

I called him Moi



RUBANA HUQ

KNOT SO TRUE

I always need a clean sheet to write on. I always prefer the backside of a calendar month to detail projects. But when it comes to life, no sheet or paper space has ever come to my rescue. I guess life, while it requires planning also plays out of a songbook that has a Composer who we can't keep track of or keep up with. His grand orchestra does not need to sync with ours and His tune plays on. We sob when we are hurt and we celebrate when we win. Amidst the mirth and mortal failures, we live from this minute to the next, with the hope that we won't be over soon.

Death is what we fear and the end is truly something we dread. Some grow fearless with time and go down sounding like heroes. My husband's life in this side of the world ended in grandeur.

In the race of fast cars, watches, designer clothing and the rest of the luxuries of the world, Annis had none to brag. His wardrobe is still untouched and boasts a dash of blue denim kurtas and striped ones made from fabric in the factory. Routinely he would ask merchandisers to show his swatches of the styles being sewn in the factories. Our sample man in charge would come to our head office every Saturday and take his directions. The colour of his buttons, the contrasts were all decided by him. And ultimately, he would end up with the eternal question of whether they would have to use a new measurement as he always assumed that he had lost weight. Our white walls were always marked with his weight chart on a daily basis. Up until almost the end, he worried about fitness. All he cared about was about staying healthy. The innumerable files of his lipid profile, his checks of various types and categories...all speak of one thing: he wanted to live for as long as he could.

What he mostly cared about was statistics and data. His obsession about quoting numbers and figures was unique. Our eldest daughter used to buy the Economist's yearly pocket book

and helped her dad with facts across the world. He would wonder about the GDP of every country and compare with what we have all the time. And he would always quote up to the extent of fractions.

That contributed to his credibility. He thought that no one ever believed in rounded up figures. So, he tried reading every paper to its detail. He treated every project with a dose of passion that it deserved. Detail is what made him who he was and still is, today.

While he stained all his kurtas with stains of *jhalmuris* and *chanachurs* that he had on his way back from work, at home never quite sensed the extent. That was one thing he hid in his life: his infinite binging on street food. And in all honesty, that's what made him the man he was. He was simple and larger than the circle of our boxed lives. Making a difference mattered to him; but what quite didn't matter was being relevant for wrong reasons.

At my end, while I watched him track his food and weight, I worried about him not spending time with himself. What I missed in him was his lack of attention to his private space. Yet, till date, I meet absolute strangers who tell me about the lovely interactions that they had with Annis. Almost everyone has a memory with him. I wonder, how was it possible for him to have impacted so many lives, touched so many hearts, evoke such huge emotion in such a short span of time...

I guess, brevity has its charms and perhaps only the good die young.

For many months, I had wondered whether it would be appropriate to share a few private moments openly, in a public space. I finally decided in its favour, just because it's worth it. So here I am...

The last week of July was hectic for him and I was unhappy about him not making enough time to investigate the cause of his "vertigo." So, over one of our breakfast times in the morning, we spoke about our lives. On the 26th of July 2017, he spoke of wealth and stressed about not having enough for the children. I recall having corrected him and saying that we had more than what we required and that we had given our children what they needed the most: their education. I also reminded him how there were endless queue of

cars and super rich visitors outside our gate, lobbying for the wrong reasons and how wealth could never define life. That morning, he actually gave in to my argument and moved on to his first appointment.

On the 29th of July, for the first time in his life, he tried meditation in the little study room that we have in our home, tucked away in a corner on the ground floor. His yoga instructor, right after an hour, mailed me and told me that he had collapsed during the session and he thought we should be looking for neurologists abroad. I didn't waste a moment. We flew down to London the next morning on the 30th of July. Annis, a man who never

time in her life watching her super buff dad getting sick and I, at my end, was at a loss trying to tell my husband that the Banani graveyard work would be finished on time and he need not worry about it looking perfect by 15th of August, 2017. A man who couldn't be separated from his phone gave his phone up and left it with me from the day he was admitted to the hospital. I took over his messages and made sure that all his texts were answered from August 10th. My husband had his final conversation with me on 13th of August. While he worried about transfer of shares and the company and had a whole bunch of documents fly in to London with our son, I assured him

memorise his dates, events and a few specific memories so that he could cheat the nursing staff into believing that he was still coherent.

By early evening he had lost consciousness and we never got him back. While he occasionally opened his eyes, I knew he was close to being over. For almost three and a half months, he wasn't there and we clung on to the hope that he would somehow, some day wake up.

Annis loved Suchitra Sen and thought it was clever of her to have remained in our memories as the young vixen that she once was as she was never photographed in her late years. I honoured his wish. None, except my children, have any photos of Annis in his unshaven state. I made sure that he remained and continues to remain a handsome man, all organic, sporting his cheap watches and humble attire to all. My husband wasn't the greatest; but he wanted to be good. For me and my kids, that's enough of a legacy to carry through.

While I conclude this column, my youngest daughter has just walked in reminding me that Ehaan, my 9-month old grandson is about to come and visit me. Today, I am just so sad that Annis has missed it all. While working till late hours at night, while focusing on city streets, lights and pavements, he had totally forgotten that Life was still out there, waiting for him to be lived. He had totally forgotten that we had a lovely family that needed him and that while work mattered, what mattered more was his own breath. He totally forgot that he was chasing goals without realising that Time had cheated him into believing in an elusive eternity. He had totally ignored that life was there not to be missed, vacations couldn't be ignored, and soulful conversations couldn't be skipped.

While I end this column, let me shamelessly share that I plan on crying an ocean today. And for the comfort of our children and me, I would like to believe that he is at least being able to watch us from the next invisible room and know that we are all home, safe.

I can't wait for it to be over, Moi. I can't wait to be with you again.

Dr Rubana Huq is the President of BGMEA and the Managing Director of Mohammadi Group.



Annisul Huq.

FILE PHOTO

wanted to depend on anybody in his entire life, spent the whole travel time to London telling me that he didn't still want to be on a wheelchair and that he would hate being spotted on one. So, he leaned on me at Dhaka airport and I steadied his pace and made it to the aircraft. I became his instant crutch. In London, he gave in. Our daughter, in full pregnancy, pushed his wheelchair and made him enjoy Hyde Park for the last time in his life. Our son flew in with his wife, struggling to come to terms with reality; our youngest daughter ended up having the toughest

that we, as a family, was way beyond the mundane and that our children and we would survive with or without wealth. He had his last conversation with the kids on the very same day along with leaving a video message for Laith, our grandson.

Towards the end of the day, the nurses were coming in with questions about his birthday, his name, his address, etc. We joked about how his official birthday 27th of Oct 1952 would have to be quoted and how he couldn't ever disclose that he was a little older than that. I helped him

manoeuvring.

Think for a moment what the pundits say about words being both poisons and medicines, depending on how you use them and against whom. It's a slippery slope really. Since I cannot use words that "kill" nor cannot, in my right mind, use words that "heal", with undeserved compliments, I have to take the middle-of-the-road approach. It's not difficult sometimes. All I have to do is use the shortcut key "Ctrl + F" on my keyboard after I have finished writing a piece, and replace emphatic, incendiary adjectives like "dictatorial", "totalitarian" and "Orwellian" with less suggestive ones. The "government" becomes "the system". "Chhatra League" becomes "the student wing of the ruling party". The "military" becomes something else. BNP becomes more than BNP. Names are replaced by titles, facts deleted, if not altered, and headings robbed of their "spark".

The more challenging task, when it comes to writing on politics and high-level corruption, is to refashion entire sentences and even paragraphs to make them seem benignly analytical but, if you must, be critical only to the extent that it doesn't upset the guardians of the status quo. But in the absence of a state-approved manual on how to sterilise critical pieces, even our most astute editorial policy at times fails to predict reactions.

My deleted sentences, thus, represent the shifting ground beneath a media industry where the written word is looked at with more distrust than ever before.

Hence all the legal and moral policing, not to mention the countless invisible barriers that are placed before the media

managers. You see the latter burning the midnight oil trying to come up with ideas to scrape through this existential threat. But for the individual writer, there is a learning curve in this job. You stay long enough in the profession and it becomes less of a grunt work for you than it used to be. You get used to writing a certain way. You auto-correct yourself as you go along, and think less and less of warnings like that of Irish novelist John Banville—that in a climate of fear and censorship, "the populace becomes so cowed that it does the state's work for it voluntarily"—because prolonged exposure to a reprogramming regime can alter the very way your thought process works.

The result? "I obey, therefore I am" becomes your default setting.

My deleted sentences—a shushed community of unhappy words—are thus the first casualty of my exercise in self-correction. They are the forgotten relics of my first step of independence into the thinking world... my first brush with a revolutionary zeal born only to be thrown into the bin of irrelevance...

In the end, my deleted sentences are a painful reminder of all the times that I had to swallow my pride, toe the line drawn either by the government or by my employers oh-so afraid of consequences, and put an end to the illusion of control over my own life.

The history of my deleted sentences is truly the history of my unmet potential, if any, both as a lay writer and as a person. All that I could have been but couldn't.

An ode to my deleted sentences



BADIUZZAMAN BAY

OF MAGIC & MADNESS

My deleted sentences are like the children I never had. Anyone with an appreciation of the sanctity of the written word can perhaps relate to my sentiment and the pain of having to write something and then being forced to give it a quiet burial, like it never existed. I tend to take this personally. I look back, longingly, at all the sentences I had to delete, and the files I had to erase, because of their incendiary potential, and it gives me a headache. I sense their presence, in my mind and my Recycle Bin, the haunting vistas of a "life" I snuffed out for no fault of its own. And I wonder if my life would have been different had I not done so.

My deleted sentences represent the life I never had.

Consider: I have deleted more sentences than I have published, suppressed more thoughts than I have indulged, killed more ideas than I have nurtured, policed myself more times than I can count. The words that I have deleted define me more than the words that I have put on display, for your reading, viewing, tantalising pleasure. For me, it's a daily compromise. It's a career-spanning compromise. It's the kind of compromise, I'm told, that makes the difference between life outside the prison and life inside. In the language of the learned, this balancing act goes by the name of "self-censorship"—a four-syllable punch to the gut of every writer, creative or non-

creative, who takes their profession seriously. My deleted sentences, as the law would tell you, are the wrong kind of sentences.

In a country where the "politically correct" is a synonym for the "politically tolerable", my deleted sentences are the price I pay for having any opinion at all. So I "adjust". I sugar-coat. Both my thoughts and the truths. No ad-libbing, I remind myself. No unchecked vituperation. So as I write, I

try to produce the right kind of sentences. And certain ministers that everyone knows to be corrupt become nondescript. Certain statements that everyone knows to be hollow become gospel. Certain crimes that everyone sees happening around—and suffers from on a daily basis—turn into "alleged crimes"

unflattering adjectives and portrayals being either chopped off or replaced with ones that are ambiguous and that, my editors hope, would ruffle no feathers, none that matter anyway.

In other words, my deleted words and sentences are an exercise in thesaurus

or "propaganda". Certain offences against the truth become slightly less offensive. Certain gaffes and goofs are de-emphasised.

I take care not to be specific. I take care not to name names. I dare not name names, for if the wrong kind of sentences comes out, can the correcting kind of sentences (punishment) be far behind?

My deleted sentences, in that sense, are a result of constant self-correction, of

manoeuvring.

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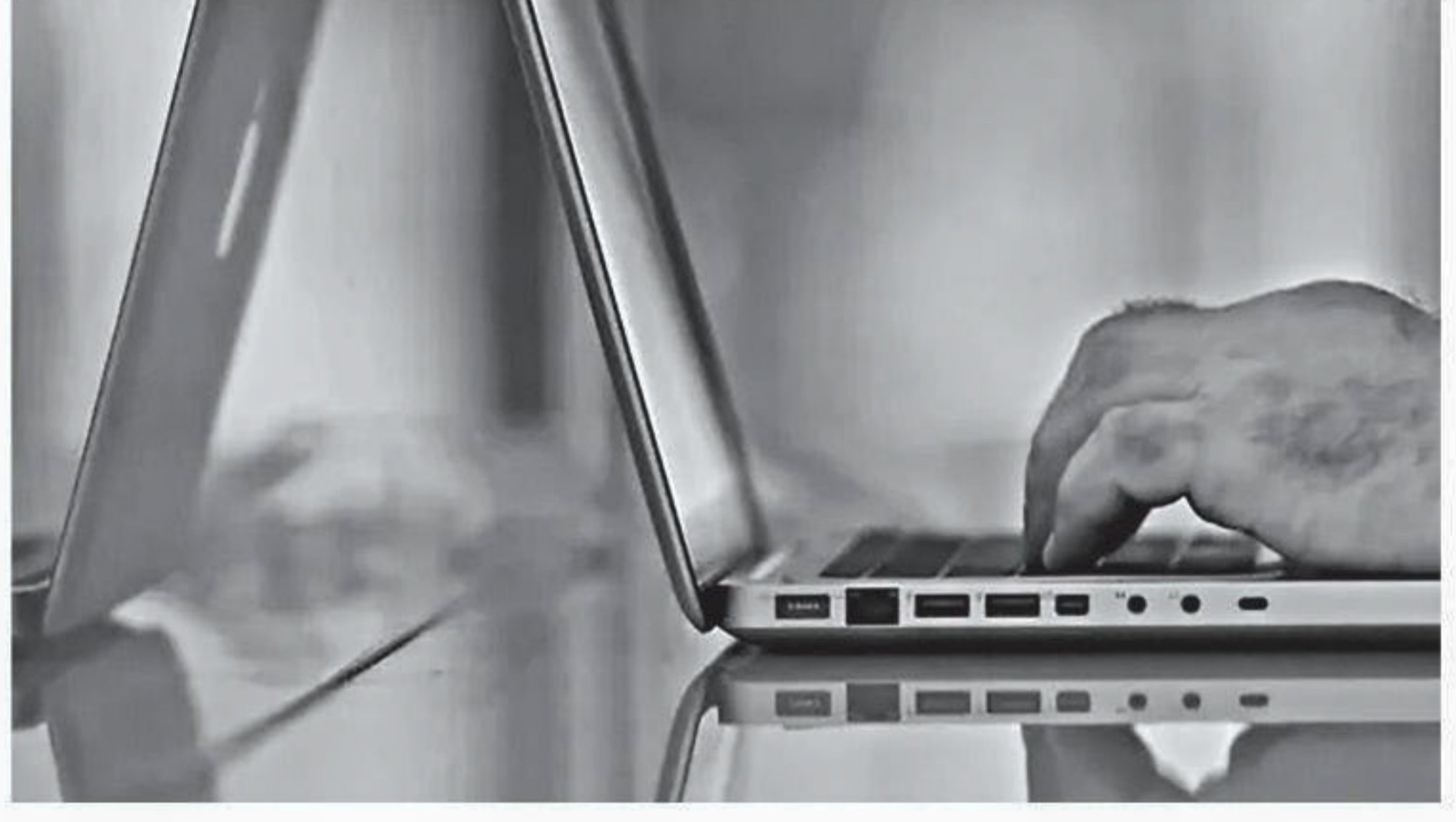


PHOTO: AFP

QUOTABLE Quote

EDGAR ALLEN POE
(1809-1849)
American short-story writer, poet, critic, and editor who is famous for his cultivation of mystery and the macabre.

"Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality."

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Ollie's pal
- 5 Hammer part
- 9 Spelunking sites
- 11 Be generous
- 12 Ease up
- 13 Reviled
- 14 Diner sandwich
- 15 Bringing up
- 17 Very hot
- 19 Opposition vote
- 20 Court event
- 21 Sinking signal
- 22 Act the coquette
- 24 Light touch
- 26 Wedding cover ups
- 29 Polite address
- 30 Getting warm, so to speak

DOWN

- 1 Strike defiers
- 2 Laptop's kin
- 3 Film set on
- 4 Pandora
- 5 Take home
- 6 Blacken
- 7 Telemundo viewer
- 8 Fight sites

32 Senate event

34 Pitch's kin

35 Inert gas

36 Texas player

38 Authored

39 Ohio city

40 Camera part

41 Thomas Hardy heroine

8 Shaped like a pie slice

10 Continuing story

11 Carpet type

16 Pep up

18 Division

21 Mix up

23 Carter's successor

24 South Dakota capital

25 Spanish region

27 Petite

28 Traps

29 Knitted wrap

30 Muse count

31 Disgusting

33 Goes bad

37 Take a load off

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

GERALD EDIT
ITALIA AURA
GATECRASHER
RITZY
MUTT TASK
ROSS TESTED
ALASECREO
HAGRID MALT
REED SAWS
ALIEN
FENCESITTER
ALOT INLOVE
RIDS SEEPED

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BEETLE! TAKE OFF THAT SILLY OUTFIT NOW!

GREG + MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

"THE BIG BOOK OF BOOGERS"

"AVOIDING VEGETABLES"

"RAISING RODENTS"

HAMMIE'S LIBRARY BOOKS?

IS IT WRONG TO HOPE YOUR KID DOESN'T DO HIS SUMMER READING?