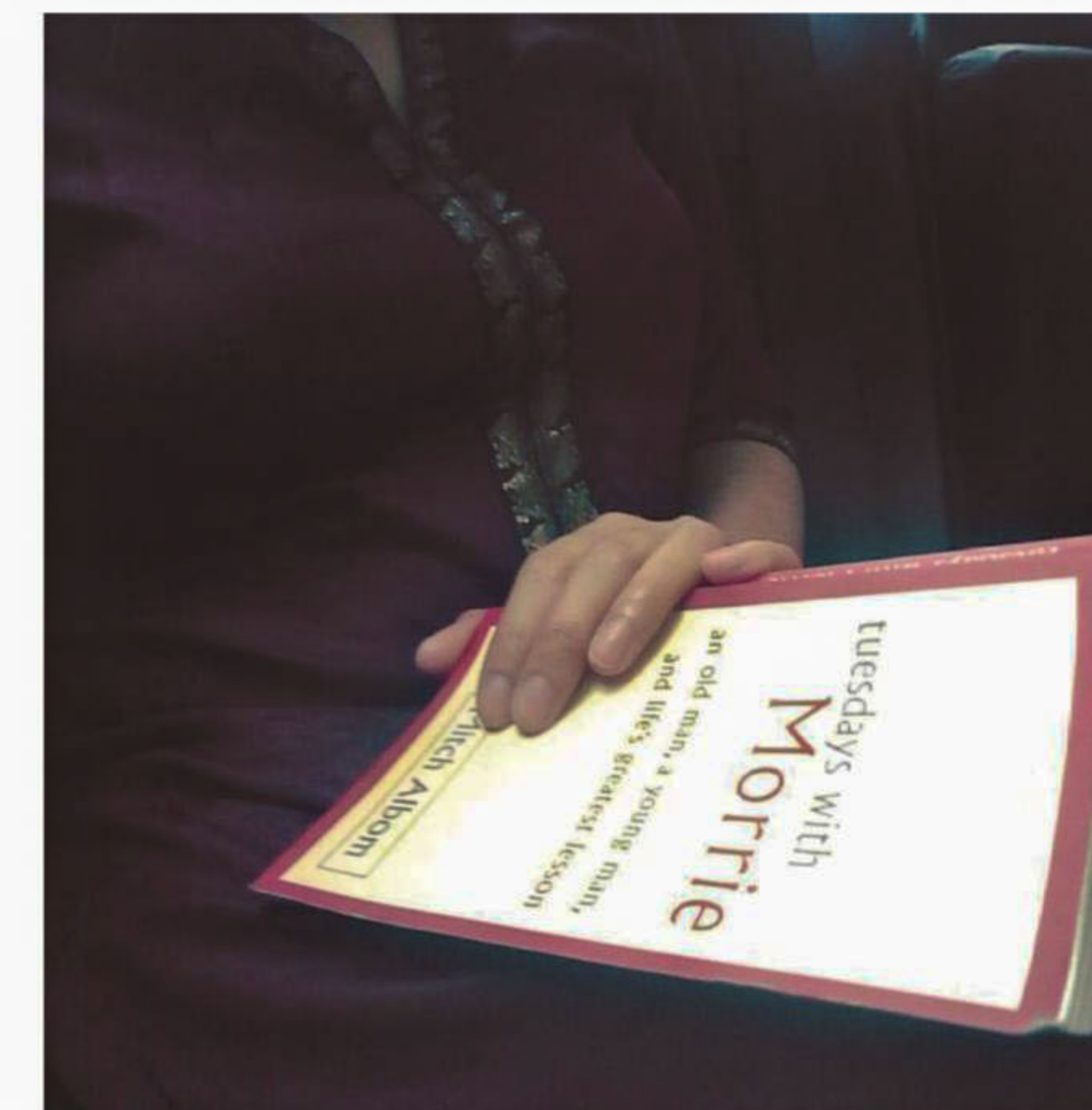
When I first read 'The Five People You Meet in Heaven' by Mitch Albom, I was astonished at how amazing a book it was. I was so awed by it, I kept in my bag for days even after finishing it, just to have it around me. On the first page of the book, I read the list of the other books that were written by Mitch, who had already become a favourite author of mine. There I read the name 'Tuesdays with Morrie.' Just mentioning that name to a colleague brought on an exasperated, almost breathless reaction. "YOU HAVEN'T READ TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE YET?" she squealed. Taken aback a little, I promised I would get to it as soon as possible, still giving her the 'such-a-weirdo' side-eyed look. I was wrong; she wasn't a weirdo at all. I was, for not having read this before.

When I turned to the first page of the first chapter of Tuesdays with Morrie, I knew I was hooked. It was love at first line.

With Morrie and Mitch, I laughed, I cried, I felt despair, and most of all, I learned about life. That's what Morrie Schwartz was best known for- imparting wisdom. Mitch Albom's college professor, Morrie, who later became a victim of Lou Gehrig's disease, gave his student, the author, his final lesson, when he was already bed-ridden. Every Tuesday, Mitch visited Morrie's house with a bag full of food that was easy to swallow, to take his lesson on the most wondrous subject in the world-how to live.

I searched here and there for my Morrie Schwartz. I began wondering whether we were all ever fortunate enough to have a Morrie in our lives. I thought I was one of those poor souls who would never have one. Until one day when I was cleaning out my closet.

I found an old school shirt of mine from when I was in Grade 8. There were messages of friends and signatures all over it. Right underneath my collar was the biggest signature of all, with a horrendous drawing; it said- 'to a very special girl, all the best, Mr. B'. No, Mr Richard Mervyn Brown, aka Mr B, my 8th grade English teacher,



could not draw at all. But he was, in fact, my Morrie, and I never even knew until now.

I grew up under Mr. B's wing. About life, love, heartbreak, school, dreams, and the future, we talked for hours at school, as I skipped the more boring classes. After I came to Bangladesh, parting with Mr. B was the toughest. But every now and then, I would get an international phone call with an English accented 'Ello there! How've you been, girl?' waiting at the other end of it. We went on to meet many times after, as I would go back to Saudi Arabia for vacations. I would visit my old school just to see him and update him about my life (I

would make lists of things to tell him before departing- getting into the debate team, getting an A in English, landing a writing job). We somehow got even closer after I moved. He was in fact that one person who gave me dreams to chase, rules to break, who taught me mischief and obedience at the same time, who made me love school, who discovered my knack for languages and words, who told me I would be a writer one day.

These words, I had never cherished so much until the day he passed away. And almost a decade later, I felt his impact upon my life. Much like Mitch did when he found out Morrie was dying and rushed to him for that one final lesson. I missed out on that final lesson because I was too far away, but the lifetime of lessons Mr. B had left me with were more than enough for me to become the person I am today. With Morrie's philosophy in mind, Mr. B's death ended his life, but not our relationship.

We are all blessed with some of these people in our lives who have a bigger impact than we can imagine. Whether a teacher, a friend, or a parent, or a certain stranger turned BFF there is always the one person who has wisdom and knowledge stored in their hearts just waiting for your attentive ears.

Because of Mitch Albom's generosity, the beauty of 'Tuesdays with Morrie' though is that even if you are someone who doesn't have one of these people in your life, or haven't found them yet, this book itself has all the power to become your own Morrie.

So go, flip through the pages, find your Morrie Schwartz, and learn all you can about life and all its wonders. ■