



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Navigating the world with a poker face

FABIHA AFIFA

Right when we were about to go on stage to get our science fair awards, my friend subtly elbowed me in the ribs and hissed, "You really need to start smiling more."

This was back in eighth grade, and even to this day, there are times when I struggle with looking like I'm over it. Sure, like Simone Biles said, "Smiling doesn't win you gold medals" but a soft, approachable expression can do wonders in the way people perceive us, or at least that's what I've been told over the years. Many people who're now some of my best friends have told how they thought I was an ice queen when they first saw me, and it's definitely the worst in group settings because then I have to be extra diligent in building a rapport with others. Without the compensation of smiles and calculated expressions, I know I appear cold and uninterested, and perhaps even unwell, because there have been times when people directly asked if I was going through hard times when in reality, I was actually really happy about something.

But surprisingly, it's not all bad. For starters, having a poker face myself means I'm less intimidated by others with a stony expression because I know that usually, it's nothing personal. They're probably not even aware that they have their poker face on, and won't mind being approached. As a result, I'm more comfortable in my social interactions and open to engaging with more people. On the flip side, of course, my face can act as a great repellent for unnecessary chats when I'm not in the mood for them. I also have an easier time in negotiations because I don't come off as desperate, and when I'm working in a team, I always

earn my teammates' trust as the most level-headed one.

That being said, my poker face has ironically made me more invested in those around me. Because I know some people often wrongly translate a poker face as annoyance or flippancy, I pay more attention to my facial expressions and body language when I'm talking, and that helps me make people feel safer. Similarly, my focus on my own social and emotional cues in conversations means I observe other's behavior very minutely as well. Be it very well-hidden contempt or more apparent hints, chances are I'll notice instantly.

Poker faces get a lot of negative attention in social settings, and I can obviously see why. Even if unintended, it can come across as apathetic or even angry to most people, and unless someone's alright with how people perceive them, it'll be in their best interest to figure out when they really should put on that face. After all, it can be both an asset and a liability, and it all depends on the timing and place. In my personal experience, my poker face has been a source of understanding how I interact with other people as well as how other people interact with me, and for that, I'm grateful.

Fabiha is now the Martell heir apparent of Dorne, but still a secret Slytherin alum. Pledge your allegiance and soul to her at afifafabiha01@gmail.com

There's no such thing as a failed hobby

SUMAIYA RASHID

Hobbies. How much time do you dedicate to your hobbies? It's probably not as long as you'd want. As we become older, we stop understanding the importance of having interests. As a result, one of the first things to leave us when life gets busy is our hobbies. Our whole health and well-being can be improved by engaging in hobbies, hobbies that you can't monetise, hobbies that you're probably not very good at.

You know how they say that no love, no matter how fleeting, is ever wasted, and joy is never pointless? There is no such thing as a failing hobby either, in my opinion. Even if your hobby was not "successful", I am sure you had some contentment with it, however brief it was. You most likely learnt something from it, or at the very least discovered some limitations in your talents. If you don't recognise your own strengths and limits, you might set lofty aspirations and dreams yet end up falling short. This might lead to a bitter sense of failure.

When I was 11 years old and dealing with my father's death, I channelled my anxious energy into baking. Making delectable sweet treats provided my younger self with the comfort she required. The transition from slimy eggs to soft white foam in the process of making meringue was my escape from reality.

I realised how much I enjoyed baking when I noticed how often it worked to put smiles on people's faces. At that point, I fell in love with this much-appreciated hobby of mine; baking became my mode of release and catharsis. Nonetheless, due to mental health concerns, I've been finding it tough to find the motivation to bake, but I don't consider baking a failed hobby because I recognised a talent I know I'm pretty good at.

While hobbies are meant to make us feel great, sometimes they don't or we just feel like they're out of our reach. Yet, this just encourages us to try everything we haven't. We quit trying to be good



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

at things because we'd rather never try than fail. We don't want to be assessed or seem like we are in need of help. However, doing new things, learning from others, having fun, and perhaps even seeming a little silly are all great ways to grow. Hobbies make us happy because they strengthen our sense of identity, and a strong sense of identity leads to greater happiness. Allow yourself to develop your self-awareness so that you may learn what interests you in a variety of fields that are not only confined to relationships, employment, or education.

I prefer to think of leisure in its most basic form, which is time spent doing something other than working. It's important to note that many people have structural barriers to enjoying hobbies and free time. Taking leisure time or picking up a new activity, like any other habit, must be actively cultivated. Indeed, they can help you relax and clear your thoughts. The most significant advantage, though, is that you eventually let yourself dive into the beautiful pleasure of being alive.

Sumaiya is in the midst of her researching untold topics era; send her leads at sumrashid10@gmail.com