

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Hazy road to growing up.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Earliest Memories

Benvenuto Cellini from the Italian Renaissance was an artist and a sculptor, but he is remembered for his autobiography. In it he relates the following story. When he was five, he and his father witnessed a rare scene on a winter's night: a small lizard, called a salamander, had entered their room's fireplace and was glowing in the dark. Watching this, his father suddenly boxed him in the ear. The shocked boy howled in pain.

His father then hugged him, explaining that now the boy would remember this rare and unusual sight all his life.

Childhood memories are often like that: we only remember things because something shocking or startling happened. My earliest childhood memories are no exception. Neither profound nor important, they were strange or shocking in some way.

Take the calf that remains vivid after all these years.

We lived in a sprawling home including a barn for the cows, chickens and ducks. One day in the barn, a cow gave birth to a pretty calf. Like any five-year-old, I was delighted.

But some days later, much to my dismay, the calf died. It was quickly taken away. Surprisingly, it returned the next day. It had been stuffed. Why? I learned that the cow would stop giving milk if she discovered her baby was dead. So I watched every morning as the stuffed calf was brought in front of her mother where it stood with splayed legs while its mother was milked. After milking it was hidden away.

Not a profound event, but I can still see the stuffed calf in my mind's eye and wonder how its mother was fooled.

My next memory is about being naive at six and getting into trouble.

We had a Pye record changer and hundreds of 78 RPM records, each containing one song. You stacked up a dozen records on the spindle and the changer played them in a row. This was a source of great joy for me.

An older, distant cousin came to visit for a few days. I showed him the record changer and he was hooked. One day, after breakfast, he selected twelve records for playing. Engaged in conversation with me, he placed them on a chair. Then he inadvertently sat on the chair. All twelve broke with a horrible cracking sound. After overcoming the shock he talked me into hiding the accident. However, my parents found out soon enough, and as his accomplice I got into trouble.

My third memory – at five – is about taking an initiative and facing the consequences.

We had a kerosene powered refrigerator. It broke in the middle of summer. The repairman came and worked all day. I watched with great interest, very impressed by his ability. But in the heat, he dehydrated and fell sick. My grandmother gave him salt water to drink. This worked like magic – he was fully revived and energized.

Not comprehending the dehydration part, I thought that a large glass of salt water could also fill me with energy. So I made one and gulped it down. Within a few minutes I was sick with diarrhoea. My family was amused by my misadventure, but I suffered.

In childhood, just like now, every day brings many events. Most recede with time, but some stand out. For me, these events stay like milepost markers on the hazy road to growing up.

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Ctg zoo sees baby boom

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Ctg

With no visitors interfering, the animals of Chattogram zoo have spent a blissful summer this year, thanks to the pandemic. At least 50 offspring of different animals were born at the zoo in the past two months, which includes tiger cubs, deer fawns, and peacocks.

The zoo authorities said the birth rate has increased due to chaos-free tranquil environment for a long period due to the closure of the zoo.

On the other hand, the zoo also got a renovation with infrastructural development and tree plantation during the pandemic period.

One tiger cub, four deer fawns, four peacocks, ten parakeets, two monkeys, seven Indonesian chickens, and twenty doves of various species were born at the zoo.

The authorities are also waiting to welcome more baby animals -- zebra, horse, deer and cuckoo -- soon.

While visiting the zoo on Wednesday, the newborn offspring were seen busy playing with their parents. There are very few visitors at the zoo since its reopening amid the pandemic on Sunday.

Abul Hossain of Muradpur area visited with his two daughters. He told The Daily Star, "I came here before the pandemic but I did not see such a beautiful environment. Now almost every cage is full of animals and birds."

Zoo physician and deputy curator Dr Md Shahadat Hossain said, "The habit of animals has changed during the lockdown. In absence of visitors, these animals found a favourable environment for breeding."

He said before the pandemic, 2,000 people visited the zoo on average per day but now there are around 500 visitors a day. If the situation is normal, the number of visitors will increase, he added.

Tisha Bhattachariya, founder of Society of Rise for Paws & Claws, said, "The zoo should limit the number of visitors it allows as several animals are still in the process of delivery or carrying their babies. A crowded environment may cause problems for them."

"Those animals are accustomed to breeding in the forest in their favorable environment. At this time, they like to avoid people or noise.

The zoo authorities should keep these animals in separate places during birth period," she added.

Contacted, the zoo's member secretary and Hathazari Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Ruhul Amin said, "These animals have become accustomed to seeing visitors at the zoo. Even then, it is being ensured that no visitors disturb them during birth period."

He said they are increasing the budget to fulfil the additional demand of food for newborn members of the zoo.

Chattogram zoo, set up on February 28, 1989, is located in six acres of hilly terrain in the city's Foy's Lake area. The zoo now hosts 620 animals and birds of 66 species.



Chattogram zoo saw the arrival of nearly 50 baby animals in the past two months. The royalest of these arrivals was of the tiger cub Corona (seen napping). The chirping of baby birds can be heard throughout the zoo, and baby fawns are starting to resemble the adults.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

This city is theirs too

Murals on Dhaka street rally for stray dogs' habitation

FAHMIM FERDOUS

If one can even remember a time before the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the most familiar scenes on the streets of Dhaka were people gathered around tea stalls – snacking, smoking and chatting with friends, colleagues or even total strangers. And almost inevitably around every such gathering would be a friendly canine face or two, waiting eagerly for a kind soul to throw a piece of cookie or cake.

Stray dogs have inhabited Dhaka perhaps for as long as the city has existed, living in harmony with the urban ecosystem and adapting to it. While a cruel practice of culling was once commonplace, animal rights activists in 2014 succeeded in getting a High Court rule banning dog culling in the country.

However, media reports in the last two weeks about Dhaka South City Corporation's (DSCC) plans to relocate all stray dogs within its area to outside the city has worried animal lovers.

Yesterday morning at Satmasjid Road, a group of aggrieved animal lovers joined hands to protest the decision, not with banners and slogans but with brushes and buckets of paint.

People for Animal Welfare (PAW) Foundation organised the event, to depict the struggle of the furry four-legged friends in this city in murals on a wall. Renowned painters Abul Barq Alvi and Kanak Chanpa Chakma inaugurated the event by putting the first brushstrokes on the wall, between Dhanmondi's roads 9/A and 10/A.

A few dozen people were in attendance, some ready to paint the murals, some handling the logistics, while some others came just to support.

Shamim, a BGB personnel currently enjoying leave, was spotted appreciating the artwork. "I came here from Biswa Road to support the initiative, and plan to be here all day today and tomorrow," he told this newspaper.

"Back in my hometown Patuakhali, I have been looking after street dogs and rescuing injured ones since my teenage years. I think it is an unjust decision by authorities to move so many dogs outside the city, because they could all starve to death if they are sent to a new area."

Talking to The Daily Star, eminent artist Abul Barq Alvi said, "If us humans don't look after these animals, they will not be able to survive."

"I often see on my commutes homeless children who live on footpaths caring for and feeding street animals from whatever little they have, and it fills my heart with joy. Love for other beings also make us better humans," he further added.

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Unprecedented waterlogging cripples life in Barishal city

Kirtankhola overflows during high tide; road condition gets worse

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Barishal has been experiencing unprecedented waterlogging for over a week due to tidal surge from the river Kirtankhola, causing immense suffering to city-dwellers.

Most of the city areas go under water during the high tide while the low-lying areas remain waterlogged always, said the residents.

The Kirtankhola has been flowing above danger level, said Md Masum, assistant engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board, Barishal. On August 20, its water went up to 52cm crossing the level, he added.

"We have not recorded such a measurement for the last 20 years," said the official.

About 1 lakh slum dwellers living near the river and at least 50,000 people in the low-lying areas are the worst affected. Many are struggling to make ends meet, said locals.

Manabendra Batabeyal from College Raw area said he never saw such a situation in his 80 years of life. During the high tide, his area now goes three to four feet under water, he said.

Nasim, a pickup driver from the city's Kalijira, told The Daily Star, "At present, we have to move from one place to another by boat."

Anowar Hossain, a grocer at Palashpur, said valuable items worth around Tk 50,000 of his shop were badly damaged.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found that the low-lying areas like Amanatganj, Palashpur, Stadium, Sadar Road, and Port Road went almost four feet under water. Around 12 people living in those areas said they have never witnessed such waterlogging.

They blamed the authorities' failure for the situation.

Md Aktaruzzaman, a teacher of Government BM College, said as many as 22 canals are flowing through the city. The water from the tidal surge cannot recede towards the waterbodies as most of them remain not cared for. He said those were either grabbed or filled with solid waste.

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A truck passes through a waterlogged road in Amanatganj after water from the river Kirtankhola flowing over the danger level inundates Barishal city during high tide. The situation continues to make the city's already dilapidated roads worse for over a week. Inset, a big pothole on Kawnia road from where bitumen totally disappeared.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Couple found dead in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered bodies of a couple from a house in Dhaka's Nakhalpara area yesterday morning.

The deceased were identified as Asmat Ali (45), and Farzana Begum (33).

Police recovered the bodies around 10:30am, said Kamal Uddin, inspector (investigation) of Tejgaon Police Station.

The man's body was hanging from a ceiling fan while his wife's was lying on the floor. She had head injuries, the inspector said.

CID was collecting evidence from the spot at the time of filing this report.



There's virtually no space in Arshad's tiny house that's not taken up by one or the other of the family's 30 curious cats.

Who knew loving cats could be this hard?

Family comes under pressure from neighbours

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

In Arshad Hasan's 100 square feet apartment at Mirpur section-11's Bihari camp, there's barely enough room for his family of four.

Yet, the family houses two-and-a-half dozen cats within that space, earning a reputation as something of a kitten sanctuary. What started with only two cats some four years ago, has now ballooned into around 30.

"Anytime we come across a stray cat that's ill or too weak to survive, we bring it home and nurture it to full health," said Rahila Anzum Khushbu, Arshad's daughter. "Our neighbours also call for our help any time they see a struggling stray."

It's hard to walk inside the apartment without risking stepping over one of the cats. When this correspondent went to visit the family recently, he saw Arshad cooped up on a table laid out for boutique work, with cats everywhere around him.

There were a few on the table, a few under the chair, some more under the table, and a couple others on top of Arshad's body. Right beside the table, a few more were eating rice and fish from a bowl, while a couple more were resting around a brick enclosure set up at the corner of the flat as a restroom for them.

At another corner, a bunch of prescription bottles could be seen. Asked, Arshad said, "We keep medicines to help with the primary treatment of the cats. We also keep antibiotics. When needed, we take them to a veterinary hospital."

Arshad said the family visits Gulistan's Fulbaria Veterinary Hospital at least once or twice a month.

"We have to spend around Tk 300 daily to take care of our cats. We need at least two-kg rice and one-and-a-half kg fish to feed them six times every day," Khushboo said.

Finishing her honours back in 2017, she said she couldn't pursue a master's degree due to financial troubles. Asked why they spend so much for the cats, she simply said they are bonded with the animals with love and can't stop taking care of them.

The family doesn't exactly keep the cats forever though. If anyone expresses interest to care for a cat, they cross-check their personal info before letting them take the one they desire.

However, "There are neighbours around the area who see the cats as nothing but a nuisance. Among them are two women who regularly harass our family. They

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