

The Power of Love

Valerie Taylor, whose work on disability issues in Bangladesh has transformed countless lives for the better, turns 75 today

AMITAVA KAR

VALERIE Taylor refuses to accept despair as the final outcome of the ambiguities of life. She proves that nothing makes one incapable of reaching up for the possibilities that confront him or her. At the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), she and her dedicated staff have given a new life to many paralysed persons by providing them with treatment and training.

Born on February 8, 1944 in the UK, Taylor's first visit to Bangladesh was in 1969 to volunteer as a physiotherapist at a hospital in Chandraghona. She returned to England four years later to raise funds for establishing a rehabilitation centre for paralysed people in Bangladesh. CRP opened its doors to patients in 1979. She has received numerous accolades at home and abroad including OBE (1995) and Bangladesh Independence Award (2004). She was granted Bangladeshi citizenship in 1998. Today is her 75th birthday.

In 2012, Kaniz Fatima, now a captain in the Bangladesh Army, met with an accident before she was about to get commission. The injury left her paralysed from C4-C5 level. From Chittagong, she was taken to the



Valerie Taylor

Combined Military Hospital by a helicopter. Then the Army sent her to Bangkok.

After coming back, Captain Fatima received treatment at CRP for six months. She says on email, "At CRP, the treatment of persons with disabilities is extraordinary. They have a dedicated team of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, psychologists and clinical nurses. CRP not only provides medical treatment and rehabilitation, but also addresses emotional and psychological aspects of patients which is very important in early stages of injury."

Md Foysal Rahman, a teacher at a public school, is a survivor of spinal cord injury. In 1987, while a student of class seven, he was hit by a train when his bicycle got stuck in a rail crossing, leaving him paralysed from waist down. "I underwent treatment in Singapore and India. Then I went to CRP. With the encouragement of Valerie, I earned a Masters from Dhaka University. I also completed B.Ed. and M.Ed. Valerie took care of me like a mother. Who else but a mother loves this way?"

Then there is Tania Sultana Munni, a former school teacher. On January 18, 2012, she was riding an auto rickshaw when all of a sudden, her shawl got stuck in the wheel. She suffered a broken neck. "After receiving treatment at another hospital, I went to CRP. I received treatment and counselling for six months. The sports and cultural activities helped me a great deal. Valerie gave me a job as an office assistant at CRP."

I had an opportunity to see many more lives that were transformed by this institution when I visited on a cool November morning in 2014. A tri-nation sports tournament was being held at its premises. A group of players played basketball while spectators cheered them on. A 16-year-

old young man named Pintu who broke his backbone after falling from a tree wheezed past on his wheelchair singing a film song. The place seemed magical. Everybody was in a wheelchair but their spirit was free.

Now contrast this with many other hospitals where patients are reportedly overcharged, neglected and harassed, and we understand how big of an achievement it is to create an environment like this.

What makes the difference? Dr Jon Moussaly, a renowned US physician, says, "I always leave CRP with a renewed sense of purpose in pursuing our work, no matter what obstacles we face. It is truly a unique institution in its commitment and dedication to caring for patients from the time of their injuries until they are integrated back into their communities, and then for the rest of their lives." Dr Moussaly is an emergency physician at Massachusetts General Hospital, US and founder of TraumaLink Bangladesh who has visited CRP several times.

He adds that CRP has pioneered the field of assistive device manufacturing in Bangladesh by relying on locally available materials. This makes them far less expensive and easier to repair than products imported from abroad. And they have also focused on nurturing the development of new

leaders in rehabilitation science and patient care in South Asia through their educational programmes.

When I asked Valerie Taylor why she did all this, she gave a very simple answer. "If we send these people home after giving them the initial treatment, what are they going to do with their lives? Without vocational training and a chance of a job, they will be left alone in the backrooms of their homes and watch life slip by."

It seems entirely self-evident to her that those in need of loving care should be able to receive it. Captain Fatima says, "Valerie Taylor's approach towards patients is very open and cordial. While talking to her patients, she makes them comfortable in such a manner that they can share their sorrows and grievances with her without hesitation."

As we emphatically acknowledge Valerie's sacrifice, we wonder what to make of an act of love so complete that it encompasses even those she had never met or known nothing about previously. For most of us that's where the difficulty lies—in feeling empathy that transcends geographic boundaries, colour and creed.

Amitava Kar is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

And Then There Were None...

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

STILLWATER, Oklahoma. Dad is picking up his son from high school. Mom is videoing the event. Dad rushes to hug the son. The only reason the video goes

viral is that dad is in a Speedo swimming trunk (more of a thong), and nothing else. The boy's machismo, that takes 12 years to build, is reduced to dust in a matter of 12 seconds. It is a practical joke that the son is not likely to forget nor forgive that easily.

I show the video to my teenage daughter, adding that I will do the same if she doesn't do what we parents tell her to do. As an afterthought, I add, Don Corleone style: "Oh, and in my case, I will not even be wearing a Speedo..."

The parental demand? No, not straight A's, but physical fitness.

Daughter has no doubt of dad's capability of pulling the stunt off, fully endorsed by mom. And the belief is backed by daddy's "impeccable" track record. It is daddy who is sitting at the parent-teacher meeting listening to the music teacher giving a boiler plate response to every parent of every grade: "Your son/daughter is good, but needs to practice more." When my turn comes, I stop the teacher before she starts. I pull out my wallet, take a photo of my daughter out of it, give it to her, and then tell her: "THIS is my daughter. Now, tell me how she's doing." The teacher is shell shocked and the other waiting parents are mortified. But I don't blame the teacher, as it is indeed hard for one single person to remember the names and faces of hundreds of students—for I myself sometimes even forget the name of my wife...

Coming back to the main demand of physical fitness, I enthusiastically show up at the interschool sports meet. It's her school and several similar cohort institutions (local schools) at the

As time went, playing full court became playing half court which then became 1-on-1 coaching, which really made no sense.

arduous 100-metre journey. Dejected, I relegate myself to hoping to see glory at my daughter's school sports—just her school. I show up and make a beeline for where she's sitting with her friends. A serious looking gentleman asks me: "If you're a parent, you can't sit here—parents need to sit over there [1 mile away]." I ask the



teacher: "Sir, do you have kids?" An irrelevant question usually takes the recipient aback so much, that he blurts out the answer before realising the ludicrous nature of the question itself. No exception here as he answers: "Yes, 2, why?" "Well sir, in that case, you are also a parent and should not be sitting here."

At that moment, my teenage daughter probably wished I HAD pulled the Speedo thong (less) stunt which would have been far less damaging to her reputation than what just happened. Her other friends crack up, to whom, my wife and I are the coolest parents ever, so much so, that several of them had put themselves up to us for adoption.

You drop a bomb and you leave—that's strategic bombing 101. I immediately leave, not looking back. But I look forward to my daughter's 4 x 100 metre relay race.

After waiting for what seemed an eternity, it's time for the relay race. Then

the announcement on the PA system (why scream? I can hear you man, unless a loud speaker means telling the whole world how loud we really are...): "The 4 x 100 metre relay race is cancelled."

What? I've heard of classes getting cancelled, but a race? Upon enquiring, I find out that the other teams have not shown up. Wait, no show on sports day? That's one day I, along with all my fellow students, would look forward to all throughout the year! No show? For otherwise doing what? Was up late watching Netflix? Rather stay home and study and become the next Albert Einstein? Just didn't feel like coming? What's the big deal about "sports"? What is it?

And then, it all made sense. Remember the big splash I made on social media when I said that I have finally succumbed to getting a private tutor for my daughter, and it was a basketball coach? Yes, it started with fanfare with a dedicated coach coaching

a small army of young girls, all hell bent on making it to the school team and the national trials. As time went, playing full court became playing half court which then became 1-on-1 coaching, which really made no sense. All the other young ladies, or should I say, their parents, somehow thought that foregoing one hour of fresh (polluted) air, burning calories, getting the adrenaline going, not to mention getting fitter, stronger, faster and even taller than Six Million Dollar Man, would be the difference between an A and an F in their O-Levels.

The playing field, if there is one, sadly ends with "and then, there were none". But if going to a good university abroad is really the goal, remember, there is something called a sports scholarship.

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

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Stasi Chief Erich Mielke (centre)
FEBRUARY 8, 1950

THE STASI, EAST GERMANY'S NOTORIOUS SECRET POLICE, IS ESTABLISHED

The "Staatsicherheit", which was dissolved in 1990, is considered one of the most repressive intelligence agencies in the world.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 33 Barton of "The letter
- 1 Does kitchen work 0C"
- 6 "Ghosts" play-wright
- 11 Smart guy
- 12 Because of
- 13 Towel off again
- 14 Tire feature
- 15 Metro
- 17 Tit for --
- 19 Fall back
- 20 Diamond club
- 23 Doomed flier
- 25 Stallion's mate
- 26 Bridge bid
- 28 Jared of "Dallas Buyers Club"
- 29 Draw out
- 30 Snaky shape
- 31 Vein yield
- 32 "Yo!"

DOWN

- 1 Hole number
- 2 Brit's brew
- 3 American warblers
- 4 Beige
- 5 Azure
- 6 Luggage clip-on
- 7 Hide, in a way
- 8 Notice
- 9 Seventh Greek
- 10 Silent assent
- 16 Gaskets' kin
- 17 Cover words
- 18 Massage features
- 20 Annual report
- 21 Bandleader
- 22 Peevish
- 24 Old auto
- 25 Avril follower
- 27 Sophocles play
- 31 Hog calls
- 33 Earth orbiter
- 34 Listen to
- 35 Stake
- 36 Tad's dad
- 37 Low digit
- 39 Carioca city
- 40 Hither's partner



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



BEETLE BAILEY



7-25



BY MORT WALKER



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.