



# Heroes

among us!

2007

By Mudar Patherya

Dedicated to His Holiness  
Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin  
Saheb on his 96th birthday, 1428

## Heroes among us!

Where did I get *this* idea?

By speaking one afternoon to Shahidaben. At the end of the telephonic conversation, I felt a little ...what is the right word...inadequate. I felt inadequate.

And this sparked an interesting idea. That perhaps she wasn't alone. That perhaps in every city, every street, every building, every house there lives a hero.

Someone who is keeping the chin up under challenge. Someone who is smiling through stress. Someone with grace under pressure.


These people may look ordinary. But aren't.

It's time we acknowledged. It's time we saluted.

But that is not why I am taking the trouble of printing this booklet and handing them out. There is a bigger message somewhere.

That there is a hero in every single one of us.

Ever inspired,



Mudar Patherya

29 April 2007

# Shahidaben

Tambawala

You are  
a hero and  
inspiration  
to us ...

Because you have discovered the real meaning of life through your suffering.

Because you have a lifetime to live without two kidneys and instead of being reduced to an object of pity, you are now a source of hope to other such patients at Health Point in Bhowanipore.

Because people at your age – 33 – could at worst lose one kidney but you have lost both and you go through dialysis every third day of your life with as much normalcy as people go to work, to the club or to the theatre.

Because most people would dread going through one dialysis session in their entire life; you have already been through nearly 330!

Because there is no escape; if you delay the dialysis even by a couple of days, you begin to choke – like a noose around the neck – as the moisture retention in the body increases and you are finally unable to walk.

Because in your position, you could have easily lost your motivation to live, but you consider it your duty to soldier on for the sake of your three young children and family.

Because it would have been very easy for you to be resigned and defeated, but you said in an interview recently “I am completely active and normal *otherwise*.”

Because you do not see yourself as a victim or a patient; on the contrary, you tell people that the only real currency that we have in life is ‘confidence’ and the moment we lose it, our ailments would take over and we would cease to live. ★

# Bilquisbai

★ Bengali

★ You are  
a hero and  
inspiration  
to us ...

★ Because you looked at defeat eyeball-to-eyeball until defeat blinked.

Because even though you were divorced in your twenties and had a son to take care of, you decided that you would not ask your parents or brothers to support but would do so yourself.

Because you decided to assume control and responsibility for your life and that of your son by making yourself financially independent in whatever little way you could; you ran stitching classes at home, you stocked Dalda and other personal care products that people could buy from you for a small mark-up; you even sold programme tickets on commission!

Because even though the money was really meagre, you taught your son that 'koi ke saamney apan ko haath nahi phailaaney ka'; and despite all this, you told him 'tumko hum padhaa ke rahegyaa'.

Because you were industrious enough to stretch the scarce rupee furthest by checking if your son Aquil's school books were available in the Saifee Club library; besides, you would go from

pavement to pavement on College Street for the school books and when finding one – even one! – returning home triumphantly (as a result, Aquil remembers never going with all his books during the first month of any year during his Calcutta schooling career).

Because you would take these second-hand books, wrap them with the brown paper you would retrieve from the packaging of your brother Noman's consignment from Moradabad, iron the paper till it looked flattened and cover all your son's books so that he would not feel embarrassed in front of all the well-off children with mint-fresh copies.

Because you would stitch your son's clothes to save money; because you were enterprising enough to even stitch his jeans inside-out, so that he could wear it both ways if he liked!

Because even though you had meagre resources as a divorced individual with no external means of support, you liquidated your investments to fund your son's MBA at XLRI.

Because when there wasn't enough money to buy vegetables for dinner, you would prepare simple 'jeera roti-chai' and proudly announce that this was a really special spread for the two!

And finally, despite all the hardship that you endured, you lived a life of no resentment towards those financially fortunate; because despite all the troubles that you weathered on your son's behalf, you never ever said, "Remember that I am doing all this for you!"

Thank you for being an inspiration! ★★

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*\* Aquil Busray went on to work for Blue Star, Hindustan Lever, Motorola and Shell. He is presently Executive Director (HR) for IBM. He was awarded the HR Pathfinder's Award in 2006 and the HR Person of the Year Award 2007.*

# Alifiya

## Tundawala

You are  
a hero and  
inspiration  
to us ...



Because you are an individual with vision.

Because even though you cannot see like most of us – ‘retinitis pigmentosa’ – you can see a number of things that we cannot.

Because even though most with our intact eyes and faculties have hardly read enough to enrich our minds, you read nearly 50 books a year.

Because even though most of us are still struggling to come to grips with technology, you think nothing of scanning a 200 page book all by yourself (a page a minute) and then running it

through text-to voice software so that you can *listen* to the book on your PC.

Because even though most of us care little for our kin or community, you have ventured to research a thesis on ‘The Muslim Search For Identity’ across Muslims in West Bengal after 1971.

Because you are researching this thesis not from the comfort of your home but across five newspaper offices in Calcutta, searching every single edition in the newspaper’s existence with the help of a research assistant.

Because while most in your position would have sat at home and whiled away their years in solitude, you have ventured to go out and earn a living as a lecturer in political science in a girls’ college five hours a day for five days a week.

Because you could have insisted on a door-to-door commute to the college, but you walk to the Park Street metro station, take the underground to MG Road and then walk to the college in Mukhtaram Babu Street.

Because while most people would have been happy with what they are doing in the circumstances, you are not; your dream is to eventually teach in a full-fledged university.

Because the magnitude of your problem will probably last a lifetime and whereas most would have complained to God, you are one of the few to have thanked him for *everything*.

Because while most people would have been bitter about their circumstances, your motto is ‘accept destiny gracefully’.

Thank you for teaching us that adversity can also be a teacher! ★★

# Haiderbhai

★ Rangoonwala

★ You are  
a hero and  
inspiration  
to us ...

★ Because in this world where most people have no time for themselves, you have time for others.

Because as the secretary of the Hizbe Husaini you have not only absorbed an existing culture, but also been able to take it ahead.

Because even though you manage a growing business, you think nothing of saying 'jaraa, humnaa aaoo chhoo', dropping things at a minute's notice and attending to someone, somewhere who might be in grief.

Because there is a saying that the man who is your friend to the grave is your truest friend; you are known to have attended or co-ordinated hundreds of burials of *mumineen* in Calcutta over the last three decades.

Because even if someone has expired late in the night, you can be expected to be there at the location with your team within an hour of receiving the information with a stretcher and a

matador and the wherewithal to complete the burial within two and-a-half hours flat.

Because you and your team have now seamlessly institutionalized the process of receiving the dead body, giving it a ritual bath, arranging the *jamaaza ni namaaz*, co-ordinating the transportation to the burial ground, having the graveyard site ready and completing the burial. With full dignity. For whoever.

Because you and your team don't just finish with this; you arrange for the matador van and the *jaman* to the family of the deceased on the first day free of any charge.

Because in the unfortunate instance of any unnatural death, you and your team are now experts in coroner reports, release of the body from the hospital and corresponding morgue management so that the family of the deceased can be saved the trouble of running from pillar to post in one of the most critical hours of their lives.

Because even if someone from the community expires in Darjeeling or Assam, you and your team have thought nothing of going there, braving the weather, retrieving the body and giving it a dignified burial.

Because you and your team have demonstrated what service means; on a number of occasions when after having served dinner or *sherbet* to *mumineen*, there is not enough for yourselves, you have most cheerfully gone home hungry.

Because despite all this, you and your team have demonstrated the true essence of service – the unseen hand helping people and unspeaking tongue after you have delivered relief.

Thank you for telling us that there is always a shoulder to lean on in times of need. ★

Shaikh  
Dawoodbhal  
Ujjainwala

★ You are  
a hero and  
inspiration  
to us ...

★  
★  
★ Because you are a living example of what it means to age  
with grace.

Because even though you are 96 (as per Hijri), you demonstrate  
the spirit of someone half your age.

Because even though in your tenth decade of existence, you  
still maintain a keen sense of business in real estate broking,  
keep abreast of the latest opportunities and also go out to fix  
the occasional deal.

Because at an age when most people would have been bed-  
ridden, you commute to the masjid every single day by public  
transport *unattended*; you are at the masjid between 9.30 and  
3.30 and in the event you are invited for an evening *daris*, you  
complete a 12 hour day by returning only late in the evening.

Because at an age when most people would be burden on others,  
you wake up every morning at 4.30, commence your day with  
prayers to keep the soul fit, follow it up with exercises to keep  
your body fit and then round off the morning by reading the  
newspaper to keep the mind fit.

Because at an age when most people surrender their  
responsibilities, you continue to be the *maali* for the 30 flower  
pots on your terrace, examining which plants are growing and  
which are not, which need to be replaced and which do not.

Because at an age when most people would complain that they  
are handicapped by age, you think nothing of accompanying  
*aamil sahib* to 70 shops on 1st April for *alaamat*, walking and  
climbing distances that would tire a younger man.

Thank you for telling us that the right place for the word 'buzurg'  
is only in the dictionary. ★★

## *Friends,*

We intend to make 'Heroes among us' an annual programme. You too can play a role in making it a growing success. Simply call Mudar at 98300 72720 and tell him about a hero that you have encountered, whose life has been lived with a passion. He will research the subject with the objective to present it for general awareness next year. So simply speak to him or write to him at [mudar@trisyscom.com](mailto:mudar@trisyscom.com). He has an incorrigible reputation for replying to emails within ten minutes! Alternatively, write to him at 16A Sarat Chatterjee Avenue, Water Front, Kolkata 700 029. The same address should do if you want more copies of this hope-enhancing booklet.

“He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.”

*Nietzsche*

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