

# A STORY ABOUT LOVING, IN BLACK AND WHITE



**A** landmark US Supreme Court decision was handed down over 50 years ago this month, but more about that in a moment.

In its very essence, this is an extraordinary love story of two ordinary people.

Mildred and Richard grew up in Central Point, a speck of a town in rural Virginia. When Mildred first met Richard, she was a skinny 11-year-old nicknamed "Bean", and Richard was a strapping 17-year-old teenager. Their friendship deepened over the years and led to courtship. When Mildred was 18, they drove 80 miles away to Washington, DC, to get married.

They returned home to Virginia to start a new life.

But soon disaster struck. At 2am in July 1958, a local sheriff burst into their bedroom and shined flashlights into their eyes. A threatening voice demanded: "Who is this woman you are sleeping with?"

Mildred replied that she was his wife, and Richard pointed to their marriage certificate.

The sheriff said their marriage certificate was no good in Virginia, giving the lie to the state's fond claim in publicity campaigns that "Virginia is for lovers."

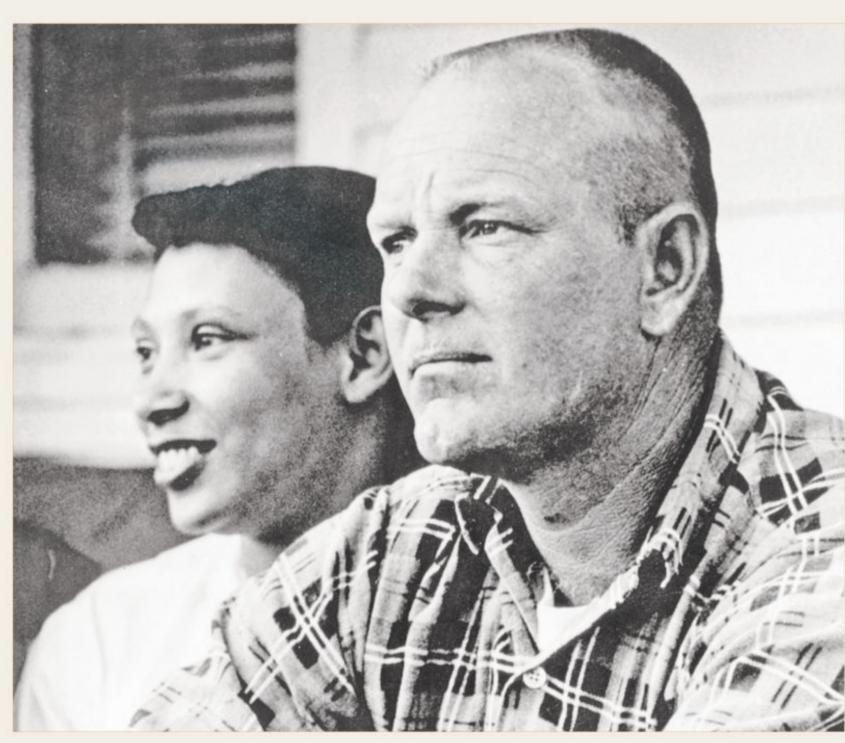
You see, Mildred Jeter was black, while her husband, Richard Loving (yes, that is his real name) was white. In the 1950s, Virginia was one of 24 states whose anti-miscegenation laws made interracial marriage a felony.

The Lovings were charged with "cohabiting as man and wife, against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth."

Virginia trial judge Leon M Bazile ruled: "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay (sic) and red, and he placed them on separate continents.... The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix."

The Lovings were forced to plead guilty. They avoided prison by pledging to leave the state for 25 years. They moved to Washington, DC, but Mildred bitterly missed family and friends in Virginia.

So here you had a family, poor and working-class - Richard Loving was a



Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving

bricklayer - helpless against the massive might of a state judiciary wedded to an implacably racist law.

Mildred did not give up. She wrote to erstwhile attorney general Robert Kennedy, who suggested she seek the help of the American Civil Liberties Union. ACLU took their case, and eventually it reached the US Supreme Court.

Fifty years ago this month, the US Supreme Court rose to the challenge. In a unanimous ruling written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, the court enshrined the freedom to marry.

"Marriage is ... fundamental to our very existence and survival," Warren ruled in *Loving v. Virginia*. "To deny this fundamental

freedom on so unsupportable a basis as the racial classifications embodied in these statutes ... is surely to deprive all the State's citizens of liberty without due process of law. The 14th Amendment requires that the freedom of choice to marry not be restricted by invidious racial discrimination."

Today, the ruling sounds like a no-brainer, but racial animus still ran deep in the US in 1967.

Some people had to be brought kicking and screaming into a brave new world of race-neutral equality. Two years after the ruling, Georgia's state legislature refused to hire former US Secretary of State Dean Rusk to teach at the University of Georgia because he had participated in his daughter's wedding

to an African American. Some southern states clung to state laws banning interracial marriage. South Carolina repealed it in 1998, Alabama in 2000!

God knows America's struggle to achieve a colour blind society is still a work in progress. Outrage at recent police killings of African Americans with minimal or no penalties has given rise to the Black Lives Matter movement. Meanwhile President Donald Trump and his overt race-baiting - including his shameless promotion of the canard about former President Barack Obama's Kenyan birth - continue to rile up white racial rancour. The Republican Party has also been complicit.

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Amidst this turmoil, however, there is cause for hope. In the 50 years since the landmark case, the rate of interracial marriage in America has increased five-fold from three percent in 1967 to 17 percent in 2015, according to a Pew Research Center report. As America becomes more diverse, larger parts of younger demographic cohorts are shedding the racial prejudices of their forebears.

Now let's return to the Lovings. Whatever became of them?

Mildred and Richard were an unassuming, down-to-earth couple. They did not even go to the Supreme Court hearings. "Tell the judge I love my wife and it is just unfair that I can't live with her in Virginia," Richard told his lawyer.

After the legal victory, Richard got his wish. "Richard, by all accounts a stoic, blue-collar man content to let Mildred do the talking, moved his family into a small house on Passing Road, and tried to live happily ever after," the *Associated Press* reported in 2007, marking 40 years of the landmark case.

"That ended when a drunken driver struck their car in 1975, killing Richard and costing Mildred her right eye. The small cemetery where he is buried is a few minutes from their home."

Mildred never remarried. She largely shunned publicity.

"Her hands are curled by arthritis and her right eye is just a lidded hollow now. Still, Mildred's face lights up as she talks about Richard. She thinks about him every day," the AP report continued.

"Each June 12, Loving Day events around the country mark the advances of mixed-race couples. Mildred doesn't pay much attention to the grassroots celebrations.

"Mostly she spends time enjoying her family, two dogs, and the countryside she fought so fiercely to again call home.

"She wishes her husband was there to enjoy it with her.

"He used to take care of me," said Mildred Loving. "He was my support, he was my rock."

On May 2, 2016, Mildred Loving died in Central Point, Va. She was 68.

The writer is a contributing editor for *Siliconer*, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States.

# Murphy's Brother-in-Law



**HUMOROUSLY YOURS**

**THE** red marks on my three month old's face are definitely not mosquito bites. And mosquitoes are something we are REALLY scared of. First it was the Dengue, now the Chikungunya. The deadly Aedes

mosquitoes come out during the daytime.

Their bites are so scary that even all other mosquitoes are scared of them and hence come out only at night. And we sure are providing all the breeding grounds possible.

For the Aedes and their nocturnal cohorts, we are providing all the 'love in the air' with all the water on the ground. Monsoon is not quite here, and we are already knee deep in water at the first downpour. Well, there is one good news for the residents of the Tri-State area who never get to venture out of the bubble to go and see the Buriganga - now the Buriganga will come to them, home delivery style. Just like Food Panda, to be called Food Ganga, or Flood Ganga, or Ganga Panda (closing in on you like Gunda Panda). And the students are thrilled. They can kill two birds with one essay - just replace 'bus' with 'boat' or vice versa for the essays A Journey By Boat and A Journey By Bus.

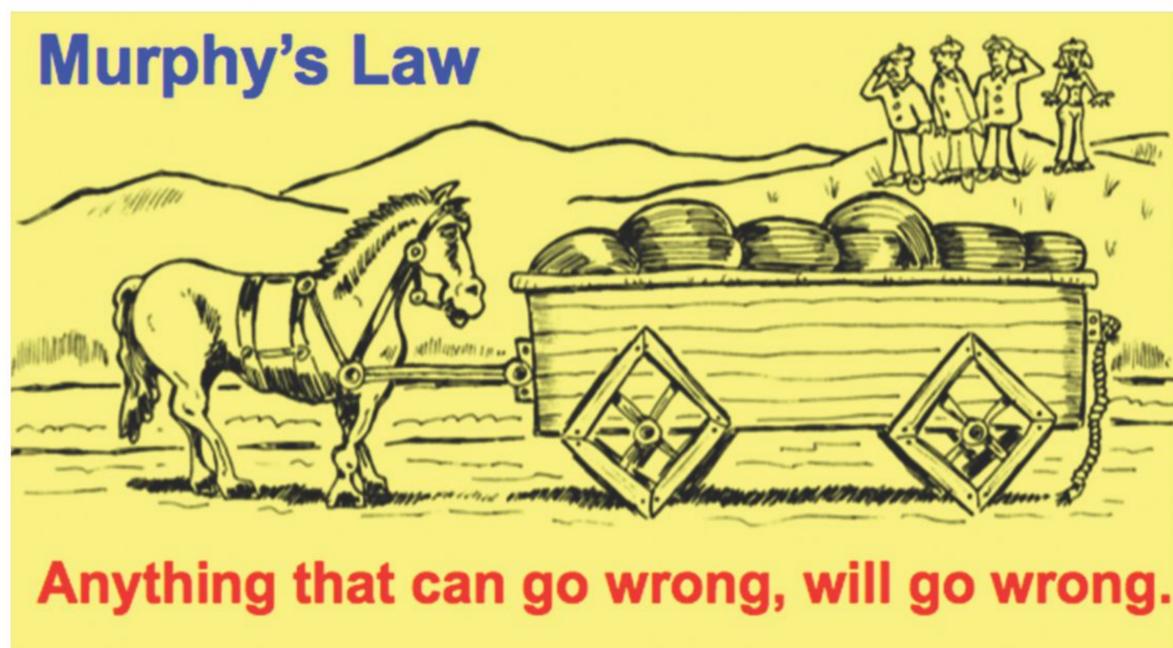
Coming back to the red marks on my three month old's cheeks. Soon the marks are on my butt cheeks. Bed bugs! Urgh!! So, we call in pest control. Quite impressed that there are professionals. We are uprooted as the whole house is fumigated. We take refuge at my parents', to their delight of having the

grand kids around.

But the refugee status takes its toll on us while the chemicals refuse to take their toll on the bugs despite the claims of the exterminators being Navy S.E.A.Ls. We decide to move back in. Bites are better than being nomads. Interestingly, once we're back in, we notice a lull in the bugs. That's because there is no electricity. And no, it's not a power outage. DESCO has severed our electricity connection. No, I'm no controversial figure. We simply forgot to pay our bills on time. I had a bug in my feeling that I had forgotten something. I have to say, DESCO is very efficient at this. Also heartening to know that they also have numbers to meet, given Eid closures. I call up my engineer buddy at DESCO as the line man gives us 10 minutes to clear payments (even "Beam me up to the bank, Scottie" can't resolve that). But my buddy says, "Dude. First pay the bills and I promise we'll reconnect right away." Sigh. My BUET engineering degree with its social capital fails. But I am impressed - no bills, no service. I wished that would apply uniformly everywhere.

Coming back to the one good news - no bed bugs. Wow! The chemicals finally worked. Meanwhile, as promised, the electricity is reconnected within an hour of clearing our bills. And it is also clear that within another hour, the bed bugs are right back with full force. A new learning, these bugs also like the comforts of the modern day - electricity!

It seems that when things go wrong, they go so wrong. If there is such a thing called Murphy's Law, I should change my last name from Mahbub to Murphy, because I sure am



Murphy's Brother-In-Law!

Have you ever faced your wife when an electric line man comes to cut the umbilical cord? Not fun. I have seen that once with my in-laws. As I brace myself for a similar predicament this time, the wife answers Gandhi style, "Hey, we have each other and our kids." For once, I thank the bed bugs that we are actually NOT in our home and being a

refugee turns out to be not all that bad.

As the drama pans out through Thursday, I sit down to write this column a day late, i.e., on Friday to be published on Saturday when the readers are a day late in going home for Eid, leaving back an empty Dhaka City. But an empty Dhaka City with no readers of my column is still so, so much preferable. I shudder to think of the Saturday after the last

Friday of last year's Ramadan. If there are nefarious schemes hatching, may the Laws of Murphy be with them.

The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ATN Bangla's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and ABC Radio's *Good Morning Bangladesh*, the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. E-mail: Naveed@NaveedMahbub.com

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE**

Without music, life would be a mistake.

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

<b>ACROSS</b>	33 Massage	6 Extreme
1 Pike	34 TV's Danson	7 School near Windsor
6 Second airing	36 Role for Keanu	8 Hall of Fame catcher
11 Hold stuff	37 Sign of correction	9 Except if
12 Make amends	39 Shade source	10 Must have
13 Make fresh	40 Kitchen gadget	17 Promise
14 Holmes' creator	41 Fancy estate	22 Keg need
15 Peyton's brother	43 Old English forest	24 Bright beam
16 Demonstrated	44 Did nothing	26 Investor's income
18 Pub supply	45 Great care	28 Dawn goddess
19 Clinic nickname	46 A lot	29 German article
20 Braying beast		31 Rose
21 Brewing need	<b>DOWN</b>	32 Wanderers
23 Heats up	1 React to a monster	33 News summary
25 Galley item	2 Rice dish	35 New Jersey player
28 Pet perch	3 Hall of Fame catcher	38 Spotted
28 Really stoked	4 Wisdom bringer	42 Groom's answer
30 Show boredom	5 Did galley work	

**BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER**

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

D	I	S	C	F	O	B	O	B	I	P
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**BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT**