

My Friend Shahid

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Shahid and I are very close friends since our boyhood. We attended St. Gregory's High School in Laxmibazar of old Dhaka city between 1960 and 1970. My school friends were made up mostly of front benchers in our class - Jyoti, Masudul, Taqsem, Deepak, Masrur, Mahabub, Mamunur and a few more, known to be meritorious students, and off course Shahid, who was an exception. What a life it was! Studying, playing in the school compound before and after the school, moving about in the streets in group, going to picnics far from Dhaka city, were part of our boyhood life.

We, the friends in our group, all started from infant class in St. Gregory's High School. We came from all parts of the city but the core group comprised boys from the local area. Shahid's house stood just on the other side of the school boundary wall and I used to come from Patuatuly, a ten minutes walking distance from the school. We the boys from the local area were to be found in the school compound long after the school hour. We stuck to the school as if it was our very own backyard.

Jyoti was the top student of our class and rarely missed the top position every year. At the other end of the spectrum was Shahid. Although, he was not a studious student, but it didn't matter. He was a very good active friend and led our friend's group outside class in all sorts of activities. He was known for daring activities and didn't lag behind to come forward to friends in need of help. Shahid was a good sportsman excelling in basketball, football and volleyball and became player of school teams. He was a good boxer with an effective left hook, which he employed with stunning effect against his opponents in local area. Shahid was a left hander, which made him quite conspicuous in our group.

I can't remember much of his exploits in the class now. He targeted a couple of eccentric teachers and was able to get exit from the classes by working on their hot tempers. He got many post class hour detentions for his misadventures in the class and contempt of school discipline. When other students would beg teachers for canceling a detention order, he would pocket the detention slip without any fuss. School authority became tired of awarding him frequent detentions and eventually got rid of him before year ten. But Shahid was not concerned at all and took admission in West End High School quite easily. In spite of this minor setback, we continued to be friends as usual and roamed about St. Gregory's High School premises.

We would go to picnics outside city regularly, arranged either by the school or us. I remember, in one picnic during our teen age I saw Shahid and Masrur smoking surreptitiously in bush. I am sure, they planned it in advance. In retrospect, I think that's how teen age boys of our time embraced the habits of their seniors. Masrur and Shahid became smokers when they advanced in their ages. I was a good boy and

taking to smoking was out of the question. But I was not at all surprised by Masrur and Shahid's idea of smoking.

I find my boyhood life a wonderful experience enjoying every aspect of it. Growing up centering on my school with the company of boyhood friends was no less than a fairy tale. No worries, full of happiness and uninterrupted flow of bliss. Boyhood friends were the key players of this time. But things changed when our liberation war started. I experienced collective panic, fear and uncertainty for the first time in my life. Gone was the carefree life and we had no idea about our future. Only Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra kept alive our spirit and thirst for life.

After liberation, we entered a new phase of our life with personal choices and priorities creeping into our psyche. We were growing up as individuals while our vision widened into outer world but keeping intact our friendship somehow. Shahid and Masrur almost fell out from our original group and sought friendship with one year junior group of school boys, who followed in our footsteps of frequenting the school compound.

After passing HSC, I took admission in the 1st year of B.Sc. Engineering Class of BUET. For family reason we had to move to Rayerbazra from the old Dhaka. Since then I almost lost contact of Shahid and Masrur. Studying engineering was a mixed experience for me but I held on putting family interest above everything. After graduation, I started looking for jobs and then I heard Shahid has left for USA. Masrur accepted a job as Pharmacist in Middle East. For me, a hard real life began where I was almost alone, only a hard core group of friends remained through infrequent contact.

Shahid met me after a long gap of 25 years at my workplace. I had a family then and I was working as Senior Engineer with Surface Water Modeling Centre (SWMC) at Mahakhali. He got my details from Taqsem, another hard core friend of mine. Taqsem was making frequent visits to USA as part of his move to settle in USA. He maintained a good contact with many of our friends from St. Gregory School either in Bangladesh or USA because of his flair for keeping in touch with old friends.

Shahid came to see me at my office. He was full of warmth and exuberance and we immediately renewed our lost friendship. He was on a family visit to Dhaka. He is employed with United Airlines as Aircraft Maintenance Engineer. As an employee of the airlines, he was entitled to receive free or subsidized air travels. So coming to Dhaka was not financially burden to him. He was couple of days away from departure to USA. We promised to be in touch.

I entered a new phase of my life when my family received migration visa to Australia, which was quite overdue. My family and I left for Australia in January 2002. At the onset, the life of a migrant is a horrendous one. You start from scratch and aim to get a job by any means. You try every source. You have a high hope of

getting a job one day. Next day you sink to depths of despair. I had a very bitter life for the first six months' of stay in Australia. Shahid got my telephone number from Kazi Babul, my only boyhood friend in Australia. He started hammering me with his frequent calls from USA trying to pull me out of despair. I had to lift myself out of this quagmire and finally did it. But I can't forget Shahid's calls which told amply of his concern and feeling for a friend, although we were living continent apart. I discovered a new side of Shahid.

I had hardly been in any contact with Shahid for the last one year because of personal reasons. But I was keeping his track via others who were in touch with him. He was in a process of rebuilding his life after he was fired by his employer United Airlines. It was a difficult task considering that he was in the middle age, although, I was confident he would turn around because of his resilience and easy going attitude about life. He made significant adjustment in his career to become a real estate professional after the setback.

Last year fate struck Shahid another severe blow. His wife died in an accident in the middle of a family excursion trip. I felt extremely sad about this tragic end to her life. He has two small kids. A tough life lied ahead of him. But Shahid's attitude made me hopeful about the prospect of overcoming all the odds of life. Actually, he did it. He is now caring for his son and daughter, who still believe their mama is not dead; she just disappeared. It is really a difficult task to fill the void left behind his wife. But, Shahid, with such a big heart, is capable more than others to shoulder such responsibility.